

THE SANDE SOCIETY MASKS OF THE MENDE OF SIERRA LEONE

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Ruth B. Phillips
School of Oriental and African Studies
University of London

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The Sande society masks of the Mende of Sierra Leone

Ruth B. Phillips

Abstract

The dissertation is a monograph on the sowei (or bundu) masks of the Mende of Sierra Leone. Its aim is to provide information which will aid in the understanding of its symbolic forms and in the appreciation of its aesthetic qualities. The sowei masker personifies the sacred spirit of the Sande, a women's secret society, into which all Mende girls are initiated at puberty and which marks the transition from child to adult. Masking figures prominently in its public ceremonies and although the general features of the society have been studied no detailed information about the ritual context of masking has been made available. The first section of the thesis therefore describes Mende masking in general and the specific ritual context of Sande society masking in particular. The role of the carver in Mende society, his repertory, the mythological structure for the creation of sowei masks and the system of patronage are also described in order to present information essential to the art-historical investigation of the sowei mask which is the focus of the thesis.

Several hundred sowei masks were documented photographically in the field. This sample includes a core group of eighty masks from one chiefdom in central Mendeland which was studied in depth to provide a basis for comparison of regional variation in iconographic motifs, ritual usage, and carving style. The iconography of the mask is analysed and with the use of early field photographs, old masks, and informant interviews several motifs are identified which have been misinterpreted in the literature. A further analysis of the personal names given to the sowei masks shows that these names repeatedly refer to certain central ideas which elucidate the symbolic meanings of the masks.

Finally, the formal stylistic range of the sowei mask is studied. This discussion is based on a study of masks in museum collections as well as on field material. Regional variation in carving style as well as changes over the last one-hundred years are described, and the stylistic characteristics of the Gola, Vai, Sherbro-Bullom, Kpa-, Kö-, and Sewa Mende are identified. An analysis of the eighty masks from the core area permits an examination of the degree of variation found within one chiefdom and the ways in which individual artists respond to the positive value which the Mende place on innovative carving on the one hand, and the necessity of adhering to traditional norms on the other.

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Preface

The focus of the study presented on the following pages is the sowei (or bundu) mask used in the rituals of the Sande society of the Mende of Sierra Leone. This type of mask is of particular interest within African art both because it is the only documented mask which is worn by women and because it is the most important object made by Mende woodcarvers. Although the sowei mask has attracted the interest of ethnographers in the past it has not previously been the subject of a full-scale art-historical study. Fortunately excellent ethnographic studies of the Mende have already been done, principally by Professor Kenneth Little, and such background is indispensable for work in art-history. As a service to the reader the broad outlines of Mende culture and history are summarized in the introduction, along with a discussion of the major sources for a specialized study of carving.

In the course of this study it was necessary to investigate further certain specific aspects of Mende society which are important for the understanding of iconography and aesthetic values and which are dealt with only briefly by Little and other writers. The object is not so easily divorced from its context in Africa as in Europe not only because it is often so closely tied to ritual, but also because of our ignorance of the mundane details of everyday life in an exotic culture. To understand the symbolic 'load' of the sowei mask and the conditions which helped to

dictate its stylistic range it is necessary to investigate first the process of masking among the Mende as a whole and more specifically the role and activities of the Sande society itself. This information is discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

Although the art-historian in pursuit of this contextual understanding must use anthropological rather than historical methodology he has an advantage over the student of European art in being able to interview the makers and users of objects rather than depending on mute archives and libraries. To this advantage is counterposed the lack of time depth of his sample of objects which has frequently led to scepticism about the 'historical' nature of studies of much ethnographic art. While it is certainly true that most researchers dealing with objects made of perishable materials from tropical climates cannot hope to assemble a sample extending much beyond a hundred years, the possibilities which do exist for accurate dating within that sample both in the field and in museum collections have often been overlooked.

It is here that art-historical methods can make a significant contribution to the study of ethnographic art. In the present study I hope to show that systematic museum work and fieldwork are complementary, each source supplying gaps in the other. Museum collections, although they usually lack hard data about specific provenance, provide firm dates of acquisition. Carvings documented in the field, although often difficult to date accurately, can be identified with precise locations. Even in the field, it should

be noted, it is often possible to attach quite accurate dates to carvings by asking informants to estimate age in relation to well-remembered events such as wars, earthquakes, and the reigns of local chiefs, or to events in their own personal lives such as Poró and Sande initiation or marriage. The examination of the combined sample of sowei masks assembled and dated from museum collections and from fieldwork shows a development in style even within the one-hundred year span represented which illuminates the way in which a traditional art such as that of the Mende has responded to changing conditions.

Some more specific notes on the research methods adopted will enable the reader better to understand my approach in the following pages. Research was begun on museum collections in 1971. Questionnaires were sent out to British, Continental, and American museums regarding their holdings in Mende and related wood carvings. In the course of 1970 and 1971 I visited the major collections to photograph and document their pieces, and where this was not possible photographs were ordered. This preliminary research revealed a number of problems in the attribution of the sowei mask arising from the fact that closely related and sculpturally very similar masks are used by peoples bordering on the Mende, the most prominent of whom are the Sherbro-Bullom, Vai, and Gola. And, as has been mentioned, discussions of the mask in the existing literature deal very superficially with the iconography and specific

ritual function of the sowei mask.

Fieldwork in Sierra Leone was carried out between March and June 1972 and between September and November 1972. As then conceived the major aims were to investigate the iconography and symbolism of the mask, and to define as far as possible the stylistic tradition or traditions, both geographical and historical, to which the sowei belongs. It is no doubt a common experience of researchers in ethnographic art that direct contact with traditional arts causes shifts within the original plan of study. Unsuspected sources of information present themselves and expected areas of investigation prove unfruitful. I took with me to the field a selection of photographs of masks and other carvings in museum collections which displayed the iconographic and stylistic range of the pieces. I used these pictures as an initial basis for discussion with informants and they invariably proved a source of great interest and enjoyment. Many of the motifs they illustrated and which I had assumed were 'symbolic' proved to be decorative virtuoso exercises invented by carvers, or to be depictions of old fashioned ornaments which are no longer recognized. On the other hand these sessions elicited comments which were very illuminating about basic aesthetic values. I also discovered that the personal names of the masks, whose existence was barely reported in the literature, proved a rich enough source of information about the general meaning of the sowei masker in Mende life to merit a separate discussion of their own.

I studied Mende at S.O.A.S. with Dr. Gordon Innes during the year preceding my fieldwork, but used an interpreter during field interviews. A basic knowledge of the language, however, made it possible to check the interpreter's translations, to transcribe Mende terms and phrases, and to provide literal translations where necessary. Wherever possible I have followed the orthography indicated in Innes's A Mende-English dictionary; in transcribing Mende words 'è' indicates an open 'e', 'ö' represents an open 'o' and 'n̄' indicates the nasality of the preceding vowel or vowels. Tones are unmarked. Fieldwork was carried out among the Kpa and Sewa Mende dialect groups as well as among the Kö-Mende on whose dialect Innes's dictionary is based; this may have resulted in mistakes or ambiguities in transcription for which I apologise -- as well as for the unavoidable insensitivities of an untrained ear.

In the course of fieldwork two separate approaches to the problems under investigation were adopted. Initially a survey of Mendeland and its neighbours was carried out in which chiefdoms were visited in western, central, and north-eastern Mendeland, as well as among the Sierra Leonean Vai and Gola and, briefly, the Vai in Liberia. I was unable to visit the area which is today still Sherbro-Bullom speaking although fieldwork was carried out in Imperri chiefdom which was considered Sherbro until about twenty years ago. In each region I approached the District Officer first and was referred to several Paramount Chiefs whose chiefdoms were accounted to be rich in traditional arts. In turn I approached

these Paramount Chiefs and visited a number of villages in each chiefdom which the chiefs indicated as best for my purposes. I photographed the masks which were in use in these villages, established provenance and age as closely as possible and interviewed Sande society officials, town chiefs and elders. The form I have adopted in references and catalogue entries for carvings documented in the field is a three part notation giving first the village, second the chiefdom, and third the district where the piece is kept. In a number of places I was also able to observe public ritual occasions on which the sowei masker and other Mende maskers appeared since Sande initiation was taking place in several towns while the fieldwork was being carried out. People were most co-operative in arranging special performances of the minor masquerades.

A major problem encountered by all students of Mende culture is the strict secrecy which surrounds the Sande society and its brother organization, the even more powerful Poro society. No researcher, to my knowledge, has joined either society and subsequently broken the oath of secrecy (which all members must swear) in order to report on society rituals as a participant-observer. I chose, like others before me, to fill in as much as possible about these rituals from discussions with informants which could be used to confirm each other independently. Fortunately almost all masking activity belongs to the realm of public ritual and here, as I have said, it was possible to observe

directly. It may be mentioned in this context that a woman, even though a non-member, has an advantage in investigating a women's organization. On a number of occasions it was possible to see and handle masks which would have been unavailable to a man, particularly in more remote areas where traditional prohibitions are more strictly observed.

The second approach adopted in the field was the selection of a 'core' area in central Mendeland to be studied in depth and used both as a standard for comparison of the material gathered in the more superficial regional survey, and as the basis for a more detailed analysis of masking traditions and stylistic variation within a limited area. For this purpose I chose Jaiima-Bongor chiefdom in Bo district. Here, in the course of about six weeks, very nearly every village possessing a sowei mask was visited and the same technique of photographic documentation and field interview was employed. The distribution and activity of other mask types in the chiefdom was also documented. The Paramount Chief of Jaiima-Bongor, the Honorable B.A. Foday Kai, O.B.E., is devoted to the encouragement and recording of traditional Mende culture, and was of inestimable help in arranging for me to live in the chiefdom town, Telu, during the study of the core area as well as being an extremely well-informed and stimulating informant.

I would also like to acknowledge the generous help I received in the field from Barbara Paxson, Dr. Barbara Harrell-Bond, Dr. Jule Rynsdorp, and Mr. Jonathan Odowu Hyde of the Institute of

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I am also grateful for the financial support of the Canada Council through its Doctoral Grants program, of the University of London Central Research Fund, and of the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies. It is impossible to acknowledge adequately the help and encouragement I have received throughout from my supervisors, Dr. Guy Atkins and Dr. John Golding.

Chapter 1. Introduction

The Mende inhabit an area of nearly 12,000 square miles lying almost entirely in the southern half of the modern state of Sierra Leone. (Fig. 1). Their territory is bounded to the west and southwest by the narrow strip of coastland in which live the Sherbro-Bullom, Krim, and Vai people. At the easternmost corner of Sierra Leone the Mende border on the Kissi and on the northeast, the Kono. A small group of Mende overlaps the Liberian border to the south, and along this frontier live also the Liberian Bandi, Gola, and Vai peoples. The Mende are divided into three major dialect groups distinguished also by certain cultural differences, the western or Kpa-Mende, the central or Sewa Mende, and the eastern or Kö-Mende (Fig.2). With a population in 1963 of nearly 700,000 the Mende are the largest single ethnic group in Sierra Leone, slightly outnumbering their northern neighbours, the Temne.¹

The terrain of Mendeland is hilly and is covered today with the 'high bush' vegetation which has replaced the original tropical rain forest. Three large rivers, the Jong, the Sewa, and the Moa, intersect western, central, and eastern Mendeland respectively, rising in the north and running in a southwesterly direction to the sea; these rivers are not navigable for any great distance except during the rainy season. The Mende are an agricultural people whose most important crop, rice, is cultivated

on 'uplands' rather than in swamps, on land cleared by the slash and burn method.² This method requires periodic clearing of new fields when the old ones have become exhausted, and it is one factor which has influenced the pattern of settlement in the region. Most Mende live in villages which usually consist of one to two dozen houses although there are also a considerable number of larger towns which may have 200 or more houses with a total population of between 1,200 and 2,000 people. Kenneth Little has analysed the relationship of villages and towns:

The town is made up of so many separate localities containing the 'compounds' of its inhabitants. With each 'urban' locality is associated one or more 'rural' localities, comprising villages and farm lands. These 'satellite' villages are scattered around the outside circumference of the town and are connected to it like beads on a thread, by a series of winding paths which radiate out of the town.³

Villages and towns are governed by councils composed of the heads of the family groups and are presided over by a town chief. The towns are, in turn, combined into sections presided over by section chiefs and the sections into a chiefdom headed by a Paramount Chief.

Rice farming supports virtually the whole Mende community, and almost everyone must do his share of the farm work. The staple grain is supplemented by the cultivation of the oil palm and by fishing; palm nuts are also exported, and several other cash crops are grown. In addition to farming some members of the community practice specialized crafts or trading, but very few people are able to support themselves exclusively by artisan or commercial activities.

Land is farmed by extended family households known as mawèisia whose rights to the land are legitimated by descent from the original hunters or warriors who settled the area. These descent groups are patrilineal, inheritance passing first to the brothers and then to the sons of a man, although the patrilineal principle is not followed rigidly if circumstances are unusual. Strong ties and obligations also exist between maternal uncles and their nephews and nieces regarding mutual help and service. Although these underlying kinship patterns appear to be relatively consistent, Kenneth Little remarks in a number of contexts on the flexibility of the Mende system, a feature which most probably reflects the historical conditions which governed the settlement of Mendeland. As regards outsiders in the community, for instance, Little writes:

Once they have shown willingness to associate with and take their part as members of the local group, their acceptance follows as a matter of course, irrespective of the question of kinship itself. The implication, very probably, is that for purposes of community life the factor of common residence is as decisive as kinship.⁴

The Mende are polygamous and the economics of rice farming dictate that unless a man has more than two wives he cannot expect to prosper or to be accounted a success in life. Bridewealth is paid to the family of each wife so that a man cannot usually establish his household until he is approaching middle age. Every woman is expected to marry, usually after she has been initiated into the Sande society at about the age of 15. She normally goes to live with her husband's family and children of the marriage belong

to the father's family group. Although in its broad outlines the role assigned to a woman in Mende society is one of obedience and subservience to her husband - - working on his farm, raising his children, and remaining faithful to him -- the position of women is more complex than it at first appears. In a number of important areas women regulate their own conduct as well as that of men and they also influence public affairs in decisive ways through the exclusively female Sande society and through the high offices they hold in the Njaye and Humoi societies. They may also hold political office, and female chiefs, both local and Paramount, have been fairly common in the past century at least.⁵

Traditional Mende religious belief centers on the notion of a creator god, Ngewö, who retired into the heavens after making the world and does not intervene directly in human affairs.⁶ Ritual observance is connected rather with the cult of the ancestors whose spirits are believed to continue to dwell in the places where their descendants live and work. The ancestors are divided into remote and more recently deceased antecedents, and it is to the latter group that prayers are addressed. Regular ceremonial offerings of food are made to them at appointed places and they are believed to cause misfortune and illness to punish lapses in behaviour or neglect of proper ritual offerings. In addition the Mende believe in other types of spirits, the jingnga or nature spirits which include certain spirits connected with the secret societies, about which more will be said in

subsequent chapters.⁷ Today the majority of Mende people profess at least a nominal belief in Islam, and there is widespread rudimentary literacy in Arabic. Like other Sierra Leonean peoples the Mende have always welcomed the itinerant Moslem or mori man who has been esteemed as the maker of powerful amulets ever since the early Mende settlement of the region. It is only in this century that a stricter form of Islam has begun to make headway, displacing many of the traditional religious practices.⁸ Christian missionaries have worked among the Mende from about 1850 and they too have adherents, although Islam has proved more popular.⁹

Both the present borders of Mendeland and the present type of 'high bush' land cover are relatively recent. Until the nineteenth century the land the Mende now occupy was covered by dense rain forests sparsely populated by people who relied more on hunting than on settled agriculture.¹⁰ Until the late seventeenth century, in Ogilby's Africa, there is no mention of the Mende as inhabitants of the area in any of the accounts written by European travellers and traders who had had close contacts with the coast of Sierra Leone from the late fifteenth century.¹¹ It is probable that for about a century before this first printed reference to the Mende small bands of Mande speaking invaders had been pushing into the area which is now Mendeland from the south. These early thrusts, which are recorded as the 'Mani' and 'Kru' invasions, were followed in the late seventeenth century by larger numbers of invaders who continued to push north and west.

By the end of the eighteenth century they had begun to put pressure on the coastal Sherbro-Bullom and on the Temne to the north who had been settled in these areas since before European contacts began.

The exact identity of these 'Mende' invaders is not clear.¹² The push into Sierra Leone of groups of Mande-speaking warriors together with followers whom they had impressed into military service, was, according to A.P. Kup, 'part of the final collapse of law and order in the Songhai empire in the western Sudan'.¹³ He also notes that modern place names suggest that 'all Kono country, much of Mendeland, and part of Vai territory as we know them today were occupied at one time by the Kissis, who soon after their arrival in the sixteenth century separated the Kono and Vais'.¹⁴ Another author suggests that the Mende invaders themselves may have been of Loma or Bandi origin.¹⁵ In any case, the invaders did not drive out the previous inhabitants but rather dominated and intermingled with them so that today, as a number of anthropologists have noted, the modern Mende population shows evidence both in mixture of physical types and in linguistic and cultural variation of its composite history.

The nineteenth century was a period of continual warfare both between the various Mende chiefdoms and between groups of Mende and their neighbours. For the most part the Mende war chiefs acted independently; 'alliances for defence', Kup says, 'may have helped the process of state formation but, at least until almost the end of the nineteenth century, it would be wrong to think of the Mende

as a state or a "people" acting as a unit'.¹⁶ Warfare resulted not only from the competition for land and attempts to interfere with trade, but also from the need to acquire the slaves who were the basis of the labor force. By means of slave labor the dense forest was gradually cleared and the land brought under cultivation. Slaves were also vital as 'currency' in the trade for salt, cattle, tobacco, rum, and weapons which was carried on with the coast. But by the end of the nineteenth century slavery as an institution had been considerably modified by changing conditions. By this time, according to Little, the majority of the slave population had been assimilated and by the fourth generation they were virtually the same as freeborn Mende.¹⁷

Warfare dominated Mende culture throughout the pre-colonial period, however. Major towns were well fortified with as many as eight or nine circles of strongly built war fences, and warrior-chiefs were the dominant political figures. Although the establishment of the British Protectorate in 1896 radically changed this highly important feature of traditional Mende life it did not turn back the tide of Mende expansionism. In the early nineteenth century the Mende were described as occupying an area 'divided almost equally across the Sierra Leone-Liberia frontier of modern times'.¹⁸ Warfare had brought them further west and north in the course of the next century and, at the end of that period, 'they also often moved peacefully into Bullom [Sherbro] villages, gradually coming to outnumber the chief's own subjects, electing

their own headmen and turning them into Mende villages'.¹⁹ This is a pattern which has continued into this century and which has meant the spread to neighbouring people of the Mende secret society terminology and the masking traditions which will be the focus of this study.

The secret societies which sponsor masking activity have been extremely important institutions in Mende life, particularly the male Poru society whose political power equalled and intersected that of the chiefs, and the female Sande society. Their structure and functions will be discussed in more detail in the next two chapters, but it would be appropriate here to note the cultural link which these secret societies form among the Mende and several neighbouring peoples. Sande and Poru exist also among the Vai, Gola, Sherbro-Bullom, and Krim (usually considered a sub-group of the Sherbro-Bullom) as traditional features of these cultures. It appears that these peoples had been settled in their present homelands for some time before the arrival of the Mende. The Vai are the most recent arrivals among them, having moved into their coastal territory from the western Sudan sometime in the late fourteenth century. Of the Poru-Sande group only the Vai and the Mende are members of the Mande language group although they belong to different branches. The Gola and Bullom peoples belong to the Mel language family.²⁰ Despite this linguistic division there is a noteworthy uniformity in the terminology used in the secret societies. Only the Sherbro-Bullom have a different name for

the Sande society which they call Bundu; the other Mel group, the Gola, use the term Sande, and their term for an official of the society, zo, is the same as the Vai term and closely related to the Mende sowo (part of the term sowei). There is also a great uniformity in the ritual and masking practices of these peoples as we shall see, which cut across linguistic and ethnic divisions.

The earliest description of male and female secret society organization and initiation was recorded by Dapper in 1676 and appears to be based on the peoples of the coast, particularly the Sherbro-Bullom. Fifteen years later another explorer, Barbot, gave further details and speculated that the Gola were the originators of Sande.²¹ However, it appears that during the early Mende incursions into southern Sierra Leone they already observed Sande and Poru rituals; the first late seventeenth-century references to their movements record a few words of Mende vocabulary including a number of secret society terms.²² It is unlikely therefore that these institutions were taken over whole by any one group from any of the others. More probably the similar institutions they now share have resulted from a gradual evolution influenced by copying and interborrowing amongst all the peoples of the region.

The British Protectorate over the hinterland of Sierra Leone was proclaimed in 1896. In the course of the two preceding decades treaties had been concluded with the Mende chiefs which gave the British powers over trade and appointed them as arbitrators in

interchiefdom disputes. However, continuing internecine wars together with French colonial expansion to the north posed increasing threats to British control over trade. This led the British government to take the final step toward colonization. The subsequent imposition of a house tax provoked a short-lived but fierce revolt against British domination in 1898, known as the Mende Rising or the House-Tax War. The rising was dealt with relatively quickly and the show of military might seems to have impressed the Mende chiefs sufficiently for them to accept the sovereignty of the British by right of their superior military power.²³

One of the first projects undertaken by the British once their control of the hinterland had been assured was the building of a railroad which followed a route from Freetown on the coast to the eastern Mende chiefdoms through almost the whole breadth of Mendeland. This railway was completed in 1908 and provided for the first time a line of transportation and communication unaffected by seasonal changes and, of course, no longer subject to interruptions caused by war. Modernization has proceeded slowly and steadily in this century as it has elsewhere in West Africa, gradually altering the traditional economy and way of life. The railroad and other factors encouraged the Mende to develop palm nuts as a cash crop and these together with piassava were the most important exports from the colony in the first part of the century. The introduction of a money economy, increased urbanization,

literacy in English, modern medicine, and other Western influences, have all altered the traditional fabric of Mende life although the old ways have by no means disappeared. The pace of modernization was speeded up by the involvement of Sierra Leone in the two World Wars; Mende soldiers were used in the fighting in the Cameroons in World War I and in Burma in World War II and these campaigns are widely remembered throughout modern Mendeland. The discovery of industrial diamonds and iron in Sierra Leone has provided new sources of wealth to a number of Mende in recent years, particularly since Independence was granted in 1961.

Very little had been written about Mende society or material culture until the beginning of this century. Examples of Vai Sande masks began to appear in museum collections toward the end of the nineteenth century. The first sketches appear in the publication of the Swiss naturalist Büttikofer, the Reisebilder aus Liberia of 1890, which reported on the scientific expeditions he made to the Vai country and other parts of Liberia in the late 1870's and the 1880's.²⁴ Leo Frobenius reproduced two of Büttikofer's sketches and also published drawings of two other Sande masks in German museums in his Masken und Geheimbünde Afrikas of 1898.²⁵ Sir Harry Johnston's Liberia of 1906 also included very early photographs of Vai and Gola Sande masking.²⁶

The first publication dealing with Mende masking and ethnography is T.J. Alldridge's The Sherbro and its hinterland of 1901.²⁷

Alldrige was District Commissioner of the Sherbro region in the 1870's and 1880's and was asked to undertake several treaty-making expeditions to the eastern or 'upper' Mende in 1889-90, 1891, and 1894. As Government Travelling Commissioner he was the first European to have extensive contacts with the eastern Mende chiefdoms. His book, which was intended to provide accurate and useful information to the British public about the new colony thus includes detailed descriptions of the terrain, the people, and their ritual and masking activity, and is illustrated with photographs among which are the first published pictures of Mende Sande masks. In 1910, after a return tour of inspection of Sierra Leone Alldrige published a second book, A transformed colony, in which he reports on the changes which had occurred since the British takeover and includes further ethnographic information.²⁸ Alldrige's accounts are characterized on the one hand by an overall respect for Mende culture and character and a desire to make their good qualities and the resources of their country known to the British public, and on the other by the characteristic ethnocentrism of the period. This leads him, for example, to give a detailed description of Sande initiation and masking and at the same time to refer to the 'Bundu devil...in all her barbaric grotesqueness'.²⁹ However, the wealth of first hand observation of customs as yet unchanged by direct contact with Europeans makes Alldrige's publications extremely valuable as historical sources.

During the first decade of this century Alldrige also procured

a number of masks and other carvings from the Sherbro and Mende regions for the British Museum and the Brighton Museum which are among the oldest examples in British collections. Unfortunately he was not as meticulous about recording provenance as he was about other kinds of information, so that we do not know exactly where he acquired the pieces.³⁰ Another very important early collection of Mende and Sherbro carving in Great Britain was acquired by the Liverpool museum in the first decade of this century. Most of the pieces reached the museum through the agency of Mr. Ridyard, who as chief engineer on the Elder Dempster line ship S.S. Niger made regular trips to the West African coast. From the evidence of his contributions to the museum, Ridyard was a keen collector with a good eye who often took the trouble to record the exact provenance of individual pieces.³¹

Interest in the material culture of Sierra Leone was also keen at this early period in the Bernisches Historisches Museum. There were a number of Swiss merchants established in the Sherbro area at the turn of the century, and one of these, Mr. Ruply, had supplied the Bern ethnographic museum with a small but fine collection of Sherbro masks and wood carvings. Possibly stimulated by the presence of this collection Dr. Walter Volz, a Swiss oil geographer who had had previous experience in southeast Asia, decided to make an expedition to Sierra Leone and the hinterland of Liberia.³² He set out in the spring of 1906 with a commission from the Bern museum to increase its holdings from these regions. We are told by Rudolf

Zeller, the curator of the ethnographic department, that Volz was given a shopping list in the form of a 'detailed program which had been worked out for him'.³³ During the summer of 1906 Volz made 'some small tours of orientation from Freetown which took him partly with the railroad to the Liberian border and partly with the commercial ships of Ryff, Roth and Company to the region of the Bum and Kittam rivers'.³⁴ Following these short expeditions Volz travelled into the interior of Liberia where he was killed later in the year during the storming of Bussamai by the French. His collections arrived safely in Switzerland, however, together with his catalogue and notebooks and these were used as the basis for two publications by Swiss scholars issued over the next two decades. The first of these was a long article published by Zeller in 1912, 'Die Bundu-Gesellschaft: Ein Geheimbund der Sierra Leone',³⁵ illustrating many pieces from the Volz collection which had by then been divided among the ethnographic museums in Basel, St. Gallen, and Bern, where the largest part remained.³⁶ Zeller gives an account of Sande society organization and ritual, summarizing the publications of Alldridge and others, and incorporating additional information recorded by Volz in his field notebooks. These notes are particularly full in relation to Sande masking and regalia including the charms and medicinal paraphernalia used by initiates and members of the society. Zeller's contribution consists primarily in his systematic organization of information relating specifically to material culture which had previously been scattered through more

general descriptions of the Mende.

The establishment of the British Protectorate and the sensation caused by the atrocities of the House-Tax War stimulated a number of publications over the next two decades by British soldiers, administrators, and others who wanted to make conditions in the Protectorate better known and to correct misinformation. Many of these books contain previously unpublished items of information relating to the secret societies or isolated photographs of maskers and regalia which are useful to the student of material culture and carving, particularly in the identification of motifs based on now out-moded ornaments and body decoration.³⁷ The most important additions to our knowledge of Mende secret society organization and ritual, however, are found in several articles by F.W. Migeod and in his book, A View of Sierra Leone, which came out in 1925.³⁸ Migeod, who had had considerable experience as a civil servant in the Protectorate in the early part of the century was particularly interested in the Mende language and transcribed prayers, songs, and stories as well as publishing a compendium of Mende 'natural history' vocabulary. His book contains a number of rare or unique photographs of Mende maskers, as well as detailed descriptions of a variety of types of masking performances.

The second study based on Volz's collection and notebooks was a doctoral dissertation by Jules Staub on the material culture of the Mende as a whole which was published in 1935.³⁹ Zeller says in his foreword to the study that 'as a supplement to Volz's already

published diaries [presumably Zeller's own 1912 article] a large number of the originally enclosed notes to his collection are here worked up'.⁴⁰ Like Zeller's own earlier article Staub's work is valuable chiefly as a comprehensive and systematic summary of publications and museum collections available at that time. The section on the Sande society is the least original as Zeller had already dealt quite thoroughly with the relevant Volz material, but Staub illustrates the collection more fully. The lack of fresh fieldwork, too, leads Staub to reproduce the dilettantish tone as well as the confusions in terminology and iconographic interpretation contained in the early accounts.⁴¹

In the same year that Staub's study was published new field work was, in fact, being carried out. An Austrian ethnographer, Ralph Eberl-Elber, with the support of the Viennese Academy of Science and an Austrian publishing house, spent six months in Sierra Leone from March until October 1935 studying the nine ethnic groups in the country with a particular emphasis on their religious beliefs and secret societies. His book, Westafrikas letztes Rätsel, was published in 1936.⁴² This ambitious project could not, of course, be carried out with any great depth in the time allotted, but Eberl-Elber nevertheless provided a considerable amount of new information closely observed and apparently transcribed with respect for the integrity of his informants' cultural perspective and language. He illustrated the text with many good photographs of maskers which are carefully labelled as to ethnic group and location. He also included detailed descriptions of Sande dances, the carving of a

sowei mask, and other ritual activity.⁴³

Two years after Eberl-Elber's field work in the interior of Sierra Leone the University of Pennsylvania Museum sent out an expedition to the Sherbro-Bullom led by H.U. Hall.⁴⁴ Hall studied the material culture of the Sherbro both on Sherbro Island and on the mainland. He made a large and very well authenticated collection of masks and other carvings for the University Museum and recorded the specific provenances and ritual contexts associated with these items with great accuracy and unprecedented detail. Unfortunately the material in his notebooks was never fully published, as Hall died before he could write a full report. He did, however, bring out a preliminary report of the expedition's findings entitled The Sherbro of Sierra Leone in 1938, and he catalogued the collection he had made for the museum thoroughly with full explanatory notes for each piece.⁴⁵ These notes, as well as the photographs printed in the preliminary report and the additional field material preserved in the museum archives, constitute a rich source of information on traditional Sherbro-Bullom culture which was even then heavily influenced by the Mende.⁴⁶ Hall's work is characterized by a consistent objectivity of tone which is often lacking in the occasionally romantic Eberl-Elber and in most of the earlier British authors; the latter group, like Alldridge, had many ingrained late Victorian prejudices and were often imbued as well with a proselytizing desire to justify colonialism and to attract interest and settlers to the colony by presenting the native

peoples in the most favorable light.

In the post-war period our knowledge of the Mende has, of course, been enormously enriched by Kenneth Little's fundamental ethnographic study The Mende of Sierra Leone, first published in 1951, and by his many articles on specific aspects of Mende culture.⁴⁷ His work is anthropological and excludes the consideration of material culture or artistic activity per se. In addition our knowledge of Mende history has been clarified by the work of A.P. Kup, our understanding of traditional Mende religion by the publications of W.T. Harris and Harry Sawyerr, and our interpretation of oral literature by articles by Marion Kilson and Gordon Innes.⁴⁸

The literature dealing specifically with wood carving has also been enriched. Several recent articles by J.V.O. Richards and an exhibition catalogue by William Hommel have provided additional information and visual documentation.⁴⁹ A doctoral dissertation by Loretta Reinhardt completed in 1975, 'Mende carvers', provides valuable data about the attitudes and methods of modern carvers and attempts a formulation of aesthetic principles underlying Mende sculpture.⁵⁰ A series of extremely illuminating studies of Gola Sande masking and aesthetics by Warren d'Azevedo provide invaluable comparative information for the study of Mende masking, as well as being in themselves the most satisfying accounts of Sande ritual and its underlying mythology which have yet been made available for any of the Sande peoples.⁵¹ No systematic study of

the iconography and ritual context of Mende Sande society masking has yet been provided, nor has the attempt been made to identify stylistic groups within the Sande region as a whole. It is in these areas in particular that it is hoped the present study can make a contribution.

Notes

- 1 The exact figure was 672,831. Government of Sierra Leone, General Statistics Office, Population census of Sierra Leone, 1 (Freetown, 1965).
- 2 The following brief description of Mendeland and Mende social organization is based on Kenneth Little, The Mende of Sierra Leone: A West African people in transition, Revised Edition (London, 1967), particularly Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 7.
- 3 Little, Mende of Sierra Leone, 106.
- 4 Little, Mende of Sierra Leone, 111.
- 5 There is some debate over the question of women and political power in traditional Mende society. Arthur Abraham argues that women chiefs are a recent phenomenon furthered by the British. See 'Women chiefs in Sierra Leone: a historical reappraisal', Odu, N.S. 10 (1974), 30-44. In another article Carol Hoffer says that Mende and Sherbro women have traditionally held political power. See 'Mende and Sherbro women in high office', Canadian journal of African studies, 6 (1972), 151-164.
- 6 A valuable discussion of Mende traditional religious beliefs is W.T. Harris and Harry Sawyerr, The springs of Mende belief and conduct (Freetown, 1968). See also Kenneth Little, 'The Mende in Sierra Leone', in African worlds edited by Daryll Forde (London, 1954), 111-37.
- 7 Little considers the jinanga and secret society spirits to be separate categories. It was my understanding, however, that the latter constitute a special group within the category of nature spirits. See Chapter 2 for further discussion.
- 8 See J. Spencer Trimmingham and Christopher Fyfe, 'The early expansion of Islam in Sierra Leone', The Sierra Leone bulletin of religion, 2 (1960), 39.
- 9 See Little, Mende of Sierra Leone, 273-275 for a discussion of the reasons for this.
- 10 The following summary of the historical origins of the Mende is based on the conclusions set forth by A.P. Kup in A history of Sierra Leone: 1400-1787 (Cambridge, 1961), and the discussion of their movements in the nineteenth century on his Sierra Leone: a concise history (London, 1975).

- 11 John Ogilby, Africa: being an accurate description of the regions of Aegypt, Barbary, Lybia, and Billedulgeria... (London, 1680). This book is basically a translation of Dapper with added information. See Kup, Sierra Leone: 1400-1787, 25 (note) for a discussion of these early sources.
- 12 The name 'Mendi' means 'lords' in Sherbro-Bullom according to Kup who says: 'The original Mani leaders had been understood to owe allegiance to some overlord in the interior; their successors seem to have continued this into the seventeenth century for it was said that the Temme, Bullom, Krim, Vai and other peoples paid homage to a nation who in turn were subject to the Emperor of Mano, south of Cape Mount. Bullom and Krim called the subjects of this Emperor Mendi of "Lords"'. 'Introduction' to Adam Afzelius, Sierra Leone journal edited by Alexander Peter Kup, Studia Ethnographica Uppsalsensia, 27 (1967), 4.
- 13 Kup, Sierra Leone: 1400-1787, 153.
- 14 Kup, Sierra Leone: 1400-1787, 130.
- 15 Northcote Thomas, 'Who were the Manes?', Journal of the African society, 19 (1919), 176-188, and 20 (1920), 33-42.
- 16 Kup, A concise history, 80.
- 17 See Little, Mende of Sierra Leone, Chapter 1 for a detailed discussion of slavery.
- 18 Kup, Sierra Leone: 1400-1787, 157.
- 19 Kup, A concise history, 89.
- 20 The Mande language group originated in the western Sudan. Mende belongs to the south-western branch of this group as do Loko and Bandi, while Vai and Kono belong to the northern branch of this group. See T.D.P. Dalby, 'Language distribution in Sierra Leone, 1961-1962', Sierra Leone language review, 1 (1962), 62-67.
- 21 Olfert Dapper, Description de l'Afrique... (Amsterdam, 1686). The original Flemish edition was published in 1676. Barbot's remarks are cited by Kup, 'Notes' to Afzelius, Journal.
- 22 Among the words listed by Ogilby are 'sovah' (sowei), 'Sande', and 'pilly' and 'billy', words referring to male initiation. See Kup, Sierra Leone: 1400-1787, 152-53.

- 23 This is Little's conclusion. See Chapter 2, Mende of Sierra Leone.
- 24 J. Büttikofer, Reisebilder aus Liberia, 2 vols (Leiden, 1890). In volume 1, p. 255 Büttikofer gives an eye-witness description of a 'devil dance among the Vai' which took place near Fisherman's Lake in 1881, and in volume 2, pp. 307-310 he describes the Sande society and its initiation festivals as well as the zo ba or sowei masker.
- 25 Leo Frobenius, Die Masken und Geheimbünde Afrikas (Halle, 1898). Figure 18, p. 101, is a composite redrawing of two sketches in Büttikofer. Fig. 115, Table VIII copies Büttikofer's sketch although the lower border of the coiffure is shown slightly differently. The other two masks sketched are still owned by the Bremen and Berlin ethnographic museums.
- 26 Sir Harry Johnston, Liberia, 2 vols (London, 1906).
- 27 T.J. Alldridge, The Sherbro and its hinterland (London, 1901).
- 28 T.J. Alldridge, A transformed colony: Sierra Leone (London, 1910).
- 29 Alldridge, Sherbro, 142.
- 30 What evidence can be deduced from carving style and from Alldridge's own early photographs is discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.
- 31 Ridyard also acted as agent and courier on a number of occasions for resident British officials who had acquired carvings which they wished to donate to a museum in Britain.
- 32 For descriptions of the expedition see 'Einige Ergebnisse der Expedition von Dr. Walter Volz nach Liberia. Bericht über den XV Kongress des Verbandes der Schweiz. geographischen Gesellschaften...', Jahresbericht der Geographischen Gesellschaft von Bern, 21 (1909), 52-57; and also 'Reise durch das Hinterland von Liberia, Winter 1906-1907, Nach seinen Tagebüchern bearbeitet von R. Zeller Bern 1911', Jahresbericht der Geographischen Gesellschaft von Bern, 22 (1911), 232-249.
- 33 Rudolf Zeller, 'Die Bundu-Gesellschaft: Ein Geheimbund der Sierra Leone', Jahresbericht des Historischen Museums in Bern (1912), 104.
- 34 Zeller, 'Bundu-Gesellschaft', 104.

- 35 Zeller, 'Bundu-Gesellschaft', 103-144 (see note 33).
- 36 Of the 22 sowei masks in the collection twelve remained in Bern, four went to Basel, five to St. Gallen, and one is recorded as having remained in the possession of the Volz family. Unfortunately at the time I visited the Bern museum in 1971 several of the masks listed in the museum's catalogue could not be located, although the extant pieces form a remarkable collection in any case. Volz's notebooks and handwritten catalogue, said by Zeller and Staub to be on deposit in the museum's archive, could also not be found although a great deal of the relevant information contained in both had been transferred to the museum's card index. It is possible that further searching may yet unearth these documents.
- 37 The general attitude of many of these writers is perhaps epitomised by a remark made by the editor of the newly founded Sierra Leone studies in urging the native chiefs to contribute to the journal: 'It is hoped that they will in time gain confidence and learn that, although by a curious concatenation of circumstances white men are sometimes compelled to hang a cannibal, yet white men are none the less genuinely interested to know why he was a cannibal'. 1 (1918), 4. Among the more useful of these publications are R.G. Berry, 'The Sierra Leone cannibals, with notes on their history, religion and customs', Proceedings of the royal Irish academy, 30 (1912); F.W. Butt-Thompson, Secret societies of West Africa (London, 1929), which although riddled with mistakes has a number of good photographs; H.O. Newland, Sierra Leone, its people, products, and societies (London, 1916); C.B. Wallis, The advance of our West African empire (London, 1903); and A.R. Wright, 'Secret societies and fetishism in Sierra Leone', Folk-Lore, 4 (1907).
- 38 F.W.H. Migeod, A view of Sierra Leone (London, 1926). See also 'A Mende dance', Man, 17, 153-156: 'The Poro society: The building of the Poro house and the making of the image', Man, 16, 102-108; and 'Mende songs', Man, 16, 184-191.
- 39 Jules Staub, 'Beiträge zur Kenntnis der materiellen Kultur der Mende in der Sierra Leone', Jahrbuch des Bernischen Historischen Museums in Bern, 15 (1936).
- 40 Rudolf Zeller, 'Introduction' to Staub, 'Beiträge', 1.
- 41 For example, Staub continues to use the Sherbro-Bullom term Bundu when dealing specifically with the Mende society. At one point Staub seems to suggest that sande is the name for the society enclosure outside the village, which is incorrect. 'Beiträge', 53.

- 42 Ralph Eberl-Elber, Westafrikas letztes Rätsel (Salzburg, 1936).
- 43 Eberl-Elber also wrote a useful article on men's masquerades; 'Die Masken der Männerbunde in Sierra Leone', Ethnos, 2 (1937), 38-46. For more recent information on men's masking see William Seigmann and Judith Perani, 'Men's masquerades in Sierra Leone and Liberia', African arts 9 (1976), 42-46.
- 44 An interesting footnote to the history of such expeditions is contained in a letter from Hall in the museum archives in which he admits that his original desire had been to study the Bini of Nigeria but that due to the stringent financial conditions of the Depression period his grant from the American Philosophical Society was too small. (Hall had lost his curatorial position in the museum because of cut-backs as well). 'In view of the sma-1 amount which apparently I can expect', he wrote, 'it is my present idea to go to some nearer West Coast area, to which the passage money would be less, and remain as long as the funds hold out, even if this is nor more than a few months. Sierra Leone is what I am thinking of now'. Letter to Mr. Jayne, director of the museum, Jan. 23, 1936.
- 45 H.U. Hall, The Sherbro of Sierra Leone: A preliminary report of the university museum's expedition to West Africa, 1937 (Philadelphia, 1938).
- 46 The museum possesses a large additional collection of Hall's field photographs and field notes, both of which were consulted during this study.
- 47 Little's book has already been cited; a full list of his articles is included in the bibliography.
- 48 Kup's Sierra Leone: 1400-1787 and his Concise history, and Harris and Sawyerr's Springs of Mende belief have already been cited. See also Harris' article 'Ceremonies and stories connected with trees, rivers and hills in the protectorate of Sierra Leone', Sierra Leone studies, N.S. 2 (1954), 91-97, and Sawyerr's piece 'Ancestor worship--the mechanics', Sierra Leone bulletin of religion, 6 (1964). For interpretations of Mende oral literature which aid in understanding aesthetic approaches in general see Gordon Innes, 'Some features of theme and style in Mende folktales', Sierra Leone language review, 4 (1964), 6-19, and 'The function of the song in Mende folktales', Sierra Leone language review, 4 (1965), 54-63. See also Marion de B. Kilson, 'Social relationships in Mende dömèisia', Sierra Leone studies, N.S. 15 (1961) and 'Supernatural beings in Mende dömèisia', Sierra Leone bulletin of religion, 3 (1961), 1-11.

- 49 See J.V.O. Richards, 'The Sande: A socio-cultural organization in the Mende community in Sierra Leone', Baessler Archiv N.F. 22 (1974), and 'The Sande mask', African arts, 7 (1974), 48-51. Unfortunately I have not been able to consult Richards' doctoral dissertation. Hommel's catalogue is entitled Art of the Mende (College Park, Maryland, 1974).
- 50 Loretta R. Reinhardt. 'Mende carvers' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Southern Illinois University, 1975).
- 51 See especially 'Mask makers and myth in western Liberia', in Primitive art and society, edited by Anthony Forge (London, 1973); and 'Sources of Gola artistry', in The traditional artist in African society, edited by Warren L. d'Azevedo (Bloomington, Indiana, 1973).

Chapter 2. Masking Among the Mende

The artist becomes a participant. "Artists" "write", organize, cast, rehearse and produce masked dances, but may never touch carving tools. 1

As the early writers on the Mende recognized, the sowei masker is but one of a group of maskers who have a place in Mende life. Although the remainder of this study will concentrate on the sowei, a balanced conception of this masker depends on an understanding of Mende masking traditions as a whole. To the Mende, as we shall see, the appearance and performance of each masker is determined in large part by the way it fits into a hierarchically conceived group, and this group in turn reflects both Mende social organization and aesthetic sensibility. The public appearances of the maskers are regulated by an annual calendar of ritual and secular events in which a balance is struck among the different types of maskers. Furthermore when several maskers appear together the particular aesthetic qualities and spiritual identity of each is played off against the others for greater dramatic impact.

Our appreciation of the aesthetics of African masking--or what Cole calls the 'arts of transformation'--has developed considerably since the early European contacts. The early recorders of Mende traditions, for example, largely ignored the aesthetic aspects of masking as a unique combination of sculpture, theatre, and dance. They regarded masking as a primitive pagan religious observance and focussed their attention on, if anything, the easily separable and collectable headpieces. As is well known the

revolution in European art around the turn of this century gradually brought about changes in taste which allowed Westerners to appreciate African masks as sculpture representing traditions as formally sophisticated as their own.² But with this change in European perception came the rigid division between 'fine arts' rendered in the enduring media of wood, metal, stone, and clay, and 'folk arts' which are often made of more common and perishable materials such as cloth, leather, and basketry. It is a matter for debate how well this distinction has served European art history but it is certainly entirely arbitrary in the case of African art. Yet the distinction remained operative until very recently and, for Mende art, has led to an exclusive concentration in most publications on the wooden sowei mask as opposed to the other mask types.

As it happens the distortion is not too great in the case of Mende art. For the sowei is not only the one important Mende mask carved in wood but is also the major mask which has an anthropomorphic head; the head pieces of the other maskers are constructed of basketry, raffia, leather, cloth and other materials in non-human configurations. As such, the sowei is by far the most important product of the Mende carver, and the subject of the greatest artistic innovation, elaboration and attention both from him and from the public. Furthermore, the sowei is by far the most numerous mask type; nearly every village has one or more and larger towns may have as many as a dozen, while the other mask types are far less

frequently found. The problem, involved in an exclusive concentration on the sowei, rather, is that we lose the point of view of the intended audience of the work of art. In focussing on the headpiece, furthermore, we would miss the overall characterization associated with the sculptural representation. The sowei, to the Mende, is not a mask but a masker and meaningful only in the context of its performance or masquerade. Informants, when shown a photograph of a sowei mask, will often ask in puzzlement, 'this is the head, but where is the rest of the body?' And after seeing a group of such photographs they will express wonder that no other types of maskers are included.³ These comments are keys to the Mende concept of the sowei which it is our aim to explore. To be convinced of this we need only imagine what we would miss if we studied the figure of one particular god from the east pediment of the Parthenon, for example, without knowledge or understanding of any of the others, or if we concentrated exclusively on one apostle in the tympanum at Vezelay and ignored the surrounding group and its interrelationships.

The Mende pantheon of maskers includes about a dozen 'personalities' embodying spirits of varying degrees of power and importance. They can be roughly divided up as belonging to three categories. There are maskers embodying the powerful spirits which belong to the secret societies: the goboi, gbini, and nafale of the male Poro society, the sowei of the female Sande society, and the njaye and humōi maskers belonging to the 'medicine' societies of the same names.

The powers of these maskers, as we shall see, are directed toward the maintenance of social order and the inculcation and enforcement of traditional rules of social intercourse. A second group of maskers personifies spirits of a lesser degree, representing not the corporate identity of whole sections of society, but the private entrepreneurship of small cliques or of individual men. This group of maskers, including jobai, falui, and yavi embody somewhat less powerful spirits which perform 'miracles' for the entertainment of crowds at times of public celebration. A final group of maskers, including the male gongoli and the female gonde and samawa are not true masked spirits but are clown-like figures which parody the other maskers for the amusement of onlookers.

In order to understand the roles these maskers play it will be useful to describe briefly the role of secret societies in Mende life, as well as Mende ideas about the 'natural' and 'supernatural' worlds. Associations performing special services are central institutions in many of the cultures of the Central West Atlantic Region, which coincides roughly with the modern states of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Ivory Coast.⁴ These tribes have in the past sometimes been referred to as the 'Sande-Poro complex' because the male Poro and female Sande societies are the most important among these associations, although recent research has narrowed the group who can be said to have true Poro and Sande organizations.⁵ As the activities of these groups are kept secret from non-members they are usually termed 'secret

societies'. This term may at first be somewhat misleading to the Western ear inasmuch as it might lead us to expect small esoteric cults rather than the large, powerful governmental and regulatory agencies the associations traditionally were. For the Mende, as for the other related peoples, the membership of Poru includes all adult men, and of Sande all adult women. Poru and Sande were traditionally responsible for the training of young people in nearly all the formal skills and ritual knowledge necessary to Mende men and women, and every girl and boy had to be initiated into the Sande and Poru societies respectively in order to be considered marriageable and able to play a full, responsible role in the life of the community. The Poru society, in addition, exercised a great degree of control over economic and political life, organizing everything from warfare to agricultural work. Its power intersected that of the hierarchy of elders and chiefs all of whom, of course, were Poru members. The Poru inner circle of officials influenced the selection of a chief, and he, in turn, was expected to uphold Poru and Sande society sanctions and decrees.⁶ A number of smaller and more specialized societies regulate particular areas of social interaction. The Humöi society lays down and enforces rules regarding sexual relations, prohibiting liaisons among various categories of blood and affinal relations. Another society, the Njaye, controls a powerful 'medicine' which is believed to be effective in the treatment of insanity and mental illness, and which can also be used to increase a person's

popularity and personal magnetism.⁷

Each secret society, like the Njaye society, is in possession of a 'medicine' peculiar to it and its control over this medicine is the means by which it enforces its rules and sanctions on the community. These medicines are natural substances such as herbs or rocks with inherent magical properties which the officials of the society know how to manipulate. The properties and whereabouts of the substances are imparted to the leaders in dreams by spirits associated with the 'medicines'. This knowledge together with the actual substances is passed down by the leaders to their descendants. It is the spirit associated with the society 'medicine' which is embodied by the society masker. Most bodily ills are considered by the Mende to result from transgressions against the rules of conduct laid down by one society or another. Once a person has discovered through divination or self-examination which rule he has broken he applies to the appropriate society for help. This may involve initiation into the society, payment of a fine, ritual 'washing' with a prescribed 'medicine' or a combination of these remedies. The masked spirits of the secret societies may take an active role in the accusation of an offender or in the process by which his 'sin' is remitted.

A brief discussion of Mende cosmology and terminology will help to clarify the concepts involved. The Mende, like most African peoples, do not have a separate word for 'mask' or 'masker', for distinguishing the costume from the human being who wears it, or

the headpiece from the rest of the costume, would contradict the notion that a masked figure is an ngafa (plural, ngafeisia), a spirit.⁸ The Mende recognize different types of ngafeisia, all of which were originally created by Ngewö, the supreme god, and it is he who is also ultimately responsible for imbuing certain substances with medicinal or magical power.⁹

The Mende believe that there is ngafa in each human being which goes after death to join the ancestral spirits. These spirits are tended and worshipped by their descendants as intermediaries between humans and Ngewö. In addition to the ancestral ngafeisia there are also nature spirits, the jinanga, which live in the bush, rivers, and hills, outside of human habitations. Kilson calls them 'localized spirits' because they 'are associated with particular places like a raffia palm grove, a river, or a place on a bush path'.¹⁰ They can appear to human beings individually and make bargains with them; they are termed 'spirit brothers' and 'sisters' and form intimate relationships with their human correspondents which may include sexual seduction. One group, the tèmoisia, are midgets who are encountered in the forest and can help people by imparting special skills to them. Others, like the white-skinned man ndogboyösoi or the mermaid njaloi (also known as tingoi) can be made to bestow great wealth on people if they are handled properly.¹¹ Lack of sufficient cleverness on the part of people who encounter them can, however, bring disaster.

There is some ambiguity regarding the category of ngafeisia to which the secret society masked spirits belong. On the one hand

they appear to be closely related to the ancestral spirits. Little quotes Poru invocations which recommend the new initiates to Ngewö through the agency of the ancestors in an unbroken chain back to the founders of the tribe. The role played by the Poru spirit during initiation is one of bearing and nurturing the new members; they are swallowed by the ngafa and reborn again, the spirit's teeth leaving marks on their backs in the form of small scars. The most widespread story explaining the origins of Poru links the society with an early Mende chief or 'big man' who retired to the bush because of a disfiguring disease and was subsequently transformed into a spirit which became the head of the society. This story suggests that in one aspect the Poru gbini masker, which is always referred to as the Poru spirit, is an actual ancestor spirit as well as a symbol of chiefly authority by virtue of its descent from that original Mende chief. This type of masked spirit, half monster and half human, is known in a number of forms throughout West Africa, and has been termed by Douglas Fraser the 'legendary ancestor' of the tribe. Thus he argues, 'the legendary forefather stands somewhere between the simple family ancestor cult of agriculturalists and the divine ancestor of the king which is venerated in courtly societies'.¹² As we shall see in Chapter 6 the Sande society maskers too are frequently linked with ancestors through the names they are given, and among certain neighbouring peoples they are believed to be direct embodiments of male ancestors of the owners of the masks. The link between the ancestors and

the secret society maskers helps us to understand how the maskers are able to act as concrete personifications of traditional morality -- physical reminders of the time-honored modes of behavior promulgated by the societies. On the other hand, the major masked spirits of the secret societies are linked to the category of nature spirits since they are embodiments of the medicinal substances which are found in nature. Thus the Humöi society masker, for instance, is associated with large rocks and hills and the Sande masker with river dwelling nature spirits similar to njaloi.¹³

The second group of masked spirits discussed above, which entertain through magic tricks at times of celebration, appears to be even more closely related in kind to these nature spirits. Like the jinanga these minor maskers lack social 'conscience' and have more limited powers than the secret society maskers. Individuals can get control of the spirits embodied by maskers such as jobai, falui, and yavi, and manipulate them for their own ends rather than those of any group, for although these maskers are often classed in the literature as minor Porö spirits they have no ritual or symbolic role. They are only Porö spirits in the sense that virtually every public activity of adult men falls ultimately within the domain of Porö authority. The 'entertainment' maskers have no healing power but, like the nature spirits use their magical properties to get wealth for their owners in the form of gifts given to them at performances. The parallel between the two

categories of spirits is driven home by the fact that virtually the only painted images used as house decorations are depictions of the river spirit njaloi and of the 'entertainment' maskers jobai, yavi, and nafali. These are to be found in widely separated areas and appear to be purely ornamental in intent.¹⁴ The fact that these particular types of ngafeisia are singled out for such a purpose is evidence both of their non-sacral character and of the great enjoyment they afford the public.

Whether of higher or lower order, then, the masked spirits are held to partake of the supernatural powers contained in their particular medicines. The word for medicine, hale, is in fact the usual term for a masker. The secret societies take their own names, furthermore, from the specific hale each possesses. Thus, the medicine or hale of the Sande society is called sande, of the Njaye society njaye, and so on. The overlapping entities can be somewhat confusing, but terminology in the end is an important key to understanding. Thus the phrase Sande ngafa refers both to an insubstantial spirit and to the Sande society masker the sowei. The Sande hale in turn can mean either the sowei masker or the sande medicine. The term sowei, too, has a double reference, meaning both a high official of a secret society, and the Sande masker. The Poro society official who is the custodian of the gbini or goboi masquerade is called sowo and officials of the same title are found also in the other secret societies. Thus, in the case of the sowei, the masker assumes the triple identity of spirit of the

Sande society, powerful medicine of the Sande, and leader or teacher of the members.

Kenneth Little has described the masked society spirits as resulting from 'a more or less conscious attempt to endow spiritual force and power with an active personality, achieved by means of masks and various kinds of body gear. In this conception spiritual power has been "canalized" for purposes of social expression and action'.¹⁵ Thus, a masker might 'come out', especially in past years, when it was necessary to bring to justice an offender against the laws of a secret society. In such cases the offender would be chased by the masker, often followed by a crowd singing satirical songs, and brought before the chief or society leaders for punishment. Alldrige gives a good description of the way the Poro gbini (binni, in his transcription) might also be enlisted to enforce government regulations, in this case having to do with collecting men to work on the railway extension then being built, or persuading people 'properly to prepare their palm-kernels, palm-oil, and then camwood before offering it for sale to the traders'.

He notes:

When [the nafali masker] and his procession have been through the town the Binni is escorted back to the Poro bush, where the law is given orally to the Poro boys and the Wiyangas are then despatched with the actual words of the law throughout the Paramount Chief's jurisdiction, the Binni devil remaining in the Poro bush, but coming out to dance at intervals until the Wiyangas have returned and the law has been given to the country. 16

In addition to their role in enforcing laws, the maskers of the Sande and Poro societies are important symbolic presences in the rituals of initiation and in the public ceremonies which mark the coronation and funerals of chiefs and society officials and, today, in visits of important officials to Mende towns. The 'entertainment' maskers often appear in the wake of the secret society maskers during such celebrations as well as at Christmas and the end of Ramadan when people are rejoicing.

The Njaye and Humöi society maskers as well as certain others may be brought out as 'swearing medicines'. An individual with a grievance such as a bad debt or theft by an unknown person, may call upon the owners of the hale and cause its power to be invoked against the culprit. 'The medicine on which the curse is pronounced is said to release a spirit which goes out hunting for the culprit and others associated with him and, when it finds them, duly punishes them', one author explains.¹⁷ Harm will come to the guilty person unless he comes forward and makes restitution. He must also approach the owners of the hale to 'wash' him so that the hale which has been directed against him is neutralized. The 'swearing' procedure reproduces the mechanism by which the secret societies are able to enforce their laws.

Finally there are the much beloved parody maskers gongoli and gonde which have no spiritual identity or medicinal powers. Their purpose is to entertain through comic grotesqueness, clowning, and the inherent humor of their juxtaposition with the serious masks

they claim to 'imitate'. The lack of seriousness in these two maskers is most clearly seen from the fact that the raffia cape which serious maskers wear to disguise and hide their bodies is in the case of gongoli and gonde scanty and revealing. This would expose the wearer to great danger from the hale with which he is associated if he had any real spiritual identity. All the serious maskers, in fact, are accompanied in public by one or more attendants who make sure no such disarray occurs and who act as interpreters for the maskers.

Of all the Mende maskers the gbini is considered the most powerful ¹⁸ (Fig. 3). It is associated with the power of the Paramount Chief and its rare appearances make manifest his authority, as we saw in the event described by Alldridge. The gbini appears at the final 'pulling' ceremony of Poro initiation only if a son of the Paramount Chief is being initiated, and also comes out at the coronation or funeral of a Paramount Chief. Although the mask is in the care of a particular person initiated into its mysteries it is said to be 'kept for the Paramount Chief' and may only appear at his command. The physical attribute in its costume which indicates this connection is the large leopard skin which the gbini wears and which symbolizes supreme chiefly power, and the flat cylindrical form of its headpiece resembles the shape of a Paramount Chief's 'crown' (Fig. 38). The rarity of the gbini's public appearances is explained to be necessitated by its tremendous power which requires very careful control. By summoning the masker

a great force is released with destructive as well as constructive power. Women must stay far back from the masker and if a woman inadvertently touches it she must be washed with a special medicine called sawe or she will become ill. 'In the old days', as one informant explained, 'wherever gbini stepped they had to put medicine there before a woman could step there...' And when gbini comes out women must take off their headties so they will resemble men.¹⁹ The masker is preceded about an hour before its appearance by an official known as Wujei who announces its imminent arrival so that people can behave with proper circumspection. Another group of attendants, the mbulebla, 'pull' the gbini from its enclosure, begging it with gifts for some time preceding its appearance, and when it appears it comes through the town by a circuitous route so that no one will know where it came from.

The gbini is not primarily a dancing masker, it moves slowly and rhythmically in a ponderous way, crouching down and rearing up so that the mbulebla appear able to control it only with difficulty. It wears a shallow cylindrical headpiece with a round mirror placed in the center of its flat round top. The headpiece is constructed of a framework of bamboo cane over which is stretched hide ornamented with red, black, and white strips of cloth worked in a variety of symmetrically placed geometric motifs. Cowrie shells and white monkey fur are sewn on as decorative borders and designs. At the base of the headpiece a series of rounded flaps similarly ornamented overlap the thick natural-coloured raffia cape which covers the

masker's upper torso in front and falls almost to his feet in back. A trunk-like form protrudes below the headpiece in front. Additional fringes of raffia cover feet and arms, and barely visible underneath, the masker's body is covered by a loose-fitting suit of country cloth. Some variation is permitted in the ornamentation of the gbini headpiece, but the basic components remain the same: a mirror centrally placed on the top of the headpiece (although additional mirrors may be incorporated elsewhere), and red, black, and white appliquéd cloth in symmetrical geometric designs, further embellished with cowrie shells. On its back the gbini wears a cascade of wooden plaques (wala) bearing magical inscriptions in Arabic which are visible evidence of its power.

In addition to the gbini masker the Mende have another masker, the goboi, which is nearly identical in appearance. (Fig. 4). The one highly significant difference in costume is the substitution of a monkey skin for the leopard skin which gbini wears. By the removal of this symbol the connection of the masker with the Paramount Chief is eliminated and far fewer prohibitions surround his appearances. Goboi, though less powerful than gbini is still a highly important masker.²⁰ It is said to be 'kept for' sub-chiefs and their important advisors and may come out at the behest of any one of these men. Thus he appears when any one of their sons is pulled after Poro initiation, which is at virtually every session. Goboi may also appear at funerals of big men, visits of important officials, and sometimes on Christian, Moslem, or secular

holidays depending on the observances of the particular community. The goboi, too, has a livelier dancing style than gbini and contributes a more festive spirit to an important public event. Thus the goboi acts as a less awesome stand-in for the gbini when the Paramount Chief is not directly concerned, and enables the male community to have a symbolic representative just as the female community has the sowei masker. There may be as many goboi maskers theoretically, as there are towns wealthy enough to commission and support them, whereas there may be only one gbini in a chiefdom.²¹

The makers of gbini, goboi, and most other male masquerades are usually self-taught specialists who accept commissions in addition to their usual work. In the case of goboi a group of prominent men in a town will decide together to acquire it and will bring the proposal before the chief for his approval. Money is raised from the town as a whole, for the endeavor is quite costly.²² Training of the individual who dances with the mask and of the masker's followers takes place in secret under the auspices of Poru. Once the goboi is acquired it may be borrowed for a fee by other towns which lack one so that their local festivals will not lack a joyous atmosphere and aesthetic interest. In this way, as well as through the fees it receives whenever it performs, the masker repays the initial investment and brings additional wealth to the society. The goboi masker is particularly interesting because it brings into high relief the great importance of dancing in Mende life. Dancing is the supreme expression of happiness and

harmony; the goboi, in fact, will not come out when any major dispute divides the town. Without its participation at the close of Poro initiation, it is reiterated, 'the ceremony will not be nice', for 'if goboi is there everyone will dance'. And without dancing the town will not be lively, for dancing 'demonstrates the well-being of the town'. (Tei gahu ii gbua pon).²³ The creation of goboi is probably more recent than that of gbini and appears to be a direct response to a deeply felt need for a more public symbol of the men's society which can act as a catalyst for community-wide dancing and festivity at times of celebration.

The masker of the Njaye society, the njayeköi, like the gbini, serves ritual rather than festive purposes. It is closely associated with the working of the society medicine, and may also be used as a 'swearing medicine' both in chieftom disputes or by private persons with grievances. The masker comes out when a leader of the society dies in order to announce the death, and in ceremonies performed at the time of the new moon.²⁴ It also appears, inside the Njaye society house, to effect the cure of mentally ill persons whose relatives have enlisted the aid of the njaye medicine. The medicine is identified with tupoi, the horned viper, and one is kept in the Njaye shrine house. Members of the society are said to be able to immobilize the snake if they happen to encounter one. The medicine is collected in rivers, as is that of the Sande society. It is also striking that the headpieces of both the Njaye and Sande maskers employ female imagery and are both carved of wood.

The form of the Njaye masker's headpiece, however, seems to be capable of more variation than is that of the Sande soweï masker, possibly because chapters of the society are widely scattered--one Njaye chapter may serve one or more chiefdoms. One njayeköï, in Makpele chiefdom, Pujehun district, consists of a plain cylindrical wooden helmet which covers the wearer's head and which is provided with a perforated grill through which he sees. (Fig. 5). This is surmounted by a slender elongated ringed neck and an anthropomorphic female head. It closely resembles the Vai and Gola male mbowui or gbetu masker. Another Njaye masker from Bumpe chiefdom, Bo district, has a headpiece in the form of a wooden helmet with roughly carved features somewhat resembling those of the gonde, the female mask which parodies the soweï. A third njaye mask, illustrated by Hommel, appears to be a Poro nyangbei mask from the Loma of Liberia which has been adapted to other purposes.²⁵ It is a large face mask with schematic human features. The common feature of all these headpieces which marks them as Njaye maskers is that all are covered with painted spots of white, brown, yellow or black as is the Njaye society house and other ritual objects belonging to it. The njayeköï's costume consists of a natural-colored raffia cape falling from neck to feet, and its movements are slow and solemn so that the cape sways as it walks. Recent information about the appearance and activity of the Hümöï society masker is rare, but one example was published by Migeod in the 1920's. (Fig. 6).

Alldridge describes, in the passage cited above, how the nafali masker traditionally acted as a messenger for the gbini, appearing in the town before the gbini emerged to announce its arrival. It is difficult to know whether the nafali masker should be viewed as a Pororo spirit or as an entertainment masker, because its original role, though not completely forgotten, has often today given way to purely festive activity. Among the central and western Mende it enjoys the reputation of the Mende dancer par excellence and is frequently performed by young boys of ten or twelve who are not yet full Pororo members. In the eastern region it is more seriously regarded and is usually danced by grown men.²⁶ The nafali is described as the fastest of the Mende masked dancers, combining quick and intricate foot movements with high jumps. It wears a headpiece consisting of a flat oval cut off at the neck, like a bishop's mitre and made of black or white cloth over a stiff lining. (Fig. 7). In the middle of one side a mirror is attached and in one popular design four strips of cloth or rows of cowries radiate out from the center dividing the area in four. The other side of the headpiece is usually sewn with cowries in decorative motifs often taking the form of a cross or a four-leaf clover. The edge of the headpiece is bordered by a stiff short fringe of raffia, and short raffia ruffs are worn around the dancer's neck, waist, wrists, and ankles. The body of the masker is covered by a shirt and trousers of white cloth.

The falui masker has been characterized as an 'entertainment'

masker because of the non-ritual context of his appearances, but it is nevertheless regarded as a true masked spirit. The hale its owners control enables it to perform miracles (njosolui) which consist of various types of conjuring and carefully orchestrated illusions. Owners of falui will often say that the masker is even able to cure minor ills such as headache or stomach-ache, but this does not now appear to be taken too seriously. The conjuring tricks performed by falui are remembered and discussed long after. One man gave the following list:

At times when it is speaking it spits fire. It's very cunning [kabanako]. It can get on top of a house without anyone's knowing how it got there and you won't know how and when it comes down. It can lie down with a mortar filled with stones on top of its stomach and someone will pound the mortar and nothing will happen. It can make a very big fire, jump into it and stop dancing. If someone is sitting and nothing is wrong with you the devil can make you start shivering. As soon as it touches you you stop shaking. It can both make people happy and sick.²⁷

Other falui maskers emit smoke from their costumes and perform feats of magic by pointing at people with the whip (fomei) they carry. For example a falui will have his followers tie his feet to a rope and then attempt to move him, or direct them to lift jointly a small stool.²⁸ Because of the hale falui has directed against them, they are unable to move him, or the stool, and because of their own skill at acting out the illusion, the performance is quite convincing. Falui is usually performed by a young man with considerable dancing skill, and he alternates his tricks with bursts of dancing. His costume consists of a sack-like gown made of striped country cloth which covers his entire body. (Fig. 8).

Fringes of natural-colored raffia ring his neck and ankles. The headpiece is conical, usually made of red, black, and white cloth with a cluster of hornbill feathers on top. At the base of the cone the lower half of the masker's face is covered by black monkey fur. The headpiece is ornamented with a small mirror, strips of appliqued cloth, and cowrie shells. On the back of the headpiece is a cluster of wooden plaques with magical Arabic inscriptions (wala) like those worn by the gbini and goboi. Another small flap of cloth ornamented with cowries is sewn on the front of the gown.

The knowledge necessary to assemble the costume, medicines, and performing skills of the falui masquerade is sometimes handed down from father to son, as is the case with the other entertainment maskers which will be discussed. Often, however, a young man will travel to the eastern Mende chiefdoms where, it is generally agreed, falui originated and he will apprentice himself to an expert in order to learn its mysteries. He may pay off his fee in agricultural work for as much as a year, or he may be supported by a group of fellows who will become the followers of the mask and will share the money earned through masking performances. The falui is said to speak many languages and when he is performing one of his followers acts as interpreter and translates his unintelligible utterances. The other followers like those of goboi and gbini, though in a more modest way, are responsible for 'begging' the masker to come out and for keeping his costume in order. The falui masker may come out on any festive public occasion. In a

typical year, one falui in Jaiima-Bongor, for example, performed three times in different towns in the chiefdom-- once at the end of Ramadan, once to welcome a Resident Minister visiting the chiefdom seat, and once when Sande held its final 'pulling' ceremony. Its owner also takes it out of the chiefdom on occasion to the annual Cacao Show at Kenema which is now the biggest annual gathering of entertainment maskers in Mendeland.

The two other entertainment masquerades most commonly found in Mendeland are the jobai and yavi. These maskers appear on the same kinds of occasion as falui and are acquired and administered in the same way. Both are particularly admired for the beauty of their headpieces which are constructed of a basketry base woven into a four, five, or six sided form which is completely covered with brightly colored threads of European manufacture called wudi. Hoops wrapped with wudi criss-cross each other on top of the headpiece and the whole is further embellished with pom-poms and mirrors set into the sides. Though the headpieces of jobai and yavi resemble each other closely the masquerades are differentiated by the costumes and performances of the two maskers. The jobai is completely covered from the top of the wearer's head to his toes by a voluminous cape of natural-colored raffia which swirls out as the masker turns and dips during his dance. (Fig. 9). The jobai is perhaps the best Mende example of Cole's characterization of masking as 'kinetic art, flourishing in lively motion', for the masker is designed to be seen in action with light reflecting off

the mirrors and the vivid, checkerboard colors of the headpiece shimmering kaleidoscopically.²⁹ The raffia cape is manipulated both vertically and horizontally; the masker squats down and then allows the cape to unfold fluidly as he rises or turns so that the cape undulates rhythmically in a wide circle. The jobai also performs illusions, though they are somewhat less varied than those of falui. The masker manipulates his cape to make objects in his path or even small children 'disappear', and also claims to be able to walk over water and to perform feats of strength such as lifting heavy oil drums and mortars. Jobai is accompanied by an attendant carrying a bottle of medicine by which he controls the movements of the masker. The yavi, by contrast, doesn't perform tricks, but entertains entirely through dancing. He too wears a costume of undyed raffia, but unlike that of jobai it is articulated over the wearer's limbs. (Fig. 10). The masker's arms and legs are individually covered with densely packed ruffs of raffia, and short fringes encircle his neck, waist, wrists and ankles. The design of the costume, of course, gives the dancing of the yavi a completely different character from that of jobai, and it is much more dependent on foot work and the bending of elbow and knee.

Two final maskers which are found throughout Mende country are the much beloved clowns gongoli and gonde. The female gonde and the female satirical masker samawa will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. We may say here, however, that they, like the gongoli, represent what Thompson calls an 'anti-aesthetic'

in the context of Mende masking.³⁰ They overturn all the conventions and behaviour carefully observed by the other maskers. Thus, as previously mentioned, their raffia is thin and inadequately covers their bodies. Their headpieces are badly carved and ugly and are allowed to become dusty, broken, and insect-eaten. To the laughter of the crowd, gongoli goes about proclaiming in his deep rasping voice that he is handsome, in fact, the most handsome of all the maskers. He tries to demonstrate his 'tricks' and always fails laughably. One gongoli announced that he was about to make a child disappear, aping the conjuring of the jobai. After much ostentatious preparation he picked up the child and in full view of everyone placed him behind a house, and then asked for money in recognition of his skill! Another gongoli pretended to transport himself miraculously to the top of a house, and then had himself be awkwardly tossed up in the air in a big fish net held by several young men. For these wonderful feats gongoli asks shamelessly for payment but, 'if he is dancing and you give him even one cent he will be happy; even if you give him a lump of rice he will accept it'.³¹ Payment of this sort would, of course, be an insult if offered to any real masked spirit. Gongoli also satirizes people in the town. 'When it's dancing it will take young boys to blow a horn behind him as if he's a chief, just to make people laugh'. The 'followers' of the gongoli are troops of little children who follow him about singing songs which poke fun at his antics.

The masker wears a large face mask which he often carves

himself; inasmuch as the image is supposed to be rough and ugly anyone can make one, much like a Halloween jack-o-lantern.³² (Figs. 11, 12). The character of an old man is borne out not only by the deep growling voice but by the stooped posture the masker usually adopts and the long staff upon which he leans. The mask usually has a scrap of fur attached to the chin to provide the old man with a beard. Most gongoli masks are carved with large protruding ears, big mouths with carved or attached teeth, and have various bits of junk attached such as crushed tin cans, scraps of rubber, or perhaps a pair of old padlocks for earrings.

The maskers outlined above are the major figures in what I have called the Mende pantheon. They are the ones always described by informants who are asked to enumerate the dancing haleisia, and everyone is familiar with them.³³ When one of the masquerades becomes spoiled it may be allowed to lapse for a time until sufficient know-how and money are available to make a new one. If there is no masker of a given type present in a town it can usually be borrowed from a neighbouring town. But the range of mask types is somewhat more fluid than the outline indicates. New masquerades are constantly being introduced, especially in areas bordering on other ethnic groups, and part of the excitement of an event such as the Cacao Show or a large political gathering is the opportunity to see strange masquerades from distant places.

When new types are adapted to Mende use they may change somewhat in character. Thus a Kissi man in Bo has introduced the

powerful Poró nyangbei mask of the Liberian Loma and Bandi as a medicine which can be hired out by private individuals to 'swear' adversaries.³⁴ (The same type of headpiece, as we saw earlier, has also been adopted for use as an njayeköi). At the western perimeter of the Mende area, in Bonthe district, the performance of the Vai and Gola gbetu masquerade has been copied, although a different name, ngolu, and a different headpiece are used.³⁵ One ngolu masquerade has three interchangeable heads carved of wood which resemble the sowei headpiece but are smaller, more simplified, and lacking in elaborate iconographic motifs and ornaments. (Fig. 13). Like the gbetu, ngolu maskers have the ability to get shorter and taller during their dance, and to 'give birth' to 'children' as part of the performance.³⁶

New types of masquerades are also invented outright. The njagba masquerade found in Kailahun district in the eastern Mende area is an example of such local innovation. (Fig. 14). One njagba masker possessed two intricately carved wooden headpieces which could be interchanged in the course of the same performance. (Fig. 15). One headpiece was carved in the form of a helmet with a human face carved on one side, surmounted by a female half-figure holding a rattle with the head of a bird. The other headpiece was janus-faced, each side showing a face at the base surmounted by a female half-figure suckling a child. Round mirrors were set into both headpieces. The costume of the njagba consists of an undyed raffia cape reaching to the wearer's knees and full raffia fringes attached

to each leg. The njagba entertains through dancing rather than the performance of tricks, and the elaborate carving of its headpieces is intended to be aesthetically pleasing rather than symbolic. The headpieces represent a display of ingenuity and skill on the part of the carver which renders them attractive and able to excite and hold the interest of the crowd.³⁷

In addition to the introduction of new types of masquerades standard types are sometimes modified in order to create greater interest. An example of such a modification in one village involved the alternation of a traditional basketry and wool jobai headpiece with three interchangeable wooden carvings. (Fig. 16). One of these wooden headpieces is a crown-like composition of red, blue, and white beadwork out of which projects a small carved female head; a second shows a female figure seated in a chair holding a mirror in her hand; and a third has a base ringed by four faces surmounted by a smaller three-faced head wearing a pith helmet.³⁸ This departure from normal jobai imagery appears to be the result of unusual enterprise and originality on the part of the owners of the mask who correctly gauged the willingness of the Mende audience to accept innovation as long as enough of the elements of the masquerade remained constant-- in this case the body-costume and the performance-- to make the mask recognizable.

Another example of modification of type, the jobulii masker found in the eastern Kailahum district, represents the obverse of the jobai just described. Here the mask and costume are

borrowed almost whole from the gongoli masker but the nature of the performance is changed. The jobulii wears a large face mask closely resembling that of gongoli in size, type, and proportions, but somewhat more refined in carving. (Fig. 17). Its costume is like that of jobai, a full length undyed raffia cape, and the masquerade is appreciated for its singing-- which both praises and satirizes individuals-- and particularly for the lovely music associated with it.³⁹

The introduction of new types of masquerade or the modification of older types occurs almost always within the group of entertainment masks.⁴⁰ This category is the most flexible, of course, because entertainment maskers play no ritual or symbolic role, and so the addition of new types or the subtraction of old ones does not upset the balance of power within the basic group. This balance is important because the whole set of maskers is conceptualized hierarchically by the Mende as a microcosmic representation of Mende community and family structure. As we have seen, the most powerful maskers, gbini, goboi, sowei, njaye, and humōi are corporate symbols of whole segments of Mende society. In addition, the gbini is closely tied to the figure of the Paramount Chief. Thus the Mende say the gbini is the leader of all the other maskers ('Mende hale kini ye mahei mia'), and goboi is described as his 'speaker', the second most powerful chiefdom official to whom the chief may delegate his power. Sowei is the 'wife' of gbini and next in power and importance. Gonde is called

the 'daughter' or 'younger sister' of sowei, while gongoli is relegated to the lowliest status, that of 'servant'. The cycle of masking performances is regulated by the relationships existing among the social factions represented. The Poro and Sande societies hold their initiation sessions in alternate years since only one hale can be active at a given time. Accordingly, the gbini or goboi masker does not appear together with the sowei masker. Either, however, may be accompanied by any of the entertainment maskers or by gongoli or gonde.

The parallelisms, oppositions, and contrasts within the group of maskers are important elements in the aesthetic experience of the audience, and the stock characters of the maskers are fixed in the memory of spectators even when they do not appear together. The characterization of the gbini as an awe-inspiring semi-monstrous spirit contrasts with the beautiful, delicate rendering of the female head of the sowei masker, just as the undyed raffia of the one contrasts with the unrelieved blackness of the other. The theme of beauty and the beast can also be seen in the contrast of the grotesque and ugly gongoli with the beautiful jobai or yavi. And in its characterization of a poor, funny old man the gongoli also represents a humble and earthbound version of the majestic ancestral spirit embodied in the gbini. In their particular powers and performances the entertainment maskers also make use of dramatic juxtaposition. The garrulous and deep-voiced falui and gongoli stand out particularly because the other maskers are silent;

nafali is renowned for quickness and smallness, while jobai is a huge presence in its voluminous costume and its movements are slow and fluid.

Differentiation within the set of maskers is further developed by the interchangeable headpieces which, it will have been observed, are provided for the maskers whenever possible.⁴¹ The use of multiple heads, like the mirrors which so often appear prominently on the headpieces, imply the mysterious nature of the spirit which is being portrayed.⁴² By changing the headpiece in the course of the performance the spirit is seen to have many 'faces' unlike ordinary humans. In addition, of course, these transformations heighten the aesthetic experience of the audience by playing with the basic elements which make up the traditional representation of each mask type and reordering them in new and unexpected compositions. And, as we have seen, on occasion the artist/masker will go even further and recast the type in a new medium or form entirely, testing the limits of type and creating further aesthetic interest through the tension between variation and the norm. As we shall see, nowhere in Mende art does greater scope exist for the exploration and variation of form than in the sowei mask which will occupy the remainder of this study.

Notes

- 1 Herbert Cole, African arts of transformation (Santa Barbara, California, 1970).
- 2 For a detailed discussion of the changing perception of African art in the West see Robert Goldwater, 'Judgements of primitive art, 1905-1965', in Tradition and creativity in tribal art, edited by Daniel Biebuyck (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), 24-41.
- 3 Informants were sometimes reluctant to allow the headpieces of maskers' costumes to be examined by themselves. One informant asked, in explanation, 'can you go out without your head?' Paramount Chief Karkartuwa, Mende, Juawa, Kailahun. 3 Nov 1972.
- 4 See Warren L. d'Azevedo, 'Some historical problems in the delineation of a central west Atlantic region', Annals of the New York academy of sciences, 96 (1962), 512-538.
- 5 A series of papers was presented on the masking traditions related to Poros and Sande at a panel chaired by Warren d'Azevedo at the Fourth Triennial Symposium on Traditional African Art in Washington, D.C. in April 1977. It was demonstrated that many of the Liberian peoples which the American missionary Dr. George Harley identified as having 'Poros' societies and masking in his influential studies of the 1940's, 'Notes on the Poros in Liberia', Papers of the Peabody Museum of American archaeology and ethnology, 19 (1941), and 'Masks as agents of social control in northeast Liberia', Papers of the Peabody Museum of American archaeology and ethnology, 32 (1950), cannot be said to have true Poros societies but rather initiation societies and masking of a distinctly different type from the Mende, Vai, Gola, Sherbro-Bullom, Kpelle, Loma, and Konor. See also Vandenhoute's earlier criticism of Harley, 'Poros en masker; enkele beschouwingen over "Masks as agents of social control in northeast Liberia door G.W. Harley"', Kongo-Overzee, 18 (1952), 153-94 (English summary appended).
- 6 See Kenneth Little, 'The Poros society as an arbiter of culture', African studies, 7 (1948), 1-15; and his 'The political function of the Poros', Africa, 35 (1965), 349-365, and 36 (1966), 62-72.
- 7 See Kenneth Little, 'The role of the secret society in cultural specialization', American anthropologist, n.s. 51 (1949), 199-212.

- 8 Cole gives a number of examples of words translating as mask in English. He comments, 'For the tribal African, the word or name embodies the living personage....In English, however, we interpose an extra word, 'mask', for something that to the African is active and powerful and very real. Thus our neutral, inanimate "mask" is for the African a meta-human presence, an antelope spirit or a dead "father" returned, even if temporarily, to the village'. Arts of transformation, 24.
- 9 This is not explicitly stated but rather implied by Mende cosmology. As Little notes, 'the Mende are not given very much to theoretical speculation. I found it difficult to draw them out on questions of an abstract kind and am inclined to suspect that their lack of interest in this respect was due, not merely to the alien nature of some of my concepts, but to a genuine feeling of indifference'. 'The Mende in Sierra Leone', 112. Like Little, I received the impression that the cursory and sometimes apparently superficial answers I received to questions about the nature of spirits and medicines were due to this lack of interest rather than to the secrecy imposed by secret societies. In a recent and very illuminating article M.C. Jedrej has analysed the meaning of Mende societies as haleisia and concluded that they are in no true sense 'secret' societies but that the 'secrecy' described by Western observers is a necessary effect of the 'ritual separation' which must occur in the passage of individuals from one status to another. See 'Medicine, fetish, and secret society in a West African culture', Africa, 46 (1976), 247-257.
- 10 Marion de B. Kilson, 'Supernatural beings in Mende dòmèisia', 2.
- 11 Njaloi or tingoi, a female jina with the lower half of a fish, is of course a local interpretation of the Mammy Wata figure found all over West Africa. Belief in a female river spirit appears to be a traditional Mende notion, however, quite possibly antedating the Islamic influence which is now integrated into the figure. Note, for example, that female imagery is traditionally associated with rivers through the river-dwelling tutelary spirits of the Njaye and Sande societies, whose maskers also wear headpieces carved as female heads.
- 12 Douglas Fraser, 'The legendary ancestor tradition in West African art', in African art as philosophy edited by Douglas Fraser, (New York, 1974), 50. Fraser uses Eberl-Elber's 1937 article 'Die Masken der Männerbünde in Sierra Leone', as a source for some of his factual data and therefore repeats Eberl-Elber's mistake of attributing the Kissi landei mask to the eastern Mende as well. Though he does not use it, the

Mende gbini illustrates equally well the 'legendary ancestor' tradition he discusses in the essay.

- 13 The belief in an actual sowei masker called malejowei which is of supernatural origin and 'found' by human beings in rivers will be discussed in Chapter 4. Informants often spoke of malejowei as though it were the same type of spirit as njaloi. These river spirits, known generically as jinanga, are always female and after they have visited a man there is a nasty fishy smell. I recorded one instance of a sowei masker who was said to do the same, the masker known as 'Sölê' at Nanyahun, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo, 6 Oct 1972.

- 14 Wall paintings of jobai were found in Selinga chiefdom, Bo district and in Soro-Gbema chiefdom, Pujehun district. Nafali was depicted in Nongowa chiefdom, Kenema district and on a house in Dandabu, Small Bo chiefdom, Kenema district where it is paired with a depiction of tingoi. In all cases informants said that they had painted the images because they were beautiful and enjoyable to look at. Cole notes similar instances of representations of maskers for decorative purposes among other African peoples (Arts, 24).

- 15 Little, Mende of Sierra Leone, 226.

- 16 Alldridge, Sherbro, 195. According to Alldridge's itinerary this event must have taken place in Kailahun district in 1890.

- 17 Isaac Ndanema, 'The rationale of Mende "swears"', Sierra Leone bulletin of religion, 6 (1964), 24.

- 18 Great confusion exists in the literature over the exact identity of the chief Mende Poró masker. This ambiguity is present in Little's writings. He states, for example, that the gbini may be seen only by society members. (Mende of Sierra Leone, 246). [Indeed, as I can attest from personal experience, the rule requiring women, children, and non-members to remain indoors behind tightly shut doors and windows when the 'Poró spirit' (which is not named) comes into town to take the new initiates is very strictly observed.] Several sentences later, however, Little says, 'the Gbeni appears in public only on the most important occasions'. Elsewhere, too, he writes, 'This individual [who holds the devil's pipe] does not wear any distinctive costume but on the various occasions during the initiation period when the "devil" visits the town he is its impersonator'. 'Poró as arbiter of culture', 8.

Direct questioning on this subject is impossible for a non-member of Poró, but I think we must infer that 'the Poró spirit' has a

number of manifestations, one of which is gbini. As we have seen the Mende understand hale to be capable of taking different forms as is shown by the fact that hale can mean a masker or the medicine depending on context. (See also note 21 below).

- 19 Interview with section speaker Bokari Jebu, Mende Kema, Jaiima-Bongor, 22 Sept 1972.
- 20 I do not agree with Reinhardt's conclusion that goboi is a 'secular' Poru spirit and gbini a 'sacred' spirit. It seems to me that the secular-sacred dichotomy on which her analysis of masking is based is inappropriate for the Mende who, like other African peoples, believe that the whole 'natural' world is permeated by the supernatural. By the same token Reinhardt's assertion that all Mende 'sacred' masks have wooden headpieces while 'secular' masks are 'composite' is an arbitrary division which does not fit the data. 'Mende carvers', 37-41 and 68.
- 21 In Jaiima-Bongor chiefdom, where an in-depth study was made of all locatable examples of all mask types there were thirteen goboi maskers and one gbini. The owners of all the goboi maskers and of the gbini were interviewed and were in agreement on the basic distinctions between the two masquerades outlined above. Alhadji Abdulai Koroma of Soogoma elaborated further: 'Gbini is the leader of all the other devils and goboi is a kind of speaker to the gbini. Gbini comes out for very important reasons. When the world was made gbini was the first devil. In the olden days if you committed a serious crime and they said you would die gbini had the right to protect you from being killed...Goboi and gbini cannot come out together, not even on the same day. In any one village you can't have both of them. If they were both there it would be difficult for people to control them because they are both so powerful'. (4 Oct 1972).

Further support for the idea that gbini and goboi are manifestations of the same spirit is found in a song about the making of the Poru image transcribed by Migeod in 1916: 'And the next morning they asked the big men, they said, this spirit yesterday who came to dance, what is his name? And they asked him [the chief]. He said, his name is Gorboy. Another name is Porvoolee [Povuli=Poru vulei, Poru himself?]. His other is Gbenee. He said, those are the three names I give him, and it was finished'. The poem also describes the spirit as changing in height during its dance, and the need to go to the 'skin cutter' in order to make the head of the spirit. The dancing of gbini and goboi and the use of a leather headpiece both agree with this description. 'Building of the Poru house', 107-108.

- 22 Informants gave costs varying from twenty to a hundred pounds.
- 23 Town chief Ansumana Safa, Ngodi, Jaiima-Bongor, 28 Sept 1972. Another example of dancing as an expression of social harmony was given by Foday Ado of Buma, Jaiima-Bongor, the keeper of another goboi. He said he was accustomed to bring out the masquerade for the local medical officer. 'He is building a school. When they have a meeting they call on the goboi to come. The dancing means that all the people agree and are happy about it'. (3 Oct 1972)
- 24 In GboPON, Makpele, Pujehun, Njaye society members said that the njayeköi comes out at each new moon and will not keep its powers unless it is brought out. In Mende, Luawa, Kailahun, however, the njayeköi comes out every year in the month called nanuwihun (July). At the beginning of this month (at the new moon) the inner enclosure of the Njaye house where the njayeköi is kept (the kunguwi) is closed and is only opened at the end of the month when a great dance is held and the njayeköi comes out. The njayeköi is known as faköi in Kenema district.
- 25 Hommel, Art of the Mende, (Fig. 34).
- 26 There is a popular notion that the nafali masker originated in the eastern region, in Jawi chiefdom. (The masker is known as ngafagötu among the Kö-Mende). This was also the opinion of Arthur Abraham, who comes from that area. (Personal communication at a seminar I gave on Mende masking, Institute of African Studies, Fourah Bay College, Oct 1972).
- 27 Section chief Alfa Koroma, Laoma, Jaiima-Bongor, 15 Sept 1972.
- 28 Damballa, Selinga, Bo, at a Sande society celebration following the first stage of initiation, 2 Apr 1972.
- 29 Cole, Arts of Transformation, 37. Cole says: 'logically, performance dictates the artistic structure of these and most masks, and hence their "aesthetic" has more to do with shifting kinetic relationships than with a headpiece or detailed carving'.
- 30 Robert Farris Thompson, Black gods and kings (Los Angeles, 1971).
- 31 Section chief Alfa Koroma, Laoma, Jaiima-Bongor, 15 Sept 1972. A gongoli masker in Dambala, Selinga, Bo, incorporated into his dance a hand movement miming begging and pocketing money. This is regarded as totally undignified behavior.
- 32 There can apparently be exceptions to the format; one gongoli in Mamboma, Jaiima-Bongor, was carved as a helmet mask.

- 33 In Jaiima-Bongor chiefdom in 1972 there were eighty sowei maskers, thirteen impersonations of goboi, seven of gongoli, three of jobai, four of falui, seven of nafali, one of gbini, and no humöi or njaye masker.
- 34 The masquerade is owned by Lamin Kortu, a Kissi herbalist in Bo. He says it was brought to Bo about forty-five years ago from Liberia by his brother. The masquerade is used to hunt out witches as well as for 'swearing', and it travels throughout the surrounding countryside when requested. Interview at Bo, 24 Mar 1972.
- 35 Rubande, Banta, Bonthe, 30 May 1972.
- 36 Hall's collection includes a similar ngolu mask from Shenge in the Sherbro region, University of Pennsylvania Museum no. 37.22.275. His catalogue entry gives a description of the way it is worn: 'It is not a mask but is worn by a dancer on the top of the head, attached to the long raphia fibre cape of his...costume. The cape, with the head, is lifted upwards by the dancer's arms, his head still unexposed, so that he appears of superhuman height, then lowered again'.
- 37 Owned by A.K. Gbakie, Ngiyehun, Luawa, Kailahun, and carved in 1965 by Mustafa Ado Dasama. (3 Nov 1972).
- 38 Owned by Vandi Bahun, Kponima, Jaiima-Bongor, and carved by Momoh Lamin in 1966.
- 39 Giema, Luawa, Kailahun. Another virtually identical mask is in use as a gongoli in Talia, Nongowa, Kenema. Both were carved by a professional carver named Abdulla from Majihun, Dama chiefdom. The jobulii headpiece is if anything more fierce looking by virtue of its bared teeth and scowling expression. The gongoli has a small European crown carved on the forehead which may be linked with the masker's satirical role.
- 40 For example the tondo masquerade, introduced in the 1960's, has already become fairly widespread. See Siegmann and Perani, 'Men's masquerades', for a description as well as for detailed information about the organization of men's masking cliques.
- 41 In addition to the examples given in the text goboi and jobai masquerades are also frequently provided with several headpieces.
- 42 Mirrors were also explained by one owner of falui to be effective in catching witches.

Chapter 3. Masking in the Sande Society

To see a close-ranked contingent of Bundu women dancing through the street, singing their songs, shaking their gourd rattles in time with their swaying, is to see a display of female solidarity. 1

Public masquerades constitute extremely important symbolic forms in Mende life.² They are a means of mediating between the secret society activity which dominates Mende social life and the experience of the general community.³ Through masking performances the public is kept informed of important events which occur in the secret domain and is allowed to share to a carefully controlled extent in the experience of society members. Such sharing of experience produces an aesthetically heightened impression of unity and harmony which overcomes the threat of disunity implicit in the division of the community into separate secret factions. The masker makes visible the powerful hale of a secret society without revealing its essential mystery. By virtue of its greater proximity to human form this power can be dramatized in a masquerade and respect and tribute exacted from the spectators.

The relationship of masking performances to secret society activity can best be understood through a detailed examination of the ritual context. Although the cultural role and general features of the Sande society have been described, precise information about masking has not yet been made available.⁴ Discussion of the structural role of the Sande society in the life of Mende women and of the specific ritual context of Sande masking

will provide essential background for our further discussion of the artistic elaboration of the mask as a symbolic form.

The Sande society, as we have said, is a women's society entrusted with the education of young girls. This traditionally included all the ritual knowledge and many of the practical skills women needed throughout life, and paralleled the training given to young men by the Poro society. Proper attitudes towards their future husbands, sexual behavior, childbearing and rearing were all expounded to young girls during Sande initiation, and membership in the society is still an essential precondition to marriage and to acceptance as a responsible adult woman. At puberty or, in past years, sometimes earlier girls are taken from their families to the society enclosure or 'bush' built especially for each new session just outside the village. There, segregated from the rest of the community, they are instructed by officials of the society. Formerly the girls remained initiates for several years, interrupting formal Sande sessions with periods of normal activity amongst their families. Now the initiation period is usually shortened to a period of months or even weeks, often timed so that the major ceremonies take place during school vacations. The usual time for these ceremonies is the latter part of the dry season, between December and May. Poro and Sande initiation usually take place in alternate years, since only one society can 'control the bush' at a time.

Traditionally initiates into the Sande society underwent

excision of the clitoris at the start of initiation but this too has apparently now been modified so that only a small incision is made.⁵ During the whole period of initiation sexual relations are forbidden with the girls and severe penalties are exacted from those who break this rule. Initiates are instructed to avoid men they encounter outside the town by passing quickly by without speech or contact. Thus one rather important function of the society, particularly in the days when girls retained the status of initiates for a longer time, was to protect the virginity of women until the completion of their training as responsible adults.⁶ Traditionally, too, the close of the period of initiation was immediately followed by marriage, and men often helped the families of their promised brides pay the society fees and support them while in the bush.⁷ As initiates girls wear special ornaments identifying their status and warning the public that they are under the special protection of the sande medicine. After the initial period of seclusion is over the girls return to the village during the day to perform chores for their families and for the Sande leaders. As in Poro initiation, the girls have been given new names by which they are addressed for the rest of their lives. Groups of initiates also come out from time to time to perform the special dances they have been taught for the big men in the district. In the past this was one of the finest entertainments a chief could summon forth for important visitors, as the dancing of Sande initiates is of particular grace and beauty.⁸ Instruction in singing is also an

important part of Sande training and provides women with a repertoire of songs which are used on special occasions throughout their lives. During the initiation period the songs can be heard coming from the society enclosure far into the night. Little also points out that Sande training, which includes the performance of many chores by the initiates for the older women, is designed to inculcate values of modesty, diligence, and respect for one's seniors.⁹ Such qualities have an obvious appropriateness for young women who will start out either as junior wives in a large household, or, if they are first wives, under the direction of senior women in the households of their husbands' parents. Thus, as Hoffer comments, Sande 'mitigates co-wife rivalry, enhances female solidarity, and has important political implications'.¹⁰

These political implications can be seen both in the organization of Sande groups and in the pattern of inheritance of the higher ranks in the society. Little has stressed the many parallels between Poro and Sande rituals and educational functions which are indeed striking. Yet the structural implications of initiation into the two societies cannot coincide exactly because the position of women in a predominantly patrilineal and virilocal society is fundamentally different from that of men. A girl is initiated into the Sande society in the town of her birth and early childhood, although she may later leave it if she marries a man from another village. Furthermore, girls are usually entrusted to a Sande group attached to the patrilineal lineage group if at all possible. The

strong bond which is formed among a group of girls initiated together and with the older women who have been their preceptresses thus reinforces loyalty to the descent group and to the childhood community. This bond offsets the ties which are formed through marriage and increases, in a sense, the options available to a woman. Childbirth is a Sande matter and women may choose to give birth either in the Sande bush or in the house of the Sande leader, attended by women of the society. Throughout her life a woman remains a member of the Sande group into which she was initiated and may return to it in old age as a respected elder.

For the leaders of a Sande society the situation is somewhat different. The higher ranks of the society are titles inherited through the patrilineal descent group, descending from a man's wife to her eldest daughter or to a younger sister. The normal Mende custom of marrying out of the descent group or mawe would thus result in the highly valued control over sande leaving the family, and the Mende therefore discard the usual prohibition against marriage between paternal first cousins in order to retain possession of the society. When necessary the mawe may also appoint a woman who is related by marriage rather than blood to high Sande rank, or it may recall a blood relative who has married out of the village if the woman is widowed or beyond child-bearing age.¹¹ The considerable flexibility in the system of inheritance of Sande titles gives ambitious women an advantage since they can exploit either blood or affinal connections in order to achieve

positions of considerable power as Sande officials.¹² Men always stress, however, that the actual selection of the particular woman who is to inherit a title is largely in control of the male elders of the descent group, advised by the other Sande leaders, although they deny knowledge of the private business of the society once the leaders have been chosen. Since Sande usually belongs to important descent groups the male elders of the group are frequently high officials of Poro and the chiefdom hierarchy, so it can be seen that at the highest level there is considerable co-operation between the leaders of the most important Mende social institutions.

Each Sande group is led by one or more Soweisia who have custody of the sande medicine and the sowei masks. Though a woman of lesser rank may own a sowei mask it must be kept for her together with the others by the society head in a special enclosure called the kundei. The kundei is located either in the chief Sowei's house or in a special sande house and the sande is also kept there. In a large town there are usually several Sande groups which will join forces to initiate new members although each girl is attached to a particular group and pays fees to its Sowei. One amongst the Soweisia in a town will be chosen as the leader and has the title of Sande wa jowei (big Sande sowei) or Sowo kindei (keeper of the kundei). She is assisted by the Nyande jowei (a title which means the 'beautiful' sowei) who can deputise for her, and by one or more Ndogbo jowaisia (bush Soweisia) responsible for 'begging' the bush from the chief for Sande sessions. Other

administrative and financial duties such as collecting and preparing food and water for the initiates and collecting fees from their families are taken care of by the ligbeisia, the next rank of Sande officials. These are in turn subdivided into ligba wa (big ligba) and ligba wulo (small ligba). To dance with the sowei mask or to act as its attendant, a woman must be of ligba rank. Jedrej has identified five categories through which the girls move in the course of Sande initiation. Before she enters Sande a candidate is simply a child (ndopoi). After being taken to the Sande enclosure in the bush, or Kpanguima, she becomes a Kpwei, which he translates in this context as 'novice'; after circumcision a girl is known as gbogbini, a 'virgin', and at the end of the initiation period she emerges as hanjoe, a 'bride'.¹³ A full member of Sande is known as sande nyaha or Sande 'wife'.

The Sande masker, as we have seen, bears the same title as the highest rank in the society, Sowei. This title gives an extra dimension to the masker's identity. Like the other secret society maskers she is hale and ngafa, a personification of the society medicine and of its spirit. But unlike the others she is also given the same title as the human leaders of the society, a title which means etymologically that she is expert in the secret knowledge and wisdom of Sande.¹⁴ In other words as a Sowei with a perfect understanding of those things which the society seeks to teach its members the Sande masker represents an ideal. As we shall see the Sande masker is also unique among Mende masquerades

in its artistic elaboration and anthropomorphic form. It is in the conception of the masker as Sowei that the explanation of its idealized human beauty, unique among the Mende maskers must lie.¹⁵ To distinguish the sowei masker from the other Soweisia and also to characterize her particular role in the society the masker is usually referred to as ndoli jowei, the dancing Sowei. The importance of dancing in her public appearances will become clear as we describe the ritual context of masking performances.

There is some variation in the different parts of Mendeland in the specific occasions on which the ndoli jowei appears during Sande initiation. For the sake of clarity we will begin with a description of the rituals observed in a single chiefdom, Jaiima-Bongor, in the central Sewa Mende area, although even within one chiefdom there are minor differences in terminology and observance. In Jaiima-Bongor the ndoli jowei appears publicly at three key moments during initiation. The first occurs two or three days after the girls have been taken to the bush and circumcised and is known as yaya gbè gbi or yaya ('they hunt yaya').¹⁶ The ndoli jowei comes into town with a group of Sande women while the new initiates remain secluded in the bush. This is a time of danger, for the initiates are still recovering from circumcision and the families of the girls have not previously had news of them. The women 'come out to tell men they've initiated people into Sande', it is explained, and 'they rush around the town waving leaves and taking food and things they need which don't belong to them'.¹⁷ The ndoli jowei does not dance

on this occasion, as it is not yet time for celebration, but her presence is a reminder of the powerful medicine which has been invoked by the Sande session and which legitimates the lawless behavior of the women on this occasion.¹⁸

In some villages in Jaiima-Bongor the ndoli jowei also comes out at a minor feast which occurs a week or so later called Kpètè gbula yombo le ('to make the mud of the swamp mushy') or Sowo mba yili gbi ('the cooking of the Sowei's rice').¹⁹ On this occasion the Sowesia collect supplies for a special dish to be eaten by them and by the girls in the bush. In most towns where the ndoli jowei appears at this time she does not dance and the occasion may be used to announce the date for the imminent gani celebration.

One evening, about two weeks after yaya, ndoli jowei comes out again. The Sowesia announce that the new initiates will be brought to town for the first time the next day, and to celebrate the event ndoli jowei dances through the night. Contributions of rice, oil, fish, and money are collected from the initiates' families and the Sowesia prepare gani, a special dish containing 'medicinal' herbs, which they take into the Sande bush for the initiates. Portions are also distributed to the girls' relatives, as it is held to be beneficial to partake of the food. After eating the gani the initiates come into town wearing headcloths tied in a special way around their waists and a necklace (gbali) on which is strung an animal horn or bell, cowrie shells, and a leopard's tooth, the ancient symbol of the free-born. White clay (wojei) is rubbed

on their faces, and they wear ropes of beads around their waists.²⁰ (Fig. 18). The girls dress in this way until the end of the initiation period as a visible reminder of their special status-- and a warning to men to keep their distance. The reappearance of the initiates in town is known either as gani or a ndahiti ('they are ready').²¹ 'They come to deliver greetings to their families', one informant explained and from this time on they spend their days in the village and return to the Sande bush to sleep at night. Despite the joyous atmosphere of the gani celebration, the demeanor of the initiates is solemn and they are led forth in an orderly row under the supervision of the Soweisia. (Fig. 19). Ndoli jowei accompanies them and dances are performed both by the maskers and the initiates.

The final release of the girls from the initiation session is known as ti sande gbua ('they pull sande') which, these days, usually occurs one or two months after gani. The night before the 'pulling' begins the Soweisia cut branches of leaves (ta tifei lo gbia) and the initiates are collected from the houses of their families and brought together in a special round enclosure built near the house of the Sande wa jowei called the gumi.²² The girls are dressed all in white-- white clay is rubbed on their upper torsos and faces and they wear white wrappers and headties-- and the significance is explained as 'unity'.²³ All the members are joined together in their uniformity of appearance and the Soweisia too wear white headties on this as on other ritual occasions. The initiates remain in the gumi for three days, while final preparations are made for

their release, and each night there is dancing by the ndoli joweisia known as ja wa (big ja, or Sande dance). New clothes and finery are collected for the initiates during this time and the final payments are made to the society. At the turn of the century Alldridge witnessed a 'pulling' ceremony and his detailed description shows that it has changed very little during the intervening seventy-five years:

The notification that the washing was to take place was made that same evening. The devils [ndoli joweisia] to the number of four, were out the entire night, rushing round the town with every available person, men, women, and children; the place was turned into a perfect pandemonium....It began about eight o'clock and concluded at dawn....The next afternoon the first part of the ceremony was begun by sixty or seventy women, all carrying branches or clusters of leaves, entering the town behind five Bundu devils, who were preceded by several women of the highest degree in the order, readily distinguished by their having white cloth wound turban-fashion around their heads....Five empty gin cases were produced and placed in the form of a crescent on the ground, upon which the five devils clothed in this curious fibrous costume sat. Over the lower part of the dress was unrolled before each devil a palm-leaf mat which reached to the waist, the unused portion being drawn out on the ground in front. The devils sat in perfect quiet awaiting the offerings which were to be presented to them by the husbands-elect of the girls in return for the four months they had spent with the initiates in the Bundu bush.²⁴

Alldridge describes how the public was occasionally allowed glimpses of the white-robed initiates inside the gumi as the negotiations proceeded, and Hoffer, seventy-five years later witnessed similar hard-bargaining.²⁵

When arrangements have been completed the Soweisia march around the village carrying the kundei, the sande medicine contained in a rectangular box draped in white cloth. This is one of the

rare occasions on which the kundei is seen in public. The ndoli jowei is not present since the sande and the masker do not appear together as their combined powers would be too powerful to control. On the following morning the initiates are led by ndoli jowei to the river, dwelling place of the Sande ngafa, to be ritually 'washed'. The special protection extended to them by sande is removed or 'pulled' and they are released from the prohibitions of the period of initiation.²⁶ The white clay is washed from their faces and, according to traditional practice, their skin is rubbed with oil to make it gleam attractively. They are dressed in the finest clothes their parents are able to buy and borrow and, in the past, they were laden with heavy silver jewelry. (Fig. 20). Today up-to-date European clothes and make-up are often worn and umbrellas may replace the traditional canopy of country cloths under which the new Sande members are escorted to the town.

During the washing ceremony the ndoli jowei again disappears because she may not be present together with the Sande ngafa who is being invoked at the riverside. The masker comes back, however, to lead the procession of richly dressed initiates, Sande officials dressed in white robes and headties, and older women carrying branches of leaves, back to the town meeting place, the bari. There the Sande graduates are seated in state and are feasted and made much of for several days. At the close of the celebration they either go to their appointed bridegrooms or, these days, return to school. Ndoli jowei, having presented the girls to their parents, disappears

until the next Sande session. 'She will almost cry', it is said, 'at being dismissed from her post, and appears angry as she goes away'.²⁷

The gani and ti sande gbua ceremonies are the highpoints of Sande initiation and they are conducted in much the same way all over Mendeland. There is considerable variation, however, in the occasions on which ndoli jowei appears between the start of the initiation session and the initiates' first appearance in town. In Kailahun district among the eastern Mende ndoli jowei parades around town on the day the girls first enter the Sande bush but the yaya rite is not observed. The ceremony is called Sande wa gbii (they all go to Sande) or kpowa gowi (non-initiate path).²⁸ The attendants of ndoli jowei announce what has taken place but there is no dancing. Among the Sierra Leone Gola, the ndoli jowei comes out on the evening before the start of initiation to celebrate the 'buying of the bush' (ndogbo wu ma wo lè) and a small dance is held. Instead of the yaya or kpètè gbula yombo le appearances of the Sewa Mende here the ndoli jowei comes out again seven days after initiation to announce that the girls are 'under the water' and demands contributions of money for the buying of fire and rice. There is no dance for as at yaya the time has not yet come to celebrate. This occasion is known as ngombu yeya lè, ('buying the fire'). In the Vai area of Sierra Leone the first appearance of ndoli jowei occurs about two weeks after the start of initiation to celebrate the completion of the first stage of initiation and

to beg food from the initiates' families. This is known in Vai as bo maè (we have done it) and the Mende translation is given as kpète gbula yombo lè, although the event is observed differently in the Vai region than is the event of the same name among the Sewa Mende since a small dance is held.²⁹

Ndoli jowei is often referred to as the 'tutorial spirit' of the Sande society since her public appearances occur primarily during Sande initiation and because, as we have said, she bears the same title as a society leader. During Sande initiation her appearances tell the community that specific stages of initiation have been successfully completed, and act as the focus for public celebration. Ndoli jowei also appears, however, on certain other occasions when her presence is a means of impressing on the community the unity and strength of the female corporate body. The Sande society expresses its respect for the chieftaincy by causing ndoli jowei to dance with the other masked haleisia at the crowning of a Paramount Chief or at the funeral ceremony after the death of a Paramount Chief or important man. She may also dance if another important chief or high government official comes to visit the town. That the participation of ndoli jowei on such occasions has specifically political significance is made evident by the fact that on other festive occasions such as Christmas and the end of Ramadan, when many masked haleisia come out to dance, ndoli jowei does not appear.

In earlier times especially, ndoli jowei also came out to bring

to justice an offender against Sande laws such as a man who has spied on the Sande bush or had sexual relations with an initiate. In such cases the offender is pointed out by the Sande masker and led to the chief, who imposes the punishment demanded by the society. Depending on the offence this might involve initiation into the society (at great expense) or a substantial fine and ritual 'washing'. Early observers of Mende society stress this aspect of the sowei masker's role. For example Newland writes:

The 'medicine' which the devil is supposed to have at her command is much feared, and no man who has transgressed a Bondu law, and is pointed out by the devil, dare refuse to follow her, and to pay the fine or other penalty which his headman metes out. A flogging is one of the penalties inflicted for leading a Bondu girl astray.³⁰

The Sande masker must also come out if a Sowei or an important ligba dies. On such an occasion it is ndoli jowei rather than members of the family who 'pulls the cry' for the deceased, walking around the house of the dead woman with her attendant ligbeisia in attitudes of mourning and announcing the death. Since men cannot see the body of a dead Sowei they first prepare the grave and then retire, allowing the Sande women to conduct the burial. The ndoli jowei, hands on her head, leads the procession to the grave. If a three- or seven-day ceremony is held for the dead woman the ndoli jowei will again appear and dance.³¹ When a Sowei dies a young girl from the same family must immediately be initiated into Sande to show that there is no vacancy in the society.

Lastly, a small dance may be held when a new sowei mask is

'initiated' into the society. For, since the ndoli jowei is a leader of the Sande group she too must undergo the ceremonies a woman would go through. Masks are frequently acquired by women who at first lack the status and money to have them initiated. Such a mask is known as kpowa jowei ('uninitiated sowei') and although it may be danced with at Sande celebrations it lacks the supernatural power of a true sowei mask. The ceremony of initiation can be held at any time and is called ti kpia ngiti ya ('they bring it outside'). The other ndoli joweisia in the town bring the new masker outside and present her after the owners of the new mask have paid a fee of money, rice, oil, fish, and a goat to the owners of the old masks. A gun is shot off and the new ndoli jowei is taken to call on the chief and important men of the town. Feasting and dancing follow.

The dancing performances of the ndoli jowei follow the same general pattern as those of the other masked haleisia. The ndoli jowei emerges from the society enclosure or from a house, depending on the occasion, and she is accompanied by a ligba who carries a straw mat which is draped over the masker's lap when she is seated and which may also be used to screen her if she wishes to rearrange her costume. Her attendant calls out the masker's personal name in a short wailing chant to introduce her to the crowd and warn of her presence as they approach. The ndoli jowei wears, in addition to the black helmet mask, one or more capes of black-dyed palm fiber around neck and waist and under these a shirt, pair of trousers and

shoes which cover the masker's skin completely. Traditionally these clothes should be black as well, but today garments of other dark colors are occasionally worn, and tennis shoes are not uncommon.³² She carries a switch in one hand with which she gestures, and bells are tied to her costume which jingle when she moves. The costume, like those of the other maskers, includes various traditional herbal charms encased in fritambo or sheep's horns, as well as Moslem amulets folded into leather or cloth packets. These are intended to increase the masker's attractive powers and afford protection from witchcraft.

A group of Sande women accompanies the dancing, singing and rhythmically shaking the segbura (a gourd filled with seeds encased in a netting sewn with more seeds), and they are joined by men beating the sangbei and slit kili drums. If there are a number of ndoli jowesia each dances in turn, by herself, for a short period of time. The dancer faces the drummers and does not move far in the course of the dance. The Mende characterize the dancing of ndoli jowei as 'tight' and 'awkward' (kömo loongo) and value the rapidity and intricacy of the footwork. This footwork is quick and abrupt, and the dancer moves her feet in a rapid series of steps capable of much individual variation. The raffia capes flare out and swirl in wide circles with the dipping and turning of the dancer. (Fig. 21). As at other dancing performances the audience forms a wide circle around the dancer and, at the end of each performance, shows its appreciation by means of gifts of money.

There is humor, too, as ndoli jowei assumes playful, spirited, or restless attitudes which her attendants must control, often by presenting her with more money.³³

The use of dramatic mime is an important part of the ndoli jowei's performance and her behavior, as we have seen, varies according_^ to the occasion which calls her forth. At yaya while the new initiates are still in a precarious state her wild rush around the town with the Sande women demonstrates the power which has been released by the opening of the Sande session and the care with which it must be controlled. At the death of a Sowei her behavior dramatizes the grief of the society. On occasions of rejoicing, however, such as gani ('pulling'), the crowning of a Paramount Chief or the visit of an important personage, ndoli jowei dances. Dancing, as was emphasized in connection with the Porogoboi masker, creates an atmosphere of infectious happiness and harmony. As one man expressed it 'dancing is what [we] do to forget about death!'³⁴ And the dancing of the society masker is felt to be both the spark necessary to set off the general rejoicing and the highlight of the celebration.

The centrality of dancing in the role of the ndoli jowei can be seen not only in her title of 'dancing Sowei' but also in the efforts which are expended to acquire the services of not only one but of as many ndoli jowei maskers as possible. The Mende say that it is theoretically possible to hold Sande initiation without an ndoli jowei since it is only possession of sande hale which is

essential for the efficacy of the Sande session. In practice, however, it is felt that the masking performance adds so much to the ceremonies that the rare village society which has no sowei masquerade of its own will go to great lengths to borrow one or more from neighboring villages. Amongst the Temne, Kono, and Limba of northern Sierra Leone, many of whom have adopted Sande relatively recently, it is interesting to note that the ndoli jowei is usually found only in areas bordering the Mende. Within Mendeland, the use of masking in secret societies has been sporadically challenged by reformist and iconoclastic Moslem groups. In some places they have succeeded in forcing the abandonment of the ndoli jowei and other masquerades although the Sande society itself has continued in modified form. In a number of towns the traditional Mende Sande exists side by side with the Islamicized Sande or mori jande.³⁵

In addition to the ndoli jowei there are two other minor women's masquerades which add greatly to the texture and enjoyment of Sande entertainments. These are performed by the gonde masker who is described as ngengema jowei, the 'funny sowei', and by the satirical masker samawa. Both appear as side shows to the performances of ndoli jowei and the humor, particularly of gonde, lies in her juxtaposition with the object of her parody. Like the male gongoli, gonde is not a real hale but a clown-like figure which overturns all the conventions and decorum proper to ndoli jowei. Her costume is a pastiche of rags and tatters, and she is hung about

with all sorts of junk-- rusty old tin cans, shells, and other discarded fragments.³⁶ (Figs. 21, 23). Also like gongoli she represents an anti-aesthetic, purposely reversing the normal criteria of beauty. Because ndoli jowei is always in black, gonde wears any color; because the ndoli jowei headpiece is always beautifully blackened, polished, intact, and surrounded by a full raffia cape, gonde's mask is weathered, broken, daubed with paint, and possessed of only the wispiest raffia. The headpiece of the gonde is, in fact, often an old sowei mask discarded because of insect damage or breakage. (Cat. 56, 57). When the headpiece is carved specifically to be gonde the workmanship is crude and the features made to look grotesque. (Cat.226-228). Most upsetting of all to the approved behavior of a masked hale, gonde's face and body are left half-uncovered by her disarray. One song sung about gonde goes, 'gonde is shameless, she's not ashamed to show her face', and she may actually push her mask up as she dances to reveal even more of her head. Gonde is also shameless in going right up to people despite her utter unworthiness and asking for money, rather than waiting in a dignified manner for people to present whatever gifts they might want to give her. This angers ndoli jowei (who, people explain, wants all the money for herself) and she will try to chase gonde away to the amusement of the crowd. Another song mocks gonde's poverty: 'gonde has not yet eaten.... she's roaming the darkness looking for food'.³⁷

The samawa masquerade makes use not of parody but of satire,

and the masker's costume changes depending on the object of her satire.³⁸ Samawa wears no headpiece, but rather face paint, exaggerated clothing, and the appropriate appended objects. In one version the samawa's face was painted with black and white spots to represent leprosy, a strip of fur was tied around her chin as a beard, and she was dressed in dirty rags. (Fig. 24). A big bulge under the front of her costume represented a swelling of the scrotum, and she hobbled about leaning on a stick like a cripple. All these deformities, she sang, would afflict any man who disobeys Sande rules, and she interrupted her song with bursts of loud raucous laughter.³⁹ Another interpretation of samawa in a nearby village satirized Moslem 'learned men'. She scribbled away with a crab's claw and 'divined' people's fortunes with a collection of old shells and pieces of discarded objects. (Fig. 25). In her kit she carried many pairs of spectacles for her 'reading' which she constantly put on and off, and she wore a necklace of bones which she kissed and touched to her forehead in imitation of Moslem prayer beads. She also had a collection of horns and bones slung over her back to 'dance with' satirizing the wudi worn by falui and goboi, and wore mismatched shoes and an old battered straw hat which she proclaimed were her badges of office in the Poro society.⁴⁰ Although the samawa masquerade is not nearly so widespread as gonde which is found in nearly every village that has sowei masks, it is likely quite old and may have been borrowed from neighbouring peoples. Allridge described a comic female masquerade he calls 'santelule'

which he saw among the Bandi which sounds very like the samawa.⁴¹

Gonde and samawa are, in different ways, good examples of Turner's dictum that, 'cognitively, nothing underlines regularity so well as absurdity or paradox; emotionally nothing satisfies as much as extravagant or temporarily permitted illicit behavior'.⁴²

Gonde, though her absurdity, serves only to reinforce the dignity and transcendent power of the ndoli jowei. Samawa in her graphic representation of the ills which befall offenders against Sande demonstrates the helplessness of men before the power of sande, and her open satire is itself made possible by the position of power she occupies as a member of Sande. The weakness of men, normally more powerful than women, is thus shown up in a temporary assumption of supremacy by women during Sande society masquerades. Issues fundamental to the very survival of the group are at stake, for the Mende believe that male impotence results from transgressions against Sande just as female barrenness is caused by the breaking of Poro laws. In laughing at these 'comic' maskers, then, one is also laughing at the folly of ignoring the principles of right conduct. Thus, through comic and serious masquerades the Sande society provides the public with periodic reminders of its teachings and powers. And equally importantly, its masking performances afford occasions for unified and joyous community-wide celebrations of the successful application of these powers and teachings as each new group of young women enters into Sande.

Notes

- 1 Hoffer, 'Mende and Sherbro women', 159.
- 2 This chapter has appeared in published form under the title 'Masking in Mende Sande society initiation rituals', Africa, 48 (1978), 265-277.
- 3 The notions of symbolic forms and ritual which underlie the following discussion are influenced by the writings of Victor Turner. Although his exposition of these concepts is complex it may be useful here to quote his definition of ritual in Ndembu culture (which is equally applicable to the Mende) as 'prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical... beings or powers'. 'Symbols in Ndembu ritual', in Closed systems and open minds; the limits of naivety in social anthropology, edited by Max Gluckman, (London, 1964), 20. His notion of the 'multivocality' of symbols as representing 'both the obligatory and the desirable' is also central. The forest of symbols, (Ithaca, New York, 1967), 54.
- 4 Kenneth Little was able to describe in great detail Poro initiation despite his decision not to join the society. He limits his discussion of Sande, however, to a brief outline which stresses its similarities to Poro. Mende of Sierra Leone, 126-130.
- 5 Several explanations are given for female circumcision and the actual operation appears to have undergone successive modifications or perhaps has always been subject to regional variation. Early in the century Berry wrote, for example, that 'before leaving the Bundu bush each girl undergoes a rite similar to circumcision by the excision of the clitoris and labia minor', which describes a more radical operation than now appears to be customary. He records the purpose of circumcision as 'assisting continence during the long period from the beginning of pregnancy to the termination of lactation' (when the child is about two years old during which time intercourse is forbidden). Sierra Leone cannibals, 41. In her study of contemporary Sierra Leonean marriage Barbara Harrell-Bond found that, 'the most popular explanation or rationalization of the practice of cliterodectomy in the Bundu society is that it reduces a woman's sexual desire and makes the husband's problem of controlling his household easier'. Modern marriage in Sierra Leone: A study of the professional group, (Paris, 1975), 268.

In the 1940's Dr. M.A.S. Margai tried to introduce general instruction in hygiene through traditional Sande channels. See 'Welfare work in a secret society', African affairs, 47 (1948), 227-230.

- 6 According to Little any sexual interference with an unmarried girl is 'an infringement of her family's authority over her'. As a result such an offense requires ritual treatment-- by the Humōi society in the case of an immature girl and by the Sande society in case of a pubescent girl-- as well as monetary compensation to the family. Mende of Sierra Leone, 151.
- 7 These fees are considerable-- currently in Jaiima-Bongor chiefdom it costs seven leones or three and a half pounds to initiate a girl. Little notes that the bridegroom deducts his contribution from bridewealth.
- 8 Migeod writes: 'Sometimes a chief will hire a party of Sande girl dancers in Mende country, for a special occasion such as a funeral. The invitation may not be accepted, but if it is a heavy price will be paid, perhaps as much as two pounds a dancer. 'View of Sierra Leone', 245.
- 9 Mende of Sierra Leone, 127.
- 10 Hoffer, 'Mende and Sherbro women', 159.
- 11 This flexibility is illustrated by the history of a typical Sande chapter, one of three in the village of Mende Kema, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo: 'At about the time the white men came [1890's] Bundu Ka paid a certain sum to the head of Sande in order for his elder wife Lawobu to begin her own Sande society [after she had found sande in the river as the result of a dream]. When she died Kuji took over; she was no relation to Lawobu but was elected by the elders of the family and society officials. Then Gombè took over, wife of a nephew of Bundu Ka named Foreka. Then Yende became head, wife of a nephew of Foreka'. Although women informants almost always state that sande is inherited through the female line in uninterrupted fashion the actual practice appears to be closer to the example quoted above, through women connected affinally to the patrilineal descent group.
- 12 Similarly, Hoffer explains the way in which a woman with political ambitions is able to exploit both sets of connections to seek the chieftaincy. By contrast, a man cannot use his wife's family connections. 'Mende and Sherbro women'.

- 13 Jedrej, 'Medicine', 251, and M.C. Jedrej, 'Structural aspects of a West African secret society', Journal of anthropological research, 32 (1976), 237-238.
- 14 The etymology of the term sowa or sowei may be related to the related words in Vai (zo ba) and Gola (zo gbe). A zo is 'a term applied to anyone who possesses, or is sophisticated in, some secret lore'. Mende wa means 'big' or 'important'. (Augustus Feweh Caine, 'A study and comparison of the West African bush school and the southern Sotho circumcision school', (Unpublished Masters thesis, Northwestern University, 1959), 60.
- 15 Fraser has gone so far as to characterize the 'legendary ancestor' maskers to which the gbini and goboi belong and which parallel the sowei in the Poros society, as symbols of anarchy rather than idealized anthropomorphic beings. 'In his disruptive or inarticulate role, he holds up the mirror of cosmic chaos to those whose ignorance of disobedience threatens religion and the world order', he says. ('Legendary ancestor', 50).
- 16 The term yaya appears to derive from the chorus of the song sung by the Sande women on this occasion, which I am unable, however, to translate, ('O ya ya gō yo...ndoli goè wa ji woma').
- 17 Sowei Matta Kpèègbou, Mano, Jaiima-Bongor, 3 Oct 1972.
- 18 Note that similar license is granted to Poros men in the name of the Poros spirit during the rite of ngafa gohu lewe lei at the end of Poros initiation. Little, Mende of Sierra Leone, 123. Jedrej describes yaya (which he does not name) as a 'ritual devastation of the village' and speculates that the picking up of leaves which occurs afterwards is connected with the preparation of the sande hale in some way. He states that yaya occurs before circumcision which he calls pili Kamei hu and which, he says, entails the ritual separation and removal of the male element which existed in the sexually 'neutral' child by the excision of the clitoris. 'Medicine', 251-252.
- 19 The phrase 'to make the mud of the swamp mushy' is usually explained as referring to the swamp as the source of the ingredients used in the dish. In most of the towns in Jaiima-Bongor where the feast is observed ndoli jowei appears.
- 20 The ropes of beads are said to be an adaptation of a Vai custom, but is almost universal now among the Mende. The beads are kept as a cherished souvenir of initiation after it is over.
- 21 The parallel stage in Poros initiation is also known as ndahiti.

- 22 'Pulling' is also commonly referred to as tifei (leaves).
- 23 Migeod writes that 'to smear the body with white clay is in connection with mourning or a dedication to the spirit world'. View of Sierra Leone, 272.
- 24 Alldridge, Transformed colony, 224.
- 25 'The girls, surrounded by Bundu women and covered by a canopy of country cloths, came into the village. Amid the dusty excitement the procession abruptly stopped, while the leader entered into a final round of negotiations with the waiting fathers and husbands. Surrounded by stern women, she bargained hard in order to extract the last possible penny from the men before she released her charges to them'. 'Mende and Sherbro women', 160.
- 26 Alldridge also describes the ritual application and washing off of a cap of black mud called 'soboro' to those girls already betrothed. My informants did not mention this. Transformed colony, 226.
- 27 Swei Boi Titi Kabla, Blama, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo. 4 Oct 1972.
- 28 There are, of course, anomalies even within a district. Thus in Jaiima-Bongor one town in the chiefdom observes Sande wa gbii and not yaya.
- 29 This brief discussion of differences in initiation rituals is not meant to be comprehensive, but rather suggestive of the degree of variation to be found.
- 30 Sierra Leone, 125.
- 31 Similar accounts were given by Paramount Chief Foday Kai, Jaiima-Bongor chiefdom, and Paramount Chief Vandi Pabai in the Vai/Mende chiefdom of Soro-Gbema. See also the discussion of the war-like behavior of Sande women on this occasion in Chapter 7.
- 32 One finds the occasional very rare exception to the overall blackness of the costume of ndoli jowei. There is a sowei masker which is much talked of in Nongowa and Small Bo chiefdoms, Kenema district which is all red and called 'sowo gboi' ('the red sowei'). Multicolored wudi, or strands of wool, are also occasionally used as added decoration on the neck cape of the ndoli jowei in this district. I also documented a sowei mask which was painted blue, 'Jama', at Taninahun Molango, Kaiyamba, Moyamba. 3 Jun 1972.

- 33 A great deal of palm wine or other liquor is usually drunk at big Sande celebrations and consequently by the close of such an event the behavior of ndoli jowesia may become quite free. On one occasion a group of them got into my car and pretended to drive it away!
- 34 Town chief M.F. Tajawi, Koribondo, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo. 27 Sept 1972.
- 35 Mori jande initiation takes the same amount of time as ordinary Sande (Mende jande) but the fees are somewhat smaller and the ritual less elaborate. The main feast occurs when the initiates first come to town and is called sooki. Prayers are led by Moslem teachers at this time. The girls are taught songs in Arabic and different dances. (Mori jande wa jowei Jatu Lukeule, Telu, Jaiima-Bongor). In Telu, the mori jande has been there since the late 1940's. A wave of such reformist outbreaks occurred throughout Sierra Leone in the early 1950's. I also encountered more recent examples in Bo and Kenema districts. In one town the traditional masking practices were suppressed by a group of diamond-rich 'new men' upon their return from a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1962.
- 36 One explanation of the name gonde is that it derives from köndö, a 'shell', since empty shells are quintessential junk to the Mende.
- 37 'Gonde ya mehe me'ii le...a le gbindihun gbon gbon'. Kponima, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo. 27 Mar 1972.
- 38 Little mentions a Porö satirical masker called dagbadaii which I did not encounter, perhaps because like samawa it either always was or has become rare. Its existence bears out, nevertheless, the structural parallelism in the types of masquerades belonging to the two societies.
- 39 Kpakuma, Jaiima-Bongor, 29 Sept. 1972.
- 40 Buma, Jaiima-Bongor, 3 Oct 1972.
- 41 Alldrige, Sherbro, 223: 'At Kolahum [Bandi] I saw some very curious dances here...one was called the Santelule and was a pas seul performed by a Bande woman. Her get up was most extraordinary. The high headdress was composed of a heap of skulls and beaks of hornbills mixed with the jaw bones of some small animals and her waist was festooned with bones, bits of shell, and a collection of similar things. The costume was by no means pleasing; she however sang and danced about vigorously, which seemed to highly amuse the people'.

42 The ritual process, structure and anti-structure (London, 1969),
176.

Chapter 4. Carvers and Patrons

"Every man is different in his own way of dreaming...." (Gola saying)

The archetypical Gola artist is one who "dreams" and whose creative inspiration is supported by a very special relationship with a tutelary... ¹

Woodcarving among the Mende and the neighbouring Vai, Sherbro, and Gola is a male occupation. Unlike many other African peoples the Mende do not restrict carving to certain clans or families, nor is there a formalized system of apprenticeship for the training of carvers. Although sons of established carvers do sometimes take up the craft, any individual may in fact decide to become a carver. Arrangements will often be made for such a person to stay with a professional carver for a period of time to learn the elements of the art, but there is nothing to prevent a man from setting up as a carver with only the most rudimentary tuition or observation of basic techniques as a foundation. In fact, as we shall see, even when they have received formal training almost all carvers claim to be self-taught and to 'know how to carve' by virtue of an inborn and 'god-given' ability.

Because only the most famous carvers can find enough work to support themselves by full-time carving in their home communities most are forced to do farm work as well and also to travel considerable distances to take up commissions when they are 'called' by patrons in other villages. The itinerant nature of carving appears to be a traditional feature of the occupation, as the provenance

data of many old masks shows.² A carver of recognized skill is a respected figure, but this is a status which can only be attained after a man has 'made a name for himself' with a corpus of works demonstrating his talent and virtuosity. Once his reputation has spread patrons will come to him to commission carvings or 'call' him to stay for periods of time in their communities as an invited guest while he makes one or more commissioned pieces. Until such a reputation has been gained, however, the carver is usually forced either to practice his craft only intermittently or to travel widely to solicit work and to sell ready-made carvings. Carvers today may also choose to co-operate with traders and to produce pieces at home which the traders carry over a wide territory, although they are often ashamed of this practice and do not admit to it readily.³ Carvers frequently are also expert at other crafts such as blacksmithing and carpentry, and in the past they were often skilled ivory carvers or silversmiths.

To gain a clearer picture of the position of the carver in Mende society it will be useful to describe the range of carvings produced both now and in the past. Traditionally, carvers were called upon to make many utilitarian objects, many of which have now been replaced by machine-made implements; the list includes dishes, mortars, scoops, bellows, winnowing baskets, drums, musical instruments, dolls, puppets, and canoes. Although these things were also made by amateur woodworkers, people turned to professional carvers whenever possible for expertly made pieces. Museum

collections formed in the early years of this century also contain a wide range of basically utilitarian carvings from the Mende and Sherbro regions whose elaborate decoration identifies them as prestige objects. There are examples of hair-combs, mortars, hammock bars, game boards, musical instruments, spoons, and heddle pulleys embellished with finely carved figures, animals, and ornamental motifs. (Figs. 26-28). Such pieces have virtually disappeared today, probably because it is now more desirable and prestigious to possess imported manufactured goods than fine indigenous carvings.

Other types of carvings in the traditional repertory had a more specifically ceremonial use; old museum collections contain many intricately carved staffs, often incorporating an 'egg-in-cage' rattle, which were carried by chiefs, their speakers, and secret society officials. (Fig. 29). The use of such staffs can still be documented in the field, although the large number of these objects in older collections shows that they were once far more common.⁴ (Fig. 30).

There are also many carvings of the human figure in museums, both male and female and of varying sizes. The majority of these represent the female figure, both seated and standing, and many have beaded or cloth aprons and bead necklaces. Firm documentation relating to ritual usage exists for only a few types of carved figures, and many individual pieces in museums remain something of a puzzle. Alldridge gives a detailed account of the use of a carved

female figure called a minsereh for divination by the Yassi society of the Sherbro-Bullom. The figure is twirled in the hands of the diviner and consequently has a compact, elongated shape with elbows bent and pressed tightly against the body, and often shows a torsion in the hips and legs suggestive of its use. (Fig. 31).⁵

A second type of carved figure used in Yassi society rituals is described by Hall in the catalogue of the collection he made among the Sherbro-Bullom in the 1930's. The carving represents a female figure holding a bowl and was carried on the head of the society leader, the kambe mama, in processions; Hall calls the carving by the same name. 'Portions of the Yasi [sic] "medicine" are placed in the bowl', Hall explains, while 'at other times the figure stands in front of the compartment in the Yasi house where the "medicine" is kept. It is the guardian of the "medicine"'.⁶ According to Hall these figures are sometimes carved without bowls in which case a separate bowl is provided, and there is one example of a kambe mama carved as a female head and torso rising out of the middle of a bowl.⁷

Divination involving twirled figures has never been described in relation to the Mende secret society which parallels the Yassi society, the Njaye society. I was able to document, however, the use of a pair of carved figures, one male and one female, known as kambeisia (singular, kambei) by a Kpa-Mende Njaye group in Bonthe district. (Fig. 32).⁸ As in the case of the Sherbro kambe mama the Mende kambeisia are placed in front of the kunde where the njaye

medicine is kept in the society's house and are also carried in processions.⁹

Hall's collection also includes an example of an image carved as a memorial to a dead twin. He documents as well the use of small carved heads mounted on bases by the minor Sherbro masker, the Nggolo (or ngolu). 'Such young', Hall recorded, 'are produced by the leading dancer of the Nggolo "magically" from under his costume'.¹⁰ The Sherbro carve small dolls (tshantth) which, Hall says, 'are usually carried by little girls supported in a cloth wrapped around the body as babies are carried by their mothers'.¹¹ The Mende also make a small figurine of this type which they now call bebe.

Early collections contain a number of examples of a wooden palette, often ornamented with decorative carving on the handle, which was used to mix the white clay or wojei worn by Sande initiates, although none has been documented in the field in recent years. (Fig. 33).¹² There are undoubtedly other types of carvings used in ritual contexts in secret and public ceremonies by the different secret societies although no further specific documentation of ritual use has yet been published. I was shown, for example, a carving representing a coiled snake with a large female head which served an unexplained ritual purpose for one of the Bo town Sande groups.¹³ Although this was the only such carving I saw in the field there is one similar piece in the Sierra Leone National Museum, probably of fairly recent date as was the example at Bo.

(Fig. 34). It is striking that many of the unidentified figure carvings in museum collections, like the field example just cited, exist as unique or rare examples rather than as classes of objects. If, as the forms of these figures often suggest, they were carved to be guardian figures, medicine containers, or auxiliary carvings used in secret society ritual, it seems probable that they were the joint inventions of individual carvers and secret society officials. Because of the secrecy which surrounds the activities of these societies such carvings would be seen rarely or not at all by the general public and consequently such new 'genres' of carving often seem to have remained unique examples or to have enjoyed only a brief local vogue.

It is important not to assume that all Mende figure carvings were intended for ritual use.¹⁴ The fact that female heads on figures and other carvings often bear a close resemblance to sowei masks should not automatically be taken to mean that the carving was used by the Sande society. Rather this resemblance is evidence both of the fact that the sowei is an idealized image of womanhood which naturally influences the way a carver depicts female imagery in other contexts, and also of the primacy of the sowei mask within the carver's repertory. Informants all over Mendeland were consistent and emphatic in indentifying photographs of carved figures as gewe haka or 'furniture' (literally 'idle things'), that is, as house ornaments, except in Bonthe district where figures were sometimes identified as kambeisia. Mende carvers have for a long

time made figures for purely decorative use and many examples are still to be found although the possession of such ornamental sculptures was apparently more common in the past. (Fig. 35). One woman said that she had owned several statuettes whose purpose she expressively defined as 'to dress the house'.¹⁵ Some of these decorative figures have no particular 'meaning' or content while others commemorate specific individuals.¹⁶ Another informant explained that a carving would sometimes be commissioned as a memorial to a beloved woman. The Paramount Chief of Selinga chiefdom in Bo district has a small collection of carved figures in his compound. One, showing a woman standing on top of a drum, commemorates a famous dancer; two others depicting a man and a woman each with bound arms commemorate the culprits in a famous case of 'woman damage' which occurred around 1915. (Fig. 36); the fourth, a half life-size female figure, has no specific identity. Another chief in Bo district has a very lifelike polychrome figure of a British policeman in his house which he bought from a local carver.¹⁷

The possession of such carvings added to the prestige of a 'big man' as did the possession of the decoratively carved utensils described earlier. It is interesting to note that many of the museum pieces dating from the early years of the century depict figures or heads wearing the European boots, hat, or pith helmet, which were prestigious possessions at that period. (Fig. 29). Two early staffs are carved as very accurate reproductions of rifles, doubtless reflecting a similar value.¹⁸ A systematic attempt to encourage the

production of such carvings seems to have been made during the height of the colonial period. Several chiefs described the regular carving displays which were held in conjunction with district meetings of Paramount Chiefs between about 1930 and 1961. 'The things were placed in a very big bari', explained one participant in these meetings. 'Each chiefdom had its own corner. There was a kind of competition and the winner was given a prize of money. It was given to the Paramount Chief [by the District Officer] who passed it on to the carver'.¹⁹ Another informant lamented the decreasing interest in such work and suggested that Moslem iconoclasm has had a destructive effect on figure carving just as it has on masking. 'In the old days', he said, 'every rich person had carvers working for him. This will never happen again. Also, people now come from Mecca and tell people to burn them'.²⁰ Not only human figures, but also figures of various animals and birds are carved as house ornaments. This category of carving obviously affords the carver the greatest freedom for a display of inventiveness and virtuosity.

The opportunity to display his skill is obviously important to the Mende carver for, as we have said, it is by proving his talent through his work rather than by any inherited status or prescribed course of training that he must establish himself. Of all the objects in the traditional repertory, however, the masks used by the secret societies and primarily the sowei mask are the most prestigious for the carver and the most artistically challenging. The challenge is presented both by the task of carving an image which

must personify a supernatural being, and by the necessity of measuring his talent against a received tradition. Furthermore, in his work for secret societies the carver becomes party to activities which are kept hidden from the rest of the community. And in the case of the Sande society which is by far the carver's most important patron he becomes one of the very few men who is of necessity admitted to secrets from which other men are barred. The only other major secret societies which use wooden masks are the Njaye and Humöi societies whose chapters are far less numerous than those of the Sande society. Neither the gongoli mask, made by amateurs as well as by professional carvers, nor the gonde mask is a true test of a carver's skill as they are intended to appear roughly made, grotesque, and ugly.

The creation of an object which becomes the embodiment of a supernatural being is an event which is by definition mysterious and to a certain extent ambiguous. The carver is not himself a halemoi or expert in the uses of 'medicine' although his craft involves him in its workings. Furthermore the identity of the sowei masker is said to be supernatural, and it is therefore difficult for a carver to lay claim openly to the creation of a mask for which he naturally wishes to take credit. As we shall see the Mende and their neighbours explain the origin of sowei masks by means of a mythology which takes into consideration both human agency and the participation of the supernatural.

The Mende say that there are two ways in which a sowei mask can

be acquired; the mask can be made by a carver or, alternatively, a mask of supernatural origin can be 'found' in rivers or forests by people who have been told through dreams where they are located. Such a mask is known as a malejowei (plural, malejoweisia) or a sowei one has 'met with'. The frequency with which the two accounts of origin are given for individual masks varies from one part of the Sande area to another. In the Vai areas of Sierra Leone and Liberia all sowei masks are said to be malejoweisia, and Vai informants even recounted instances of sowei masks having been found together with the mats and switches used by the masker and with amulets already tied on.²¹ In the KÖ-Mende area malejoweisia are very rare, and in Jaiima-Bongor chiefdom in central Mendeland only two of the eighty-four masks documented were said to have been mystically 'found'. Gola informants in Sierra Leone said that sowei masks were often 'found' in former times both in the forests and in rivers, but that the finding of masks had become less common in recent years.²²

Theoretically malejowei, who is referred to as a female spirit similar in type to tingoi and njaloi, can appear to anyone in a dream and reveal to the dreamer where she is to be found. An informant who had experienced such a dream described how she had then gone to the place indicated and had gone 'under the water' stayed there for a very long time, and then brought the malejowei back to the village.²³ People may also unexpectedly catch a glimpse of malejowei floating in rivers, but if she doesn't want to be found she will change her

position and disappear.²⁴ Those who experience such dreams are usually Sande society officials, but if they are not they must bring the mask to a Sande Soweï; the finder usually acquires high Sande rank soon afterwards.²⁵ Men also have been known to experience dreams of malejoweï, and they, too, must bring the mask to the Sande officials.²⁶

It is said that malejoweisia are often unusual in appearance, and not particularly beautiful. In photograph sessions informants frequently suggested that an unusual Sande mask, or one with particularly schematized facial features or a fierce expression might be a malejoweï. Such attributions were usually based on odd or unfamiliar facial representations rather than on unusual decorative or iconographic motifs. The latter were usually explained as the result of a carver's desire to demonstrate his virtuosity.²⁷

Carvers, too, often volunteer this distinction between 'found' and man-made masks in the course of discussions about mask carving. The carver Ansumana Sona told Reinhardt a very interesting story about the origin of the first soweï mask in which the connection between the 'found' and man-made masks is explained.²⁸ In the story an old woman was shown where to find a soweï mask in a dream but the mask was taken away after her death because her children did not offer to the spirits in the proper way. The mask was restored after they resumed their offerings, and one of the women asked a man to come secretly and peek at the mask through the trees during Sande meetings so that he could copy it. 'So then more and more women

needed the masks', Sona concludes, 'and the men began carving them for them. But even now, the carvers don't make all the masks. Some women, from time to time, have dreams, and get the masks that way. But now not as much as before'. As has been mentioned Gola informants in Sierra Leone also said that malejoweisia had been more common in the past. Other informants in central Mendeland said that the very first sowei in their towns had been malejoweisia but that subsequent masks were man-made, an explanation which is consistent with Sona's story.²⁹

Part of the interest of Sona's story is that it makes clear that it is the artist's ability to copy which makes both necessary and legitimate his limited participation in Sande mysteries. He emphasizes this in his narrative:

When they had initiations, they would let him come and look-- through a row of trees-- and see the Bundu mask when it came, so he could carve it right. He could see how the ear was, and go back and carve the ear like that.

The artist's ability to reproduce a prototype is fundamental to his traditional role as the maker of sowei masks. Very often in the past, it is stated, commissions took the form of requests to copy a damaged older mask, a practice which is still common.³⁰ The copy would, of course, keep the same name as its predecessor since it was meant to personify the same spirit. The new mask was also supposed to resemble the original and the fact that a replacement had been made was not publicly acknowledged, although now, in practice, there is often considerable stylistic and iconographic variation.

The traditional practice of making copies of old masks is,

however, of great interest in the consideration of style change in Mende sowei masks since old prototypes and motifs must have been preserved quite faithfully by this custom. The practice may also provide an explanation for the apparent ignorance many carvers and owners show about the significance of motifs which probably once had symbolic meaning, since the process of copying would require a carver to reproduce forms even when he did not understand their meanings. Alterations in the scale or rendering of such forms easily creep in, making recognition even more difficult.³¹

When a mask was to be commissioned from a carver, whether as a copy or a new piece, negotiations were carried on secretly so that when the mask was presented in public for the first time its appearance would come as a surprise and 'no one would know where it had come from'. The Sowei would approach the carver privately and tell him 'hin tɛ' -- 'bring down' -- a mask for me.³² A fee would be paid of a white chicken, rice, and a white country cloth or length of other expensive material.³³ Usually the Sowei did not give special instructions as to the appearance of the mask, although general preferences were sometimes stated. In such cases the carver would usually be requested to include a particular iconographic or decorative motif, such as a pot or a bird, rather than to render the face in any particular way.³⁴

Traditionally carvers worked in isolation in rough workshops built in the bush outside the village. In the 1930's Ralph Eberl-Elber was able to observe and interview a carver at Semabu in Kenema

district who was still working in the customary way:

The workshop of the carver lay deep in the bush. The path that leads to it is "tabu", no one may meet him, only headmen and the highest ranking members of secret religious sects form an exception. The hut in which the carver works, in silence and isolation, is completely simple and almost meagre. The outside is covered with twisted curled raphia palm, the sides are built so badly that in many places the rain can come in even when it isn't the least bit heavy. Now during the rainy season it comes in at all corners. Only where the carver works is the roof reinforced with an especially thick layer of palm fronds.³⁵

Although preferred materials and techniques vary to some extent from one carver to another a general outline of the Mende carver's methods can be given. The tree is felled and sectioned on the spot with an axe. The most common wood used for sowei masks is from a tree known as kpole valued both because it is soft and easy to carve and because its lightness makes the mask easy to wear. Carvers vary in their choice of young or full-grown trees and in their preference for using the wood immediately or letting it age.³⁶ There is also considerable variation in the systems used for measuring off the block of wood. These measurements are based on various sections of the carver's own hand and arm and once a particular formula is adopted it appears to become a fixed working procedure which is never varied.

Ansumana Sona gave a description of the methods of measurement used by his father which may be taken as representative of the traditional approach.³⁷ After the rough block of wood was cut it was trimmed to a height equivalent to the length between the carver's elbow and his closed fist. Then the inside of the block was dug out

with the söndi (gouge) to a depth equal to the distance between the third finger and thumb when extended plus the length of the top two joints of the third finger. Then the inside was further scraped out with the kumboi (round knife) until it exactly fit the carver's own head. The outside of the mask was then shaped with the kpe (adze). (Fig. 37). The carver located the level of the eyes first, by placing his thumb against the base of the neck and marking the top of his extended index finger. This distance was then divided in two, the top half defining the length of the nose and the bottom half the mouth and chin. The length of the nose can also be equated to two joints of the middle finger; the distance from the point of the chin to the top of the nose is equal to the distance from the top of the nose to the peak of the forehead. Further alignments were made between the level of the nostrils and the bottom of the ear and between the inner corners of the eyes and the tops of the ears.³⁸ After these forms had been roughed in they were defined and detailed with the small knife (kpeka). Modern carvers also make use of saws, drills, chisels, and vices. One of the most significant changes in procedure is a tendency to replace measurement based on human anatomy with all its attendant individual variations, with rulers and fixed measurements. Ansumana Sona and other carvers say that they now equate the length of a joint of a finger with one inch and use tape measures to guide them.

After the mask is carved the surface is polished until it is perfectly smooth. Traditionally this was done with rough-surfaced

leaves (kami), but now sandpaper is often used. The carver then blackens the mask, and here again there appears to be some variation in technique. Most commonly leaves known as njuj are used to make a dye, although some carvers claim to use powdered burnt coco-nut shell or a sediment obtained from a blacksmith mixed with palm oil.³⁹ Black shoe-polish and European paint are frequent modern substitutions. If silver ornament was to be applied, the metal was usually given to the carver by his patron and then worked and applied by him. Modern carvers claim to be able to carve a sowei mask in a week or less, depending on interruptions and, of course, on the standard of quality they aim for.

During the carving of a mask the carver was fed and generally looked after by his patrons. If he had been 'called' to a town he was also housed.⁴⁰ Upon completion of a mask the carver was paid a further fee which, since the turn of the century at least, has taken the form of a cash payment. Up until about 1940 this payment was one and a half to two pounds and since then the price has averaged about four pounds.⁴¹

The carver of Semabu whose workshop was described above also gave Eberl-Elber a fascinating account of the way an individual carving progressed, and how he sought inspiration:

He explained to me how for him not all days were the same, how there were often hours in which he was moved to work and how then his work went without pause and practically without mistakes, and grew as if helped to its completion by an unseen hand. He confided in me that there were also, however, weeks in which all the spirits abandoned his creation and he didn't conceal from me how at such adverse times not the slightest thing succeeded.

Then the carver wanders further into the deep bush far from any human settlement. No one can say where he goes. It almost appears as if he doesn't know himself. For many days he remains absent. He speaks to the spirits, say the natives, and consults the spirits about his work. (I said that maybe he had to leave a sacred mask incomplete at times. He said with great emphasis, no. From the first cut when he sat before the unhewn wood, the spirits lived in the started work and could never again leave it, and under their influence the work must finally at some time be completed).⁴²

The spirits to which the carver refers are a class of supernatural beings known as tèmoisia (singular, tèmoi). The tèmoisia are land spirits who inhabit the forests and take the form of tiny men; they teach various arts to people whom they befriend.⁴³ One informant explained the relationship as follows:

In the olden days when those spirits loved people they asked them what they wanted the spirits to do for them. Then you tell the spirit what you want and what you want to learn how to do and ask the spirit to teach you. The spirit will do what you ask. If you want to be a wood carver the spirit will teach you.⁴⁴

The knowledge gained from the tèmoisia is not merely a matter of craft or skill, but is knowledge of hale or 'medicine' about which these spirits are expert. Jedrej has pointed out that the identification which the Mende make between the tèmoisia and their forest habitation is significant, since hale is to be found outside human settlements, in the realm of nature. He sees the tèmoisia, furthermore, as a mediating category of spirits who aid in the transition between village and forest and between the human and the non-human.⁴⁵ Mende informants also explain that some sowei masks are made by the tèmoisia themselves and that these are the malejoweisia. The carver of Semabu, referred, however, to two

categories of spirits; the spirits whom he met in the bush and who helped him to carve were the tèmoisia, but the spirit which lives in the wood once he has begun to carve should be understood as the spirit of the sowei herself.

There is clearly an area of necessary ambiguity in these explanations in that informants are giving voice to what is essentially a mystery, but there is nevertheless a notable consistency to the mythological framework of mask making among the Mende. The essential element of this myth, then, is the belief in a supernatural origin for the prototype of the sowei mask which human beings then copied. An unbroken chain of reproduction is implied by the custom of copying old and damaged masks. The presence of hale in man-made masks is accounted for by the belief that the carver is aided by supernatural helpers, the tèmoisia, who make possible the entrance into the block of wood of the spirit of the sowei. Finally, continued direct contact with the supernatural world is guaranteed by the periodic 'finding' of certain sowei masks, the malejoweisia, which are of supernatural origin and made, according to some informants, by the tèmoisia themselves.

D'Azevedo has given a detailed account of a parallel belief in spirit helpers among the Gola. Among the Mende, as among the Gola, the relationships and bargains made between human beings and their spirit helpers are kept secret, and Mende carvers do not usually admit openly that they have received this kind of help, although they often speak of acquiring specialized knowledge and inspiration

in dreams, which the Mende understand to be the channel through which contact is made with the supernatural world. As we will see in the interviews with carvers summarized below, ability to carve is now also frequently stated to be a gift of god. This may well be a restatement in a more modern Islamicized idiom of the traditional belief since Sawyerr and other authorities emphasize that the têmoisia and other nature spirits are intermediary deities which ultimately link the human petitioner with the one supreme deity, Ngewö.⁴⁶

The traditional relationship between patron and carver has been greatly altered by modern social and economic changes. Carvers today enjoy a much larger market, expanded significantly by tourists, resident Europeans and other foreigners. Although the practice of commissioning masks has by no means disappeared a class of traders has sprung up and carvers often supply them with sowei masks not knowing whether they will be used in Sande masquerades or as ornaments on a coffee table. The traditional secrecy has also been eroded and carvers now usually work inside their villages, often in a place open to public view. Carvers move about more often and more widely as well, with the result that the continuity of local iconographic and stylistic traditions is increasingly broken up. The replacement for an old and damaged mask these days is rarely a copy of the original, but more commonly a mask bought ready-made from an itinerant carver or trader. And of course the time spent on an individual carving has decreased since the expanded market makes

it advantageous to work as quickly as possible. The principle that time is money was articulated very clearly to Reinhardt by Paul Lahai; when she asked him why he always carved the same type of sowei mask for Peace Corps volunteers he answered, 'the others are harder to do and people won't pay any more for them'.⁴⁷

The traditional role assigned to the carver in Mende society contains, as we have seen, a number of built in uncertainties and ambiguities. The lack of a fixed system of apprenticeship, enforced itineracy, and the isolation and secrecy imposed by the secret societies on his most important work all made it difficult for an individual carver to establish a stable base and reputation. Furthermore, their association with tèmoisia sets them apart from other people, not always in a positive sense. The tèmoisia are nature spirits, jinanga, and as such they often bargain with human beings for their aid. Hofstra explains:

The dyinanga, on the other hand, do not always give their favours for nothing. Some kind of service will be asked from the people with whom they are in contact. In native stories it is frequently mentioned that dyinanga also have to be propitiated by offerings. Something or somebody a person is very much attached to, for instance his wife or child, must be sacrificed to his dyina.⁴⁸

This places the Mende artist in a situation parallel to that which d'Azevedo has described for the Gola artist; his association with spirit helpers allows him to create marvelous things by which the whole community is enriched, but may also burden him with terrible debts which cause destruction to other people.⁴⁹

To overcome latent distrust in the community and to justify his somewhat unconventional life style the Mende artist must impress the public with the supremacy of his talent and the force of his personality. One way of doing this is by dramatizing the events of his own life, particularly the way his talent was 'discovered'. In interviews with six contemporary carvers-- five Mende and one Vai-- it can be seen that each man restructures the events of his life to a certain extent in order to conform to a generally accepted image of the artist. These six brief 'autobiographies' help define that image, and also provide examples of the variation in life style and degree of itineracy which exists among Mende carvers.

Vandi Sona

Ansumana Sona gave the following account of his father's life.⁵⁰ Vandi Sona was born at Lago, about a mile from Potoru in Barri Chiefdom, Pujehun District. He was the son of Dueka, a warrior who fought in the war between the warrior-chief Ndawa and the Kailahun chiefdoms. Dueka married Bete from Kpapi in the Krim area. After the Ndawa war Vandi Sona was sent to rebuild the town of Gawula in Wunde chiefdom as his father's representative. According to Ansumana, no one taught his father to carve, and this is how he came to be a carver:

He was a gambler playing cards. They used to hear from Krim people that they are great carvers of [sowei] masks. One man sent Vandi Sona to go and buy a mask in Krim country where Vandi's relatives came from. The man gave him the money but he [Vandi] "ate it" and the man wanted the money or the mask. It was hard to get money, and this man was behind him every

day and Vandi was afraid he would be taken before high authorities and sold into slavery. During the time he was ready to hide away he took two tools with him, an axe (söndi) and a hoe (kali). He went and gave them to a blacksmith to remake into tools for carving. He made an adze (kpe) out of the hoe and a scraper (kumbui) and a small gouge (söndi) out of the axe. Then his father went to the bush and cut the wood and made his measurement... After his father carved this God gave him sense to get a leaf to dye it. Then he told his mother to get the man and gave him the mask without telling him that he had carved it. The man was very happy. The style was the same as the Krim which came to his [Vandi's] mind since he had spent some time there. He told his mother that he carved the mask so his mother asked him to carve one for her... it was from his imagination, not copied from another style.

Vandi Sona was a goldsmith and ivory carver as well.⁵¹ He would travel from place to place to do his work, and frequently worked in Kenema. The Paramount Chief of Nongowa chiefdom at the time, Momoh Vagahun, was the same age and 'rank' as Vandi and 'they were great friends', according to Ansumana. Vandi carved an ivory chief's horn for him as well as a number of sowei masks. Vandi Sona died in 1951.⁵²

Ansumana Sona

Ansumana Sona was born in 1931 at Gawula, in Wunde chiefdom, and spent part of his childhood at Telu, Jaiima-Bongor chiefdom.⁵³ He learned to be a mason at Gawula and worked there for a few years; he then moved to Segbwema where he worked as a blacksmith for two years and as a carpenter for four years. After his father died, when Ansumana was about twenty-five, he started to study the masks his father had carved and began to carve himself. From the mid-1950's until 1968 Sona lived at Telu, the chiefdom town of Jaiima-

Bongor. He worked primarily as a carver and was patronized in particular by Paramount Chief Foday Kai. He also sold a number of masks to European and American visitors. In 1968 he moved to Kenema where he was hired by the government owned Forest Industries Corporation. He carves various decorative and commemorative objects there, such as tables supported by carved elephants, small pieces of furniture, portrait busts of Sierra Leonean leaders, animals, and wall plaques of human heads. (Fig. 38). Ansumana gives instruction to apprentices in this type of carving, but does not teach anyone to carve sowei masks. He still carves sowaisia on commission, and works on them quite publicly on the verandah of his house.

Banasi

Squire James, nicknamed 'Banasi', said that he was a small boy when World War I began, and must therefore have been born around 1910.⁵⁴ He still lives in the town of his birth, Njaluahun, Damballa chiefdom, Bo district, although he spent part of his boyhood at Sembehun in the same chiefdom. He recounted that he did not begin carving until after he had a wife (probably in his mid- or late twenties). At that time Banasi's brother made a carving of a bird which he showed to Banasi, suggesting that they should make a sowei mask and put the bird on top of it. Banasi then 'made one as though I had always made them', although he said that he had had no teacher and had never made any carved thing before. He sold the mask to a Sowei from a nearby town and people asked him to make many after that.

When Banasi was young he often worked together with Pessima, the only other carver in the area. The Paramount Chiefs asked them to make carvings for display in their compounds and at meetings of chiefs. They made figures of little girls (bebe), animals such as snakes and elephants, warri boards, as well as wood carvings of an airplane and a gun for these patrons. Banasi has also carved gongoli masks. A relative of his former associate, Alfred Pessima, was apprenticed to Banasi for three years and is the only student he has taught. Banasi still carves in seclusion in the bush. He explained that he 'imagines the ways' to make the masks but denied that any spirit helps him.⁵⁵ He does not usually carve on commission but, 'makes [masks] and then advertizes them and people come to buy them'.

Toma Jenneh

Toma Jenneh, known as Pa Toma, was born in 1912 at Gbangbatok, Banta chiefdom, Bonthe district where he still lives.⁵⁶ He says that he began to carve when he was ten or twelve years old, before he joined Poru. No one else in his family was a carver and no one taught him, but he had a dream that he should carve. 'It is just a gift', he explained. The first thing he carved was a kambei-like figure, and he has also carved many sowei masks, as well as gongoli, njayeköi, walking sticks, combs, figures of little girls, chiefs, and birds which are used as house ornaments.

Pa Toma spent three months in Fala, Wando chiefdom, Kailahun

district when he was in his 50's; he said he had gone there 'to find sense', and to know the country. He was also called to carve at Njala in Moyamba district for two months in 1968. He says he has had one apprentice, Abu from Koilu in Kaiyamba chiefdom, Moyamba district who spent four years with him from 1943 to 1947. Pa Toma carves sowei masks in secret in the bush but makes other non-ritual carvings in public at his house in Gbangbatok. He usually carves on commission but also sometimes carves 'for market'.

Foday Ibrahim Margai

Foday Ibrahim Margai was born about 1910 at Gbangbatok, Banta chiefdom, Bonthe district.⁵⁷ Since 1961 he has lived at Bai Largo, Kore chiefdom, Moyamba district close to the main road from Bo to Freetown. He appears to be a prosperous man who supports himself exclusively by carving. He says that as a very young man he travelled to Kenema and Pujehun districts to carve although he had had no teacher and 'got it from God'. He also spent ten years in Guinea where he studied Arabic, and lived for periods of time in Bumpe and Lugbu chiefdoms in Bo district where he was called to carve. Foday Margai says that he has never done farm work but has always been able to support himself by carving although this has meant that he has travelled a great deal, going wherever people have called him to carve.

Foday Margai carves in public, in an open-sided shelter, explaining that because he is a more wonderful carver than anyone he

is able to carve with people watching. (Fig. 37). He owns a copy of a paperback book on African art, and has made copies of non-Mende objects from pictures in the book.⁵⁸ He carves both on commission and for traders.

Vandi Kwi

Vandi Kwi, a Vai, was born about 1930 at Madina, Gawula chiefdom, Liberia where he still lives.⁵⁹ No one else in his family carved but when as a boy Vandi saw Boima Bulè, a local carver, at work he became interested. He went to Bumi in Tombe chiefdom where Boima Bulè worked, and was his apprentice from 1946 to 1948. He now carves full-time, sometimes on commission and sometimes without special orders. He carves sowei masks, gbetu masks, kokpo (gongoli) masks, single figures, figures arranged in groups, bowls, spoons, and mortars.⁶⁰ He has a special house in Madina in which he carves, and the only people who may watch him are adult members of his family.

These six autobiographies illustrate more graphically than general statements the Mende attitude toward artistic ability. All the carvers interviewed present the revelation of their artistic talent as a sudden and dramatic unveiling rather than as a difficult struggle to master a craft. This is particularly striking in those accounts which were given in front of an audience-- those of Banasi, Pa Toma, and Foday Margai-- and in Ansumana Sona's description of Vandi Sona's life, where the histories take on some of the structure

and characteristics of Mende folktales. The carvers present themselves as individuals who have been singled out by supernatural powers, and who in turn have the ability to dazzle and astonish other people through their work. Again there is a parallel with Gola wood-carvers of whom d'Azevedo writes that 'their life histories were presented to me as though they had spent their lives waiting for the opportunity to be interviewed'.⁶¹ Clearly these autobiographies are carefully composed; through them the carver creates a persona for himself which demands both the respect of other people and their tolerance of a lifestyle which often deviates from the norm.

There is also considerable variation in the practical arrangements of these six carvers. Those who have entrepreneurial ability, like Foday Margai and Vandi Kwi, advertize their work and have set up their workshops near busy roads; as a result they are able to live entirely by carving. Ansumana Sona also supports himself by carving alone although he has decided to devote most of his energy to largely decorative carvings which in many ways seem modern descendants of the virtuoso pieces made for the Paramount Chiefs' displays of earlier times. Pa Toma and Banasi are the most traditional, being content to carve only part-time and to participate in other activities as well. Neither has travelled very much, and neither is as prosperous as the other three carvers.

Discussions with artists also make clear the connections between the notions of mimetic skill and 'virtuosity'. Mimetic skill, as we saw, is fundamental to the artist's ritual function as copyist

of supernatural prototypes. He seeks to make manifest this ability by his skill in reproducing the forms of animals, people, and complex decorative motifs, for it is on the display of this virtuosity that his position in the Mende community depends. As we shall see, the iconography, ornamentation, and stylistic variation of Mende sowei masks are all influenced by the value placed by both carver and patron on this aspect of his creative ability.

Notes

- 1 D'Azevedo, 'Gola artistry', 294 and 395.
- 2 See Chapters 7 and 8 for detailed information on the movements of carvers and their masks.
- 3 Reinhardt also notes this reluctance. 'Mende carvers', 95.
- 4 The early literature refers to a number of these staffs as 'speaker's staffs'. Staub, quoting Volz's notebooks, says that these staffs were lent to messengers by chiefs or their speakers to prove that they were the legitimate representatives of these authorities. Staub, 'Beiträge', 43. Carved staffs are also occasionally included in the regalia of secret society officials or maskers, but there is no recorded documentation of any specific ritual meaning attributed to them in this context.
- 5 Alldridge says that the minsereh images were kept near the Yassi medicine, and 'are supposed to co-operate with it'. He also describes the way the figure was manipulated by the head of the society, the 'Yamama' or 'Kambeh': 'She holds the image by both hands at the waist, so that she can work it to and fro as on a pivot. She then puts questions to the figure, invariably of a leading description... A gradual inclination of the figure intends a favorable answer... but should it be otherwise the figure will remain stationary'. The Sherbro, 148.
- 6 University of Pennsylvania Museum no. 37.22.264. Hall's remarks quoted from the catalogue entry for this piece.
- 7 University of Pennsylvania Museum 37.22.279 and 37.22.280, and catalogue entries.
- 8 Bèlè, Imperri, Bonthe. Interviews with Chief Tuah Gbinde and the head of the Bèlè Njaye society, Boi Bètè. Fig. 31, shows the female figure belonging to a pair of kambeisia. The male figure has been stolen. 31 May 1972.
- 9 A good example of an old pair of kambeisia is preserved in the Liverpool museum nos. 16.2.06.29 and 16.2.06.30. They were collected by Ridyard in 1906. The pair wears cloth aprons and are close in size to the examples documented in the field.
- 10 University of Pennsylvania Museum no. 37.22.276 and catalogue entry.

- 11 University of Pennsylvania Museum no. 37.22.30 and catalogue entry. Volz also described these dolls in his notebooks but seems to have confused them with minsereh figures. Cited by Zeller, 'Reise' 56-57.
- 12 An example in the Volz collection, Bern Historisches Museum no. Sie.Leo. 247, has a handle shaped like an animal head.
- 13 Mama Fattu, keeper, Bumbokomo section, Garu Rd., Bo, 23 Mar 1972. I was not allowed to photograph this carving which was said to have been found ten years earlier at the bottom of a well, under the water. It was described as the 'head of the sowesia', and I had to be ritually washed with sande jawi after touching it.
- 14 In his catalogue Art of the Mende William Hommel has identified, it seems to me indiscriminately, virtually all figure carvings and busts as 'Sande medicine figures' or 'Sande medicine heads' including a number of undocumented pieces in museums and private collections. Unfortunately, I think, this is a major problem with his catalogue, and one which is likely to be perpetuated due to the lack of systematic publications on Mende figure carving available in English. Hommel appears to base some of his identifications on Hall's catalogue notes, which refer only to Sherbro carving and to Yassi society guardian figures and medicine containers. There appears to be no basis for identifying anything as a Sande 'medicine figure' or 'head' unless Hommel has new field information which he has not cited. Similarly his identification of a Mende 'ancestor figure' appears to be wrong on stylistic grounds and no documentation for the identification is cited. Nor are grounds given for the identification of a carving in a private collection as a 'twin figure', although stylistically it is consistent with Mende carving. (Plates 73 and 74).
- 15 Soweida Daoda Massaquoi, Sulima, Soro-Gbema, Pujehum, 3 Apr 1972.
- 16 Mr. Frances Mami of Matru Jong, Jong, Moyamba, 21 Mar 1972. The carver of Semabu told Ralph Eberl-Elber that he had recently made a portrait figure for the family of a deceased woman who had possessed great wisdom in the use of medicine. Rätsel, 115.
- 17 Chief Ibrahim Muhammed Katta, Doobu, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo. The figure was made by Moiwoh Kamara in 1961. The carver 'dreamt about it and made it the following day', according to the owner. It is used as a 'furniture' in his house, as was a figure made by the same carver portraying one of his father's wives, before it was damaged by termites. Interview, 2 Oct 1972.

- 18 One example is British Museum 1901.7.22.15 from the Alldridge collection. Another is Bern Historisches Museum no. Sie. Leo. 70, acquired in 1905 as part of the Ruply collection.
- 19 This account was given by Paramount Chief Kagobai, Damballa, Selinga, Bo. 2 Apr 1972. The carved figures belonging to this chief (described above) were made for display at such meetings.
- 20 Chief of Komende, Nongowa, Kenema, 11 May 1972.
- 21 Paramount Chief Vandi Pabai, Wai, Soro-Gbema, Pujehun, 3 Apr 1972. Informants in Liberia told equally dramatic tales of masks being 'found' inside villages, under certain trees, and in other public places where their sudden appearance had great dramatic impact.
- 22 Town chief, Gbovon, Makpele, Pujehun. 21 Oct 1972. The town is about seven miles from a motorable road; Gola is still spoken.
- 23 Sowei Lusi Lahai, Yabaiima, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo. 29 Sept 1972.
- 24 An incident which is said to have occurred in April 1947 in Jong chiefdom is still discussed as far away as Bo district. During a chiefdom election malejowei was watched by many people floating down river near Mattru Jong until she disappeared into the distance. This was interpreted to mean that one of the candidates, Madam Bunting-Williams, was the rightful Paramount Chief through an obvious identification of a Sande spirit with a female contender.
- 25 The doctrine of the malejowei clearly provides an opportunity for the acquisition of Sande titles just as the finding of sande medicine can make possible the founding of new Sande chapters. This took place at Yabaiima, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo in 1950 when Lusi Lahai became a Sowei soon after finding a malejowei.
- 26 In Bo in 1972 a man named Joe Nyenin claimed to have 'found' two malejowisia and created considerable excitement. As he is a carver, the incident would appear to be a variation on the traditional way of camouflaging the negotiations between carver and patron. (Interviews with Sowei Mama Fattu, Bo, March 21, 1972 and Joe Nyenin, May 8, 1972 at Bo).
- 27 In the Kö- and Sewa Mende areas where multifaced and janus masks are not common photographs of these types of masks were often identified as malejoweisia.
- 28 Reinhardt, 247-248. Reinhardt spells the name 'Sounah'.
- 29 This explanation was given by, among others, Chief Bokari Jebu, Mende Kema, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo, 21 Sept 1972.

- 30 The carver Pa Toma of Gbangbatok, Imperri, Bonthe had just been brought a mask to copy by a woman from a neighbouring chiefdom at the time I interviewed him. Other examples of copying were documented in both the Sewa and Kŏ-Mende regions. (See the detailed discussion of Ansumana Sona's copy of a mask by his father in Chapter 8). Dorith Ofri, a musicologist with extended experience among the Vai in Liberia, was told by the Vai carver Kende Kiawu in 1968 that the Sande officials brought him old masks to copy at night for greater secrecy and that after he had made his exact copy the old mask would traditionally be buried. (Personal communication, 19 Apr 1972, Monrovia).
- 31 See for example the discussion of the gradual distortions which have occurred in the representations of old-fashioned amulets in Chapter 5.
- 32 Paramount Chief Foday Kai, 27 Sept 1972.
- 33 The whiteness of these items is usually specified by informants; white, of course, is also the color associated with the dress of Sande officials and initiates.
- 34 Reinhardt agrees with this conclusion, and goes further: 'Carvers do not seem to feel constrained in any way in fulfilling the requirements set them... The carvers see new commissions as an opportunity to demonstrate their virtuosity'. ('Mende carvers', 92).
- 35 Eberl-Elber, Rättsel, 114.
- 36 Reinhardt has given a detailed and clear account of carving techniques in her general description on pages 100-108 and some individual variations are reported in the interviews with carvers which are appended. This brief outline is based both on her data and on my own field interviews with carvers. The discussion of systems of measurement is, however, my own.
- 37 Interviewed at Kenema, 17 May 1972.
- 38 The Vai carver Vandi Kwi gave an account of his methods of measurement which illustrates the kind of variation which occurs and which also, in this case, clearly lies at the back of variations in regional carving styles. The block of wood is cut to a height equal to three times the span of his thumb to extended fourth finger. The face length equals the length of his palm to the tip of the middle finger; the ear to the peak of the forehead measured along the hair-line equals the distance from the base of his palm to the end of the little finger; the bottom of the neck to the bottom of the chin equals the top two joints of the middle finger and the distance from the point of

- the chin to the top of the nose equals one and a half joints of the middle finger; the horizontal length of the eye equals two joints of the middle finger, and the length of the nose equals one joint of this finger; the distance between the chin and the back of the ear equals one hand-span plus two finger joints. Vandi Kwi also equates a finger joint with one inch. Madina, Gawula, Liberia. 14 Apr 1972.
- 39 The use of burnt coco-nut shell was described by Sowei Mattu Amara, Kpitima, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo, 1 Oct 1972; the use of kobui, a black syrupy residue from iron smelting which is boiled together with sangbe leaves, was described by Sowei Wuya, Mende Kema, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo, 24 Sept 1972.
- 40 Eberl-Elber's account of the carver's position in the community stresses this although his description seems somewhat romanticized and would be accurate only for the most famous carvers: 'A carver has a special place within his tribe', he says, 'and he enjoys the same respect as a medicine man and is honored even by the Paramount Chiefs. The carver doesn't have any cares for the necessities of life. He need never fear that he will suffer need and hunger through his artistic talents because it is the duty of the natives in whose region he stays to provide for his needs. Each headman considers it an honor to give him the best fields. The carver doesn't have to look after his residence. There are always enough people ready to lighten the work for the master'. Rätzel, 118-119.
- 41 These fees, including the exact type of length of cloth and quantity of rice and chickens, are remembered with great accuracy even when the name of the carver is forgotten. Fees are also paid when malejowesia are found in the form of offerings made at the riverside and collected from the whole community. It was said that for one malejowei found in 1950 an offering of thirty pounds, one goat, rice, a length of satin, two tins of palm oil and four chickens were offered. (For 'Nyoko', Yabaiima, Jaiima-Bongor, interview September 25, 1972). The price for a gonde is much less; one pound was paid in the late 1960's in Kailahun district.
- 42 Eberl-Elber, Rätzel, 118.
- 43 The Mende belief in tëmoisia is very similar to the Gola belief in the a teva teva. See Harris and Sawyerr, Springs, 44, and d'Azevedo, 'Gola Artistry', 292.
- 44 Alhadji Abdulai Koroma, Mano, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo. 4 Oct 1972.
- 45 M.C. Jedrej, 'An analytical note on the land and spirits of the Sewa Mende', Africa, 44 (1974), 38-44.

- 46 See Harris and Sawyerr, Springs, 16. Eberl-Elber noted that the carver of Semabu was initially very suspicious of him and unwilling to co-operate. Eberl-Elber attributed this to the fact that, as he says, carvers were under constant attack from Moslem iconoclasts. 'The work of a carver is idolatry, and his work seems the damnable product of an evil fantasy', Rätsel, 114.
- 47 Reinhardt, 'Mende carvers', 309.
- 48 Sjoerd Hofstra, 'The belief among the Mendi in non-ancestral spirits', Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie, 40 (1942), 176.
- 49 D'Azevedo, 'Gola artistry', 295.
- 50 Interviewed at Kenema, 17 May 1972, in English. (See Cat. 136-138). This interview, and the five which follow, were conducted in the framework of questions and answers which I have here turned into narratives for ease of reading. I have kept as closely as possible to the language and phrases used by the carvers themselves whether in English or translated from Mende, and have indicated direct quotations with appropriate punctuation.
- 51 A beautifully made necklace of ivory links with a pendant in the form of a leaf, and a hair comb with a female head carved on the handle both made by Vandi Sona are still in the possession of one of his daughters, Tènè Sona of Gawula, Wunde, Bo. Interviewed 18 Oct 1972.
- 52 A number of masks by Vandi Sona are fairly reliably dated by their owners to about 1910. This would mean that Vandi was probably born about 1885 at the latest and was about 75 when he died.
- 53 Interviewed at Kenema, 17 May 1972, in English. (See Fig. 38 and Cat. 198-203 and 223).
- 54 Interviewed at Njaluhun, Selinga, Bo, on 13 May 1972, through an interpreter. (See Fig. 34).
- 55 Because this interview was held in public with a number of listeners Banasi would probably not have spoken of a spirit helper even if he does believe that he has one.
- 56 Interviewed on 30 May 1972, at Gbangabatok, through an interpreter. (See Cat. 103-104).
- 57 Interviewed 2 Jun 1972, at Bai Largo, in English. (See Cat. 105).

- 58 William Fagg and Margaret Plass, African sculpture: an anthology (London, 1966). It seems likely that Foday Margai derives some of his income from the production of these copies, possibly passed off as genuine by the traders although in his mind they are not forgeries but rather proofs of his own virtuosity in being able to reproduce the images in the photographs. He also apparently enjoys a good reputation among Sande officials in Freetown. See Richards, 'Santigie Sesay: Sierra Leone carver', African arts, 11 (1977), 65-69.
- 59 Interviewed 14 Apr 1972 at Madina, Gawula, Liberia, in English. (See Cat. 52).
- 60 Vandi Kwi's house has a large notice painted on the wall nearest the road reading: 'Attention to all clients: You are welcome to your African curious station. Come and observe for yourself. For clear information contact Mr. Varney Quay Jandi'. He clearly deals both with tourists and with traditional patrons.
- 61 D'Azevedo, 'Gola artistry', 324.

Chapter 5. The Iconography of the Sowei Mask

When it comes to representations of themes other than biblical stories or scenes from history and mythology which happen to be known to the average "educated person" all of us are Australian bushmen.¹

The methodology which has been developed for the study of iconography in Western art enables us to bridge the gap in time which separates us from earlier ages. This gap makes it necessary for us to rediscover the meaning not only of esoteric symbols and images but also of everyday motifs whose associations have changed with the altered social context. The student of African art must bridge a gap in culture and space and often a gap in time as well. Although he must substitute field observations and interviews for written documentation as interpretative tools, the methodology of art history remains a very useful tool for the iconographic analysis of African ritual objects. Precisely because of the recognition of a gap between ourselves and our subject matter such an approach takes nothing for granted. Even forms which may appear to be recognizable must be checked against the 'factual information' and 'practical experience', to use Panofsky's terms, available to a member of the culture which produced the object.² We must proceed systematically from the identification of simple motifs to the association of conventional usage or symbolic meaning, and finally to the interpretation of the underlying values expressed by the image. Thus, for instance, when we see a bird carved on top of a sowei mask we establish first whether it is a generic or a specific representation

of a bird, next whether the bird has any conventional associations or specific symbolic meaning, and last what aspect of the total significance of the sowei it suggests.

In the past, the understanding of the imagery of the sowei mask has often been hindered by a confusion of these three iconographic levels. There has also been a tendency to ignore the need for 'factual information' and 'practical experience' as means of identifying familiar forms in favor of an immediate symbolic inference. Where a form has a definite descriptive purpose, however, it may serve to suggest conventional associations in the mind of the audience rather than symbolic meanings, and it is important to distinguish the two types of meaning clearly.

As has been mentioned before, there are also special problems involved in examining the art of secret societies like the Sande. The complete initiation cycle of the Sande has never been observed and recorded by an outsider and although something is known in the Mende community of these rituals, it is naturally impossible to know how full an account one has received, or how much distortion may have crept into a second- or third-hand report. We must also be aware of the dangers of relying on carvers for interpretative information. Since most carvers today claim to be self-taught they cannot be presumed to have inherited knowledge about Sande ritual symbolism. Furthermore carvers today are almost never directly commissioned and bring their masks ready-made to the market place without having received specific instructions or explanations from the users. By

their own admission, however, carvers do study and copy images seen on older masks, and in the course of time many of these have become conventional motifs of the mask type whose original significance is now forgotten. We must accept the fact, then, that a full iconographic explanation of the sowei mask is not in all probability possible at present both because of the secrecy imposed by the Sande society and because of the process of historical change which may have rendered motifs which were once symbolic merely decorative today.³

The sowei mask, as has been seen, is a helmet mask made to fit closely over the head of the wearer. It displays an anthropomorphic head, a ringed neck, and is stained black. The eyes are shown cast down or nearly closed, with the slits through which the masker sees cut either in or just under the carved eye, or in the neck. If, as is less common, the slits are in the neck, they are either hidden in the crease between chin and neck (Cat. 143), between rings, or, very rarely, provided by a decorative perforated panel placed centrally under the chin, (Cat. 27). The eye slits are cunningly positioned so as to be as inconspicuous as possible. The mouth is shown closed or very slightly open. If all these features are present as well as one of the several characteristic types of coiffure which will be described below, a mask will be identifiable as a sowei, although there is a whole range of optional motifs which are usually present but non-essential for identification by the

spectator. If any one of the essential details is changed-- if the mask is left unstained, if the neck is not ringed, or the eye or mouth aperture is large enough for the wearer to be glimpsed through it-- the mask will not be recognizable as a sowei.⁴

These basic attributes, then, may be taken to represent fundamental qualities of the spirit embodied in the mask. Blackness is explained as betokening the non-human and mysterious quality of the spirit. Also, as Jedrej has pointed out, 'black' in Mende is teli which also may mean 'wet' or 'wetness', and as we have seen the sowei masker probably embodies a river-dwelling spirit.⁵ The blackness of the sowei, furthermore is important as an attribute which distinguishes the sowei from all the other Mende maskers whose costumes are of undyed raffia, as well as from human beings. (Although we are accustomed to speaking of Africans as 'black', of course the deep black of the mask and its costume contrast strikingly with the light and medium-brown skin tones and colorful dress of the Mende, as well as with the all white garb worn by Sande high officials on ceremonial occasions). Informants also mentioned other connotations of blackness; the black color of the mask 'makes it more dreadful' and makes it 'black like the darkness', the time when spirits are most frequently encountered. It must be remembered, too, that much Sande dancing occurs at night, and the blackness of the sowei masker enables it to blend with the darkness until it actually enters the circle of lamplight or until an onlooker is quite close to it, which gives a dramatic quality of suddenness to the appearances of the sowei.

The slightly downcast eyes of the mask are also associated with the non-human and mysterious essence of the spirit which inhabits the mask. The closed mouth suggests seriousness and silence to a Mende audience, for talk and laughter are associated with the human sphere rather than with the important masked spirits. Either large eye-openings or an open mouth would immediately identify a mask to a Mende as gonde who 'is not ashamed to show her face'. Much has been written about the significance of the sowei's ringed neck, and the rounded rings have usually been interpreted as rings of fat, or, most recently, as 'an expression of the Mende equation of corpulence to fertility'.⁶ No evidence was found to support this interpretation. Informants said repeatedly, in all parts of Mendeland, that the neck rings of the sowei depict not fat but 'cut neck'. The Mende adjective used was 'kènyè', meaning 'cut round without severing', 'notch', and of the neck, 'have lines in'; that is, the neck is shown to have lines, not folds, which are considered beautiful in a real person and therefore add beauty to the mask. The helmet form of the sowei mask causes the neck to be of the same circumference as the head which, although perhaps giving an impression of corpulence to the non-Mende, is recognized by the audience as a convention of the mask type rather than a representation of fleshiness. We may note, too, that Mende figure carvings are generally rather more elongated and slender than most African figurines, and on Mende figures the neck is shown in normal (naturalistic) dimensions relative to the head, or is even more elongated (Fig. 31).

The coiffures of sowei masks are the most sculpturally elaborated features of the masks and are deserving of close attention. Although there is some variation in the degree of naturalism with which they are carved, most coiffures are depicted with great precision, with finely incised lines showing intricate patterns of hair parting and braiding. The hair is arranged into three over-all configurations. In the first style the hair is divided into a graduated series of ridges running from front to back. The number of ridges varies, but the most common numbers are one, three, five, and seven (Cat. 108, 116, 107, 137). The number is always odd because of the demands of symmetry; there must be a central ridge originating at the apex of the triangle which describes the forehead and an equal number of ridges on either side. In some versions all the hair ridges originate at the same point and come together again in the back (Cat. 162), while in others only the middle ridge is centered and the side ridges are shown roughly parallel (Cat. 142). On several old sowei masks a further variant of the hairstyle is shown, in which the hair ridges run from side to side rather than from back to front (Cat. 139). In Jaiima-Bongor chiefdom, thirteen of the eighty masks had this type of coiffure; of these eight were at least seventy-five years old and two others were over forty years old. Three more were explicitly explained (and confirmed by the carver) to have been commissioned as exact copies of masks carved at the turn of the century. Four other masks between five and twenty years old had coiffures in a related style, with parallel ridges of hair of even height covering the whole scalp rather than

the central portion alone (Cat. 191).

From the age of the masks bearing the ridged hair-style we may conclude that this is an old type of coiffure, and indeed photographs taken by Alldridge and others at the turn of the century depict Mende women with their hair arranged in similar fashions (Fig. 39). Alldridge writes, furthermore, that:

The most common and favorite pattern rather [suggests] that curious cell-like concretion known to geologists as the brain stone, the top being embellished by a little silver or leather gree-gree [charm]. The inside is stuffed with some soft material, and as this coiffure is to remain up for a considerable time, a silver or cane skewer readily available is frequently seen stuck through this mound.⁷

Büttikofer, too, illustrates a mask with this type of coiffure and comments that on such 'soh' masks 'the characteristic hair-styles are imitated, with much care'⁸ (Cat. 1).

Two other major styles of hair arrangement are depicted on masks found in Jaiima-Bongor chiefdom. In both styles the hair is divided into lobes or 'buns'-- usually four, six, or eight in number-- which radiate out from the crown of the head. (Cat. 111, 120, 106). Following the actual contemporary practice of Mende women, the hair is gathered together either at the lower or upper end of the bun and either braided or formed into a knob. In the four and six-lobed coiffures the divisions between lobes are often accented by additional narrow braids which also often terminate in tufts or plaits. On occasion these narrow braids may give the appearance of composing separate lobes but on close examination the overall composition of this hair-style usually falls into either the

four or the six-part category. The finial tufts and braids are sometimes twisted around and interlaced with the coiffure (Cat. 112) and sometimes project up or down, away from the head (Cat. 112, 188). On a number of masks the hair at the crown is gathered into a smaller mound surmounting the whole coiffure. (Cat. 150). In another passage Alldridge gives a further description of hairdressing which indicates the variety of styles current at the turn of the century:

The women, of whom there were a great number assembled in the barri, had got the wool on their heads arranged in the most wonderful manner. I noticed one had the wool closely cut two inches above the ears, extending in the form of a crescent from the forehead to the back of the head, the crown being a mass of long, heavily grown wool standing up in a number of little tumbled pod-like bunches; others had the wool in pyramidal tufts two or three inches high all over the head. I observed other women with the wool shaved off just above their forehead with a plaited edging to it, the wool on the head being drawn in a crinkled condition to the centre of the crown where the ends, assuming the form of a ball about three inches in diameter, stood up in bold relief.⁹

We can see from this description that the lobed styles too were worn at the turn of the century, and in fact there are about a dozen sowei masks with four-lobed hair-styles in Jaiima-Bongor chiefdom which were carved before World War I. The six and eight-lobed styles appear to be somewhat newer, and what is especially interesting is that nearly all the post World War II masks in the chiefdom belong to this general category rather than to the ridged style described earlier.¹⁰ Mende women do not wear the high ridged style today, describing it as old-fashioned, and have adopted either the lobed styles or the low ridged style covering the whole scalp which, as was mentioned above, is seen on several new masks.

In addition to these popular types of coiffure several other hair-styles are occasionally depicted on sowei masks. In one coiffure, known as nyangabökui, the hair is gathered into many small buns which taper off into fine twists. (See Fig. 40 and Cat. 20, 35). This arrangement is often combined with elements of other hair-styles as well (Cat. 71, 139, 146). Another hair arrangement, described by informants as old-fashioned, is named ngovola meaning 'umbrella palm' whose spreading leaves the coiffure resembles (Cat. 118, 166). Another rather unusual coiffure called konro is still occasionally to be seen in Kenema district according to informants; in this style the hair is formed into tiny balls which cover the head (Cat. 225), or which are sometimes seen on masks in combination with the ridged hair arrangement (Cat. 108, 116). Finally, any of these types of coiffures may be further elaborated by the addition of ornamental borders along the hairline, some of which are quite prominent (Cat. 6, 49, 108, 110).

The elaborate depiction of the coiffure on sowei masks has important connotations. Alldridge makes a distinction between 'the ordinary hairdressing and... the high coiffure which is usually only seen amongst the Bundu girls or chiefs' wives on special occasions'.¹¹ Elaborate hair-styles were reserved for special occasions and were more available to women of status and wealth who had the leisure (and perhaps junior wives in attendance) to dress their hair in complicated styles. Depicting the sowei mask with an elaborate coiffure associates it, in the minds of Mende observers, with notions

of status and wealth as well as of beauty.

With this background we are now able to examine an additional iconographic interpretation of sowei mask coiffures put forth by Hommel. He writes that:

The three lobed hair arrangement of the Kpa-Mende masks symbolizes maleness and acts as the physical complement in the women's society. Three and the corresponding female number, four, are found among many of the Mende speaking people. Phallic symbolism is also associated with the projections above the center lobe and with the projections from the top of the masks without lobes. This projection is a modification of the more literally depicted phallic symbol set in the center of a specially prepared meal served just before the young women are released from the Sande bush school to become brides. Another Kpa-Mende variation has a five lobed hair-style symbolizing the vagina with the clitoris represented by the same forms as the phallus.¹²

As has been shown, a close analysis of the sowei coiffures shows no three-lobed styles, but rather roughly equal percentages of four and six-lobed styles. What Hommel perhaps refers to as a three-lobed style, the ridged coiffure, is known in apparently random variations of one, three, five, and seven ridges, the odd numbers arising from the demands of compositional symmetry. It appears, then, that the notion of sexual numerical symbolism in sowei mask coiffures must be rejected.

More overt sexual symbolism has been suggested to a number of writers by the abstract formal treatment some carvers give to the ridges, and especially to the vertical tuft or mound placed on the crown of some coiffures, in which resemblances to male and female genitalia can sometimes be seen. (Cat. 118, 123). Given the fact, however, that the large majority of coiffures are so naturalistically

rendered that even individual strands of hair are shown, the primary image and literal reference must be said to be the naturalistic rendering of the aesthetically pleasing hair-styles familiar to all. If in some cases a sexual reference is intended (and this cannot absolutely be ruled out although it remains to be proved) it is likely that the carver is engaging in a sort of visual punning, either with or without the connivance of his patrons in the Sande society. In the sample of sowei masks collected sexually suggestive forms were the exception rather than the rule, so that individual artistic innovation seems a more logical explanation than reading them as a general iconographic feature of the mask type.

As if to add emphasis to the attention lavished on the arrangement of the hair, the carver sometimes adorns the hair-style with carved hair combs of either European or African type (Cat. 140, 176), and in one example with carved European-style hairbows (Cat. 163). These motifs appear to fall into the same category of ornament as the cane or silver skewer mentioned by Alldridge and to be purely decorative in intention.

Alldridge also mentioned, in a passage already cited, that women commonly placed a silver or leather charm (which he calls a ('gree-gree')) on top of the coiffure (Fig. 39, third from left). Amulets such as these known as lasimöisia (sing. lasimöi), are still widely used today and are one of the most common iconographic motifs of sowei masks. The amulets consist of Arabic inscriptions prepared by mori men and folded into small packets wrapped in cloth

or contained in leather cases which are often embellished with finely tooled geometric designs. Amulets of this sort are often worn by the Mende as protection against a variety of evils and can be quite costly. They are always worn by maskers and other performers and are tied to the base or top of every sowei mask (Fig. 41, Cat. 184). The shape of the amulets is usually either square or rectangular, and they are depicted both singly and in groups on many masks, often with their tooled designs reproduced with great accuracy (Cat. 20, 117).

In Alldridge's day wealthy people carried amulets which were larger than those seen today, often enclosed in large ornamented silver cases. Alldridge notes that the ornaments worn by Bundu initiates on leaving the bush included 'big silver plaques containing some Mori fetish charm' and 'anything and everything in the way of country-made silverwork, very massive and rough'.¹³ He also photographed chiefs' wives wearing similar amulets (Fig. 42). Large charms such as these, known as sèbèisia (sing. sèbè) are almost certainly the prototypes of objects which frequently surmount the coiffures of sowei masks and which have hitherto been unidentified. The motif has been particularly puzzling because in addition to taking the form of a simple rectangular solid (Cat. 152) it may also be represented as a stepped-pyramidal form (Cat. 143) similar to the sèbèisia worn around the neck of the women in Fig. 42. Other silver encased sèbèisia to be seen in early photographs were embellished with little knobs or pinnacles at the corners, and these too are

represented on sowei masks (Cat. 153). The use of these large amulets, which were also worn by warriors as protection in battle, has been out of fashion for many years, and modern Mende informants are no longer able to identify the motif, interpreting it as a bench, a box, or a carrier without being able to say why such an object should be represented on the sowei mask. Among older informants there is a lingering memory of the way such amulets were worn, however; two elderly Sande officials in different towns stated that although they did not know what the form represented, its purpose was to hold the hair firmly and beautify it, and that it was intended to be covered with gold because the mask belonged to a chief's family. On a number of masks the plaques are in fact covered with silver, rendering them quite naturalistic copies of those seen in the old photographs (Cat. 136). In addition to these large plaques Moslem amulets were sometimes contained in barrel shaped receptacles which can be seen hung around the necks of two high-born Mende women in one of F.W. Migeod's photographs (Fig. 43). Amulets in this form, too, are sometimes depicted on sowei masks (Cat. 157). Like the elaborate coiffures the large silver-encased sèbèisia were part of the regalia of a lady of high status, so that in this motif we have another iconographic element associating the sowei with beauty and wealth, as well as with the power implied by such large and conspicuous magical charms.

In addition to the use of amulets prepared by mori men, the Mende also frequently make use of charms made by traditional Mende

halemoisia (sing. halemoi), or herbalists, versed in the uses of magical 'medicinal' substances. These medicines are placed in horns of different sizes and, along with the lasimöisia, medicinal horns are worn by maskers and other performers. Like the Moslem amulets they are tied to the base or top of the sowei mask (Fig. 41) and are very often depicted on the masks by the carvers. The medicinal horns serve the same two purposes as do the Moslem amulets; both types of charms can be used to protect the performer against bad spells which other dancers might try to 'put' on her in the competitive 'atmosphere of the performance, or to increase the attractive power and popularity of a masker.¹⁴ The types of horns most often represented are those of the bush cow (Cat. 131), the sheep (Cat. 125), the zebra antelope (Cat. 168, front), and the small horns of the grey duiker. The latter are often depicted in rows which border the lower edge of the coiffure (Cat. 66). Horns are also frequently represented in pairs which may project up from the head (Cat. 160) or down (Cat. 77). The resultant crescent or 'V' shaped form of the paired horns is depicted by some carvers in a rather schematic way (Cat. 75, 152) but is easily identifiable when reference is made to the more naturalistic representations on other masks.

As we have said, the two functions of medicinal horns, like those of Moslem amulets, are to increase the attractive power of the masker and to make her invulnerable. The efficacy of both the medicinal horns and of the Moslem amulets increases in direct proportion to their size and number-- and also to the amount of money paid for

them. Thus the inclusion of a large number of amulets of both the traditional and Moslem types in the iconography of the sowei mask is a direct reference both to power and to wealth. A further distinction needs to be made between the two types of amulets, however. As we have seen, the lasimöisia and the smaller forms of sèbèisia were actually worn in the hair by Mende women in earlier times, and thus their depiction on the coiffures of sowei masks can be regarded as essentially descriptive and naturalistic. Medicinal horns, however, were usually worn around the neck and to my knowledge were not incorporated into the hair arrangement. Their depiction on sowei masks is thus a non-naturalistic motif which further emphasises the hale embodied by the image.

An additional motif commonly found on sowei masks is the cowrie shell. This also belongs to the category of traditional Mende 'medicines' prepared by the halemoi to increase the attractiveness of a masker. As we have seen cowrie shells are sewn onto the costumes of Mende entertainment maskers as well as being prominently displayed on the gbini and goboi maskers. They are associated with the idea of brightness, and are said to make the masker 'shine' among other performers. Cowrie shells are sometimes added to masks on the advice of a diviner and a mori man will be asked to pray over them. Like other amulets they are tied to the sowei mask (Cat. 153) and carvers often depict them as decorative borders incorporated into the hair arrangement (Cat. 107). Older masks also often have coins attached to the tops for similar reasons. In former days further

embellishment might be added by a gold-or silversmith in the form of metal ornament applied along the hairline and on the coiffure, or this decoration might be entrusted to the carver himself. Again, this ornament connoted the high status of the owners of the mask and was intended to render the mask more attractive (Cat. 15). Although masks today are rarely decorated in this way, silver or gold colored earrings are often attached to the ear lobes (Cat. 153).¹⁵

Sowei masks frequently display carved scarification on the cheeks, forehead, or at the outer corners of the eyes. The practice of facial scarification is typical of the Sherbro, Krim, and Kpa-Mende, but many masks in the Sewa and Kö-Mende areas also have scarification. This can be explained in part by the importation of masks from other areas which has gone on since pre-European times, but local carvers too often add this foreign detail to their masks in a further attempt to ornament and beautify them. One common pattern is a raised rectangular area on the forehead divided into a double row of lines or squares which is characteristic of Sherbro-Bullom women (Cat. 85). Another commonly found design consists of three or four parallel vertical lines on each cheek known as ngaya maki or 'tear marks' (Cat. 59). Less frequently, an 'X' shaped mark is made on each cheek which Reinhardt says is an old-fashioned design called a fandu (Cat. 69).¹⁶ Three short lines radiating out from the outer corners of the eyes are a typical Kpa-Mende pattern resulting from the practice common in that area of making small incisions (kèsi) in early childhood to draw off harmful blood

(Cat. 106). These scarifications are reproduced on sowei masks, it should be stressed, for purely decorative purposes. Carvers copy them freely often in ignorance of any significance they might have had historically or currently in a particular region of Mendeland.

We must now turn to a group of motifs which are less widespread than those we have been discussing, and are probably not essential to the fundamental meaning of the sowei mask although they add aesthetic interest and variety to masking performances when maskers appear in groups. These may be termed 'occasional' motifs and include animals such as the snake, tortoise, fish, and bird which are carved on top of the coiffure (Cat. 95, 122, 131). Other masks wear carved European crowns or even European hats (Cat. 148,57). Another popular motif is a ring of flaps or medallions known as kölölewengoi which is copied from those worn around the waist of a conjuror or applied to the costumes of dancers and maskers such as gbini, goboi, and falui (Figs. 44, 3, 4 and 8). The cowrie shells which are sewn on the flaps in decorative patterns are often faithfully reproduced by the carver (Cat. 92, 119). One also finds examples of masks surmounted by cooking pots (Cat. 101), by small human heads (Cat. 119), or miniature guns (Cat. 114). In the Vai and Gola areas especially, one often sees janus and four-faced masks (Cat. 13, 25). And one contemporary carver has created a series of sowei masks wearing carved spectacles (Cat. 193).

In each case the primary explanation given for the motifs by informants interviewed over a wide area was that the motif evidenced

the carver's desire to beautify the mask, to differentiate it from other masks, and to display his own virtuosity. Toma Jenneh interpreted a mask he had recently carved with an elaborate group on top including a baby on each side, a snake between them, and a bird in the middle. His explanation for the image was that 'the snake is shown watching to catch the bird'. He then added that he had carved it 'so that everyone will know that I am able to make this'.¹⁷ Sande officials, too, give the same explanation of the meaning of these occasional motifs in almost the same words, wherever and whenever questioned. Although such an interpretation may seem inadequate at first, the unanimity and openness of the informants' responses was convincing. It is certainly possible that some of these motifs refer to secret Sande beliefs or rituals, and most of them, as will be seen, have more specific conventional meanings or associations. It is also very likely that as in the case of the old-fashioned silver plaques the meaning of some of the motifs has been forgotten and is now accepted as traditional and conventional rather than symbolic. But it is unlikely that these occasional motifs represent attributes of the sowei fundamental to the meaning of the mask if only because their occurrence is relatively rare and their distribution apparently random.¹⁸

It is useful to examine the associations which these images have for the Mende, however, even where specific symbolic meanings are lacking. The crown occasionally carved on a number of older sowei masks is associated by the Mende with chiefly authority. It is fairly widely remembered that a number of Paramount Chiefs were

given crowns by Queen Victoria at the time of the establishment of the Protectorate; a female chief, Madam Woki Massaquoi, was one of these. It is supposed that a mask with a crown was either dedicated to such a chief or was carved for a chief's family. Several other old masks have European hats carved on top of their coiffures. As photographs taken at the turn of the century show, women prized these hats as prestige items and wore them as did the men (Fig. 42). Informants mentioned, too, the custom of a hat being placed on a sowei by a male bystander both in appreciation of her dancing and to provoke amusement through the unusual juxtaposition. Humor, though not the dominant tone of Sande dancing performances, is an acceptable element nevertheless. The group of modern masks shown with carved spectacles are related to the older ones with European hats through this juxtaposition of an object at once prestigious and associated with men, and the very feminine sowei mask. (See, for example the version of the satirical female masker Samawa who wears spectacles as part of her mockery of 'learned' men described in Chapter 3).

The band of cloth or leather flaps depicted on other soweisia, the kölölewengoi, is also associated by Mendes with male costume and specifically with dancing paraphernalia. The purpose of the flaps on male costumes is decorative and is said to have the same function on the sowei mask. Informants did not find the kölölewengoi out of place on a female mask nor, in this case, does there appear to be any humorous purpose.

The pot, on the other hand, is an object associated with women; large three-legged iron pots are used for preparing food while smaller ones are used for sacrifices. Some informants suggested that the pot is carved on the mask because it is a woman's object and others said that upturned pots were used to hold money received at dancing performances but were unable to give any more specific meaning. It may be in this case that there is another reference now either forgotten or kept secret.

Snakes are quite frequently depicted on sowei masks and it is possible that they are related to Sande lore or ritual practices since snakes are found in rivers where the Sande spirit lives and where a number of important ceremonies take place. Representations of birds are also found quite often and they, along with the fish, tortoises, and other animals sometimes found on soweisia were said to add interest and beauty to the mask. The bird is generally identified as bomukulo, the dove, and several informants suggested that it showed that the sowei could dance very well, like a bird.¹⁹ Other possible connotations can be found in Mende folk-tales where the bird sometimes appears as a messenger between the spirit world-- particularly river spirits-- and humans.²⁰ Figurines are more rarely found than the animal motifs and, as is suggested by the carver's remarks quoted above, are most probably an artist's conceit. The guns carved on another sowei were said by the owner to signify that the sowei is powerful, and another owner pointed to a row of small barrel shapes on the back of her mask and said they were

'bullets against witches'. The janus-faced mask, finally, is explained to have two faces because the spirit can see everything, and also because the mask can confound spectators who cannot tell if it is coming or going. This notion is consistent with the explanations given to Siegmann and Perani about the meaning of the mirrors on mens' masking costumes and also with the multiple heads provided for many of these maskers.²¹

There is no doubt a certain amount of improvisation in the explanations given for these occasional motifs. But taken as a set, a certain pattern emerges which adds to our understanding of the mask. The ideas associated with the sowei, even when improvised on the spot, are never trivial. And the innovations of carvers also adhere to the central values associated with the sowei masker. These values, as we have seen in the discussion of the basic iconography of the mask, are associated with high status, power, wealth, and beauty. Thus, although the idea of power is suggested directly by the prominent display of amulets and medicinal horns, a carver might add a representation of a gun to strengthen and underline the idea. Power is indicated indirectly by the use of coiffures associated with ladies of high estate, and the crown and top hat, act as further evidence of prestige. Beauty is displayed by the sowei in her hairdo, elaborate amulets, and cut-neck, and by finely carved animals and figurines which add aesthetic interest to the whole. And just as the serious withdrawn expression of the face indicates the non-human identity of the being represented by the

mask, so does the janus motif indicate non-human powers of vision. The tortoise, fish, and snake are all water animals and may suggest the rivers, homes of the Sande spirit.

The occasional motifs, then, can be seen to reinforce the primary iconographic attributes of the sowei mask. As an image of power, both spiritual and worldly, and also of feminine elegance and beauty, the sowei masker plays a double role. She is both the Sande hale personified and an idealized image of femininity which has a unique place among the dramatis personae of Mende masked spirits.

Notes

- 1 Erwin Panofsky, Studies in iconology (New York, 1962), 11.
- 2 This discussion is based on the ideas of Panofsky, Studies in iconology, 3-17.
- 3 See George Kubler, The Shape of Time (New Haven, Conn., 1962) for discussion of this phenomenon.
- 4 Informants were shown photographs of sowei masks each of which lacked one of the features mentioned. The questionnaire was used throughout the areas sampled, and of course there was some variation in response in the different regions the reasons for which will become apparent in the discussion of style grouping in Chapters 7 and 8.
- 5 Jedrej, 'Aspects', 241.
- 6 Hommel, Art of the Mende (page eight).
- 7 Alldridge, Sherbro, 113-114.
- 8 Büttikofer, Reisebilder, II, 309.
- 9 Alldridge, The Sherbro, 197.
- 10 Of the four-lobed coiffures twelve date from before World War I, seven from between the wars and eight from after World War II. Of the six-lobed coiffures two are pre-World War I, eight from between the wars, and eight from after World War II.
- 11 Alldridge, Sherbro, 197.
- 12 Hommel, page facing 'Bundu dancers, Kenema'.
- 13 T.J. Alldridge, 'Life in Mendi-land', Wide world magazine, 6 (1900), 192-197.
- 14 Information from Safa Goleva, traditional Mende herbalist, aged about 65. Bo district, November, 1972.
- 15 There are still a large number of masks ornamented with silver to be seen in the field, particularly in the Vai areas while such masks are very rarely found in museum collections. This is no doubt the case because silver ornamented masks usually belong to important families and are far less likely to be sold.

- 16 Reinhardt, 'Mende carvers', 318.
- 17 Toma Jenneh, Gbangbatok, Banta, Moyamba, May, 1972.
- 18 Distribution is random except for the fact that we do not find two examples of the same occasional motif in the same village, which is to be expected if we accept the explanation that one purpose of such motifs is to differentiate the masks.
- 19 Hommel gives a related explanation, that, 'the bird is said to lighten the weight of the mask', page facing 'Bundu dancers, Kenema'.
- 20 Innes mentions a story in which 'a girl encounters a water spirit on the bank of a stream and is given a singing bird by the spirit'. 'Some features', 14.
- 21 Siegmann and Perani, 'Men's' masquerades', 43.

Chapter 6. The Nomenclature of sowei masks

The Mende postulate that the name of an individual becomes so much part of him that it truly represents him.

The name of an individual is believed to possess a dynamic influence which controls his well-being.¹

Our understanding of the significance which the sowei masker has for the Mende can be further expanded by a study of the individual names the masks are given. These personal names are known and used by the public as well as by the Sande society members, and they constitute a rich source of information about the social and aesthetic values embodied by the masker. An analysis of these names as a group enables us both to test the conclusions reached through iconographic examination and to complement the visual evidence with an additional range of ideas which the Mende associate with the sowei through mask names.

Each sowei mask is given a personal name when it is consecrated.² Properly speaking the spirit which inhabits the mask appears to the owner in a dream and reveals its identity; thus the mask is said to 'name itself'. Whenever a sowei masker appears her name is sung out in a short praise song by her accompanying ligba. The sowei maskers are commonly referred to and distinguished from one another in general conversation by these personal names, and consequently no two masks in the same village will have the same name. Certain names, however, are particularly popular and recur either within a region or throughout Mendeland. The meanings of

popular names and name types will be examined closely as important evidence of the Mende interpretation of the sowei masquerade. Furthermore, the degree of popularity of a name or name type will be taken as an indication of the relative importance of the ideas it expresses. The discussion will be based on a field sample of 225 masks taken from all parts of Mendeland, from the Sierra Leonean Gola and Vai, and from the Vai of Liberia.³ Included within this rough sample is the more rigorously studied group of eighty masks from Jaiima-Bongor in central Mendeland so that the survey is somewhat weighted toward this area.⁴

The use of personal names is an important way in which the Mende emphasize the individuality of each sowei masker. An idea of the diversity of mask names can be had when we note that out of the 225 masks documented in the field there are 147 different names. This variety is in part explained by the fact that the most common type of mask name commemorates the donor of the mask, usually a male relative of the first owner who was prominent both in the family group and in the community. Masks are also occasionally named after prominent women but male names are far more common. Well over one-third of the mask names in the survey commemorate relatives of the owners.⁵

It is important to note that a mask name is usually used not only for the life of the mask, but also for its replacement if, as is traditional, the mask is copied when it becomes worn out. Thus many names now in use are considerably older than the masks

themselves.⁶ Because of the importance of warfare in Mende life before the establishment of the British Protectorate in 1896 the men commemorated by these older mask names were usually warriors. Significantly the nicknames of these warriors are used, names reflecting their qualities in battle. 'Lilo' and 'Bana', for example, are names said to mean 'strong-hearted' and 'courageous'. 'Gbende', a well-known trickster in folk-tales, is a warrior nickname meaning 'wily' and 'clever'. 'Babè' is a name said to mean quarrelsome-- 'she hasn't got a clean heart for anyone'. 'Haku', another warrior nickname, means 'tortoise', 'Wotè' means 'to turn', and the name 'Ngömbla' is a contraction of a phrase describing a particular group of warriors who were the first to swarm over the inner war fence of a town (ngömbuhubla). It is not always possible now to discover the precise meanings of nicknames such as these. Often, as in the cases of 'Babè' and 'Bana', the etymology of the definitions given is unclear. In other cases a name is known to be the nickname of a warrior ancestor, but no meaning is ascribed to it.⁷ In still other cases, names which are explained as describing personality traits of the sowei herself sound suspiciously close to the warrior nicknames, but the original derivation, if there was one, is now forgotten.

These difficulties should not be allowed to obscure the main point, however. Through many sowei mask names 'male' qualities of strength, courage, and aggressiveness are associated with the mask type which represents the corporate power of Mende women. This is,

in fact, quite consistent with a number of traditional Mende customs in which Sande officials and women in general are compared to warriors. The highest Sande officials, the Soweisia, are considered warriors, and the head of a Sande chapter is the only person other than a chief who may be buried inside a town. At the death of a Sowei the Sande women mime warlike behavior, going about the town in a group, brandishing swords and taking animals or other things in their path. They are led by the Sande wa jowei who dresses as a man and plunges a sword into the ground in front of the chief's house as the traditional sign of submission of one warrior to another.⁸

A similar demonstration occurs if a woman dies in childbirth, for a woman giving birth is also considered a 'warrior', and if she dies in the battle she must be mourned appropriately. The song sung by the mourners accuses the dead woman of cowardice and of not having known how to fight well, but the responsibility of the husband is recognized too. He is seized and bound like a prisoner and he must ransom himself before he is freed.⁹ Thus the association of ideas of strength, courage, and cunning with the sowei masker which is made by so many of the names ought not to be regarded as merely incidental to the practice of commemorating male donors. Rather it is consistent with the Mende view of the role women play as bearers of children, and also with the leadership they exercise in the community as Sande officials and occasionally as family heads and chiefs.¹⁰

A further and equally important implication of the fact that so

large a percentage of soweisia are named after powerful men who are the recognized donors of the masks is the acknowledgement of male involvement in the successful functioning of the Sande society. Sande, though a secret and exclusively female organization, depends ultimately on the co-operation of the dominant male community. The appointment of Sande officials, for example, is approved by the town chief and elders. Men also have ultimate control of the money which is paid out to the society for the training of young girls. Furthermore, as has been mentioned, 'secular' power is called on to support Sande rulings; when the Sande leaders wish to punish someone who has broken society rules the offender is brought before the chief who enforces the sentence. Just as Sande depends on the good will of men, so of course do men rely on the co-operation of women. The 'handing over of the bush' in alternate years to the Poro and Sande societies for male and female initiation exemplifies the equitable allocation of spheres of influence which is the Mende ideal.

Thus, by naming a sowei mask after male benefactors of the Sande society this mutually productive relationship between the male and female communities is gracefully recognized. The situation may perhaps be compared to medieval and renaissance altarpieces in which the donor of the painting is shown prominently, but to one side, of the sacred representation. The central image of the sowei mask is of purely female power and beauty, but the commemorative male names recall to the public the harmonious interdependence between the sexes which is both desirable and necessary. Even now with the

abandonment of warfare and martial values the practice of naming masks after men has not died out. New masks are still frequently named after men, though proper names rather than warrior nicknames are used.¹¹ The survival of the use of male commemorative names would seem to show that the honoring of prominent men was at least as important a component of the tradition as the attribution of martial qualities to the sowei.

There is regional variation in the use of male names for sowei masks which may be significant in historical terms, although there is not enough evidence at present to do more than speculate. Among the Liberian Vai all zo ba (or sowei) masks have male ancestral names, and d'Azevedo has shown that the Gola zogbe is in fact the representation of a male spirit.¹² The Gola and Vai in Sierra Leone have been heavily influenced by the Mende in this century, but a higher proportion of their sowei masks have male names than in the purely Mende areas. Thus we have two situations containing apparent contradictions.¹³ The Gola use male names which are consistent with the male identity of the spirit but which are at odds with the female appearance of the masks. The Mende, on the other hand, identify the spirit embodied in the mask as female, in keeping with the iconography of the mask, but their use of male names might be regarded as inconsistent. In both cases, of course, the contradiction is resolved on another level. D'Azevedo explains that the Gola carver uses female adornment and attributes in order to make the mask as attractive as possible.¹⁴ For the Mende, as has

been seen, male names are accepted as a means of honoring certain men, and also because women display 'male' qualities in certain situations. The historical explanation of these contradictions can only lie in a process of interborrowing which has gone on amongst the peoples of the Poru-Sande group over the centuries. It is recounted in Jaiima-Bongor chiefdom, for example, that sowei masks were sometimes part of the booty brought back by Mende warriors from raids against the Gola and other tribes, and we must suppose that the reverse was also true, perhaps going back many generations.¹⁵ With more comparative work we may be able to determine more precisely how this process of interborrowing took place.

From another point of view, the male and female commemorative mask names are also a means of focusing attention on the descent groups which control the separate chapters of the Sande society. The illustrious ancestor who is honored and who may have helped to establish the family Sande chapter by conquest in war or by personal generosity is a direct forbear of the Sande leaders. He belongs to their descent group and it is through that group that the Sande medicine and sowei masks are inherited. It is not surprising, then, to find that a fairly common sowei name is 'Bondei', meaning 'family'. Another popular name, 'Muma', from mu luma meaning 'we agree', was explained by an informant to mean 'family harmony', again emphasizing the importance of the family unit.

The name 'Luma' is also a good example of the intersecting

meanings which are often attributed to sowei mask names. In addition to the literal meaning (or sometimes instead of it) informants usually explain several implications of a name which, in the manner of important symbolic forms, may have different meanings for different people. Thus, of the four masks in the sample bearing the name 'Luma', one was said to mean that the sowei was co-operative and would agree to dance; it was explained that another was called 'Luma' because 'everyone will agree that she is the most beautiful of the maskers'; and a third, as mentioned, because the family it belonged to agreed among themselves. The first impulse of the researcher may be to disregard all but the literal meaning of a mask name, and to suspect informants of improvising on the spur of the moment. The usefulness of taking a broad sample, however, is that it enables us to cross-check informants' definitions and comments. When we do so, we find that the 'improvisations' and associations which arise in discussions of names are not random. Key ideas and values associated with the sowei are continually repeated in both the literal meanings of names and in the ideas loosely linked with these meanings. A pattern emerges in which all the names can be seen to reflect the sowei masker's essential qualities: her beauty and wealth, her great dancing skill, her compelling presence and personality, her popularity, and her significance as a symbol of family prestige.

As we have seen before, the sowei masker is not thought of as a static sculptural object but as a dynamic personality and a

talented performer. Accordingly there are relatively few mask names which refer to the physical appearance of the masker or to the carved details of the mask itself. Rather, most non-commemorative names stress the behavior and activity of the sowei, and the effects her qualities have on spectators. Mende informants have difficulty in confining themselves to the literal meanings of names because of the multifaceted role of the masker. She is the combined product of the skillful rendering of the headpiece by the carver, the dramatic performance of the impersonator and the informing power of the medicine and spirit with which she is joined. Object, performer, and spiritual power are inextricably linked together in the Mende conception of the sowei, and this complexity is often reflected in the interpretation of mask names.

The personality of the sowei masker is conveyed by a number of mask names. 'Tumbe' meaning 'annoyed' is the name of three masks in the survey. Two informants explained that the name indicated a lively dancing style-- 'if a mask is called 'Tumbe' it will dance very well'. Another related mask name, 'Gbango', means 'loud' and 'troublesome'. Three masks are named 'Yonga' which means 'boasting' or 'proud'. That these qualities are considered positive is emphasized by Little, who says that 'the conduct [the Mende] particularly admire is strongly tinged with bravado, and boastfulness is generally condoned'.¹⁶ 'Pujè', 'pepper', is the name of another sowei because she is 'hot and wild in her dancing'. A sowei named 'Gbuawei', 'sudden appearance', is said to appear suddenly, so that

the onlooker doesn't know where she came from. The mask name 'Kpema', meaning 'hide and seek', also evokes the mysteriousness of the sowei's comings and goings. Two other names would appear to belong with this group of names describing the personality of the sowei although they reveal her qualities indirectly, concentrating on the effect the masker has on the audience. 'Sölè', meaning 'noisy', is a popular name referring to the shouting and talking which result when the sowei appears, and 'Mojè', 'laughter', indicates the humorous mime which is often a part of masking performances.¹⁷

This group of names reflects a concept of the sowei as an assertive and forceful spirit. As a dramatic character she is observably irascible, humorous, quixotic, or all three in turn. Her unpredictability and eccentricity are evidence of a powerful personality not subject to human rules. To be outstanding in a group of maskers an individual sowei will play up these dramatic qualities. An example of the way this is done is contained in a story recounted about an old mask in Bonthe district. The story is told to explain how 'Saji Wulei', or 'Sergeant Wulei', got her name.

At the time when the first Europeans came to the district they said that all the people must gather at Victoria. Everyone went and so did all the maskers. Everyone gathered in the barri [meeting house], and the chief assigned a special place for the maskers to go and rest. But 'Wulei' wanted to know what was going on and didn't follow the other maskers. When everyone was quiet she walked through the middle of the crowd and sat down in the center. One of the Europeans went up and looked and looked and looked at the sowei and asked the chief what her name was. They said her name was 'Wulei', but the European said since she was the only one who acted this way she should be called 'Sergeant', and so she became the leader of all the sowesia in the chiefdom.¹⁸

As we can see in this story the sowei, as the embodiment of a spiritual force, is allowed a freedom and even a license to break rules which is denied to ordinary people. Furthermore, she earns

the admiration of the spectators by behaving unpredictably and assertively in comparison with the other maskers. The special flavor of the story lies in the fact that even the European is transfixed by the sowei and not only 'looked and looked and looked' but recognized 'Wulei's' right to behave this way and honored her for it with a special name.

The sowei masker, whether in a humorous, irate, or troublesome mood, is a strong and compelling presence. Whatever else one does one cannot ignore her. Two very popular and widespread names which make this clear are 'Voima', which means 'delay', and 'Magbe Nyanih', which means 'to waste time'. The survey contains eleven masks with these names from all over Mendeland. Everywhere the meaning is explained the same way: 'If you see the sowei, you will stop what you are doing and follow her', or 'the mask is so beautiful you will put down your work and not be able to take it up again until she has gone away'. Again, we have refinements of these definitions stressing either the beauty of the masker or her dancing skill, but the basic idea communicated by the names is that the presence of the masker is magnetic. A human being in its presence has no choice but to abandon mundane pursuits and pay homage in the form of undivided attention.¹⁹

Homage in a more concrete form is stressed by two other extremely popular and widespread names, 'Navo' which means 'money' and 'Gbate' which means both 'wealth' and 'well-made'. Here again the universal explanation is that the attractiveness of the masker is so great that the spectator feels impelled to give her 'dashes' or presents of money. Again, too, we have the variant stress on

dancing skill rather than beauty. The Mende place great importance on the wealth which a masker attracts, and names translating as 'money' are more common than names meaning 'beauty'. Pleasing appearance is, in this sense, seen as a means to an end, and its importance lies in the power it confers rather than in the purely aesthetic response it evokes. We may draw this conclusion from the widespread popularity of names such as 'Voima', discussed above, or 'Navo' and 'Gbate' which emphasize the effect on the spectator rather than the intrinsic qualities of the mask. In other words, these sowei mask names demonstrate a tendency among the Mende to articulate the visible evidence of a mask's attractiveness rather than its abstract formal qualities. It is a matter of emphasis, of course, for the connection with aesthetic pleasure is always made by informants in their expanded definitions. As we saw in the discussion of sowei iconography ideas of wealth and status are, in fact, linked with beauty in the Mende view, as they often are in our own culture. It is particularly intriguing that this connection between beauty and wealth is actually contained within the Mende word and mask name gbate, which has the double meaning of well-made (therefore beautiful) and riches. Five of the eight owners of masks named 'Gbate' gave riches as the sole definition of the name, while the other three owners mentioned both meanings. No informant, however, mentioned 'well-made' by itself-- what would be the point of a well-made sowei which failed to receive gifts? It would clearly be a contradiction in terms!

Another small group of mask names expresses in a more direct way the power which the sowei is understood to have. The name 'Dugba', 'cannon', occurs three times in the survey and is given to the masker, it is explained, because she is identified with a powerful medicine which, among other things, is a strong weapon against witchcraft. The name 'Londo', 'silence', also implies power; the sowei with this name is so awe-inspiring that people are struck dumb by her presence. We might also include the name 'Balui', 'airplane', in this group. The name belongs to an old mask in Bonthe district in commemoration of the appearance of the first airplane in the district. It has an obvious association with the might of European technology.

It would not be accurate to give the impression that there are no names referring to the physical appearance of a mask or masker. It is again, a matter of emphasis. A number of examples can be given but they are much rarer than the name types discussed above. There is one mask named 'Nyandemo', for instance, which means 'pretty person'. Two masks have names meaning 'red lips', 'Lagbou', not because the mask has a painted mouth but because this is a female attraction. Similarly the name 'Mapai', an old-fashioned style of headtie, is given to one mask, and the name 'Kaki Böbi', 'brassiere', is given to another to indicate a more up-to-date fashion. Two masks have names meaning 'tall', 'Kpiahu' and 'Jongoun', describing another admired physical attribute. Rarest of all are names referring to particular carved details of

sowei masks, but there are three scattered examples in the sample: 'Bomu', 'dove'; 'Kove', 'pot'; and 'Mbando', 'sheep's horn'. The name 'Yimo', 'sleepy', is given to five masks in the survey because, as their owners explained, the semi-shut appearance of the eyes make the sowei masks look drowsy. Several of the informants added that this sleepy look is stylish and attractive because the closed and secretive look of the face is intriguing.

Skill in dancing is a subsidiary meaning which has been associated with many of the names mentioned thus far. The Mende hold that spiritual qualities manifest themselves in the style of movement both of maskers and ordinary people; the more skilled and vigorous the dancing the more impressive is the spiritual presence. Dancing performances, furthermore, are the climactic public celebration and entertainment of the Sande initiation cycle and a source of very great enjoyment to everyone. We may recall here, too, that the sowei masker is usually called, in Mende, the ndoli jowei, the 'dancing sowei' not only to distinguish her from the Sande officials of the same name but also because of the centrality of her role as dancer. We may also recall that although the presence of a sowei masker is not ritually necessary to Sande ceremonies the Mende say that the masquerade is essential to the enjoyment of the occasion-- 'without her the town will not be lively'.²⁰ It is not surprising, then, to find that in addition to the indirect association of dancing with names which have no literal connection with dancing there is a group of mask names dealing directly with this

theme. 'Vanja', a popular and widespread name belonging to seven masks in the survey is translated variously as 'she dances very well', and 'she shakes the ground when dancing'.²¹ Another name, 'Nepo', means 'to encourage' or 'to coax', and this reflects audience encouragement of the sowei when she dances. Two other soweisia are named simply, 'Ndoli', 'dancer' while another small group of names including 'Mada', 'Jaagba', and 'Jaaaju', are said to mean 'a dance' and 'to dance'.²²

As well as bringing into relief the role of the sowei as a dancer, discussions of mask names also constantly stress her role as a competitor. A sowei almost always appears in a group of other soweisia and amongst them a strong competitive spirit prevails. Thus informants will usually say that a mask has a particular name not, for example, because 'she dances well', but because 'she dances better than any of the others'; not 'because she is beautiful', but, 'because she is more beautiful than any of the others'. Each masker strives to be better and more popular than any other and to receive more money and acclaim than her companions. This atmosphere of contest is expressed explicitly in one final group of names. The popular name 'Ndima' means 'favorite', as well as 'desirable' and 'beloved' but informants usually define the name as 'favorite -- you like her best' in emphasis of this competitive spirit. Similarly the name 'Nyoko' or 'Nyoko Wa', which literally means 'kind' or 'special kind', is always translated by informants as 'nothing else of its kind' or 'unique'. The name 'Peka Nyande',

'beautiful one', is defined, in accordance with this tendency, as 'the most beautiful one'.

The emphasis on the uniqueness of each sowei mask expressed by these names accords with the iconographic innovation and variety of form by which Mende carvers differentiate sowei masks. Indeed, the use of personal mask names is in itself an important way of stressing the individuality of each masker. The types of names given to the masks can be related more closely to the iconography of the mask. The prominence of amulets and medicinal horns in sowei mask imagery communicates visually what names such as 'Voima', 'Magbe', and 'Navo' say in words-- that the sowei is an embodiment of power which is irresistible and compelling. Names, however, allow us to understand more precisely the goals toward which this power is directed, such as the capture of public attention and the accumulation of wealth, than do carved images alone. Plastic forms are in themselves mute, and sowei mask names provide a literary context which enables us to go beyond visual imagery and to enlarge our concept of the masker's aesthetic and social significance. Iconographic analysis shows that the attractiveness of the sowei mask lies largely in the elaboration of its coiffure and ornamentation. The interpretation of mask names shows us that the Mende understand such physical beauty as an active quality which enhances a masker's-- or a woman's-- forcefulness and personality and enables her to influence other people. Most importantly, the popularity of the dominant name type, the male commemorative name, reveals that

although the sowei masker is in one sense the symbol of the ritual separation of the sexes, this separation is made possible by the consent and co-operation of men. Such co-operation ensures the proper balance and harmony between men and women, which is expressed through the structure of Sande and Porro ritual.

Notes

- 1 Harris and Sawyerr, Springs, 117 and 90-91.
- 2 Unconsecrated or 'uninitiated' sowei masks (kpowa jowei) are sometimes found in use as decorative objects in a wealthy household. These may be danced with by members of the household at Sande celebrations but have no ritual significance. They may also be given names by their owners. If they are later initiated they are moved to the keeping of the Sowei. The ceremony of consecration involves making an offering of rice and oil to the spirits 'to show their names [of the masks]' which the spirits do in dreams. Sowei Naaso Maji, Pelewahun, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo, 5 Oct 1972.
- 3 Please see Appendix 1 for an alphabetical list of these names with their meanings and geographical distribution. The sample includes names of several masks no longer in use or used now as gondeisia.
- 4 The survey is not, of course, in any sense a scientific sample. An attempt was made to cover the major areas of Mendeland so that differences in naming traditions and types could be established and overall tendencies noted. The inclusion of the core area provides a means of checking apparent overall trends against the results of a rigorous analysis. The numerical breakdown of the 225 masks in the survey by district is as follows: Kailahun, 13; Kenema, 25; Bo including Jaiima-Bongor, 83; Moyamba, 26; Pujehun (Gola/Mende), 12; Pujehun (Vai/Mende), 14; Liberia (Vai), 8; Bonthe, 44.
- 5 Ninety-one masks have commemorative names, seventy-eight of these male and thirteen female. In this case the rough sample and the Jaiima-Bongor results agree. In both cases over one-third of the names are commemorative. In the case of other name types regional 'fads' can be observed such as the great popularity of the names 'Navo' and 'Gbate' in Jaiima-Bongor and the name 'Ndima' in Moyamba district.
- 6 It is difficult to discover exactly how old a particular name is, since the substitution of a copy was supposed to go unnoticed by the public. Although the custom is freely discussed in Mendeland today the fiction of official ignorance was no doubt maintained much more strictly in the past, which often makes informants vague on the exact number of replacements which have been made.

- 7 See appendix: 'Jebo', 'Kabo', 'Kongo', and 'Kutè'. Not all warrior nicknames necessarily had meanings, of course.
- 8 Informant, Paramount Chief Foday Kai, Juhun, Jaiima-Bongor, 5 Oct 1972. 'The death of a Sowei is like that of a Paramount Chief. She is a warrior in her own right. The women mimic warfare when she dies. They go around town holding swords; if they happen to catch a goat or chicken you can't take it away from them. This is to show she died a warrior. The leading Sowei will dress like a man; she comes and sticks a sword in the ground in front of the chief's house as a sign of authority. She comes to submit herself to him as chief warrior. He gives her a little kola and takes the sword away'.
- 9 This ceremony was observed in Telu, Jaiima-Bongor on 6 Oct 1972.
- 10 Sowei mask naming practices would seem to have some bearing on the debate between Carol Hoffer and Arthur Abraham on the position of women in traditional Mende society. On the one hand a small number of women are commemorated in sowei mask names which may be evidence of the considerable authority Hoffer believes women could achieve. On the other hand these female ancestresses may belong to the group of parvenus who, in Abraham's view, emerged only because of the power vacuum created by the British takeover. The dating problem indicated in Note 6 makes it difficult to decide the matter at present.
- 11 See appendix: examples such as 'Boya', 'Lapia', 'Momoh', and 'Ngolia'.
- 12 D'Azevedo, 'Mask Makers', 128.
- 13 The underlying assumption of this discussion is, of course, that the explanation of ritual symbols can be expected to display a certain logical consistency and that inconsistencies are frequently caused by adaptation of elements from outside the culture. For the interrelationships among the groups of the Poró complex see Warren L. d'Azevedo, 'Some historical problems in the delineation of a Central West Atlantic region', Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, Vol. 96, 1962, pp. 512-538.
- 14 D'Azevedo explains that 'Gola tutelaries (especially if they are water spirits-- anyun kuwi) are considered to be almost always of the opposite sex of their human "friend". These relationships between a guardian spirit (nemè) and a person are highly sexualized...'. As regards the female appearance of the mask he says that 'a Gola carver will inform you that all beautiful and attractive things must come from female imagery...' and that in earlier periods men too sometimes wore elaborate hairstyles and ornaments like those on the masks.

He also mentions that he has heard of a Zogbe representing a female ancestor on rare occasions. Letter to Prof. M.J. Adams, Harvard University, 3 Apr 1976. (Quoted by permission).

- 15 The mask 'Keba', belonging to Sowei Ngangö of Telu, Jaima-Bongor is associated with sande medicine captured in war. The present mask is said to be about seventy years old, and is a replacement for the original mask, named 'Navo', which was captured with the medicine. The name 'Keba', meaning 'no father', came in a dream. According to Chief Foday Kai, a member of the descent group, the present owner inherited it from her mother Janjo, who received it from her sister-in-law, Sowulo, who received it from Mahebiê, a female relative of the warrior who captured it; 'The sande was brought by Moikulo, a warrior horn-blower, so when they went to besiege a town and eventually capture it everything in the town is yours and if you find sande you can give it to a woman to start a society. Moikulo gave it to his great aunt'. Another mask, 'Nyoko Wa', also from Telu, has a similar history. 'Sowei Tajo [the present owner] got it from Miatta Membui, her sister-in-law, who got it from Ndamê, her mother, who got it from Bindi Tikpö, who got it from Kema Sana, her aunt. Kema got it from Magao, her mother, who got it from Nyamnyawa, a warrior who captured it from Gola country in Liberia. This was put on the head of a captured Gola girl who carried it to Telu [because men may not touch sande] and remained there. The Gola girl was Bindi Tikpö [third keeper of the mask]'. 11 Oct 1972.
- 16 Little, Mende of Sierra Leone, 74.
- 17 As noted earlier names denoting character traits such as these bear a marked similarity to warrior nicknames, and it seems likely that in some cases their original derivation from such nicknames is no longer remembered.
- 18 The mask is now used as a gonde. Story told by owner, Sowei Maseri Ndeyiya of Tiso, Imperri, Bonthe, born about 1890. 31 May 1972.
- 19 D'Azevedo also notes the popularity of Gola mask names meaning 'waste time' and related notions and explains: 'One is caught up in contradictory emotions, but is made powerless to escape the entrancement'. 'Gola artistry', 307.
- 20 See Chapter 3 for a discussion of this subject.
- 21 I could not establish any literal meaning for 'Vanja', but the unanimity of the six informants seems to justify the interpretation 'dances well'. 'Vanja' may be a shout which the spectators make to encourage the sowei's dancing.

- 22 The importance of dancing in the role of the sowei masker cannot be too much emphasized. Even when an informant does not know the meaning of the name, she will usually volunteer that it has to do with the masker's dancing skills. See, for example, 'Ghana', 'Jegbo', 'Köbö', 'Njagba', 'Vayombu' in the appendix. In further support of this point, d'Azevedo points out that among neighbouring Liberian tribes the Gola Sande and Poro societies are known as 'dancing societies'. 'Gola artistry', 313.

Chapter 7. The Style Grouping of Sowei Masks (I):
The Vai, Gola, and Sherbro

Works of art are the chief concrete evidences of the affective world of the ancestors.¹

The analysis of style grouping can further our understanding and aesthetic appreciation of the sowei mask in a number of ways. In the first place there is a basic problem of identification. Despite the similarities in the masking traditions of the peoples who have the Sande and Poru societies, there exist significant differences in carving style in addition to the variations in ritual practice and iconography which have already been mentioned. The true provenance of a carving cannot always be known from its place of acquisition, and a morphological guide, however general, can guard against mistakes of attribution which occasionally occur in museum and private collections.² Related to the problem of classification is the problem of connoisseurship. To have an appreciation of an individual carver's achievement we must first have some knowledge of the scope and limitations of his artistic environment and of his own oeuvre. Before the artist can be viewed in the context of a particular tradition the spatial and historical confines of that tradition must be identified. More intrinsically interesting, perhaps, is the insight an investigation of style grouping can give us into the ways in which carvers reconcile the difficulties inherent in a traditional ritual art form which is subjected to continual attempts at variation and creative innovation.

In approaching the question of the style grouping of sowei masks it is important to keep the political and historical experience of the region in mind as a guard against too casual an attribution or provenance. Because the spread of Poro and Sande has created certain structural similarities among neighbouring ethnic groups in the area there exists a greater possibility of borrowing both actual masks and particular innovations of carving than in most other parts of Africa. As we have seen, the basic sowei mask type is used by peoples belonging to different language groups and possessing different systems of social organization. Yet Sande masks from widely separated regions both within and crossing linguistic boundaries are usually mutually recognizable and therefore functional.³ Furthermore the premium placed on variety and originality in masking activity often leads the Mende man or woman travelling outside his own region to bring back a mask from another area as something exotic and highly prized. This same interest in differentiation leads the Mende patron to welcome the itinerant carver from a distant area with something unusual to sell, just as he welcomes innovation in the work of a local carver. This interchangeability is necessarily limited, however, because the patron is 'conditioned' by his familiarity with the prevalent local styles and conventions, and too great a divergence from these will make an exotic mask unacceptable.

The process of borrowing can lead to the degeneration or alteration of iconographic motifs whose meanings, based on different

ritual practices, are unknown to distant audiences. In such cases motifs which were originally conditioned by ritual practice may become merely decorative. It is worth recalling, in this context, the example already discussed of the contradictory interpretations given by the Gola and Mende of the sex and nature of the Sande spirit. Maskers which are virtually identical visually represent, for the Gola, a male ancestral spirit and for the Mende, a female water spirit. The explanation for this type of anomaly must lie in the historical conditions of diffusion of the masking tradition. Although this chapter will be concerned with the variability of the plastic form and not the symbolic content of the sowei mask, any discussion of the formal range of the mask type must be based on some understanding of the historical forces which shaped its diffusion and development and which must also have caused shifts in related ritual and symbolism.

The identification of style groups is a controversial problem for African art studies in general. Whereas pioneering studies of African art in this century sought to define 'style areas' and 'tribal styles' along strictly formal lines,⁴ most recent scholarship has qualified, refined, or even denied the existence of such rigid categories. Indeed the concept of the tribe as a unit of linguistic and cultural congruity and homogeneity has itself been largely discarded by anthropologists in favor of a model which takes into greater account historical interaction and change.⁵ The possession from an early date of the Sande and Poro societies and

their related masking traditions by the Gola, Vai, Mende, Krim, and Sherbro, is in itself evidence of their historical and cultural interrelatedness. The sharing of such important social institutions creates similar ritual structures for artistic endeavor, but too many differences in specific usages and formal characteristics occur for us to identify a unitary Sande masking tradition in the region.

The question therefore arises whether the masks of these peoples should properly be regarded as group and sub-group or as distinct and separate traditions. Historical information is scant and somewhat speculative, but, as we shall see, a useful hypothesis regarding the spread of Pororo in the region has been proposed which clarifies the problem. Much less has been written specifically about the beginnings of Sande but as it is the counterpart of the Pororo society and closely resembles it structurally, we may assume that the two institutions developed and spread along similar lines.

The history of the Mende migration into Sierra Leone was briefly outlined in Chapter 1 and, as we saw, they entered their present territory from what is now Liberia in a series of invasions between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. They merged with people already living in their present territory whose identity has now been lost. The Mende claim to be the originators of Pororo and Sande, although this cannot in any way be demonstrated. The Vai, who migrated south as well, first reached the Sierra Leone coast some time between 1500 and 1550 and became separated from the Kono who remained in northern Sierra Leone. In all likelihood the Vai already had circumcision societies similar to those of the Kono and other

Manding peoples. Their male society of this type-- distinct from Poros-- still exists today. Holsoe's research among the Vai led him to believe that they adopted Poros from the Gola who were already settled in the area, and he also demonstrates that the present composition of the Vai population includes the descendants of many immigrants from non-Vai areas.⁶ According to d'Azevedo, the widespread popularity of the Poros type of secret society may be in part a response to the need to integrate heterogeneous peoples in an area long characterized by rapid environmental change and movement of population.⁷ The educational role of the Poros initiation period was important in the adaptation to new methods of farming, and the political and economic control exercised by the society made possible the integration of disparate ethnic elements along intertribal lines. The situation strongly suggests, he writes, that:

Poros distribution is a manifestation of the peculiar politico-economic relations among peoples brought into close proximity under conditions requiring intensive mutual adjustment and thus represents an adaptive mechanism of societies in an emergent region.⁸

The adoption of Poros and Sande by peoples in the region, then, appears to be the result both of parallel response to similar conditions as well as the exchange and adaptation of successful innovations among neighbouring ethnic groups. In fact it appears that we put the question wrongly when we look for precise points of origin and spread for one or another of these institutions, as the forms in which we know them today are no doubt the result of borrowing and counter-borrowing over a long period of time. The

masking traditions which accompany the societies, I would suggest, must have developed in the same way. Because the time depth of the sample of sowei masks is so shallow (the earliest ones extant cannot date much before 1850 because of climatic conditions in the region) we cannot expect to see this historical process mirrored in an analysis of stylistic or iconographic development. But it is useful to have even this roughly drawn historical perspective because it makes clear that Sande and Poru did not radiate out from some central point of origin. Therefore we must not expect to find a 'classic' style of sowei mask with 'provincial' variations, but rather a set of closely related stylistic traditions carrying equal weight and influencing each other.⁹

The colonial experience added another layer of complexity to the distribution of masking and stylistic traditions which ought also to be kept in mind. The drawing of the modern political boundaries increased, sometimes inadvertently and sometimes by design, the dominance of one group over another and changed old patterns of patronage and even of ritual observance. In Sierra Leone the Mende achieved this dominance over the small groups of Vai and Gola along the Mano river who were cut off from the larger Vai and Gola populations in Liberia by the modern national border. The most obvious manifestation of dominance is linguistic: although some Vai and Gola are still spoken in Sierra Leone, most people in these areas are bilingual and the young are usually unilingual Mende. Similarly though old masks still in use display distinctive stylistic

characteristics related to the Liberian Vai and Gola masks, new ones are commonly bought from itinerant Mende carvers.¹⁰ A similar pattern of increasing Mende dominance occurs in the coastal Krim and Sherbro areas, although here the process of assimilation appears to have begun with the establishment of the Protectorate. Since that date it has become increasingly advantageous to belong to the demographically dominant group, the Mende.

A further development of recent years has been the spread of Sande and Poru to peoples who did not traditionally have these institutions, such as the Temne of Sierra Leone, particularly those bordering the Mende and Sherbro, and the Bassa of Liberia. Although masking is not regarded as integral to the efficacy of the Sande and Poru societies, its appeal today is apparently considerable. The Kono, for example, have had Poru and Sande for some time, but have only recently begun to introduce masking in some areas. In most cases of modern adoption of these societies, however, masking traditions are taken over as well. Often the masks themselves are imported; the Temne, for example, usually buy masks from Mende carvers. This is not always the case, however, as is seen in new Bassa Sande masks which display a distinctive carving style.¹¹

Despite historical interborrowing, the mobility of the carver, and the taste for the exotic, all of which complicate the question of the provenance of sowei masks, overall regional stylistic tendencies can be distinguished. The word regional rather than tribal is used advisedly. The transition between one set of stylistic

conventions and another is gradual rather than abrupt, and any attempt to characterize even a 'regional' style represents a certain abstraction of the actual situation. For a regional style is, of course, not a monolithic entity but an accumulation of individual carver's modes. The individual carver, accustomed from childhood to seeing the particular group of masks owned by the Sande societies of his own and neighbouring communities, is conditioned by this experience to a particular sense of the possibilities of the plastic form. If apprenticed to a local carver he will probably adopt the same method of measuring off the proportions of the mask (described in Chapter 4) which are incorporated into many of those used locally. To this foundation he will add ideas drawn from the occasional exotic mask he may see in the course of his own travels or imported into his district as well as, of course, creative innovations of his own.

Although carvers today travel widely to sell their masks, traditionally their movements would have been more restricted, encompassing an area equivalent, perhaps, to one or two modern chiefdoms. We might diagram the traditional pattern of style development as a map covered by overlapping circles each of which stands for the set of masks made by an individual carver. The intersecting areas of the circles will then represent mutual influence and borrowing. As we move over the map the dominant plastic configuration can be expected to shift gradually because each carver's style develops in response to a slightly different

combination of sets of other carver's work than his neighbours on the map. A group of carvers on one section of the map will, however, have seen many of the same carvings even though no two visual 'biographies' are ever identical. The areas of common visual experience as well as the ways in which the personal innovations of neighbouring carvers act on each other account for the regional similarities which are found.

The tension between the collective tradition and individual creativity is a universal problem for the artist, although the nature of the specific limitations placed on artists varies from one culture to another. In his essay on style Ackerman describes the limitations imposed by tradition in terms which apply as much to Mende carvers as to the pre-modern Western artist. He notes that:

In order to make a meaningful innovation he must be able to concentrate his forces upon the few aspects of his work where circumstances favor fresh departures; for the rest he relies on the support of his tradition and of his environment. An artist cannot invent himself out of his time and, if he could, he would succeed only in making his work incomprehensible by abandoning the framework in which it might be understood.¹²

It is typical of the Western orientation toward the problem of style that Ackerman's attention is focussed on the artist. For the Mende the tension between innovation and conformity to type is as much a problem for the patrons and audience as it is for the carver. One informant articulated this mutual interest in variation by explaining:

These masks...are all different types...(among) these carvers there is a sort of competition, one trying to carve better than the other...The women like the masks to be different so if they want to make any competition they are glad to have their masks different.¹³

The interest in variation evinced by both carver and audience broadens the scope of the problem. We must deal not only with the inherent conflict between individual creativity and traditional forms but also with a collective aesthetic preference which underlies the pattern of stylistic development in the Sande region.

The functional requirements of a ritual art do, of course, set limits to the nature and degree of permissible innovation; the boundary between pleasing variation and the 'incomprehensible' is easily overstepped. It sometimes happens, for example, that an informant will identify photographs of sowei masks which vary greatly from those in local use, either through extreme innovation by a local carver or through an exotic provenance, not as sowei but as gonde, the parody mask. Mende informants on occasion could not identify photographs of Vai sowei masks from distant areas.¹⁴ And the comment was also made, 'this is the Sande masker, but it is not our kind', implying that some but not enough of the conventions of type were present for the mask to be functional. In this sense the concept of type is closely related to iconography, although type and symbolic content are not identical. Type signifies the particular formal elements, the disposition of these elements, and the basic expressive quality produced by this ensemble which are essential to the recognizability of the carving. Style refers to the specific personal ways each carver depicts the basic components of type. The carver's personal interpretation, furthermore, will retain some constant characteristics from one piece to another-- what

Ackerman calls 'currency'-- which enable us to identify the work of a single hand. And, as we have said, style can also refer to the common characteristics of a group of related artists' work.

Precisely which details can be used in the isolation of individual and group styles differs from one genre to another and from one type of object to another. The identification of these variables must depend on a familiarity with the type and with its symbolic content. An example of an element of type in the sowei masker is the helmet format of the headpiece. This format is a convention and has no intrinsic meaning, yet it is essential to the recognizability of the masker as a sowei, and no face or head mask could be used. The narrowed eyes and closed mouth of the sowei are also elements of type and a mask with large eye or mouth apertures would in all probability be identified as a gonde. These characteristics, however, do have symbolic meaning and are not arbitrary conventions like the helmet format, since they convey the non-human identity of the image. Similarly, blackness is an essential element of the sowei type. Finally, to be recognizable the mask must have a ringed neck and an elaborate hairdo, but these particular elements of type are permitted to vary greatly in their specific manner of representation. Possibly because the 'cut-neck' and coiffure are consciously recognized aspects of human beauty among the Mende, both audience and artist expect innovation and elaboration in their depiction on the sowei. Here, to use Ackerman's phrase, 'circumstances favor fresh departures' and the carver rarely repeats himself, particularly in the styling of the hair. The addition of

carved animals, amulets and the like also falls within the scope of the carver's innovative license, and although he may have favorite motifs which he frequently incorporates these cannot in themselves be used as diagnostic tools in identifying a particular hand.

There are, however, a number of characteristics and details of sowei masks which can be used to isolate the works of a particular carver or of what may be termed a 'workshop', where similarities among a group of masks indicate a group of closely associated carvers although not close enough to point to the work of a single artist. These are the details which, following Morellian precepts, are observed to be repeated automatically because they are of no particular decorative, expressive, or symbolic interest to the artist. The shape of the face, the play of convex and concave form in the modelling of the face, and the depth of the relief of the carving appear to change only gradually and subtly from one mask to another in the work of one carver. Because a traditional carver usually measures off the raw block of wood according to a formula based on parts of his own hand and arm, the overall dimensions of neck, face and coiffure are also fairly constant. The distance between the ears, the length of the face, and the circumference of the base of the mask in particular remain very much the same, although the height of the mask will vary somewhat with different coiffures. And perhaps easiest of all to pick out, the forms of ear and nose are usually unchanging in an individual carver's work.

Eye and mouth present problems to the carver which may account

for a slightly greater degree of variation in their depiction. Both eyes and mouth have intrinsic expressive potential which the carver may exploit, as well as a strict conventional decorum which must be observed. The mouth must be shown closed and its expression must be dignified, but there is room for some variation in its depiction in the slight smiling, pursing, or even frowning which the masks display. Lips may either be delineated, represented by a single groove, or omitted completely, and there are even a number of examples of bared teeth. The eyes too must conform to conventional requirements: they must not be open enough for the wearer's own eyes to be seen while at the same time providing a large enough slit for the masker to see through. In addition to this practical problem there is an expressive one, since it is largely through the representation of a remote and inward-looking gaze that the spiritual identity of the sowei is shown. Here too there is a wide range of depictions, from the schematic use of a simple slit or hole to the full naturalistic representation of eyelids and even eyelashes.

The placement of eyes and mouth in relation to the volumes of forehead and face is another key choice which the carver makes and which he may vary slightly from piece to piece. It is useful to note the relationship of the eyes to the characteristic horizontal division between the volumes of the forehead and lower face and the relationship between the mouth and the point of the chin as elements of individual style. The slight variations in the representation and placement of the eyes and mouth within an individual carver's

work may be understood, then, not as results of a conscious attempt to vary the mask for aesthetic reasons but as consequences of the search for a successful resolution of inherent artistic problems in the representation of the sowei. As such the changes in the representation of eye and mouth are likely to be more subtle than changes in the carving of the coiffure or other superficial ornament. The forms of eye and mouth remain useful features in the identification of individual and regional styles.

The problem of style grouping is, of course, a problem of time as well as of geography. In the field, variation can be seen either as the result of the age of a piece, of its geographical provenance, or of internal variation in an individual oeuvre. In order to know which factors are at work we must have some knowledge both of the historical development of style in that area and of overall regional variation. Visible signs of age and wear are not sufficient gauges and informants are frequently unable to estimate the age of carvings accurately enough to meet the needs of art-historical analysis.¹⁵ It is here that the study of museum collections becomes an invaluable complement to field data. Museum accession records and early published examples can provide 'hard' dates which can be used as controls for dates gathered in the field. Similarly fieldwork provides 'hard' provenances for carvings which can be compared to museum pieces having, at best, vague information as to place of origin. Most useful of all, of course, are those pieces for which both date and place of origin are known, and a small number of such

well-documented sowei masks does exist. As the first step in the identification of style groups these early documented examples will be assembled and related to other similar pieces seen in museum collections and in the field. For greater clarity the discussion will be divided into two parts. The remainder of this chapter will survey the stylistic characteristics of those traditional users of Sande masks who border on the Mende, the Vai, Gola, and Sherbro. In the next chapter stylistic variation within the Mende area will be examined. First, overall regional changes within Mendeland will be discussed and then the stylistic range to be found within one central Mende chiefdom, Jaiima-Bongor, will be analysed in detail.

The earliest published example of the masks used by the Vai Sande society-- or in fact of any Sande mask-- occurs in the travel account of the Swiss zoologist Büttikofer, the Reisebilder aus Liberia of 1890.¹⁶ Büttikofer attended a Sande dance at a village near Robertsport and published sketches both of the dance and of the mask itself, remarking that it represents a female head crowned by five high tapering ridges of hair carefully imitating the hair-styles of the Vai women. (Cat. 1). The mask shown in the sketch can be identified as the one he gave to the Bernisches Historisches Museum. (Cat. 2). It has a steeply back-slanted profile and the forehead is high and rounded, bordered by a hairline in the shape of an inverted 'V'. The features are compressed into a concave triangular area excavated from the lower half of the face. The nose

is carved as a long rectangular solid confined between the plane of the forehead and the hollow of the face. The eyes are carved as slits on either side of the nose and are hooded by the overhanging ridge of the eyebrows, which are depicted with incised hatching, and the mouth is shown by a small round depression at the very point of the inverted facial triangle. The 'cut-neck' or neck rings are shown only at the back as two parallel ridges. The coiffure starts at the level of the mid-forehead, quite high, and sits on top of the head rather like a wig or a hat.

Frobenius, in his Masken und Geheimbünde illustrates what is probably the same mask, as well as another example of a Sande mask acquired by the Übersee Museum in Bremen in 1893. (Cat. 3).¹⁷ The profile of the Bremen mask is vertical rather than oblique and the convexity of the mask cylinder is unbroken. Its coiffure is simpler, its mouth larger and more fully modeled and its eyes are inlaid with rectangular metal plaques. Despite these differences, however, the Bremen and Büttikofer masks are related by their high foreheads and 'V' shaped hairlines as well as by the lack of neck rings at front and sides. These two masks can be linked stylistically by two Vai pieces in Rotterdam. (Cat. 4 and 5). Both Rotterdam masks display the concave facial area of the Büttikofer mask and one has a similar backslanted profile. However several other characteristics relate them to the Bremen example as well, such as the simpler coiffures of both masks and the inlaid metal eye plaques of one of them. Here, too, the representation of the neck rings is abbreviated.

They are shown only at the back and are incorporated into the base of the coiffure so that their meaning is almost unreadable. Both Rotterdam masks make use of shallow parallel grooves or cross-hatching to represent the hairdo. One mask, Cat. 4, can be seen in profile to have a sharp pointed nose which juts out from the depression of the forehead. The ears are set well back from the face on the sides of the mask and the hairline is indented around the ear, rhythmically echoing its shape. The sharp jutting nose and the relationship of ear and hairline of Cat. 4 and the disc-shaped ear of Cat. 5 are features which, as will be seen below, relate the masks to other style groups adjacent to the Vai.

A mask in Salem, Massachusetts (Cat. 6) is related both to one of the masks in Rotterdam, Cat. 4, which it resembles particularly in profile, and to the Büttikofer mask with which it shares a similar placement and depiction of coiffure and neck rings. Together these resemblances identify the Salem piece as Vai. It also possesses an interesting tiara-like ornamentation of the hairline at the front which is a characteristic, as we shall see, of other Vai and Gola carvings. A number of other old pieces in museum collections are also closely related to these Vai masks. A mask in the British Museum (Cat. 7) is remarkably like the Bremen mask. A piece in Chicago (Cat. 8) and another in the American Museum of Natural History (Cat. 9) have much in common with the Büttikofer mask. Another mask in Liverpool (Cat. 10) resembles many in this group in its coiffure, verticality of profile, and placement

of neck rings.¹⁸

Fieldwork carried out in Gawula chiefdom, Liberia, not far from Robertsport where the Büttikofer piece was collected indicates the continuing prevalence of the stylistic features described above. The majority of Sande masks still in use in the towns of Jöndö and Fandö probably date from the late nineteenth century and five which are among the oldest of these display the sharply excavated concave facial area, abbreviated neck-rings, and 'wig-like' placement of the coiffure of the Büttikofer mask, although they lack its oblique profile (Cat. 12-15). In addition many are lavishly decorated with applied beaten gold and silver ornament and have elaborate and varied coiffures. Masks in this style are also found in the Vai areas of Sierra Leone (Cat. 17, 18) although the group of masks from Sorc-Gbema chiefdom included in the survey are carved in several other styles as well.¹⁹ When we eliminate pieces which are obviously of exotic provenance, however, there remains a group of masks carved very similarly to the remaining masks from Jöndö in Liberia but distinct from the pieces already described (Cat. 11, 16, 19-21). Together these remaining masks seem to represent a second indigenous Vai style, related to the first Vai group, or Vai I, but possessing several marked differences. Vai II, as it will be termed for the purposes of this discussion, is characterized by much more fluid transitions between the concavity of the lower face and the rounded convex forehead. The facial features are more naturalistically depicted (although the compression of the neck is more stylized)

and contrast markedly with the schematic and geometric representation of the eyes, nose, and mouth characteristic of Vai I. They are compressed into a proportionately smaller area and often the hollowing of this triangular space is minimal and hardly noticeable. Equally significant is the contrast in the depiction of the neck rings, which in masks of the second Vai style group are fully modeled and completely encircle the mask, although they are compressed and partially interrupted in front by the triangular projection of the chin. Despite the differences between the two groups there is a certain consistency of approach in both styles visible in the way in which the hairdo is related to the rest of the mask and especially to the ears. These are usually set quite far back on the sides of the mask and they become sculpturally related not, as in the majority of Mende masks, to the features of the face, but to the coiffure. The semi-circular indentation of the coiffure around the ear is a common feature of Vai II masks and less frequently found in Vai I examples. The ear is often turned on its side or at an angle to emphasize the rhythmic interrelationship. This treatment of ear and hairline is unique to Vai masks and is a useful diagnostic trait in identifying Vai style. A common iconographic feature which also helps to identify the style is the use of paired or single horns curving downwards and placed parallel to the hair ridges or buns. (Cat. 11).

There is another group of Sande masks which were acquired by

European museums around the turn of the century which are so closely interrelated stylistically as to be almost certainly by the same carver or workshop. All but one lack provenance and that one, in Stuttgart, is recorded simply as a 'Golah mask from Liberia' (Cat. 22). The conceptualization of the basic forms of the mask is quite different in these masks from the Vai examples. In Vai examples the coiffure usually seems to be applied to the basic helmet surface while the face and neck are organically continuous with the surface of the helmet. In these 'Gola' examples it is the face which appears to be 'applied' like a plaque to the surface of the helmet, and the hairdo and neck appear continuous with the helmet surface. The faces are carved in rather flat relief with a very slight concavity in the lower half and are contained within a diamond or pointed oval shape. The ears, placed at the lateral points of the diamond are elongated oval forms laid horizontally and of an animal-like appearance. The coiffure is not sculpturally modelled, but shown by decorative linear patterns of parallel grooves, cross-hatching, zig-zag, or herringbone incised into the surface. A number of pieces have similar incised patterns under the chin as well. Only two masks in the group, in Brighton (Cat. 23) and Liverpool (Cat. 24), have true neck rings, shown only in back, although the Stuttgart mask has a row of parallel scalloped ridges on the back and sides which is probably a schematic representation of 'cut-neck'. The Brighton mask is also unique in the group because of its coiffure (in the ngovola style); the others have

very simple single or triple hair ridges across the top. Three of the masks are multi-faced, a common iconographic feature of Vai masks as well. One mask, in Oxford (Cat. 25), also has the 'tiara' motif around the forehead noted in the Salem mask (Cat. 6) which was identified as Vai.²⁰

A number of masks in museum collections can be linked stylistically to this 'Golāh' group. One, in Liverpool (Cat. 26), is extremely close in all but the shape of the ears, the slightly higher relief of the carving, and the longer, narrower face. Two very unusual masks, one of which is in Rotterdam (Cat. 27) and one in the British Museum (Cat. 28), probably products of the same carver, also appear to be related to the 'Golāh' group although not as closely as is Cat. 26. They have similar diamond-shaped faces and incised decoration of the unarticulated helmet form. The Rotterdam mask (Cat. 27) has a decorative grill under the chin in front while the British Museum mask (Cat. 28) is multi-faced. (There are four additional small faces which pun on the 'ear' forms in between the four large faces but which are unfortunately not clearly visible in the photograph).

Another pair of masks in Liverpool (Cat. 29) and the British Museum (Cat. 30) which appear to be by a single artist are also very close in style to the 'Golāh' group. The two masks display similar diamond shaped faces, incised decoration, and shallow relief in the carving of the neck rings, although here the carver has added a second set of more fully modelled rings on the backs of both masks.

In profile, however, the two masks exhibit a much deeper concavity of the lower face from which the tubular mouth and rectangular nose thrust out dramatically. The profile view, furthermore, shows a close resemblance between these two pieces and two other masks collected among the Gola by the missionary and amateur ethnographer Harley in the 1930's (Cat. 31, 32). The Liverpool and British Museum pieces just discussed thus form an essential stylistic 'missing link' between the two groups of old masks in museums bearing Gola provenances whose stylistic relationship is not at first glance apparent. The more reliable Harley attribution can thus be used to confirm the vaguer 'Goläh' provenance of the Stuttgart piece and the group of masks related to it.

A number of other unusual and anomalous masks can now also be related to the Gola style group. A Janus mask in Brooklyn (Cat. 33) bears a striking resemblance in its thrusting chin, mouth, and nose and in its representation of the hair to the Harley masks, despite the variation in the placement of the mouth. Another British Museum piece (Cat. 34) has the characteristic 'animalistic' ear form, a roughly diamond-shaped face, deep concave excavation of the lower face, and sharp protruding nose of some of the Gola masks although it lacks the projecting tubular mouth. A further example from the British Museum (Cat. 35) has the projecting nose, mouth, and eye forms, although here the face is not confined within the usual diamond shaped area. A third rather anomalous mask in Liverpool (Cat. 36) has a subtly defined diamond shaped face as well as

tubular mouth and ear forms, although here there is barely any concavity of the lower face.²¹ Two masks in Bern have an equally schematic representation of the facial forms, utilizing tubular projections to represent facial features (Cat. 37, 38). Here too we have the diamond shaped face and abbreviated neck rings. Both masks are multi-faced, one with two and one with four faces.

A last group of masks which may well belong to this Gola group are three interrelated masks so unusual that they might well be confused with gonde or even gongoli, as was the case when Mende informants examined photographs of two of them (Cat. 40, 41). The three masks are in Glasgow (Cat. 39), Liverpool (Cat. 40), and Leningrad (Cat. 41). The ear forms of the Liverpool and Leningrad masks immediately recall those of the group related to the Stuttgart 'golah' mask, while in profile the thrusting noses and mouths of the three masks resemble the Harley masks (Cat. 31, 32). The long face contained within the outline of a pointed oval also recalls the Stuttgart group, although the more plastic modelling of the three masks contrasts with the shallow relief and incised detail of the Stuttgart group. Finally, a mask in Rotterdam which was collected in Liberia can be related through face shape, proportions, and depiction of features to the Stuttgart group, and provides further evidence of the correctness of the Gola attribution of the group of masks (Cat. 42).²²

The identification of this Gola style group based on museum documentation and stylistic analysis is of particular interest

because it cannot yet be confirmed by fieldwork. Examples of Gola Sande masks collected and documented in the field in recent years are related stylistically not to the masks discussed above but to the group referred to provisionally as Vai II. A group of five such masks in Berkeley, California are reliably attributed to the Vai or Gola (Cat. 43-45), to the Vai, Kle, or Mende-Gola (Cat. 46), and to the Zodi, Kpelle, or Gola (Cat. 47).²³ The three 'Vai or Gola' masks have the same stylistic characteristics as Vai II masks: encircling neck rings compressed in front, the slight depression of the lower face, widely spaced ears, and more naturalistic facial features. Two of the three also exhibit the hairline indented around the ears and all three have the 'wig-like' placement of the coiffure.²⁴

Twelve masks were documented in the field among the Sierra Leone Gola of Makpele chiefdom. Ten of these pieces represented by Cat. 48-51, all in use for two or three generations, possess the same stylistic characteristics just outlined. It appears, then, that this style is characteristic of both the Vai and the Gola-- at least those Gola living close to the Vai-- and would more appropriately be termed the Vai/Gola style. Confirmation of this style grouping, at least in recent years, is given by the Vai carver Vandi Kwi Jandi of Gawula Chiefdom, Liberia, whose masks carved in this style are sold to both Vai and Gola patrons (Cat. 52).²⁵

A considerable number of Sande masks came into European museum

collections around the turn of the century through the agency of traders and British administrators stationed in the Sherbro region of Sierra Leone. The Sherbro-Bullom inhabit Sherbro Island and the adjacent coastal area. They border on the Mende to the east, the Temne to the north, and are separated from the Vai further down the coast only by the small Krim population. Although clearly related to the Vai and Vai/Gola style groups the Sherbro masks form a distinct group displaying a different approach to the proportions and modelling of the human head.

One of the earliest Sande masks to enter a European museum was acquired by the British Museum in 1886. (Cat. 54). It had been procured for the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of that year by Alldridge who was then the British District Officer for Sherbro. The mask is janus-faced and wears a European hat, which was then a prestigious object traded in exchange for local produce. As in the Büttikofer mask, which was acquired at the same time, the depiction of facial features is highly simplified; the mouth is not represented and the eyes are indicated by slits hidden by the brow ridge. Similarly, too, the lower face is concave and the nose projects sharply from it, and on the Alldridge mask cut-neck is not indicated at all. However, the appearance of the face is rendered quite different by the changed proportions. The face is oval in shape and roughly bisected by the line of the brows. The profile of the mask is vertical and the main rhythmic accent is provided by the inward curve of the forehead and the counterbalancing outward swing of the chin. The ears are placed more naturalistically at the ends

of the jawline and they are represented by a form which is also more anatomically based-- a semicircular ridge with a small triangle in the middle of the open side. Another mask in the British Museum purchased from Alldridge displays a somewhat more abrupt transition between the forehead and the concave excavation of the lower face (Cat. 55). On this mask the ears are more widely spaced than on the earlier piece, but in other respects the two are similar.

There are a number of other masks which resemble the two Alldridge pieces. They display the same tendencies toward curving, rounded volumes and a rhythmic modulation of the convex forehead and concave lower face. The depiction of the facial features tends toward a relative naturalism. On most examples the eyes are clearly represented as slightly convex almond-shaped forms and the mouth is shown as a small oval or groove placed at the lowest point of facial triangle. Neck rings are usually shown only at the back and sides. The Ruply Collection in Bern, acquired around 1900 from a Swiss merchant on Sherbro Island, contains two such masks (Cat. 56, 57), one of which also wears a European hat. Another mask from 'Jumbujah' [Sumbuya] on the mainland was acquired by the Liverpool museum and is also stylistically closely related. (Cat. 58).²⁶ Three masks in the British Museum also belong to this group (Cat. 59-61).

Several masks from the Sherbro area display a close resemblance to this group while having in addition particular stylistic variations which make possible the identification of a workshop or individual style. A mask in Basel collected on the Sherbro mainland

has an unusual representation of the eyes (Cat. 62). They are depicted by incised circles divided horizontally by the indentation of the brow and concentric slits are cut inside the lower part of the circles. Scarification consisting of short parallel vertical lines (ngaya maki) is carved on the cheeks and an incised rectangle represents the mouth. The face is long and narrow, carved in rather low relief and the nose is also long and thin. These same characteristics are displayed by a mask in St. Gallen (Cat. 63) and by one in Liverpool (Cat. 64), and in addition these latter two have teeth carved inside the outline of the mouth. Two further pieces which are stylistically closely related are in Brighton (Cat. 65) and in Bern (Cat. 66).

The collection formed by Walter Volz also originates from the Sherbro area, most pieces bearing the provenance of Bonthe or Sumbuya. Five masks from his collection in Bern (Cat. 67, 68), St. Gallen (Cat. 69), and Basel (Cat. 70, 71) conform to the Sherbro stylistic characteristics described above. Two others in Basel (Cat. 72, 73) are also closely related, although the pair shares particular stylistic features which suggest a single carver's work. Most notably, the lower part of the face is sharply defined as a heart-shaped concavity outlined by the double curves of the eyebrows and the triangular pointed chin. The two masks are also nearly identical in their proportions, in the placement and forms of the ears, and in the representation of the neck rings. This pair of masks also provides a useful case study of the difficulties which

are encountered in trying to establish exact provenances even where the place of acquisition has been recorded. One of the two was bought in Bonthe on Sherbro Island and the other in Sumbuya, on the border of Mende country. A third mask, now in Bern (Cat. 74) can be linked to the pair just described through its similar sharply defined heart-shaped face. A number of other masks in the Volz collection are more problematic. Two display extremely eccentric representations of facial features showing the bridge of the nose above the line of the eyebrow (Cat. 75, 76).²⁷ Another Volz collection piece in St. Gallen (Cat. 77) resembles the Gola mask in Stuttgart more closely than Sherbro examples although its worn condition may be misleading.

Several masks which came into German museums around the turn of the century also appear to be stylistically related to the Sherbro group. A mask in Hamburg (Cat. 78) is close enough to the top-hatted Rupy mask (Cat. 57) to be attributed to the same carver. Another mask in Hamburg (Cat. 79) and one in the British Museum (Cat. 80) closely resemble another Rupy piece in Bern (Cat. 56). Two other masks in Basel (Cat. 81) and Berlin (Cat. 82) which lack documentation also belong with the Sherbro group on stylistic grounds.²⁸

The Sande masks which H.U. Hall collected and photographed in the field during the University of Pennsylvania Museum's expedition to the Sherbro area in 1937 indicate a shift in stylistic development during the intervening thirty years. Although the sample is too small to make possible definitive statements about stylistic development, it is interesting to note the increased tendencies in

the Hall collection masks toward elaboration of ornament and of descriptive detail, towards linear articulation of sculpural form, and towards much flatter relief in the carving of the head and facial features (Cat. 83-85). The facial area is clearly defined by an oval or pointed oval outline and the characteristic concavity of the lower face is almost entirely lost. On a number of pieces the eyes are carved at a sharp slant (Cat. 84); on others a similar oblique line is introduced in the prominent modelling of the cheeks (Cat. 83). In both examples the eye is led by the slanting line up to the ears which are placed very high on the head.²⁹

There is one last, rather puzzling, group of Sande masks in museum collections which is linked to the Sherbro style group by a number of specific features. The masks all display a deep hollowing of the eye sockets as well as a number of other extreme stylizations of the facial features. Eberl-Elber illustrates an mbowei mask (wrongly labelled by him as a Bundu mask) which has this depiction of the eyes as well as the ear configuration typical of the Gola/Vai style group (Cat. 86). The mask also displays the same eccentric placement of the nose seen on several old Sherbro masks such as Cat. 76. Eberl-Elber attributes this mask to the Vai or Krim, a coastal sub-group of the Sherbro.

Among the related museum pieces the earliest examples of this eye depiction are in Philadelphia (Cat. 87) and Rotterdam (Cat. 88) and date to 1912 and 1911 respectively. The distortions in the modelling of the face on the Rotterdam example are so extreme that the mask assumes an almost animal-like appearance and recalls the

distortions displayed by many gonde masks. Another similar example occurs in the Bedford collection (Cat. 89) which displays the tubular mouth form associated with the Gola style group and the proportions of the Gola/Vai group. Similar to this piece are three Wellcome collection pieces in the British Museum (Cat. 90, 91), one of which is polychromed with the eye area picked out in European metallic paint.³⁰ The bared teeth of this mask resemble those on several old Sherbro pieces such as Cat. 66, adding another stylistic link between these masks and the Sherbro style group.³¹

Notes

- 1 Meyer Schapiro, 'Style', in Anthropology today, edited by A.L. Krober (Chicago, 1953), 106.
- 2 There is a pattern to these mistakes which reflects the historical connections of museums with one or another part of the area producing Sande masks. In the absence of publications on style groupings museums have naturally tended to group any new Sande mask coming into their collections with any documented pieces they already possess. Thus American museums, having had historical contacts with Liberia and particularly the Vai, occasionally misidentify Mende masks as Vai. Similarly British museums whose contacts with Sierra Leone have been more frequent sometimes do the opposite. Museums without old documented pieces usually label any Sande mask as Mende as the Mende are the largest and best known users of Sande masks.
- 3 Masks which are not universally recognizable are often very interesting for what they can tell us, through their omissions, about the essential elements of type which are prevalent in a given region. A rough test was conducted during the field survey of regional styles in which photographs of soweï masks in a wide range of carving styles were shown to informants in the various regions. Generally people showed a great willingness to admire styles different from those common in their own chiefdoms, but too great a divergence in style sometimes caused confusion and misidentification. These photograph sessions with informants are the basis for many of the statements in the following discussion.
- 4 Following the pioneering study of Carl Kjersmeier, Centres de Style de la Sculpture Negre Africaine (Paris, 1935-38) most general works on African art have tended to regard the Mende as the 'artistic centre', to use Kjersmeier's term, of the Sierra-Leone/Liberian region (vol. 2, 9-12). Wingert, for example, in The sculpture of negro Africa (New York, 1950), identifies a 'West Guinea Cost' style as one of the five major styles of the Sudan and which in turn is subdivided into the 'Mendi' and 'Poro society' styles.
- 5 William Fagg has articulated most forcefully the view that 'every tribe is, initially, a separate artistic universe' whose art is 'comprehensible to its members and not to those of other tribes since it is the expression of a system of philosophy and of religious beliefs belonging to the tribe', although Fagg also recognizes the existence of 'mutually intelligible styles in some regions'. ('Tribalité', Colloque sur l'Art negre [Paris, 1967], 117; see also his Tribes and forms in African art [London 1965].

- For a different view, analysing the diffusion of art forms across ethnic divisions in Ghana and the Cameroons which is more relevant to the arts of the Sande group see René Bravmann's catalogue Open Frontiers (Seattle, Washington, 1972). For a discussion of ethnicity and geographical divisions in Sierra Leone see P.K. Mitchell, 'Peoples, localities, and territories: "tribe" and chiefdom in Sierra Leone', Sierra Leone geographical journal, 15 (1971), 55-71.
- 6 Svend Einar Holsoe, 'The casava leaf people: an ethnohistorical study of the Vai people with a particular emphasis on Tewa chiefdom', (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1967), 25.
 - 7 Warren L. d'Azevedo, 'Some historical problems'.
 - 8 D'Azevedo, 'Some historical problems', 516.
 - 9 One way in which exchanges of actual art objects must have occurred in the past was through warfare and looting (see Chapter 6, note 15). More peaceable exchanges also took place at the meetings of Paramount Chiefs described in Chapter 4.
 - 10 Mr. W.L. Bimba, a Vai of Soro-Gbema chiefdom, Sierra Leone, said that until 1961, the year of Sierra Leone's independence, the Vais of his chiefdom frequently bought masks in Liberia but that since then it had become too difficult to cross the border for this to be done with any regularity. (Interview, 3 Apr 1972 at Fairo, Soro-Gbema, Pujehun).
 - 11 See Cat. 53 for an example of Bassa style. This style of Sande mask was identified as Bassa by the Honorable Bai T. Moore, then Liberian Minister for Cultural Affairs, who has been making a study of the Bassa Sande society and masks. (Personal communication, 11 Apr 1972).
 - 12 James S. Ackerman, 'Style', in Art and archaeology, by James S. Ackerman and Rhys Carpenter, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1963) p. 167.
 - 13 Interview with chiefdom councillor George Lahai, Korgbotuma, Kaiyamba, Moyamba. In another photograph session at Sulima, Soro-Gbema (4 Apr 1972), a Soweï remarked 'every year they are making new styles' (of soweï masks), which was said with great pleasure. The remark is revealing, implying as it does the same sort of delight in changing fashions which women in Sierra Leone as elsewhere in Africa take in the new designs of fabric which are constantly being introduced. In fact the Mende phrase, which is used to translate 'style', ngi gbatè ngi ('the way it is made') is also used in relation to styles of clothing.

- 14 For example Cat. 41, probably Gola in origin, was usually identified as gonde, or even gongoli.
- 15 For a discussion of the dating of field material please see Note on the Dating of Field Material.
- 16 Büttikofer, Reisebilder, II, 308
- 17 Frobenius, Masken, Pl. 8, Fig. 116. (See also Chapter 1, note 25).
- 18 Another museum piece which is closely related stylistically is in the Heidelberg Museum inv. no. A.1759. A mask illustrated by Elisofon and Fagg, The sculpture of Africa (London, 1958), 70, Fig. 70, and one illustrated by Segy in African Sculpture, (London, 1958), as Fig. 15 are also closely related.
- 19 In addition to the sowel masks in use in the Vai and Gola areas of Sierra Leone which were obviously bought from itinerant carvers coming from the Sewa and Kō-Mende regions, there are several older masks in the survey which are related to Mende style groups. A mask called 'Babè' in Gofor, Makpele, Pujehun closely resembles the style of the Sewa Mende carver Vandi Sona; it probably dates to about 1930 and is attributed to a Krim carver. (See Cat. 138, for example). Another mask in Zimmi, Makpele, Pujehun, probably dating to about 1905, is reminiscent of eastern Mende examples such as Cat. 113); and a third mask in Gbopon, Makepele, Pujehun, is probably by the same carver as a gonde in Jalima-Bongor. From this small survey it appears that Mende carving has been represented among the Sierra Leone Gola for a longer period of time than among the Sierra Leone Vai.
- 20 Other masks which are probably from the same workshop are in Berlin III C 12777, acquired in 1901; British Museum 1953. Af.25. 2, acquired in 1953; a janus mask in Bern (inv. no. missing); and a second mask in the Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford 1908.23.4, acquired in 1908. Two masks in the Ethnographic Museum, University of Oslo inv. nos. 32295 and 32296 which are clearly by a single carver are very closely related to the 'Gola' group. They display several unusual depictions, most notably of the ears which are carved as the same 'animalistic' forms as other masks in the 'Gola' group but which are placed low on the face, adjacent to the middle of the jawline.
- 21 This mask constitutes an interesting stylistic link between the Vai and Gola groups. The mouth and ear forms resemble Gola carving, but the face is broader and less clearly demarcated from the rest of the mask than on most Gola pieces. It is, however, defined roughly as a diamond-shape by the shallow excavation of the face, particularly noticeable along the jaw-line.

A mask related to this piece is in the collection of the Commonwealth Institute, numbered in the exhibition of 1971 as IV-V.

- 22 There is a mask very similar to Cat. 42 in Liverpool inv. no. 23-11-1910.27.
- 23 These masks were collected and identified by Warren d'Azevedo, whose fundamental studies of Gola ethnography and aesthetics have been frequently cited.
- 24 Additional museum pieces in this style are in Tervuren 68.45.1; the American Museum of Natural History 90.2.3764A; the Cambridge University Museum 66.162; and in Hamburg 36.57.1.
- 25 Vandi Kwi, a native of Madina, Gawula chiefdom, was apprenticed to Boima Bulè of Tombe chiefdom very near where the Büttikofer mask (Cat. 2) was collected. He said that his patrons came from different ethnic groups and considerable distances to his workshop in Madina. He also said that he carved differently for patrons from different ethnic groups: for Mende patrons the neck rings are higher and two faces are often carved; for Timne patrons he adds a scarification design of parallel lines on the cheek; but for Vai and Gola buyers there is no difference in the carving. (Interview at Madina, 14 Apr 1972, see also Chapter 4 for fuller information about Vandi Kwi).
- 26 There is a very nearly identical mask to Cat. 58 in the American Museum of Natural History inv. no. 17. 160.
- 27 A gonde collected by Hall in Sitia chiefdom, Sherbro Island, in 1937 displays the same placement of the nose. University Museum, Philadelphia 37.22.264, a, b, c.
- 28 Several additional masks which are stylistically related and probably come from the Sherbro region are: another piece from the Volz collection in Bern, S.L. 261; two other masks in Bern whose inventory numbers are missing but which probably also come from the Volz collection; another Ruply collection mask in Bern, S.L. 74; and a mask in Hamburg 19.25.26.
- 29 Another small group of sowei masks in the University Museum, Philadelphia was collected by J.L. Buck among the Temne of Makeni district, adjacent to the Sherbro area, in 1932. A number of the Buck masks display a similar elaboration of decorative motifs and mannered modelling of the face to these Hall collection masks (Cat. 92).
- 30 The third mask in the Wellcome collection in the British Museum, Wellcome no. 191288, is a miniature which was probably used as a house ornament or carried by attendants in Sande

masking performances. It appears to be by the same hand as Cat. 90.

- 31 The somewhat bizarre depictions on these masks make the faces seem more like those of animals than of anthropomorphically conceived beings. I think it extremely unlikely that there is any intention of representing an animal countenance, however. Rather this group of masks probably represents the attempt to represent the non-human and 'fearsome' quality of the sowei. Wright also illustrates a mask by the same hand as Cat. 89 which he wrongly identifies as a Poro mask. ('Secret societies and fetishism in Sierra Leone', Folk-Lore, 4 [1907], Pl. VIII, fig. 1).

Chapter 8. The Style Grouping of Sande Masks (II): The Mende

The major group of people who use Sande masks, both demographically and territorially, are the Mende. Because they live in the interior of Sierra Leone, however, their first contacts with Europeans date from a later period than do those of the coastal Vai, Krim, and Sherbro. British treaty-making missions to the Mende chiefs began in the 1880's and were extended to the eastern or 'upper' Mende in the early 1890's but it was not until after the House-Tax War of 1898 and the building of the railroad in the first years of this century that Europeans began to travel and work among the Mende in any number.

As a result there are fewer old Mende carvings to be found in museum collections than there are examples of the art of the coastal peoples. Furthermore the larger land area and population of the Mende is accompanied by a greater diversity of carving style. Thus the simple provenance 'Mende' attached to a few old museum pieces does not advance the identification of specific regional style groups very far, and old Mende carvings are rarely documented more precisely. For these reasons the procedure adopted in Chapter 7 will be reversed in discussing the Sande masks of the Mende. Style groups will be identified primarily on the basis of the field survey which was carried out, and museum material will then be related to these groups wherever possible.

As has been mentioned, the Mende are divided into three dialect

groups which are also distinguished by certain cultural features and historical traditions peculiar to each.¹ The boundaries of these dialect groups also correspond roughly to those of the six modern administrative districts in which the Mende live; the majority of the western or Kpa-Mende live in Bonthe and Moyamba districts, the central or Sewa Mende live in Bo and Pujehun districts, and the eastern or KÖ-Mende inhabit Kenema and Kailahun districts (see Fig. 2).² It proved both convenient and logical to organize the field-work according to these district divisions and the structuring of the field survey is reflected in the following discussion of style.³ The sowei masks of the western Mende will be discussed first, and their relationship to those of the neighbouring Sherbro and Vai will be examined. In the second section the carving styles of the eastern Mende will be described. Finally, the Sande masks of the central Sewa Mende will be examined as represented primarily by the detailed study which was carried out in the core area of Jaiima-Bongor chiefdom.

The eighty masks documented in Jaiima-Bongor together with a small sample from other chiefdoms in Bo district thus complete the survey of the carving styles of Mende sowei masks. As we have said, the purpose of such a broad survey is to identify regional stylistic tendencies which are of interest primarily as classificatory tools necessary for the location, in time and space, of individual pieces in public and private collections. However, detailed field material from one area also makes possible the investigation of more profound

questions regarding stylistic development. The Jaiima-Bongor masks will be examined not only as examples of the style of the Sewa Mende but also as a case study of the degree and nature of stylistic variation within a single chiefdom. The eighty masks documented in the core area represent the approximate range of carving style with which an individual Mende man or woman will be familiar over his lifetime, although of course no one person will have seen every one of these particular masks and many individuals will have seen others from nearby chiefdoms or more distant areas. In moving from the macrocosm to the microcosm, in abandoning the Olympian perspective of the classifier, it becomes possible to appreciate stylistic differentiation as it is perceived by the carvers and their patrons. Changes in style between old and new masks in use in the same locale, variation within the work of individual carvers, and contrasts introduced by masks of exotic provenance can be examined in order to reconstruct the specific context within which artist and audience make aesthetic judgements. It is in this context that the interaction of traditional conventions, individual creativity, and the pressures of modernization on the stylistic development of a ritual art form can best be understood.

The western Mende: Moyamba and Bonthe Districts

The western or Kpa-Mende border on the Temne to the north, the Sherbro to the west, and the Vai to the south. The field sample from this area was collected in two chiefdoms of Moyamba district

and three chiefdoms of Bonthe district (see Fig. 2). The seventy-seven sowei masks which were documented from the five chiefdoms were distributed as follows. In Moyamba district eleven came from Kaiyamba chiefdom and nineteen from Fakunya chiefdom; in Bonthe district, eighteen came from Banta chiefdom, twenty-two from Imperri chiefdom, and seven from Jong chiefdom.

Because of the geographical proximity and recent intermingling of the ethnic groups in the area it is not surprising to find that the sample contains a number of old masks which are closely linked to the Sherbro pieces discussed in the preceding chapter.⁴ Many of the masks in the Volz collection were in fact acquired, it will be remembered, at Sumbuya in Bonthe district, a town which is now Mende but which was then on the border between Mende and Sherbro territory. Hall, thirty years later, formed part of his collection of Sherbro masks in the environs of Shenge in Moyamba District which is only about thirty miles from Kaiyamba chiefdom. A mask from Imperri chiefdom which probably dates from the turn of the century (Cat. 93) displays the triangular facial concavity and full, rhythmically related curves of forehead and jaw which is seen on many of the older masks from Sherbro Island (see Cat. 58, for example). Similarly, two other old sowei masks from Imperri chiefdom bear a close resemblance to two masks in the Hall collection which were acquired on Sherbro Island. A mask from the town of Tiso (Cat. 94) has the same rather eccentric representation of the eyes, set at a sharp slant, similar depictions of the other facial

features, and the same overall proportions as a Hall collection mask in the Brooklyn Museum (Cat. 84). Another mask from Tiso (Cat. 95) closely resembles a Janus-mask from the Hall collection (Cat. 85) in face shape, depiction of eye, nose, and ear and in decorative elements of the coiffure and neck rings. Indeed, the resemblances are so close in both pairs of masks that they might well be products of the same two carvers.⁵ In all likelihood the two field examples are the work of Sherbro carvers, as they resemble Sherbro masks more closely than they do other pieces from Imperri chiefdom.⁶

Even more significant evidence of the stylistic links between Sherbro Island and Imperri chiefdom is provided by one of Hall's field photographs showing two fully costumed sowaisia from Sherbro Island (Cat. 96).⁷ The sowei on the left wears a mask which appears to be nearly identical with another mask from Imperri chiefdom (Cat. 97). The Imperri mask is not only stylistically consistent with the examples from Sherbro Island and Imperri chiefdom discussed above but in several details it is also typical of many of the masks documented in Bonthe and Moyamba districts. The depiction of the eye in Cat. 97 is found on many masks in the sample: it is shown as an almond shape bisected horizontally by the indentation of the forehead, with a curved seeing-slit carved inside the lower half of the oval and the upper half positioned very economically to suggest both the upper portion of the eye and the eyebrow. On a number of other pieces a variation of this depiction is introduced in which the eyebrow is shown more graphically (Cat. 98). The coiffure of

Cat. 97 is an even more commonly seen feature of masks in the region. The hair is arranged into four lobes or 'buns' which are gathered into small tufts at the lower ends. Nearly all the masks in the sample from Bonthe and Moyamba districts display lobed hair-styles like this or with slight variations. On some masks the hair is divided into more than four buns and on others the buns are separated by one or more plaits. The ends of the plaits and buns may be drawn up so that they project above the rest of the coiffure in little pinnacles; they may be twined together horizontally along the sides; they may extend out or downwards; or several of these modes may be combined in the same coiffure (Cat. 99). Although these modifications give the masks considerable individuality of appearance they are in fact all variations on one basic hair-style.⁸ Of the seventy-seven masks in the sample from Bonthe and Moyamba districts all but nine display one variation or another of the basic hair arrangement. Most of the remaining nine exceptions date from the turn of the century (Cat. 93, 100), and it therefore appears that the carvers of the region have chosen to reflect the changes in feminine hair fashions which occurred early in this century rather than continuing to represent the out-moded ridged style.⁹

Another stylistic feature displayed by Cat. 97 which is typical of many sowei masks from Bonthe and Moyamba districts is the sculptural articulation of the cheeks and chin. Indeed the emphasis on the cheek contour can become so pronounced that on several rather eccentric masks from the region the contour of the cheek

becomes the lower edge of the face, and the mouth is carved on one of the neck rings (Cat. 101). The representation of the mouth, too, is rather prominent on masks from this region and its expressive possibilities are more thoroughly exploited than on masks of the neighbouring Vai and Gola. Lips are usually fully modelled and on many masks they appear to be pursed, pouting, or even smiling (Cat. 98, 99). Decorative scarification is also extremely popular. The most common design is ngaya maki-- three or four parallel vertical lines placed on each cheek. Three short straight lines radiating out from the corners of the eyes are also frequently found, as are small 'X' shapes on the cheeks. Occasionally a single or double row of small raised squares or lines is carved across the forehead, and there is one example in the sample of a chevron motif carved on the cheeks. Intricacy in the carving of the neck rings is another popular decorative accent (Cat. 102). Applied gold and silver ornament is not as common among the western Mende as among the Vai, although there are a few examples (Cat. 102, forehead).¹⁰ Perhaps the most striking iconographic feature of masks from this area, however, is one of omission. The carved representations of medicinal horns and Moslem amulets which are so commonly included on Sande masks from other areas are rarely found on the masks currently in use in Moyamba and Bonthe districts. Real amulets are of course attached to the masks when they are worn, but they are not often depicted as decorative or symbolic motifs.

The newer masks in the sample are stylistically consistent with

those discussed above in their basic proportions and handling of the forms of the head and face. The lobed arrangement of the hair, the decorative use of scarification, the articulation of the contours of cheek and chin, and the expressive quality of the mouth continue to characterize recently carved masks. In addition to these continuities, however, the more recent pieces display several new and somewhat contradictory stylistic tendencies toward increased naturalism and elaboration on the one hand, and toward a rather crude simplification on the other.

The work of two local carvers, Pa Toma of Banta chiefdom (Cat. 103, 104) and Foday Ibrahim Margai of Fakunya chiefdom (Cat. 105) displays the tendency toward proliferation of decorative motifs, particularly on the superstructure of the mask.¹¹ Carved animals, small figures, bands of decorative medallions (kölölewengoi) and other ornaments are added to the coiffures. This trend toward increased complexity arises from the high value placed on displays of virtuoso carving, and at the same time seems to be a logical extension of the interest in decorative detail displayed by older masks from the western Mende area. The decorative impulse displayed by the treatment of the surfaces of many sowei masks from the region can amount at times to a horror vacui. Relative to other style groups of sowei masks the Kpa-Mende artists represent the facial features with considerable descriptive detail; the carver subdivides the surface of the face into compartments by delineating the cheeks and chin, and then fills up these compartments with scarification.

The coiffure is usually rendered with painstaking detail and even the neck rings are elaborated by additional bands of carved decoration (Cat. 102). From another perspective the carver's effort to describe fully and to render the detailed appearance of the female head and neck can be seen as an impulse toward naturalism. This interpretation is supported by the preference which carvers in the region have long shown for depicting the actual hair-styles worn by Mende women rather than the archaic coiffures still reproduced by many carvers in other regions. The lively expression which many of the masks display, resulting in particular from the rendering of the mouth, adds further to the naturalism of the image (Cat. 99) and presents a marked contrast to the remote aspect which most Vai, Gola, and Sherbro pieces traditionally present.¹²

The opposing tendency in recent carving toward a facile simplification is exemplified by the work of a carver active in recent years in Bonthe district. In his work the basic stylistic traits of the region have been reduced to a formulaic rendering of facial features and neck rings which is repeated almost without change on all his masks in the sample. The representation of the coiffure and neck rings is simplified, and variation is introduced only in the particular combination of scarification designs used on each mask and in the minor changes made in the disposition of the hair buns (Cat. 106).¹³ A similar repetitiveness and degeneration in quality can be seen in new masks by several other carvers included in the field survey which are also stylistically closely related to

Cat. 106. It seems reasonable to attribute the trend toward simplification which these masks demonstrate to the effects of modernization on the economic context of traditional art production. As researchers in Sierra Leone and other parts of Africa have observed, the modern carver has a much wider market for his work than his predecessors, and it is therefore to his advantage to work quickly.¹⁴ As a result less care is lavished on the carving of details and, as we have seen, there is a tendency to satisfy the need for variation by a mechanical recombination of formulaic elements rather than by the creation of a truly individual sculpture through imaginative innovation. The work of carvers such as Pa Toma and Foday Ibrahim Margai with its impulse toward increased ornamentation and complexity seems a more organic evolution of the stylistic characteristics of older masks from the western Mende region than the more numerous modern examples of the cruder more repetitive mode.

There are a number of masks in the sample which were imported from other parts of the Sande region and which display stylistic features and motifs unlike those of indigenous carvings. In three cases masks which were bought in Kailahun, Kenema, and Bo can easily be identified as works of carvers from the eastern Mende region.¹⁵ Two other masks in two different villages in Kaiyamba chiefdom are more puzzling. Both are janus-faced masks with diamond shaped faces and schematically represented features; one has incised decorative patterns reminiscent of the Gola style group described in the previous chapter, while the other displays a fuller, more

three-dimensional modelling. Both probably date to about 1920 or 1930 and are evidence of a long-standing willingness to accept quite different representations of the image of the sowei from those which were current in the region.¹⁶

Several masks in museum collections can be related to the field sample from the western Mende area. A mask presented to the Liverpool museum in 1905 is one of the few Mende pieces which bears an exact provenance (Cat. 107).¹⁷ The mask, from the town of Moyamba, displays a simplicity of design, old-fashioned ridged hair-style, and depiction of mouth and eye forms similar to the oldest masks in the field sample (see Cat. 98, 100). A mask sold to the Brighton museum by Alldridge from 'Mendiland' (Cat. 108) and another he sold to the British Museum (Cat. 109), as well as a third mask in the Museum of Primitive Art, New York (Cat. 110) are reminiscent of the older Sherbro-related masks from Bonthe district, such as Cat. 93. The high forehead and gentle transition to the concavity of the face on two of the museum pieces, as well as the proportions and the placement of mouth and neck rings all link the pieces stylistically.

A mask in Philadelphia (Cat. 111) is even more closely related to one of the field examples. The representation of the neck rings and facial features and the overall proportions are so similar to those of Cat. 95, as well as to the related Hall collection mask (Cat. 96, left) that the three are almost certainly the work of the same carver. The group is particularly interesting because Cat. 111 displays the four-lobed coiffure while the other two masks by the

carver are among the few masks in the sample to exhibit the ridged hair-style showing that the same carver was, at that period, accustomed to representing both hairdos. Another mask in the British Museum (Cat. 112), has a near twin amongst the masks in the sample (Cat. 99); the two are so nearly identical that only the difference in facial scarification makes it possible to tell them apart.

The eastern Mende: Kenema and Kailahun Districts

The eastern Mende are bordered by the Kono to the north, the Kissi to the east and the Bandi and Gola to the southeast and south. A sample of sixty-two sowei masks was documented, the majority of which came from Kenema district (see Fig. 2). Fieldwork was carried out in four chiefdoms amongst which the numbers of masks were distributed as follows. In Kenema district eleven were documented in Kandu-Leppiama chiefdom, eighteen in Small Bo chiefdom, and nineteen in Nongowa chiefdom. In Kailahun district fourteen were documented in Luawa chiefdom.¹⁸

Like the older masks from Bonthe and Moyamba districts, the oldest masks in the sample from the eastern region all display the old-fashioned ridged coiffure with parallel combs of hair running from front to back. The handling of the volumes of the head, however, presents a considerable stylistic contrast to the western Mende examples. One very old mask from Nongowa chiefdom is typical (Cat. 113); the length of the face is compressed, particularly the lower half, and the width rather than the height of the face is

emphasized by the horizontal indentation which is carved at the level of the eyes. The head is conceived as a single volume whose continuous rounded surface is broken only by this crease; the features of the face are carved in low relief and, seen in profile, barely interrupt the continuous line of forehead, chin (hidden by the costume in the photograph), and neck rings. The depiction of the features is simplified and economical, and the chief decorative accents occur in the coiffure, into which are incorporated representations of small amulets and cowrie shells.

Another old mask from Nongowa chiefdom displays the same almost unbroken line in profile and even fuller, more rounded volumes in the modelling of the head (Cat. 114). In addition to the original stylizations of nose and mouth on this mask, an equally unusual motif has been incorporated into the back of the head; the projecting flanges surrounding the upper two neck rings appear to be an exaggerated variant of neck ring representations sometimes seen on the back of other sowel masks in the area.¹⁹

Several more recent masks probably carved by a single artist display a similar handling of form and also represent the old-fashioned hair-style (Cat. 115, 116 and 117). The carver of these pieces was active between the 1930's and 1950's and was probably named Sowo Gande, from Foindu in Lower Bambara chiefdom.²⁰ The continuity of style and iconography with older masks is striking. This continuity is seen especially in the simplicity of design which characterizes Sowo Gande's masks. The restrained yet innovative

stylizations of the features lend an impression of great clarity and control to his work which is consistent with the dignity and solemnity of the image of the sowei in older Mende masks but which is often trivialized by the increased decorative detail that has become increasingly popular in this century.

Another pair of masks by a single hand in the sample which displays a number of variations in the treatment of the face and features is represented by Cat. 118. The carver's work is characterized by considerable wit and originality: the 'punning' humor of the phallic forms in the coiffure in the ngovolawa style has already been noted.²¹ In his depiction of the eye forms the carver has used the same cowrie shell motif that decorates the upper neck ring to create another visual 'pun'.²²

A group of three masks carved in the late 1940's or early 1950's is exemplified by Cat. 119. The three, probably also the work of a single artist, display the stylistic traits seen on older masks from Kenema district. The compression of the lower part of the face and the rendering of the forms of eye, ear, and mouth, as well as the ridged hair-style displayed by other masks by the carver clearly derive from older pieces such as Cat. 113.²³ However, an interesting shift in emphasis can be seen on these newer masks. The same care is not taken over the representation of the facial features, which are shown in the same way on the three masks. On the other hand, there has been an increase in the iconographic elaboration of the upper part of the mask to which he has added, in Cat. 119, a band

of kölölewengoi and a second small head. Masks carved in the past thirty years frequently incorporate such complex motifs; birds, animals, small figures, and kölölewengoi are commonly seen. The trend toward an increasingly complex superstructure is similar to the development noted in the western Mende area, although it appears to be of somewhat more recent date in the eastern region. Another parallel with the western Mende can also be drawn in the increasing popularity of the lobed arrangement of the hair to be seen on newer eastern Mende masks. Although the archaic ridged hairstyle has been retained longer in the eastern region, the lobed style is commonly represented on masks carved in the past thirty or forty years.

These recent trends are displayed by three groups of stylistically interrelated masks from Kenema and Kailahun districts carved in the past three or four decades. Eight masks by a carver called Nyandewa who has been active during the past twenty-five years are included in the sample.²⁴ Six of his masks were documented in Kailahun district, two in Kenema district, and one each among the Sierra Leone Vai and in Moyamba district (Cat. 120 and 121). The faces on Nyandewa's masks are carved according to an unvarying formula; the eyes are rendered as an almond shape pierced across the middle by a slit for seeing and edged by an additional incised border. Hatched eyebrows are carved above the eyes, and on some masks eyelashes, too, are added. Lips and nose are relatively naturalistically modelled and the traditional scarification design of ngaya maki is carved on the cheeks. The coiffure on all of Nyandewa's masks in

the survey is styled in varying arrangements of plaits and buns crowned by a series of different objects: birds, small animals, amulets, and horns are common, and there is one example of a janus mask and another which has six small heads on top.²⁵ It is in the overall proportions and modelling of the face, however, that the eastern Mende stylistic inheritance can chiefly be seen: the face length is short and compressed and emphasis is given to the width of the face by the horizontal indentation at the level of the eyes.

Another group of ten closely interrelated masks is included in the survey. The two stylistic subdivisions of this group are represented by Cat. 122 and 123. The total group consists of five masks from Kailahun district, three from Kenema district, one from Bonthe district and one from Moyamba district. The close stylistic similarities displayed by these masks may represent different stages in the work of one carver, or the work of two or more associated carvers.²⁶ Like the other masks from the eastern Mende region the group is characterized by compression of the face length, a horizontal accent given by a crease across the eyes and bridge of the nose, low relief in the carving of the features, and a full, rounded handling of the volume of the head. Three of the masks, similar to Cat. 122, are nearly identical in the depiction of the facial features and display a close resemblance to several older western Mende masks such as Cat. 98 in the forms of eye and mouth. The upper edge of the eye has a border which could be interpreted either as a representation of eyelashes or of eyebrows; as a result

of this ambiguity the eyes can be read either as open or downcast. Masks by this carver are often characterized by the retention of the ridged hair-style although, as in other recent Mende masks, a variety of complex motifs such as fish, animals, kölölewengoi, horns, amulets, and even small drums are added. The remaining masks in the group, as is seen in Cat. 123, are differentiated from the others chiefly by the form of the eye, which is narrower and slit across the middle rather than around the lower edge, and by the prominent addition of scarification on the cheeks. The carver of these related masks also favors the lobed type of coiffure shown in Cat. 123 or a simpler coiffure topped by a European style crown.

A third group of five recent masks in the sample which were carved in the past twenty-five years seem to be the products of another carver. The masks are stylistically related to the work of Nyandewa with several small but constant variations. The carver uses both the ridged and lobed coiffures; he carves a scarification motif at the corners of the eyes as well as on the cheeks; and his masks display a higher forehead and a characteristic pursing of the mouth (Cat. 124).²⁷ One rather unusual mask by this carver (Cat. 125) displays deep creases across the cheeks and around the chin which are reminiscent of western Mende examples such as Cat. 97 and 101, as well as an embellishment of inlaid white European beads which is unique in the sample.

A number of other carvers active in the eastern region in recent years are represented in the survey. Their masks display similar

basic stylistic traits to the masks described above, as well as minor differences in the modelling and proportions of the face and the rendering of the features. There are five masks by a carver represented by Cat. 126, two of which are depicted with carved spectacles (not illustrated).²⁸ Three other masks in the sample by another carver are represented by Cat. 127, a mask which is outstanding for the detail and refinement of its carving. When this mask, which is probably about 25 years old, is compared to the older masks by Sowo Gande in use in Kenema district (Cat. 114-116) the tendency of stylistic development in the eastern region can be clearly seen. The older masks are also distinguished by the decorative and refined rendering of the coiffure. But where the modern carver has faithfully reproduced, strand by strand, the actual arrangement of a woman's hair, the earlier carver's goal is clarity and economy. The greatest contrast is to be seen in the carving of the face. The newer mask is remarkably naturalistic; eyelids, brows, lips, nostrils, and the folds of the ear are shown in detail and with considerable anatomical accuracy. The older masks, as we have said, make use of fewer lines, flatter modelling, and a rigid geometric alignment of the features. The resultant images of the sowei are very different. In the newer mask the face of a beautiful young woman is portrayed, reserved yet very human, while the older masks present an image which is more withdrawn, forceful, and solemn, and is less identifiable with an individual human being. This comparison becomes significant in the light of the popularity which

the carvers of both the new and older masks have enjoyed. Sowogande's great fame has already been mentioned and the newer masks evoke equal enthusiasm today. The photographs of sowei masks used in the informal poll of Mende taste which was conducted during field-work included one of a mask very similar to Cat. 127 and probably by the same carver (Cat. 224). This mask was invariably the favorite of informants, who exclaimed over the detail and elaboration of the coiffure, its high polish (due to European paint), and the beauty of the face.²⁹

A number of other old masks in the sample from the eastern region were imported from other parts of Mendeland. Several were carved by artists from Bo district and will be discussed in conjunction with the masks of the Sewa Mende. Other pieces came from more distant areas, such as a mask which was bought in Kpanga Krim chiefdom on the coast by a man who had gone to trade in fish, while other masks were bought from itinerant carvers from equally distant areas. The importation of masks from other style regions is a factor in stylistic development which has undoubtedly influenced particular innovations which have occurred in the eastern region, although more detailed knowledge is needed in order to trace specific incidences of diffusion.

Several masks illustrated in early publications on the Mende are closely related to the older masks in the field sample. Alldridge photographed an 'upper Mende' sowei (Cat. 128) whose mask displays the nearly continuous rounded surface, simple representation

of the facial features, low relief of carving, and ridged hair-style of masks such as Cat. 113. Eberl-Elber illustrates a mask which he saw being carved at Semabu in Kenema district which also displays these traits.³⁰ The mask Eberl-Elber illustrates also has the same exaggerated motif at the back as Cat. 114, a highly mannered form that can probably be read as a hypertrophic depiction of neck rings.

Another mask illustrated by Eberl-Elber and identified by him as Kissi is clearly by the same carver as the group of masks linked with Cat. 123, and displays the crown motif favored by him.³¹ There are two masks in the British Museum by this same artist, one of which also has a carved crown (Cat. 129) and one whose ridged coiffure is edged by a pair of horns and surmounted by a turtle.³² The carver of Cat. 122 in the field sample whose work is, as we have said, stylistically very closely related to these masks, is also very well represented in museum collections. The museum pieces, like those in the field sample, all include one or more carved animals or small human heads: three include single birds and prominent horns (Cat. 131), one has four birds and a ring of decorative medallions, one depicts fish and lizards, and another two mice and a covered pot (Cat. 130).³³

There is an additional group of masks in museum collections which are related in their proportions and in the basic handling of the coiffure and facial features to the previous group, but which have distinctive stylizations that mark the masks as the products of another carver. The mouth is shown as a raised oval ridge or tube, and the large almond-shaped eye forms extend across almost the

entire width of the face. The forehead is higher and the compression of the lower face greater than in stylistically related groups of masks; the coiffures have varying numbers of ridges ranging from one to eleven and are occasionally surmounted by a simple horn motif, but no other animals or objects are added (Cat. 132, 133).³⁴

Although none of the masks in the field sample appears to be by the same carver, the exact provenance attached to one of the museum pieces allows us to link the group to the Kenema district. This mask, given to the Liverpool museum in 1914, was identified as coming from Blama, Small Bo chiefdom. Because of the early date of the mask and its basic stylistic conformity with the other masks in the eastern Mende field sample, this provenance firmly identifies the group as eastern Mende in style, as well as belonging to an earlier period than the masks associated with Cat. 129 and 130. The simplicity of the upper part of the masks in the Blama group in comparison with the stylistically related masks carved about twenty-five years later and the more naturalistic modelling of facial features in the later group are further evidence of the trends toward increased iconographic complexity and naturalism in the eastern Mende region which have already been described.³⁵

Jaiima-Bongor Chiefdom and Bo District

Jaiima-Bongor chiefdom lies in the geographic centre of Mendeland and in the heart of the Sewa Mende region (see Fig. 2). With its land area of 150 square miles and population of 16,189 it

is a relatively large and densely populated chiefdom.³⁶ As we shall see, the carving traditions of the chiefdom show influences from both the east and the west which have added considerably to the variety and interest of the set of sowei masks from the area.

Of the regions we have been surveying, Jaiima-Bongor lies nearest to the western parts of Kenema district, and borders Small Bo chiefdom in that district to the east. It is not surprising to find, therefore, that among the oldest sowei masks in Jaiima-Bongor there are a number of close stylistic links with eastern Mende carving. Masks stylistically similar to Cat. 134 from Small Bo chiefdom are closely related, for example, to the work of Vandi Sona (Cat. 135-138), a carver active in the first quarter of this century whose work, as we shall see, is closely associated with Jaiima-Bongor. Indeed there is another mask in Small Bo chiefdom, Cat. 135, which can be attributed to Vandi Sona himself on stylistic grounds. Sona's masks are all characterized by the old-fashioned ridged coiffure and display delicately carved patterns of hair-partings on the sides of the head. The face is proportionately large, carved with generous breadth and a high forehead. The facial features are simply but rather naturalistically rendered in comparison to old eastern Mende pieces, such as Cat. 113 and 114, and all but two of the masks (Cat. 135, 137) include realistic carved representations of amulets. The expression of the sowei in each example is serious, the mouth closed and the gaze inward looking or remote. The modelling of the volumes of the head in Vandi Sona's masks also contrasts with

contemporary eastern Mende pieces. The smooth fullness of the head and flat relief of old KÖ-Mende masks is replaced on Vandi's masks with flatter planes in the modelling of the face and a slight hollowing and back-slanting of the lower part of the face against which the features stand out in higher relief.

These two stylistic tendencies, the one confining the face to the rounded surface of the mask cylinder, and the other breaking up the surface with protruding volumes of forehead and chin and contrasting excavation of the lower face, are displayed by three other very old masks from Jaiima-Bongor. One of these (Cat. 139), perhaps the oldest mask in the chiefdom, displays swinging curves of forehead and jawline similar to old masks from the Sherbro region (Cat. 61), although the depictions of the facial features are closely related to masks of the same period from Jaiima-Bongor and adjacent chiefdoms. The other two masks (Cat. 140, 141), unmistakably by the same hand, display to an extreme degree the tendency toward flatness of relief; the close adherence to the cylindrical form of the mask on Cat. 140 is very similar to the approach used by the eastern Mende carver of Cat. 113. The two masks probably date from the early years of the century, and it is interesting to note that two motifs which we usually associate with more recent carving, the lobed hair-style of Cat. 141 and the extreme schematization of the features on both masks, were being used at that early date.

Three other masks dating from the turn of the century which are probably the work of a single carver display further stylistic

contrasts (Cat. 142, 143 and 144). The three are related by their relatively small faces, quadruple neck rings, the placement of the seeing slits under the chin, and by the forms of the facial features. In addition Cat. 142 and 143 display a feature characteristic of the Gola/Vai style group in the way in which the hairline curves around the ear. This stylistic feature is particularly interesting because one of the two masks, Cat. 142, was said to date from the 1890's and to have belonged originally to a Gola woman who brought the original sande medicine to the town from a captured Gola village in Liberia.³⁷ On stylistic grounds it is possible that the mask may have been copied from a Gola piece which was part of the war booty. The carver of Cat. 142 and of Cat. 144 (now used as a gonde) is remembered as coming from Ngolu in Baoma chiefdom which borders Jaiima-Bongor to the northeast.

A number of other masks in the chiefdom are said to date from the turn of the century (Cat. 145-149). One of these (Cat. 145) is of similar proportions to the masks just discussed, and resembles Cat. 144, particularly in profile. Cat. 147, although it also has a relatively high neck with many rings, resembles Sherbro-related masks such as Cat. 107 in its high fully rounded forehead and jutting nose. A further stylistic contrast is displayed by Cat. 146 which is reminiscent, in the fullness of the face and horizontal indentation at eye level, of eastern Mende masks, yet displays a similar naturalism in the forms of the facial features to Vandi Sona's masks. Cat. 148 and 149 are both former sowei masks now used as gonde. In

its modelling of the volumes of the face and the forms of eye, nose, and mouth, Cat. 148 closely resembles the masks of Vandi Sona, although it is difficult to make a definite attribution because telling details such as the depiction of the ear have been worn away. The other gonde, Cat. 149, resembles Cat. 148 in its proportions and in the placement of the facial features, but the carver has given the mask a particularly vivacious expression through his representation of the mouth and the slight torsion of the features, which make the sowei look as though she is speaking. This expression and the fullness of the cheeks and lower face are not consistent with Sona's known masks and indicate that the mask is the work of another, stylistically related carver.

As a group the oldest of the Jaiima-Bongor masks display considerable variety of carving style, and it is difficult to isolate underlying common factors. Stylistic relationships with both the eastern and western Mende can be seen in individual pieces. To gain a clearer idea of the stylistic traits prevalent in Jaiima-Bongor in the first half of this century, we must turn to a group of twenty closely related masks in use in the chiefdom. By virtue of numbers alone-- the group represents almost exactly 25% of the total number of masks documented-- the stylistic characteristics of these masks may be taken as representative of a major indigenous carving tradition. As we shall see, many other sowei masks of the same period in the chiefdom display similar forms and proportions although they do not make use of exactly the same stylizations and

mannerisms.

Such specific stylizations are found so consistently among the twenty masks under discussion that the group must certainly be the product of a single workshop. It is possible that a single carver may be responsible, although for reasons which will be discussed below it seems most likely that two carvers or more are involved, possibly a master carver and apprentices who may even have worked on each other's masks and who certainly borrowed ideas from each other.³⁸ The name of Manuwulo is associated with this workshop through a number of attributions made by informants in different villages. He is reported to have lived in Baoma chiefdom to the north of Jaiima-Bongor. Although information about the dates of acquisition of the masks is not precise enough to make possible a reconstruction of the exact chronological relationship of the twenty masks, stylistic analysis combined with the limited information available allows us to subdivide the group of twenty masks into two separate but interrelated sub-groups.

The first group numbers eight masks carved over a period of about 55 years, from about 1905 to about 1960 (Cat. 150-158). Three of the masks, Cat. 155, 156 and 158 are reliably attributed to Manuwulo (or his workshop); one was reported to have been bought about 1935 (Cat. 155), one about 1940 (Cat. 158), and the third about 1960 just before the carver's death (Cat. 156). The three masks could thus represent different periods in one artist's work, and they do have a number of consistent features, notably the rather

wide diamond-shaped face defined by a border in the shape of an inverted 'V' and by the sharply angled jaw line. In the newest mask this jaw line is also given emphasis by a decorative border, and the mouth, placed at the point of the chin on all the masks, is set into this border. On all three masks the ears take the form of a 'C' shaped ridge with a round dot carved in the middle of the open side, and the ears are placed at the lateral points of the diamond-shaped face. The eyes are represented as long horizontal slits set into a crease running from ear to ear, although on Cat. 158 a slightly fuller depiction of the eye is given. The form of the nose is also very similar on the three masks; it is long and slightly flared with a subtle modelling of the nostrils. Three neck rings are visible on each of the masks, one starting behind the ears and two below the chin on Cat. 155 and 156, and only one below the chin on Cat. 158.

These same features are to be found on the other masks in the sub-group. Cat. 154, said to date from about 1906, is very similar to Cat. 155 and displays an identical arrangement of the hair. Only the eye and nose representations vary slightly; the eye forms on Cat. 154 are larger and carved above the horizontal crease, and the nose is narrower. Cat. 153 is said to date from about 1905 as well, and is also very similar to these two with one significant modification: the horizontal crease which characterizes the other three masks is here shortened and does not extend beyond the ridge of the brows. There is in consequence a suggestion of the triangular depression of the lower face which characterizes many of the older

Kpa-Mende and Sherbro masks (see Cat. 73). This triangular depression is in turn more pronounced on two other masks, Cat. 150 and 151, one of which bears the approximate date of 1905 (Cat. 151). Although the altered contours of the face give the masks a quite different appearance, in other respects the resemblances to the Manowulo masks remain strong: the forms of ear, nose and mouth are very close, and the coiffures are nearly identical to those of Cat. 154 and 155. (The hair tufts at the tops of Cat. 150 and 151 have broken off but may well have taken the same 'V' form as those on the two similar masks). The configuration of the neck rings on Cat 151 varies from those of the other masks: two neck rings are carved behind the ears rather than one, as on the other masks, leaving a small triangular space below the ear and jaw. This detail becomes significant because an identical neck treatment on another old mask, together with other resemblances, links it stylistically to this first Manowulo group (Cat. 152).

Cat. 152 is a pivotal mask because it displays a number of equally specific links to a number of other masks in the group. It is related to Cat. 154 by its eye depictions and to Cat. 156 by the ornamental border along the lower half of the face into which the mouth is set. The joined twin curves of the brows are also strongly reminiscent of the heart-shaped face seen on a number of early Sherbro examples (Cat. 72), which is in turn stylistically associated with the concave excavation of the lower face seen on several masks in this first Manowulo group. One other mask in Jalima-Bongor, Cat.

157, is even more closely linked to Cat. 152 through the very similar iconographic motifs and composition of the coiffure. The two masks were reported to have been carved about thirty-five years apart: Cat. 152 dates from about 1903 and Cat. 157 from about 1940. As we have seen, Cat. 156, attributed to Manowulo just before his death in the 1950's, is also closely related to Cat. 157 through the similar treatment of the eyes and to both masks through its use of a border along the jaw line. The most likely explanation for the reappearance of similar decorative and iconographic motifs at such distances in time is that the newer masks represent the work of an apprentice of the carver of the early mask, whose style of representation of the face, though altered, is recognizably derived from that of his teacher, and who has copied motifs displayed by the earlier masks.

The second group of sowei masks connected with the workshop of Manowulo is internally more consistent in the stylistic conventions which are used (Cat. 159-168). The ten masks appear to represent a second 'generation' chronologically within the larger group, as the earliest pieces can be dated to the 1920's (Cat. 159, 163 and 165) and the most recent to the 1950's (Cat. 162, 166 and 168). A mask reliably said to have been carved in 1924 (Cat. 159) constitutes a stylistic link between the two sub-groups; it was authoritatively attributed to Manowulo although it displays a number of distinctive differences from the masks we have been examining. In particular the depiction of the nose with its sharply delineated nostrils is

significant. The eyes, too, are represented more elaborately than in most masks in the first group; only Cat. 158 has a similar depiction. The eyes are carved as narrowed semicircular shapes pierced by a seeing slit in the center of the outlined form and not at the top edge as on a number of masks in the first group. The other masks in this second sub-group are all characterized by eye and nose depictions which are nearly identical. The mouth too is carved in the same way; it is modelled more fully than on masks in the first sub-group and assumes a pursed expression. On some masks the representation of the eye is further elaborated; the near almond shape of the eye form becomes slightly convex and, on a number of examples, a continuous double-curved brow is added. A scarification pattern of three short lines at the corners of the eyes is also frequently added. Two of the masks also display an unusual scarification design on the forehead consisting of an incised diamond with a cross in the middle (Cat. 162, 166). Two other masks have configurations of paired horns and amulets which are very similar to those of Cat. 152 and 157 in the first sub-group (Cat. 160, 168). Others display four-lobed coiffures which resemble, in basic arrangement, those of masks in the first group like Cat. 151, but which omit the small mounds of hair which crown the coiffures on those masks. Instead Cat. 163 - 165 and Cat. 167 have coiffures which are less 'bouffant', with intricate, clearly depicted patterns of plaiting. The neck rings on many masks of the second sub-group display another characteristic decorative accent in the small ridges

which are alternated with the larger rings (Cat. 163-166). The carver of these masks was also rather more innovative in the arrangements of the hair; Cat. 162 is the only example of the old-fashioned ridged coiffure in the two sub-groups. Cat. 161 displays a rather 'modern' arrangement of the hair unique among the masks; hair bows have been added to the coiffure of Cat. 163, and Cat. 166 depicts the rather unusual ngovolawa style.³⁹

The many similarities both within and between the two sub-groups show without doubt that the twenty masks belong to a single 'school' of sowei carving. Once the masks belonging to the group have been assembled through the identification of stylistic similarities, however, it is the contrasts among the masks rather than the resemblances which prove most interesting. Within the Manowulo workshop group of masks, as among the older masks from Jaiima-Bongor by different carvers, influences can be detected from both the eastern and the western Mende carving traditions. The direction of change seems to be away from the modelling of the face characteristic of the western Kpa-Mende and Sherbro which is seen on early Manowulo pieces (Cat. 151) toward a more continuous convexity of the surface typical of eastern Mende masks (Cat. 156), although there is one later mask which displays the triangular concavity of the lower face typical of the western Mende (Cat. 158).⁴⁰ The masks of the second sub-group, of more recent date, also display a more naturalistic carving of the facial features and a more detailed rendering of the coiffure, following trends in stylistic development

in this century also seen in the work of other carvers.

Two masks carved in the last decade display a very strong relationship to the workshop of Manowulo in the depictions of facial features and coiffures, although their newness and less refined carving (in comparison to other products of the workshop) make it unlikely that they were made by the same carvers as the older masks (Cat. 169, 170). The representation of the ear is also different, incorporating a triangular instead of a round form in the open side of the 'C' and the eyebrow ridge has been omitted. The two masks seem to be evidence that the workshop of Manowulo has produced a younger carver or carvers who are carrying on the stylistic tradition embodied in the older group of masks. Another mask, Cat. 171, carved around 1930, displays similar motifs of paired horns and amulets arranged in an almost identical manner to those of Cat. 157. Although the facial features resemble those of the second sub-group of Manowulo masks, the different ear form and the sharply defined excavation of the face make it likely that this mask was carved by a different artist who had contact with the Manowulo oeuvre.

Two masks carved in the early 1940's (Cat. 172, 173) are distinctive because of the extreme flatness of the relief in the carving of the face, and they are probably the work of a single carver. The depiction of the eyes and coiffure are related to those of the second Manowulo group, which points to the authorship of another carver who had contact with the Manowulo workshop. At the same time the schematization and originality of the representation

of the facial features recall those on another unusual old pair of masks in the chiefdom, Cat. 140 and 141.

There is another group of closely interrelated though less aesthetically satisfying masks from Jaiima-Bongor which appear to be contemporary with many pieces in the Manowulo group. These thirteen masks, to which no carver's name can be attached, were carved between about 1920 and 1940 (Cat. 174-186). There are general similarities with the Manowulo workshop; similar coiffures are depicted, the representations of ears and mouths are closely related, as are the overall proportions of face, neck rings, and coiffure, although the rendering is less refined. Furthermore, other specific details are consistently handled differently, justifying the assumption that another carver or workshop was responsible. The ears are smaller and placed further back on the head and the hairline is rounded rather than V-shaped, so that the face is no longer defined as a diamond shape. The volume of the forehead is more rounded, the chin thrusts forward more sharply, the nose is shorter and the distance between it and the mouth is lengthened. Most noticeably, a number of the masks display a highly individual treatment of the eyes; while on some masks the eyes are shown as oval forms congruent with the indented surface of the eye sockets, on others they are depicted as convex ovals ornamented with incised lines. The double curves of the eyebrows are also echoed by concentric grooves carved between the brow and the eye (Cat. 176-178 and 184-186). This representation of the eyes may constitute a further elaboration of the eye and brow

depiction in the second sub-group of Manowulo masks, for one mask which in all other respects is consistent with the stylistic traits of the group under discussion displays the typical eye form of the second Manowulo mask group (Cat. 175).

The coiffures of the thirteen masks are all arranged into buns and plaits generally terminating in small finials on the top of the head or in plaits drawn together horizontally along the sides of the head. On three of the masks, however, (Cat. 184-186) these plaits hang straight down in a rather unusual configuration. Indeed the evolution of this motif can be clearly traced on the three masks; on Cat. 184 the plaits hang down just to the ear, while on the other two masks they have been extended down to the base of the neck, dramatically changing the overall appearance of the masks. There is also, on Cat. 184, a row of small squarish forms along the sides of the mask which evolve into the row of small knobs in the same position on the other two masks. Scarification patterns are also prominent on these three masks, as they are on the other related pieces. A double row of small raised squares across the forehead is very common, and triple lines at the eye corners are also frequently depicted.

Three masks carved in the 1960's are stylistically related to this group through the depiction of the facial features and coiffures (Cat. 187-189). The convex eye form and line of profile resemble those on masks such as Cat. 178, and the coiffure of Cat. 188 is quite similar to that of Cat. 185. The three masks also

introduce an innovation in the prominent modelling of cheeks and chin which is reminiscent of western Mende masks. The carver of the three pieces thus displays an eclecticism which is typical of many contemporary masks.⁴¹

Many of the other newer masks in Jaiima-Bongor were bought from itinerant carvers and traders, and masks like them are to be found elsewhere in Bo district and farther afield. Five masks can be identified as the work of the carver of Cat. 126 (Cat. 190-194).⁴² Three others, in their crudity of carving, lack of facial expressiveness, and impoverishment of decorative detail are examples of the degeneration in the quality of many recently carved sowei masks (Cat. 195-197).⁴³

Not all the work being done by contemporary carvers suffers from the effects of haste and repetitiveness, as indeed the survey of the eastern and western regions showed. In Jaiima-Bongor chiefdom a standard of refinement equal to that of the older masks is displayed by seven soweisia carved within the past twenty years by Ansumana Sona (Cat. 198-205). Ansumana is a son of Vandi Sona, four of whose masks (Cat. 135-138) were discussed above, and a comparison of the small but well documented corpus of masks by the two carvers is very revealing of the direction and process of stylistic change in the chiefdom in this century.⁴⁴ For Ansumana's masks show both a strong 'family likeness' to his father's work and at the same time a number of significant modifications of the older style.

The inheritance of Vandi can be seen in Ansumana's masks in the use of the older ridged hair-style on many of his masks and in

specific decorative patterns used to represent the hair partings. The pattern of hatching, for example, used on Cat. 198 would seem to be based on a pattern used by Vandi on masks such as Cat. 138, and another design of interwoven hatching is seen on both Vandi's Cat. 135 and on Ansumana's Cat. 199.⁴⁵ The projecting curls of hair seen on Cat. 136 by Vandi Sona are also seen on many of Ansumana's masks. The representation of the facial features on Ansumana's masks is also closely related to the depictions used by his father, yet subtle modifications have been introduced. Ansumana shortens the nose and carves the forms of the nostrils; the depiction of the eye is slightly amplified so that the eyelid can be represented, and eyebrows are also added; the lips are more fully modelled and the mouth assumes a more pronounced curve; the forehead is lower and the fullness of the cheeks is rendered where Vandi's masks preserve a slight concavity in the lower half of the face.

All these changes move, of course, in the direction of greater naturalism. But the evolution towards naturalism can be traced not only in the contrast between the work of the father and the son, separated by a period of about forty years, but also within the work of each of the carvers. Within Vandi Sona's oeuvre, as within Ansumana's, there is a stylistic development in this direction. The oldest of Vandi's masks is probably Cat. 137 and in its steeply back-slanted profile, the flatness of the lower face, and the rendering of the forms of nose, ears, mouth, and eyes it is the most schematized of his masks. On other soweisia carved by Vandi certain features

are described more fully; the mouth and ear forms on Cat. 136 and the ear form of Cat. 135 are shown in considerably greater detail.

Ansumana seems to have adopted the more complex rather than the simpler representations contained within his father's work, quite possibly because these more evolved forms were those being used by Vandi during Ansumana's own youth. On early masks by Ansumana such as Cat. 198 the ear form, for example, resembles that of Cat. 135 while on a mask which he was carving in 1972 this form has become even truer to nature, standing away from the head and taking an irregular shape rather than the semicircular form used earlier (Cat. 203). The depiction of nose and mouth follow a similar development away from geometric simplification toward naturalistic description.

The conscious choice involved in this development cannot be doubted. If proof were needed it would be provided by the copy of a mask by his father which had become damaged which Ansumana was commissioned to make (Cat. 204). Ansumana has rendered his father's style very accurately in almost all respects. The greater length of the face and the height of the forehead, and the flatness of the lower part of the face are carefully reproduced. The impassive expression of the mouth and the simplicity of the forms of the features are also well copied. But there are, of course, a few tell-tale details such as the slight alteration in the depictions of the eyes and ears which more closely resemble those of his own masks of the period (Cat. 198) than his father's masks.⁴⁶ Ansumana is clearly capable of carving in the style of his father but the

only forms he has chosen to copy almost unchanged from his father's work when he is working independently are contained in the rendering of the coiffure. Even here, however, he sometimes carves other types of hair-styles similar to those seen on many other recent masks in Jaiima-Bongor and in Kenema district where Ansumana now works (Cat. 201, 203). In his interpretation of the facial expression of the sowei, however, Ansumana like other contemporary carvers has been moving towards an image which is more accessible and communicative and away from the solemnity and reserve of the masks of earlier carvers such as his father. This changing quality of expression is accompanied by the more naturalistic and human depiction of the head and face which gives a portrait-like quality to his masks.⁴⁷ We cannot doubt that this quality is the result of the carver's considered choice and decision which in turn results from the changes which modernization has wrought in the sacral quality of the image of the sowei.

The remaining sowei masks from Jaiima-Bongor, constituting almost a quarter of the total sample, are stylistically related to Kpa- or KÖ-Mende masks and probably come from outside the Sewa Mende region. Seven of these masks resemble eastern Mende examples; two (Cat. 206, 207) are almost certainly by Nyandewa (see Cat. 120 and 121), and one (Cat. 208) is in a closely related style. Two other masks (Cat. 209, 210) closely resemble several masks from Kenema district, possibly from the workshop of Sowo Gande, particularly in their depictions of mouth, nose and ears (see Cat. 119). Another

unusual mask from Jaiima-Bongor (Cat. 211) may also be the work of a carver from Kenema district as there is a mask very much like it in Small Bo chiefdom.⁴⁸ Two other soweisia (Cat. 212, 213) display the deep crease at the eye level and compression of the lower face which characterize many other eastern Mende masks.

Nine masks in Jaiima-Bongor chiefdom are stylistically related to those from the Kpa-Mende and Sherbro regions. Two masks (Cat. 214, and 215) dating from the 1930's are similar enough in many details to be attributed to the same carver as Cat. 98 from Moyamba district. Two masks bought in Jaiima-Bongor from an itinerant carver (Cat. 216, 217) are equally close in style to Cat. 106 from Bonthe district. Another Jaiima-Bongor mask, Cat. 218, was bought by its owner in Kwamebai-Krim chiefdom in Bonthe district and is probably by the same carver as a mask in the sample from Banta Mokelle chiefdom, Bonthe district.⁴⁹ Cat. 219 was bought by its owner's brother at Bonthe on Sherbro Island, and it displays the sharply slanted eyes, high coiffure, and characteristic ear shape seen on other masks from the Sherbro region. Similar stylistic traits are seen on three additional masks bought nearer to Jaiima-Bongor from itinerant carvers (Cat. 220-222), indicating that these too may be Sherbro in origin.

Notes

- 1 Some differences in masking traditions have already been referred to in Chapters 2 and 3. Kenneth Little remarks that the sense which each dialect group has of its own distinctiveness is itself an important aspect of the categorization. (Mende of Sierra Leone, 76).
- 2 Relatively fewer Mende live in Pujehun district, which is also inhabited by the Sierra Leonean Vai and Gola. The field sample from these peoples is discussed in the previous chapter.
- 3 It was considered advisable to approach the Paramount Chiefs initially through the chief administrative officer of each district. The advice of this officer, and of the chiefs, was asked in deciding which chiefdoms to include in the sample. Although a methodical approach is desirable in sampling, this meant at times that arbitrary boundaries were also unavoidably drawn. Thus, in identifying stylistic tendencies with certain districts it is of course understood that neighbouring chiefdoms which happen to lie in a different district will share many of the same stylistic characteristics as those included in the survey.
- 4 Mende influence over the coastal Sherbro and Krim has steadily increased in this century and although surveys undertaken as recently as thirty years ago show Mende territory beginning about twenty miles in from the coast adjacent to Sherbro Island, at the time fieldwork was carried out the inhabitants of this coastal strip spoke and identified themselves as Mende. (See M. McCulloch, Peoples of Sierra Leone (London, 1950), ethnographic map at back).
- 5 Cat. 95 from the field sample has been in use for the past forty years during which period the Hall collection piece has been in a museum. As a result Cat. 95 has developed a patina which gives it quite a different appearance despite the similarity of the carved forms. The pair thus present a neat example of the rough and raw impression museum pieces can give when they have not received the repeated polishing and blackening intended by their makers.
- 6 The coincidence of two masks from the same village bearing such close resemblances to two well documented pieces from Sherbro Island is unique in the sample. The keeper of the masks said that Cat. 94 dates from about 1910 and was bought by her grandfather, and that Cat. 95 dates from about 1930 (which fits well with the apparent newness of the Hall piece collected in 1937). She attributed Cat. 95 to a local carver from Jong

chiefdom, probably wrongly as it does not resemble other masks attributed to the man. If the masks had been bought from an itinerant carver in Imperri chiefdom we could expect to find other pieces in nearby towns by him which does not occur. Therefore it is probable that the masks were purchased on Sherbro Island or elsewhere and imported into the district.

- 7 The photograph is reproduced in Hall's published report, The Sherbro, as Fig. 47 but is reduced in size so that the style of carving of the masks cannot be distinguished. The copy included here as Cat. 96 is a print from the original negative kindly provided by the University Museum, Philadelphia. A list written by Hall on deposit in the Museum identifies it as having been taken at Balolo near Yoni on Sherbro Island.
- 8 See Chapter 5.
- 9 Another possible explanation is that the older ridged style was an innovation copied from the Vai or Mende to the east on whose masks it is much more common. The rarity of the lobed hair-style in the early collections from the Sherbro area, however, inclines me to think that the ridged coiffure was once prevalent among the Kpa-Mende as well.
- 10 Although the custom of applying metal ornament to sowei masks has lost popularity in this century there is one mask in Gbembembu, Fakunya, Moyamba, bought in 1953, which is lavishly adorned with gold ornament. The owner, a man, says that it cost him twenty pounds and that he hires the mask out to Sande officials for Sande society festivals.
- 11 Other masks by Pa Toma are 'Voima', Mofindor, Banta; 'Bondei', Mosenesi, Banta; and a new, unnamed mask at Nyandehum, Imperri.
- 12 It is tempting to speculate on a possible connection between the bias toward naturalism and the conspicuous omission on many of the masks of the usual supernatural motifs of carved amulets and medicines. Together these two traits would seem to point to a somewhat more secularized image of the sowei, if such a term can be applied to a ritual art form.
- 13 Two other masks by this carver are 'Sölè', Rubande, Banta and 'Momoh' from Bisao, Jong. All three were bought from a carver who brought them to these towns for sale. He was identified by one of the owners as Amara from Matagem, Banta, and by another as 'Sam' from Moting, Banta Mokelle. A fourth mask, from Jaiima-Bongor, Bo is illustrated as Cat. 204. It is likely that the confusion over the identity of contemporary carvers is often due to their masks being sold by traders who act as middlemen.

- 14 See Chapter 4.
- 15 'Kpolewa' from Kenge, Imperri, bought at Kenema is the work of the same carver as the group of masks associated with Cat. 119. 'Voima' from Komende, Kaiyamba bought in Gbo chiefdom, Bo district is the work of Nyandewa (see Cat. 117). 'Kake Bobi' from Nguabu, Kaiyamba, bought in Kailahun, is by the same carver as Cat. 118.
- 16 The mask resembling the Gola style group is now used as a gonde at Mbundobu, Kaiyamba but was formerly a sowei. The other mask, 'Jama' from Taninahun Molango, Kaiyamba, has the unusual feature of being painted blue. This was done initially when it began to age but is now regarded as lending the mask distinction which is appropriate to it as it belongs to the chief.
- 17 The mask was presented by Ridyard (see Chapter 1 for discussion of his collecting activity).
- 18 Luawa chiefdom is the easternmost chiefdom in which the Mende live. Fieldwork was also carried out in the neighbouring Kissi chiefdoms of Kissi Teng and Kissi Kama to investigate the diffusion of Sande masking there. Although the Sande society itself has been established for some time only a few towns used sowei masks at the time of the field study and the custom had been adopted and the masks bought from the Mende. (Mr. Tamba E. Juannah, J.P., a Kissi, interviewed in Kangama, Kissi Teng, 1 Nov 1972).
- 19 Another mask, 'Moba', probably by the same hand, is at Vaahun, Nongowa.
- 20 The name Sowo Gande is probably an honorific nickname derived from sowo, 'expert'. Sowo Gande has a very great reputation in Kenema district and parts of Bo district. He is the best known carver in the region and as a result many masks are attributed to him which bear very little stylistic relationship to each other. I base my attribution on three masks in three different villages in Nongowa and Kando-Leppiama chiefdoms which are stylistically very close and which were all attributed to Sowo Gande by their owners. The owners were able to provide detailed information about the places and times of acquisition which were consistent with the generally known details of his life. It is probable that other carvers, possibly students, have made use of the same name. Reinhardt interviewed an elderly carver calling himself Braima Sogande who could, in his younger years have been associated with the maker of Cat. 115 - 117 and whose work, in old age, had greatly deteriorated. ('Mende carvers', 272-275). Cat. 100, from Imperri chiefdom, Bonthe district, is closely related in style to Cat. 115-117 and may be another product of this eastern Mende carver.

- 21 See Chapter 5.
- 22 Another mask by this carver, displaying the same eye representation, 'Moba', from Levuma, Kando-Leppiama, is included in the survey.
- 23 Two other masks by the same hand were documented in the eastern region: 'Nyimi', from Giema, Juawa, Kailahun and 'Mada', from the town of Kenema, Nongowa, but the carver's name was not known. In addition two masks in Jaiima-Bongor chiefdom, (Cat. 209 and 210) may also be the work of this carver.
- 24 The name Nyandewa is probably a nickname as its literal meaning is 'very pretty'.
- 25 Other masks by Nyandewa in Kailahun district are: 'Vonjo', Nyandehun, Luawa; 'Pujè', Ngiyehun, Luawa; 'Sowo Vanja', Mende Kelema, 'Luawa; 'Vanja', Giema, Luawa; 'Ndoli', Nyandehun, Luawa. There is one in Kenema district, 'Gbate', Deima, Kando-Keppiama; one in Moyamba district, 'Voima', Komende, Kaiyamba; and one in Pujehun district, 'Bake', Gon, Soro-Gbema.
- 26 Information about provenance collected from the owners was inconclusive. A number of the masks were attributed to Sowo Gande and it is not clear whether this was due to the widespread fame of the earlier carver whose works are exemplified by Cat. 115-117 or whether another carver has taken the same name, possibly an apprentice.
- 27 Other masks by this carver are 'Fèngè', Waima Hendobu, Nongowa; 'Yunga', Bandajuma, Nongowa; and 'Sipo', Deima, Kando-Leppiama.
- 28 Reinhardt illustrates a mask from Bagbe chiefdom, Bo by the same carver attributed to 'Sogande'. 'Mende carvers', Fig. 43.
- 29 Eberl-Elber illustrates another mask by the same hand, as his Fig. 160, which appears to push the period of his activity back to the 1930's. A fourth mask, nearly identical to Cat. 127 is in the Field Museum, Chicago, inv. no. 210166 and is part of the Fredericks Collection acquired in 1959.
- 30 Eberl-Elber, Figs, 43-45 showing two stages in the carving of the mask.
- 31 Eberl-Elber, Fig. 157.
- 32 British Museum 1938.10.4.13. purchased 1938.

- 33 In addition to the two pieces illustrated there is a related mask in the British Museum 1943.Af.2.15 purchased in 1943; one in the Rietberg Museum, Zurich, R.Af.130; one in the Royal Scottish Museum 1953.343, from the Wellcome Collection; and another in the Kegel-Konietzko Collection, Hamburg, illustrated in Hans Himmelheber, Negerkunst und Negerkünstler (Braunschweig, 1960), 132, Fig. 115.
- 34 Other masks in the group are British Museum 1948.Af.2.5; Liverpool 49-41-24; Cambridge University Museum (inv. no. missing); a mask from the Alan Wurtzburger Collection now in the Baltimore Museum of Art and illustrated in the catalogue of the Wurtzburger Collection (Baltimore, 1958) as no. 12; and a mask on loan to the Art Institute of Chicago from the Milton Hirsch Collection.
- 35 There are several other museum pieces which are stylistically related to the eastern Mende material. A mask in the Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens, Paris 68.5.1, is by the same hand as Cat. 126 and related pieces. An old mask in Liverpool 12.9.10.12 presented by Mr. A.C. Williams per Ridyard, and another nearly identical mask in the Royal Scottish Museum 1949.173 appear to have the same fullness, flat relief, and continuity of surface as many of the older eastern Mende masks although no one mask in the field survey is more closely related. The hair-style of Cat. 116 is very similar to the 'pebbled' arrangement known as konro on the Liverpool piece.
- 36 Sierra Leone Government, Population Census. The population per square mile of Jaiima-Bongor is 108. The chiefdom ranks 45 out of 149 chiefdoms in population. It has seven towns with populations between 500 and 1500.
- 37 See Chapter 6, note 15 for the history of this Telu Sande society chapter.
- 38 It is less likely, though also possible, that the carvers were father and son or sons, because the two stylistically related groups which can be identified both contain a chronological sequence spanning almost the same period of time. As elsewhere, informants in Jaiima-Bongor were fairly reliable with regard to the age of masks although the dates given in most cases must be taken as approximate within five or ten years. Dating was frequently decided after a discussion among a number of informants. Information about the identity of carvers was much less accurate.
- 39 See Cat. 118 from the eastern region for another depiction of the ngovolawa style of hairdressing.

- 40 It is possible that Cat. 158 is a copy by the carver of the second sub-group of Manowulo workshop masks of an earlier mask which has become damaged. See below for an example of such a copy being commissioned from Ansumana Sona.
- 41 Other masks by this carver were documented in Bo town and in Tiso, Imperri, Bonthe. The group contains variation in quality (Cat. 189, for example, is more refined than Cat. 187 and 188) which may possibly be due to special commissions or instructions received from patrons in the case of the better masks.
- 42 See note 28 above and Cat. 126.
- 43 Despite their 'airport art' quality these masks are fully functional ritually and are therefore included in the survey. A mask in the same style as Cat. 195 was documented at Rubande, Banta, Bonthe, and another is in use as a gonde at Levuma, Kando-Leppiama. That the latter example, which is in perfect condition, is seen as suitable to be used as a parody mask implies a judgement on the crudity of the carving on the part of the users. It is hard to imagine a well carved sowei in good condition being put to such a use. e
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- 44 For biographical information about Vandī and Ansumana Sona see Chapter 4.
- 45 There is another mask by Ansumana with a coiffure very nearly identical to Cat. 136 by Vandī Sona in the Religionskundliche Sammlung der Universität Marburg, inv. no. 446.af.251, purchased in 1964 (Cat. 223).
- 46 Another mask in the style of Vandī Sona (Cat. 205) is difficult to attribute. The owner was uninformative about date of acquisition and provenance. The flatness of the profile resembles Ansumana's copy of his father's mask more closely than it does Vandī's own masks, and the slightly smiling mouth, lobed coiffure and eyebrows are not represented on any of the masks by Vandī known to me. However the sample of Vandī's masks is small and his authorship cannot be absolutely ruled out. If the mask is by Ansumana it is closer to Vandī's style than any of his other work and may be another commissioned copy.
- 47 Ansumana's development must, of course, be influenced by his employment at Kenema Forest Industries where he is sometimes commissioned to do portraits of current Sierra Leonean leaders. But the tendencies toward naturalism were well established before he moved away from Jalima-Bongor. (See Chapter 4 and his portrait bust of Chief Foday Kai, Fig. 38).

- 48 The mask, 'Vaaji', from Bandajuma, Small Bo, Kenema, has very similar face shape, proportions, and depictions of facial features, particularly the ear and nose.
- 49 The mask, owned by Boi Wuso of Mondoko, Banta Mokelle, Bonthe had been brought to the carver Pa Toma at Gbangbatoke so that he could copy it.

Conclusions

As we are not of the same appearance so the devils are not.
(Chief Safa, Banda-juma, Nongowa, Kenema. 8 Apr 1972).

Stylistic analysis of Sande masks has shown an overall tendency towards greater naturalism in the depiction of the sowei. The Vai and Gola style groups current at the turn of the century which were geometric and schematized in their forms and austere in aspect are gradually being replaced by the more 'feminine' and naturalistic depictions of the Gola/Vai carving style. Within the Mende region a trend toward increased naturalism is also evident although this development seems more organically related to tendencies already present in Mende masks in use at the beginning of the colonial period.' In the Mende region the increased humanization of the face of the sowei mask occasionally approaches portraiture and may carry with it a desacralization of the representation of the spirit embodied by the masker.

A parallel trend can be observed in iconographic development. The traditional motifs incorporated into the carving of the headpiece suggested powerful magical emanations, wealth, and high social status. The meanings of these traditional motifs have been largely forgotten today, but a range of new motifs has been introduced whose function is explained to be ornamental and whose inclusion in the sowei headpiece is intended to intensify the purely aesthetic experience of the viewer. The audience, furthermore, interprets these

decorative elements as arising from a carver's desire to demonstrate his skill. As we have seen, the traditional role of the Mende carver is mimetic; his ability to copy plastic form accurately enables him to evoke and reproduce the shape of an insubstantial spirit. And this ability to conjure forth the visible forms of spirits is closely related to the contemporary emphasis on the carver's desire to surprise, delight, and entertain through virtuoso displays of carving.

In these goals the carver is in harmony with the aims of his patrons. As we have seen the sowei masker is a personality of varied qualities-- as varied as the names given to her many individual manifestations. The positive value which the Mende place on variation is in itself a key to understanding the dramatic improvisations of the maskers as well as the innovations in sculptural form made by the carvers. The Mende relish the individuality of the sowei, for the great interest of the sowei masker-- as of other maskers-- lies in the many faces she can assume.

The sowei masker is only one manifestation of sande hale and her primary significance within the ritual process is aesthetic. That this is true is clearly stated in the usual denotation of the sowei masker as ndoli jowei, the 'dancing sowei'. For the masquerade is a response to an aesthetic impulse, an impulse which is itself a component of ritual symbolism but which cannot ultimately be explained by the purely structural analysis of ritual. The dance, not the plastic art form, is the rationale for the existence of the masker. This is what the analysis of the Mende mask names and their

'definitions' tells us, and if we really listen to these explanations we cannot doubt the primacy of the performance of the masker in the aesthetic experience of the audience. This is why headpieces of inferior quality can be used alongside the products of accomplished artists and why, too, however regrettable and inevitable has been the general decline in quality in recent Mende carving, the sowei masquerade remains a flourishing and vital art form with a secure place in modern Mende life.

Appendix:1 'Sowei' Mask Names

Note on symbols: When informant's definition coincides with literal meaning no brackets are used. Square brackets are used to indicate definitions which do not agree with literal meanings or for which no literal meaning could be found. The equals sign indicates literal meaning. J.B. means Jaima-Bongor chiefdom.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Approximate Date of Acquisition</u>
Baa Luwa	Don't be afraid	Bonthe	1966
Babè	(1) Nickname of ancestor (2) [Hasn't got a clean heart for anyone]	Pujehum (Gola) Kenema	c. 1925 c. 1950
Bake	Male relative of first owner (Chief, ruled c. 1900)	Pujehum (Vai)	c. 1900
Baki	Son of first owner	Pujehum (Vai)	c. 1920
Balui	Airplane	Bonthe	c. 1925
Bana	Male ancestor [strong-hearted]	J.B., Bo	1943
Binda	Nickname of first owner [not easily scared]	Pujehum (Vai)	c. 1905
Bomo Massaquoi	Male ancestor (1) Male ancestor (2)	Pujehum (Vai) Pujehum (Vai)	1973 c. 1905
Bomu	Dove	Bo	1968
Bona	Husband of first owner	J.B., Bo	c. 1930
Bondei	(1) Family	Bonthe	1966

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Approx. Date</u>
Bondei	(2) Family (3) " (4) "	Bonthe Moyamba Moyamba	1971 c. 1950 1967
Bondo	[hunter, Gola]	Pujehum (Gola)	c. 1915
Boni	Brother of first owner	Bonthe	c. 1910
Bowu	Male ancestor	Liberia (Vai)	?
Boya	Brother of first owner	J.B., Bo	1924
Deyiya	Husband of owner	Bonthe	c. 1945
Dèmè	(1) male nickname [mighty person] (2) Brother of first owner	Pujehun (Gola) J.B., Bo	c. 1925 c. 1952
Dugba	(1) Cannon (2) " (3) "[no mask can defeat her in dancing]	J.B., Bo Kenema Bo	c. 1925 c. 1955 c. 1940
Gaaso	Male ancestor	J.B., Bo	c. 1920
Gaima	[secret]	Moyamba	c. 1925
Gayema	Confess [you must confess if you break Sande rules]	J.B., Bo	c. 1935
Gbake	[carry or hold like a baby] <u>kpaki</u> = shoulder, upper arm	Pujehum (Vai)	c. 1880
Gbamboi	[fish found in big rivers - mask wears earrings in the form of a fish]	J.B., Bo	c. 1918

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Approx. Date</u>
Gbana	[she knows how to dance a lot]	Kenema	c. 1940
Gbango	[every troublesome person] = loud	Kenema	c. 1940
Gbate	(1) Wealth (2) Made well, wealth (3) " " " (4) Mask is pretty, gets more money than the others (5) Rich (6) Adds to riches of owner (7) " " " " (8) When she dances she gets a lot of money	Gbangema, J.B. Ngodi, J.B. Kpitima, J.B. Mano, J.B. Madina, J.B. Doobu, J.B. Kailahun Moyamba	1966 1968 1968 c. 1946 1964 c. 1920 ? 1967
Gbema	[connection]	J.B., Bo	c. 1930
Gbembo	nickname [to defend yourself]	Moyamba	c. 1935
Gbende	Clever, tricky (from folk-tale character); warrior nickname	J.B., Bo	c. 1940
Gbendi	Brother-in-law of owner	J.B., Bo	1966
Gbenge	(1) Husband of first owner (2) Son of first owner	J.B., Bo J.B., Bo	1957 c. 1940
Gbindi	Husband of first owner	Pujehun (Goia)	c. 1915
Gbuawèi	Sudden appearance [you don't know where she comes from]	Kenema	1971
Gbujahun	Male ancestor	Bonthe	c. 1910
Gbujaon	First owner	J.B., Bo	c. 1940

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Approx. Date</u>
Gbundè	Nickname of owner [treat roughly]	Kailahun	1967
Gombla	First owner	J.B., Bo	c. 1903
Gomoh	Husband of first owner	J.B., Bo	c. 1900
Götö	Male ancestor	Liberia (Vai)	c. 1905
Fèngè	[she is beautiful] = thin	Kenema	1954
Haku	Husband of first owner, a warrior nickname = tortoise	J.B., Bo	c. 1952
Huanyà	[no meaning]	Kenema	c. 1955
Jaagba	[she dances well] <u>jaa</u> = Sande dance	Bonthe	c. 1960
Jaaju	[strong dancer] <u>jaa</u> = Sande dance	Kenema	c. 1930
Jama	Male ancestor, a chief (1) Male ancestor (2)	Moyamba Pujehun (Vai)	c. 1915 c. 1905
Jangua	Male ancestor	Liberia (Vai)	c. 1920
Jebe	Sister of owner	J.B., Bo	1968
Jebo	(1) Male ancestor, nickname (2) [name came in dream, she really came to dance] (3) [funny nickname] (4) name of owner (a man)* (5) named after owner's nephew	J.B., Bo J.B., Bo Kailahun Bonthe Bonthe	c. 1915 1964 1971 1968 1969
Jegbo	[dances well]	Kenema	c. 1895

* Mask not yet consecrated or 'initiated' as a true sowei.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Approx. Date</u>
Jiso	Male ancestor	Liberia (Vai)	c. 1920
Jomo	[to get money, Gola]	Pujehun (Gola)	c. 1915
Jongouŋ	Very tall	Pujehun (Gola)	c. 1915
Kaba	Named after a famous dancer	Bonthe	c. 1900
Kabo	(1) Nickname, father of first owner (2) Nickname, brother of first owner (3) [means important man or woman]	J.B., Bo J.B., Bo Bonthe	c. 1905 c. 1910 c. 1940
Kakiböbi	Brassiere [because mask is beautiful]	Moyamba	1950
Kango	Husband of first owner	J.B., Bo	c. 1935
Keba	(1) no father, name came in a dream. (from <u>keke</u> ba) (2) Niece of owner	J.B., Bo J.B., Bo	c. 1900 1954
Köbö	[she dances greatly] = traditional dance	Kenema	c. 1955
Koje	Named after owner	Bonthe	c. 1960
Kombe	(1) Female ancestress (2) Cousin of first owner (male)	J.B., Bo Pujehun (Vai)	c. 1900 c. 1905
Kongo	Male ancestor, Warrior nickname	J.B., Bo	c. 1925
Koroma	Female ancestress	Moyamba	c. 1950
Kove	Pot	Moyamba	c. 1965
Könjöi	Name of a bad jina [if owner of Könjöi doesn't like you he can play tricks on you]	Moyamba	c. 1955

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Approx. Date</u>
Kpema	[connection] = hide and seek	J.B., Bo	c. 1930
Kpêmbô	[to defend yourself] = answer, to judge	Moyamba	c. 1935
Kpiahu (Gbiahun)	Tall	J.B., Bo	1936
Kpinga	Male ancestor	Liberia (Vai)	c. 1895
Kpolei	[no meaning] = quickly	Bonthe	c. 1935
Kpolewa	Nickname of husband of first owner [means gambler]	Bonthe	c. 1940
Kpotu	Male ancestor	Liberia (Vai)	c. 1880
Kutè	(1) [round] (2) Husband of first owner (3) Male relative of first owner	J.B., Bo Kenema Kenema	1963 c. 1900 c. 1900
Lagbou	Red lips	Bonthe	c. 1925
Lapia	Named after father of owner	Bonthe	1965
Lilo	Nickname of male ancestor meaning strong-hearted (from <u>ndilo</u> = bravery, courage)	Bonthe	1968
Londo	Quiet	Pujehun (Vai)	c. 1945
Luma	(1) Agree (2) "	Kailahun Bonthe	1955 c. 1950
(Muma)	(3) [she agrees to dance] (4) [family harmony] from <u>mu luma</u>	Moyamba Kailahun	1966 1959

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Approx. Date</u>
Mada	Dances a lot = dance to	Kenema	c. 1950
Magbe, Magbe nyanih	(1) Waste time (2) " " [you have a lot to do] (3) " " [you have to follow her whenever you see her] (4) [work spoiled, you leave your work to watch the <u>sowej</u>]	J.B., Bo Kenema Kenema Moyamba	1970 c. 1955 c. 1950 c. 1955
Mage	Grandfather of owner	Bonthe	1965
Magen	Male relative of first owner	Bonthe	c. 1900
Manga	Grandfather of first owner	Bonthe	c. 1900
Manda	(1) Husband of first owner (2) Husband of first owner (this is a replacement with same name)	J.B., Bo Pujehun (Vai)	c. 1940 1973
Mapai	[old-fashioned kind of hairtie]	Bonthe	c. 1930
Mariama	Daughter of owner	Bonthe	1960
Mbambè	Dry rice, harvest (1) " " (2)	J.B., Bo J.B., Bo	c. 1935 1967
Mbando	Sheep's horns, from <u>mbale ndowui</u>	Moyamba	c. 1925
Mbembe	Type of fish net used by women	Pujehun (Vai)	c. 1905
Mbowe	[no meaning] = knife	Pujehun (Gola)	c. 1925
Mènga	Son of first owner	Pujehun (Gola)	c. 1905

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Approx. Date</u>
Momoh	Brother of owner	Bonthe	1965
Möjè	Laughter, from <u>möyè yèlè</u> = smile?	Moyamba	c. 1965
Mundu	[beautiful]	J.B., Bo	c. 1910
Nama	[a blessing]	J.B., Bo	c. 1965
Navo	(1) Money	Telu, J.B.	c. 1906
	(2) [gets a lot of money when she dances]	Nanyahun, J.B.	c. 1935
	(3) Money	Ngobebu, J.B.	c. 1935
	(4) "	Kpitima, J.B.	c. 1900
	(5) [she gets more money than the others]	Buma, J.B.	c. 1920
	(6) Money	Gbangema, J.B.	c. 1915
	(7) "	Hegbema, J.B.	c. 1910
	(8) [everyone likes money]	Kenema	1958
	(9) Money	Bonthe	1965
Ndima	(1) Desirable, favorite	J.B., Bo	c. 1963
	(2) " [you like it best]	Moyamba	c. 1935
	(3) Favorite [beautiful]	Moyamba	c. 1955
	(4) " "	Moyamba	c. 1960
	(5) " [she walks stylishly]	Moyamba	c. 1955
Ndoli	(1) Dancer	Kenema	c. 1905
	(2) "	Kailahun	c. 1950
Ndoma	[drinks a lot, can take drink away from any man because they love her] = beloved, favorite	Moyamba	c. 1965
Nèpö	(1) To encourage, coax [to dance]	Kenema	c. 1942
	(2) " " "	Bo	c. 1950
	(3) " " "	Bonthe	c. 1935

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Approx. Date</u>
Ngabè	Younger sister of owner	Bonthe	c. 1965
Ngamanga	Returning [The Sande cycle always returns after it has ended]	Bonthe	1969
Ngigula	Husband of first owner	J.B., Bo	c. 1962
Ngolia	(1) Male relative of first owner and former Paramount Chief	J.B., Bo	1960
	(2) "	J.B., Bo	1945
	(3) "[replacement mask]	J.B., Bo	c. 1965
Ngomo	Name of first owner	J.B., Bo	c. 1930
Ngongo	Husband of first owner	J.B., Bo	c. 1910
Ngoto	Male relative of first owner and former Paramount Chief	J.B., Bo	c. 1940
Ngõmbla	Nickname of male ancestor, from ngõmbuhubla = warriors who swarmed over the inner war fence once a footing had been secured	J.B., Bo	c. 1900
Njagba	[no one will leave while she is dancing]	J.B., Bo	1968
Njagi	[special way of walking]	Moyamba	c. 1945
Nyandemo	Pretty person	Pujehun (Gola)	c. 1915
Nyapo	Woman	J.B., Bo	c. 1963
Nyimi	[no meaning]	Kailahun	c. 1945

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Approx. Date</u>
Nyoko; Nyoko Wa	(1) [nothing else of its kind] = kind, sort; important kind (2) [nothing else like it] (3) " " " (4) [prettier than all the others] (5) [perfect dancer]	J.B., Bo	c. 1950
Peka Nyande	[the most beautiful one or kind] = pretty	Bonthe	c. 1950
Pujè	[very hot, wild in dancing] = pepper	Kailahun	c. 1955
Sabè	Brother of owner	J.B., Bo	c. 1957
Saji Wulei	Sergeant Wulei (cf. Chapter 6)	Bonthe	c. 1895
Sawa	Female ancestress	J.B., Bo	1961
Sèbgwe	Male ancestor	Kenema	c. 1880
Sela	Father-in-law of owner	Bonthe	1965
Soma	Brother of first owner	Bonthe	c. 1925
Sölè	(1) Noisy (2) [she dances well and when she dances people shout] (3) Noisy (4) Talkative	Kenema Kenema	c. 1950 c. 1955
Tibo	Named after carver, Safa Tamu Tibo	Bonthe Pujehun (GoLa)	1967 c. 1905
Tika	[drunk] = charcoal	Pujehun (GoLa) Pujehun (Vai)	c. 1905 1967

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Approx. Date</u>
Tongai	Named after brother of the carver	Bonthe	c. 1948
Töbö	Male ancestor	Liberia (Vai)	c. 1905
Tumbe	(1) Angry [if a mask is called Tumbe it will dance very well] (2) Annoyed (3) Angry [dances very well]	J.B., Bo J.B., Bo Kenema	c. 1880 c. 1957 c. 1900
Vaji	Husband of first owner	J.B., Bo	1935
Vanja	(1) [she dances well] (2) " (3) " (4) " (5) [name of a dance] (6) [dances well] (7) [shakes the ground when dancing]	J.B., Bo J.B., Bo J.B., Bo Kenema Kailahun Kailahun Kailahun	1968 c. 1910 c. 1905 c. 1900 1970 c. 1945 1969
(Sowo Vanja)			
Vonjo	Nickname of husband of first owner	Bonthe	c. 1940
Vayombu	[she dances very well]	Bonthe	c. 1940
Voima, Volima	(1) Wasting time (2) Delay [it stops you because of its beauty] (3) Delay (4) Wasting time (5) " " [it's very unpredictable] (6) Waste time (7) [beautiful]	Kailahun Bonthe Bonthe Moyamba Moyamba Moyamba Bo	1938 c. 1950 c. 1950 c. 1925 c. 1950 c. 1965 1966
Wango	[brightness, pleasing, likes to dance]	J.B., Bo	c. 1910

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Approx. Date</u>
Weba	[no meaning]	Kailahun	c. 1940
Wopo	(1) Empty, nothing there, because she moves so fast you can't pin her down] (2) [name of a bird]	Pujehun (Gola)	c. 1940
Wote	(1) Husband of first owner (2) Nickname of male relative [meaning to turn]	Pujehun (Vai)	c. 1955
Wunduhun	Male ancestor, a chiefdom speaker	J.B., Bo	c. 1930 c. 1950
Wuya	Male ancestor, nickname; a former chiefdom speaker	Bonthe	c. 1900
Yagba	Male ancestor	J.B., Bo	c. 1915
Yama	Nickname of male relative of first owner	Pujehun (Vai)	c. 1905
Yata	Mother of owner	J.B., Bo	c. 1935
Yewonjai	Son of first owner	Moyamba	c. 1965
Yibo	[she is fine]	Bonthe	c. 1925
Yimo	(1) Sleepy [she can dance through the night without sleeping] (2) Sleepy [beautiful] (3) Sleepy [carver made eyes look as though she's sleeping] (4) [no meaning] (5) Sleeping [sleepy eyes look mysterious, beautiful]	Bonthe	c. 1935
Yonga	(1) Boasting, proud [because of her dancing] (2) Boasting (3) Nickname of husband of first owner	J.B., Bo Kenema Bonthe	c. 1910 c. 1951 c. 1960 1956 c. 1960

Appendix 2: General Glossary

Note: This glossary is a list of terms which occur frequently in the thesis and which may be unfamiliar to the reader. Mende terms are given in the definite form and whenever possible spelling is standardized according to Innes's Dictionary. Where the pronunciation of words was consistently different from Innes's spellings I have given the form I transcribed and indicated variants in square brackets. Plural forms are also indicated, where relevant.

- barri - Sierra Leone English term for open sided structure in the center of a village used for socializing and meetings.
- Bundu - Sherbro term for Sande, female secret society.
- 'country-cloth' - Sierra Leone English term for indigenous hand-woven fabric.
- falui - Male entertainment masker.
- gbêtu - Vai name for male entertainment masker with wooden headpiece.
- gbini - [gbeni] - Chief Poro society masker, regarded as most powerful Mende masker.
- gbogbini (pl. gbogbinisia) - Sande society initiates who have undergone clitoridectomy; translated by Jedrej as 'virgins'. ('Structural aspects').
- goboi - Poro society masker, next in importance after gbini.
- gonde [gondei] - Entertainment masker of the Sande society who parodies the sowei masker.
- gongoli [köngölii] - Male entertainment masker with grotesque wooden headpiece employing satire and 'clowning'; name possibly derived from köngolê = be short and stooping.
- hale (pl. haleisia) - substance imbued with supernatural power, 'medicine'.
- Humöi society - Mende secret society regulating incest prohibitions.

- jina (pl. jinanga) [dyinyinga, dyinanga] - nature spirits inhabiting rivers, forests and hills.
- jobai - Male entertainment masker.
- jobulii - Male entertainment masker with wooden headpiece resembling that of gongoli.
- kambei (pl. kambeisia) - wooden figures used in pairs, one male and one female, associated with the 'medicine' of the Njaye society; sometimes termed 'guardian' figures. Name possibly derived from kamba = grave.
- Kami - leaf used to sand surface of masks (ficus exasperata).
- kölölewengoi - leather flaps, ornamented with tooling appliqué, or cowri shells and worn by conjurors and male maskers; (from kölö = skin).
- Kö-Mende - Eastern Mende dialect group.
- Kpa-Mende [Kpaa] - Western Mende dialect group.
- Kpole [Kpoi, Kpulei, Kpoyei] - Wood used for sowei masks (pycnanthus angolensis).
- kpowa - Novice, term for girl in first stage of Sande initiation.
- kunde - Enclosure, inside a house, where the 'medicine' of a secret society is kept; from kundö = corner, recess.
- lasimöi (pl. lasimöisia) - Small amulet, consisting of folded arabic inscription encased in cloth or leather cover.
- ligba (pl. ligbeisia) - Official of the Sande society, next in importance after the Soweisia.
- malejowei (pl. malejoweisia) - Sowei mask which is mystically 'found' usually in rivers and which is of supernatural origin; from male = meet with plus sowei.
- mbowei - Mende name for Vai gbetu masker.
- minsereh - Wooden female figure used in divination by Yassi society.

- möri jande - Islamicised Sande society, eliminating masking and other 'pagan' features.
- möri man - Moslem maker of charms and amulets.
- nafali [nafale] - Poro society masker who acts as herald for gbini in some parts of Mendeland.
- ndogbo jowei - Title of one of the Sande Soweisia, literally meaning 'bush Sowei'.
- ndoli jowei - Usual term for the Sande masker, literally meaning 'dancing Sowei'.
- ngafa (pl. ngafeisia) - A spirit, also a costumed spirit or masker.
- ngafagötui - Alternate name for nafali, eastern Mende.
- ngaya maki - Pattern of scarification consisting of three or four parallel vertical lines on each cheek, literally meaning 'tear marks'; typically worn by Kpa-Mende women.
- Ngewö - Mende name for supreme creator god.
- ngolu [Nggolo] - Male entertainment masker with a wooden headpiece found among the Sherbro and western Mende.
- ngovola [ngovolawa] - Old fashioned hair-style resembling spreading leaves of the umbrella palm; from ngovo = umbrella palm.
- njagba - Male entertainment masker with a wooden headpiece found among the eastern Mende.
- njaloi - Female water spirit now identified with the 'Mammy Water' image.
- njui - Leaf used to make black dye for staining wood carvings (ipomoea batatas).
- nyande jowei - Title of one of the Sande Soweisia, literally meaning 'beautiful sowei'.
- Njaye society [Njaye] - Mende secret society whose medicine is believed to be able to cure madness and to increase personal magnetism; the njaye masker wears a wooden headpiece.
- njayeköi - wooden headpiece of the njaye masker.

- njokoi - Alternate name for njaye masker.
- Poros society - Male secret society into which all Mende boys are traditionally initiated at puberty, exerting considerable political and economic influence.
- samawa - Female satirical masker, wearing body paint and exaggerated clothing. Possibly derived from sama = person of high social standing plus wa = big.
- Sande society - Female secret society into which all Mende girls are traditionally initiated at puberty.
- sande - The 'medicine' of the Sande society.
- Sande wa jowei - Title of the supreme head of a Sande group; from Sande, wa = big, plus sowei.
- sèbè (pl. sèbèisia) - Large amulet consisting of Arabic inscription, folded and covered with cloth, leather, or silver casing, and worn around the neck.
- Sowei - Title of the highest rank of Sande society officials.
- sowei - Name of the Sande society masker.
- Sowo kundi - Sowei in charge of Sande society medicine and masks; from Sowei and kundi.
- tèmoi (pl. tèmoisia) - Class of nature spirits inhabiting deserted villages and forests who take the form of dwarfs.
- tingoi - Female water spirit now identified with the 'Mummy Water' image.
- wojei - White clay rubbed on Sande initiates and others for 'medicinal' purposes.
- Yassi society [Yasi] - Sherbro society similar to Njaye society.
- yavi - Male entertainment masker.
- zo ba - Vai term for sowei
- zogbe - Gola term for sowei.

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A Note on the Dating of Field Material

The age of masks and other carvings documented in the field was estimated in several ways. There were usually several people present while information was being recorded often including the town chief or speaker and, in the case of sowei masks, a number of Sande society officials. Questions were addressed to the owner or custodian of the piece, but bystanders often added or corrected information. In a number of cases the precise year of acquisition of a carving was remembered. Usually, however, informants recounted the history of a carving in terms of the number of past custodians and their kinship relationships; a generation was estimated in this context at twenty-five years (or occasionally more or less if the current owner of the carving was either very old or very young). Information about the number of previous owners was recorded even when a precise date of acquisition was given in order to check the accuracy of the date.

Whenever possible specific events in recent history were also used to check the accuracy of estimated ages. Dates in local and world history which proved useful were World Wars I and II (in which Mende soldiers fought and which are termed locally the 'Kaiser' or 'Cameroon' war and the 'Hitler' or 'Burma' war respectively), the year of Sierra Leonean Independence, the House Tax and Mende-Timme wars of the late nineteenth century and the building of the railroad at the beginning of this century. The reigns of local Paramount Chiefs, earthquakes, and in certain cases the number of new farms

which had been made since the acquisition of a carving were also useful in dating. Finally, events in the personal history of the custodian or owner were used as guides in estimating age. Informants were asked, for example, whether a particular sowei mask was already in use at the time of their initiation into Sande, of their marriages, or how many children they had at the time of acquisition, and a rough reckoning was made by relating these dates to an estimate of the informants' current ages.

More than one method of dating for each carving was used whenever possible in order to double check the information. Nevertheless most of the dates given for field material are approximate and indicate the year of acquisition plus or minus about ten years.

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- 4 Goboi masker, Gbangema, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo. 22 Sept 1972.
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- 7 Nafale masker, Kponima, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo. 27 Mar 1972.
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- 9 Jobai masker, Mbawomahun, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo. 22 Sept 1972.
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- 17 Jobulii masker, Giema, Luawa, Kailahun. 4 Nov 1972.
 - 18 Sande initiates and musicians, Gon, Soro-Gbema, Pujehun. 6 Apr 1972.
 - 19 Sande initiates, sowei maskers, and Sowei (far left) at gani celebration; Bandajuma Kovegbuami, Small Bo, Kenema. 12 May 1972.
 - 20 Sande graduates, sowei masker, musician, and society members at 'pulling' celebration; Kenema Gbangbama, Fakunya, Moyamba. 4 Jun 1972.
 - 21 Sowei masker dancing, Nyandehun, Luawa, Kailahun. 3 Nov 1972.
 - 22 Gonde masker, Ngiyehun, Luawa, Kailahun. 3 Nov 1972.
 - 23 Gonde masker, Njahindama, Kakua, Bo. 26 Mar 1972.
 - 24 Samawa masker, Buma, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo. 3 Oct 1972.
 - 25 Samawa masker, Kpakuma, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo. 29 Sept 1972.
 - 26 Hammock bars, Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin III.C.14450, length 250; acquired 1902, bequest of Dr. R. Pösch, purchased on Sherbro Island.
 - 27 Scoop, Royal Scottish Museum 1950.237, length 40.5, purchased in 1950 from a dealer.
 - 28 Pulley for heddle with carved janus-head, University of Pennsylvania Museum, 37.22.42, h 22.5; collected 1937 by H.U. Hall at Trisana, Ndema, Sherbro Island.
 - 29 Staff with male figure and rattle, British Museum 1901.7.22.5, h 81.5; purchased 1901 from T.J. Alldridge.
 - 30 Town chief Madam Majo with walking stick, Gelehun, Tikonko, Bo; h 95, [no provenance]. 30 Mar 1972.
 - 31 Minserah figure, Glasgow Museum and Art Gallery 49.101b, h 46; acquired 1949 from Wellcome Historical Medical Museum.
 - 32 Kambei figure, Bèlè, Imperri, Bonthe, h 53.5, [provenance uncertain].

- 33 Wojei palette, Commonwealth Institute, London, length 41; exhibited 1971, [no provenance].
- 34 Snake with projecting female head, Sierra Leone Museum (un-numbered), circumference 121, h 28 [no provenance].
- 35 Mende girl with female figure used as house decoration, Bisao, Jong, Bonthe, h 58; owner, Safa Koroma, bought 1968 at Batogi, Sogbini, Moyamba; [carver unknown].
- 36 Three figure carvings used as house decorations, owned by Paramount Chief Kagobai, Damballa, Seling, Bo, carved by Banasi c. 1960. Heights (left to right): 51.5, 65, 63.
- 37 Foday Margai shaping the outside of a sowei mask in his workshop. Bai Largo, Kore, Moyamba. 2 Jun 1972.
- 38 Portrait bust of Paramount Chief Foday Kai wearing a Paramount Chief's 'crown'. Telu, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo; carved by Ansumana Sona (undated).
- 39 Traditional hair-styles of eastern Mende women c. 1900. (Reproduced from Alldridge, Sherbro, Fig. 34).
- 40 Mende woman at Mamboma, Jaiima-Bongor, Bo with hair dressed in nyangabökui style.
- 41 Amulets and medicinal horns tied to the base of a sowei mask, 'Bondo', Gofor, Makpele, Pujehun.
- 42 Mende women wearing sèbèisia c. 1900. (Reproduced from Alldridge, Transformed colony, facing page 222).
- 43 Paramount Chief Momo Banya of Kailahun and his wives. (Reproduced from Migeod, View, plate 3, facing page 94).
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Explanatory Note to the Catalogue

The catalogue includes sowei and gonde masks from both museum and private collections, and pieces documented in the field. The form adopted for museum pieces gives the name of the museum, inventory number, height in centimeters, date of acquisition, and available information about provenance. In some cases the names of museums are given in abbreviated form; where there is no possibility of ambiguity the city is sometimes given in place of the full name of the museum (e.g. Liverpool, for Merseyside County Museum, Liverpool). The reader is referred to the acknowledgements at the end of the Preface for a list of the full names of these institutions. In the case of masks from the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum now in other collections the provenance information was traced through the records of the Wellcome Museum, London. Unless otherwise stated the photographs of museum pieces are my own. In the case of collections which I was unable to visit personally and for which photographs were ordered from the museums, and also in the case of photographs reproduced from published sources it is unfortunately not always possible to give complete information.

Masks photographed in the field are identified as follows: name of the mask, in quotation marks, town, chiefdom, and district where photographed, height, name of the keeper of the mask, estimated age, and name of carver if known. Where there is reason for doubt as to the accuracy of the date of acquisition or name of the carver given

by the informant, either because the informant expressed uncertainty or because I received an impression of unreliability, this is indicated by (?) following dates and the words 'attributed to' preceding the carver's name. Dates preceded by 'c.' are estimated as explained in the Note on the Dating of Field Material. As in all fieldwork of this type there were occasions when knowledgeable people could not be located or when informants were unwilling to co-operate and when it was therefore not possible to record full information. When documentation is missing because an unusual degree of strictness in ritual observance prevented masks from being approached or their provenance discussed the catalogue entry is followed by an asterisk.

Catalogue of Sowei and Gonde masksCat. No.

- 1 Sketch of Vai zo ba mask. (Reproduced from Büttikofer, Reisebilder, 2, 309).
- 2 Bernisches Historisches Museum Lib. 266, h 43, 1924, gift of J. Büttikofer.
- 3 Übersee Museum, Bremen B 6701, h 36, 1893. (Photo courtesy Übersee Museum, Bremen).
- 4 Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam 23994, h 37, 1917, gift of G. Vieweg, director of Ost Afrikaanse Handels Compagnie, The Hague.
- 5 Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam 23995, h 37, 1917, gift of G. Vieweg, (see Cat. 4).
- 6 Peabody Museum, Salem, Mass. E14381, h 42, 1910, gift of Dr. Charles G. Weld, collector and traveller.
- 7 British Museum 1949.Af.34.1, h 43.5, 1949, bought from Mrs. M. Henderson.
- 8 Field Museum, Chicago 209776, h 43, 1939, collected by Frank Cushing, missionary. (Photo courtesy Field Museum).
- 9 American Museum of Natural History 6759, 1939, collected by Dr. J.H. Furbay among the Vai, Liberia during museum expedition. (Photo courtesy American Museum of Natural History).
- 10 Liverpool 52.45, h 38.5, 1952, gift of Mr. J.F. Duff.
- 11 'Gbindi', Fandö, Gawula, Liberia, Masa Bondo keeper, c. 1910.*
- 12 'Kpotu', Jöndö, Gawula, Liberia, Miatta Mali keeper, c. 1880.*
- 13 'Götö', Jöndö, Gawula, Liberia, Miatta Mali keeper, c. 1905.*
- 14 'Töbö', Jöndö, Gawula, Liberia, Miatta Mali keeper, c. 1905.*

Cat. No.

- 15 'Kpinga', Jöndö, Gawula, Liberia, Miatta Mali keeper, c. 1895.*
- 16 'Jiso', Jöndö, Gawula, Liberia, Miatta Mali keeper, c. 1920.*
- 17 'Jama', Gon, Soro-Gbema, Pujehun, h 39, Mama Zo Koroma keeper, c. 1905.*
- 18 'Binda', Sulima, Soro-Gbema, Pujehun, h 40, Fatmata Sambai keeper, c. 1905.*
- 19 'Kömbe', Gon, Soro-Gbema, Pujehun, h 41, Mama Zo Koroma keeper, c. 1905.*
- 20 'Baki', Gon, Soro-Gbema, Pujehun, h 41, Mama Zo Koroma keeper, c. 1920.*
- 21 'Mbembe', Juring, Soro-Gbema, Pujehun, h 37, Mama Wa Jenge keeper, c. 1905.*
- 22 Linden-Museum, Stuttgart 26.275, h 40, 1902, given as part of the collection of Dr. B. Hagen and identified at the time as 'Kriegs- und Tanzmaske, Liberia, Golahs'. (Photo courtesy Linden-Museum, Stuttgart).
- 23 Brighton Af. 312, h 31.5, 1893-1896, bought from T.J. Alldridge.
- 24 Liverpool 54.161.44, h 39.5, 1954, formerly in Beasley collection, Cranmore Ethnographical Museum, Chislehurst, Kent.
- 25 Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford 1908.23.3, h 40, 1908. (Photo courtesy Pitt-Rivers Museum, University of Oxford).
- 26 Liverpool 49.41.25, h 43.5, 1949, Wellcome collection no. 123,379, bought from Foster Galleries, 1932.
- 27 Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam 14292, h 40, 1908, gift of J. Korndorffer.
- 28 British Museum, Wellcome collection no. 200,094, h 39, bought at auction 1932.
- 29 Liverpool 56.25.533, h 43, 1956, formerly in Norwich Museum 102.942.

Cat. No.

- 30 British Museum, Wellcome collection no. 7605, h 41, bought at auction 1925 and recorded as 'mask used at the "Bundu" women's secret society of Mendiland, now dying out, procured by a District Commissioner while in the bush'.
- 31 Peabody Museum, Cambridge, Mass. 33.55.50.114, h 43, 1933, collected by Dr. George Harley and described by him as 'large double-faced mask used by Sande school of Gola tribe'.
- 32 Peabody Museum, Cambridge, Mass. 33.55.50.115, h 38, 1933, collected by Dr. George Harley and described by him as 'similar [to no. 33.55.50.114] cylindrical mask with one face, Sande of Gola tribe'.
- 33 Brooklyn Museum 22.1113, h 39.5, 1922, bought by museum expedition in Belgium from a concierge, M. Poncelet.
- 34 British Museum, Wellcome collection 40469, h 42, 1949, bought at auction 1925.
- 35 British Museum, Wellcome collection 22629, h 45, 1949 (earlier provenance unknown).
- 36 Liverpool 1.8.1.17.37, h 38, 1917, bought from Mrs. Karl Grossman.
- 37 Bernisches Historisches Museum Sie. Leo. 275, h 49.5, 1923, gift of Frau C. Jenni.
- 38 Bernisches Historisches Museum Sie. Leo. 276, h 48, 1923, gift of Frau C. Jenni.
- 39 Hunterian Museum, Glasgow E 1915.1. (Photo courtesy Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow).
- 40 Liverpool 53.56.1, h 43, 1953, gift of John Garnett, marine engineer.
- 41 Institute of Ethnography, Leningrad 2026.517. (Reproduced from D. Olderogge and W. Forman, The art of Africa: negro art from the Institute of Ethnography, Leningrad [London, 1969], Fig. 59).
- 42 Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam 55969, h 49, 1963, bought from Miss H.A. van der Kooy whose brother acquired it in Liberia 'long ago'.

Cat. No.

- 43 Lowie Museum, Berkeley, Calif. 5.6254, h 42, collected in Liberia in 1956-57 by Warren d'Azevedo and attributed by him to the Vai or Gola. (Photo courtesy Lowie Museum).
- 44 Lowie Museum, Berkeley, Calif. 5.6256, h 44, provenance as Cat. 43; attributed by d'Azevedo to Vai or Gola. (Photo courtesy Lowie Museum).
- 45 Lowie Museum, Berkeley, Calif. 5.6258, h 39, provenance as Cat. 43; attributed by d'Azevedo to Vai or Gola. (Photo courtesy Lowie Museum).
- 46 Lowie Museum, Berkeley, Calif. 5.5834, h 42, provenance as Cat. 43; attributed by d'Azevedo to Vai, Kle, or Mende-Gola. (Photo courtesy Lowie Museum).
- 47 Lowie Museum, Berkeley, Calif. 5.5836, h 36, provenance as Cat. 43; attributed by d'Azevedo to Zodi, Kpelle, or Gola. (Photo courtesy Lowie Museum).
- 48 'Wopo', Gbovon, Makpele, Pujehun, h 38, Wuya Gbuawei Pessima keeper, c. 1940, transferred from town of Gissiwo, Makpele when mori jande gained control there.
- 49 'Gbindi', Gofor, Makpele, Pujehun, h 36, Tènè Kalon keeper; c. 1915, carved by Lansana Ngumoi [ngumoi = wood man, or carver] from Tunkia.
- 50 'Jomo', Ngola, Makpele, Pujehun, h 45, Bendu Dakoi keeper, c. 1915.
- 51 'Nyandemo', Tuasu, Makpele, Pujehun, h 37, Sata Kondo keeper; c. 1915, carved by Siafa Bavai, a Gola carver from Tuasu who died c. 1930.
- 52 New zo ba mask, h 41; carved by Vandi Kwi, photographed in his workshop Madina, Gawula, Liberia, 14 Apr 1972.
- 53 Bassa Sande mask, h 34.5, Mangio-Meneghini collection, Monrovia, Liberia. (Photo courtesy the owners).
- 54 British Museum 86.11.26.1, h 41.5, 1886; bought from T.J. Alldridge and previously shown at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition.
- 55 British Museum 1901.7.22.9, h 43.5, 1901, bought from T.J. Alldridge.

Cat. No.

- 56 Bernisches Historisches Museum Sie. Leo. 72, h 35, 1905; bought from Ruply who acquired it in the Sherbro region of Sierra Leone.
- 57 Bernisches Historisches Museum Sie. Leo. 73, h 35, 1905, provenance as Cat. 56.
- 58 Liverpool 14.2.1908.14, h 41, 1908; bought from Mr. A. Douglas Kerr who acquired it at Jumbuyah [Sumbuja], Sherbro district, Sierra Leone.
- 59 British Museum, Wellcome collection 151,940, h 46, bought at auction 1933.
- 60 British Museum 1956.Af.10.1, h 38, 1956, purchased from Methodist Missionary Society.
- 61 British Museum, Wellcome collection 201,907, h 39, bought at auction 1930.
- 62 Basel III 7095, h 42, 1930, Brand collection acquired in Sherbro district. (Photo courtesy Museum für Völkerkunde, Basel).
- 63 St. Gallen, Switzerland C 1497, h 39.5, 1908, collected by Volz 1907. (Photo courtesy Sammlung für Völkerkunde, St. Gallen).
- 64 Liverpool 49.41.6, h 42.5, 1949, Wellcome collection (earlier provenance unknown).
- 65 Brighton R. 5258, h 32.5, 1960, bought from local antique dealer who said it had been collected c. 1900. (Photo courtesy Brighton Art Gallery and Museums).
- 66 Bernisches Historisches Museum Sie. Leo. 71, h 44, 1905, bought from Ruply, who acquired it in the Sherbro region of Sierra Leone.
- 67 Bernisches Historisches Museum Sie. Leo. 259, h 38, 1907, Volz collection. (Reproduced from Staub, 'Beiträge', Pl. 22, 4).
- 68 Bernisches Historisches Museum Sie. Leo. 252, h 34, 1907, Volz collection, from Bonthe, Sierra Leone. (Reproduced from Staub, 'Beiträge', Pl. 22,3).

Cat. No.

- 69 St. Gallen, Switzerland, 1908, Volz collection.
(Reproduced from Staub, 'Beiträge', Pl. 23, 3).
- 70 Basel III 2638, h 46, 1908, Volz collection, from
Sumbuja. (Photo courtesy Museum für Völkerkunde, Basel).
- 71 Basel III 2640, h 45, 1908, Volz collection. (Photo
courtesy Museum für Völkerkunde, Basel).
- 72 Basel III 2636, h 42, 1908, Volz collection, from
Sumbuja. (Photo courtesy Museum für Völkerkunde, Basel).
- 73 Basel III 2639, h 42.5, 1908, Volz collection, from
Bonthe. (Photo courtesy Museum für Völkerkunde, Basel).
- 74 Bernisches Historisches Museum Sie. Leo. 251, h 50,
1907, Volz collection, from Bonthe. (Reproduced from
Staub, 'Beiträge', Pl. 23, 2).
- 75 Bernisches Historisches Museum Sie. Leo. 254, h 45, 1907,
Volz collection, from Sumbuja.
- 76 Bernisches Historisches Museum Sie. Leo. 256, h 42.5,
1907, Volz collection, from Bonthe.
- 77 St. Gallen, Switzerland, 1908, Volz collection,
(Photo courtesy Sammlung für Völkerkunde, St. Gallen).
- 78 Hamburg C.3981, h 42.5, 1904, gift of Christian Schreiber.
- 79 Hamburg 19.25.27, h 36.5, 1919, bought from Frau Marg.
Gottschalk.
- 80 British Museum 1956.Af.10.2, h 36, 1956, bought from
Methodist Missionary Society.
- 81 Basel III 1603, h 38, 1904, bought from Mr. Hoppe.
(Photo courtesy Museum für Völkerkunde, Basel).
- 82 Berlin III C 6659, h 36, 1896, bought from dealer,
Umlauff. (Photo courtesy Museum für Völkerkunde,
Berlin).
- 83 University Museum, Philadelphia 37.22.266, h 40, 1937,
Hall collection, purchased from Paramount Chief Bahu
of Bendu Chiefdom, Sherbro Island.

Cat. No.

- 84 University Museum, Philadelphia 37.22.267, h 44, 1937, Hall collection, purchased from owner Miatta, Yoni, Sitia, Sherbro Island. (On loan to Brooklyn Museum L63.29.2).
- 85 University Museum, Philadelphia 37.22.271, h 39.5, 1937, Hall collection, purchased from Yema Mama at Yoni, Sherbro Island.
- 86 Reproduced from Eberl-Elber, Rätsel, Fig. 156, captioned 'Krim/Vai'.
- 87 University Museum, Philadelphia Af.3642, h 39.5, 1912, bought from a dealer.
- 88 Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam 18953, h 37.5, 1911, bought from a dealer.
- 89 R.P. Bedford collection, h 38. (Reproduced from Leon Underwood, Masks of West Africa [London, 1948], Fig. 4).
- 90 British Museum, Wellcome collection 113,933, h 44.5, bought from a dealer in 1926.
- 91 British Museum, Wellcome collection (unnumbered), h 37, auctioneer's tag attached 'St. 30/11/15', probably bought 1915.
- 92 University Museum, Philadelphia 29.61.17, h 46.5, 1929; Timne Sande mask, collected by J.L. Buck in Makeni district south of the middle Rokell River.
- 93 'Boni', Gbangbama, Imperri, Bonthe, h 44, Soweï Ngagba keeper, c. 1910.
- 94 'Gbujahun', Tiso, Imperri, Bonthe, h 38, Soweï Maseri Ndeyiya keeper, c. 1910.
- 95 'Mapai', Tiso, Imperri, Bonthe, h 35, Soweï Maseri Ndeyiya keeper, c. 1930.
- 96 Photograph of two masked soweisia and attendants taken at Balolo near Yoni, Sherbro Island, 1937 by H.U. Hall. (Original print from Hall's negative no. a-1, courtesy of University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia).

Cat. No.

- 97 'Tongai', Gbangbama, Imperri, Bonthe, h 38, Soweï Ngagba keeper; carved c. 1948 by Amara Bèma of Gbangbama (died c. 1967).
- 98 'Nyoko', Taninahun Molango, Kaiyamba, Moyamba, h 39, Soweï Nyande keeper, c. 1920.
- 99 'Nèpo', Mofindor, Banta, Bonthe, h 39, Soweï Ngabè keeper, c. 1935; attributed to Boni of Kopama, Banta.
- 100 'Kaba', Kenga, Imperri, Bonthe, h 41, Soweï Ngabè keeper, c. 1900.
- 101 'Kove', Waterloo, Fakunya, Moyamba, h 39, Soweï Gbesse Yamba keeper; c. 1965, attributed to Bundu from Bunumbu, Kore, Moyamba.
- 102 'Vayombu', Mosonge, Banta, Bonthe, h 44, Soweï Gbujahun keeper, c. 1940.
- 103 'Baa luwa', Mosenesi, Banta, Moyamba, h 38, Soweï Mabinti Senesi keeper, c. 1966, carved by Pa Toma of Gbangbatok.
- 104 'Ngabè', Nyandehun, Imperri, Bonthe, h 33, Soweï Sale Matu keeper, c. 1965; carved by Pa Toma of Gbangbatok, Banta.
- 105 New soweï mask, Bai Largo, Kore, Moyamba, h 53; photographed in the workshop of the carver, Foday Margai, 6 J'n 1972.
- 106 Kpowa joweï (uninitiated soweï mask), Gbangbama, Imperri, Bonthe, h 41, Paramount Chief G.W. Margai owner, carved 1971; attributed to carver known as 'Sam' from Moting, Banta Mokelle.
- 107 Liverpool 5.11.05.1, h 41, 1905, gift of Mr. Ridyard from 'Mayomba [Moyamba], Sierra Leone'.
- 108 Brighton R. 3483.127, h 40, 1904, bought from T.J. Alldridge, from 'Mendiland'. (Photo courtesy Brighton Art Gallery and Museums).
- 109 British Museum 1901.7.22.10, h 39, 1910, bought from T.J. Alldridge.
- 110 Museum of Primitive Art, New York 56.344, h 35. (Photo courtesy Museum of Primitive Art, New York).

Cat. No.

- 111 University Museum, Philadelphia, h 38, from Sherbro Island. (Reproduced from Wieschoff, 'The African collections of the University Museum', University of Pennsylvania Museum bulletin, 2 (1945), Fig. 25, p. 69).
- 112 British Museum 1938.10.4.12, h 38, 1938, bought at auction from collection of Capt. R.S. Rattray.
- 113 'Jegbo', Talia, Nongowa, Kenema, h 39, Soweï Musu Njayiji keeper; c. 1895; a malejowei 'found' in Bo district.
- 114 'Ndoli', Bandajuma, Nongowa, Kenema, h 42, Soweï Sokpoo keeper; c. 1905, attributed to Sovoja from Dodo chiefdom, Kenema district.
- 115 'Sölè', Bandajuma, Nongowa, Kenema, h 38, Soweï Soma keeper; c. 1950 attributed to Sowo Gande from Foindu, Lower Bambara.
- 116 'Dugba', Kakpema, Kando-Leppiama, Kenema, h 38, Soweï Mönjama keeper; c. 1955, attributed to Sowo Gande from Foindu, Lower Bambara.
- 117 'Gbango', Deima, Kando-Leppiama, Kenema, h 40, Soweï Maseri Koba keeper; c. 1940, bought from Sowo Gande at Majayebu, Lower Bambara.
- 118 'Babe', Bandajuma, Small Bo, Kenema, h 36, Soweï Jijima keeper; c. 1950, attributed to Sowo Gande 'at the time he was young'.
- 119 'Yimö', Dandabu, Small Bo, Kenema, h 49, Soweï Jenneh Amadu keeper; malejowei 'found' in 1956.
- 120 'Luma', Ngiyehun, Luawa, Kailahun, h 41, Soweï Mamandoma keeper; commissioned from Nyandewa who was called to the village to carve the mask in 1955.
- 121 'Navo', Deima, Nongowa, Kenema, h 34, Soweï Yata Fèfè keeper; brought to the village for sale in 1958 by Moigboi, from Gbewobu, Dama chiefdom.
- 122 'Nèpo', Mano Kotuhun, Nongowa, Kenema, h 34, Soweï Nesi Sakla keeper; bought by present owner about 1942 at Kunduma, Lower Bambara from carver 'Sogande Bokari'.

Cat. No.

- 123 'Voima', Ngiyehun, Luawa, Kailahun, h 46, Soweï Jeneba keeper; bought in 1938 from Saidu Kokondo, a local carver.
- 124 'Magbe', Serabu, Kando-Leppiama, Kenema, h 35, Soweï Jenne Kombe keeper; bought at Blama and attributed to Sowo Gande of Foindu Mamema.
- 125 'Huanya', Dandabu, Small Bo, Kenema, h 41, Soweï Marima Ndopojo keeper; bought from an itinerant trader c. 1955.
- 126 'Nyimi', Deima, Kando-Leppiama, Kenema, h 38, Soweï Sita Kandeh keeper; bought about 1957 from itinerant carver from Bagbo chiefdom, Bo district.
- 127 'Yèbu', Banda-juma, Small Bo, Kenema, h 41, Soweï Ngabè keeper; c. 1955.
- 128 Reproduced from Alldridge, Sherbro, Fig. 47 captioned 'The Bundu devil, Upper Mendi'.
- 129 British Museum 1943.Af.2.14, h 43, 1943, bought from Lady Byrne.
- 130 Museum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden 2861.1, h 43, 1950, bought from a dealer.
- 131 Afrika Museum, Berg-en-Dal, Netherlands 17.13, h 37, 1963, bought from a dealer.
- 132 Liverpool 12.5.14.14, h 40, 1914, gift of Claud D.H. During per Mr. Ridyard, collected at Blama, Sierra Leone.
- 133 British Museum, Wellcome collection 118,157, h 45, bought at auction 1931.
- 134 'Gbembo', Banda-juma, Small Bo, Kenema, h 34, Soweï Ngabè keeper; c. 1930 (?), attributed to Moigula from Dodo chiefdom, Kenema.
- 135 'Tumbe', Serabu, Kando-Leppiama, Kenema, Soweï Jenne Kombe keeper; c. 1905, attributed to Kani Gbogbo.
- 136 'Navo', Telu, Jaiima-Bongor, h 36, Soweï Mabinti Bona keeper; c. 1900, carved by Vandi Sona.
- 137 'Gomoh', Kponima, Jaiima-Bongor, h 39, Soweï Gbujahun keeper; c. 1900, carved by Vandi Sona.

Cat. No.

- 138 'Kabo', Njombohun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 38, Soweï Sombo Kadi keeper; c. 1910, carved by Vandï Sona.
- 139 'Tumbe', Kpitima, Lower Kama section, Jaiima-Bongor, h 37, Soweï Mariama Bakari keeper, c. 1880.
- 140 'Keibah', Telu, Jaiima-Bongor, h 39, Soweï Betti keeper; c. 1900.
- 141 'Keibah', Bendu, Jaiima-Bongor.
- 142 'Nyoko Wa', Telu, Jaiima-Bongor, h 38, Soweï Mamawa Tajo keeper; c. 1890, made by a carver from Ngolu, Baoma.
- 143 'Navo', Buma, Jaiima-Bongor, h 36, Soweï Fatmata keeper; c. 1915.
- 144 Gonde (named 'Gbate' when a soweï), Sulehun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 40, Soweï Sata Sengahun keeper; c. 1920, bought in the village from a carver named Saifu from Ngolu, Baoma.
- 145 'Kombe', Pelewahun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 35, Soweï Naaso Miji keeper; c. 1900.
- 146 'Gaaso', Telu, Jaiima-Bongor, h 37.5, c. 1920; a kpowa joweï (uninitiated soweï mask) owned by Paramount Chief Foday Kai.
- 147 'Bona', Koribondo, Jaiima-Bongor, h 42, Soweï Fatmata Duèlè keeper; c. 1930.
- 148 Gonde (named 'Yatiba' when a soweï), Doobu, Jaiima-Bongor, h 35, Maria Kuteo owner; c. 1900, attributed to Vandï Kpakra.
- 149 Gonde (named 'Kango' when a soweï), Nyandehun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 39.5, Mariama Dèvè owner, c. 1940.
- 150 'Mbambè', Doobu, Jaiima-Bongor, h 31, Soweï Kadi Kuteo keeper; c. 1935, attributed to Lahai Sowo Gande.
- 151 'Gbate', Doobu, Jaiima-Bongor, h 32, Soweï Maria Kuteo keeper; c. 1904.
- 152 'Gombla', Doobu, Jaiima-Bongor, h 39, Soweï Abi Kata keeper; c. 1903, attributed to Abu Kpangba from Jibeima, Jaiima-Bongor.

Cat. No.

- 153 'Vanja', Doobu, Jaiima-Bongor, h 37, Soweï Kadi Kuteo keeper; c. 1905, attributed to Lahai Sowo Gande.
- 154 'Navo', Hegbema, Jaiima-Bongor, h 40, Soweï Musu Lawaihun keeper; c. 1906.
- 155 'Navo', Nanyahun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 36, Soweï Fatmata Lansana keeper; c. 1935, attributed to Manowulo then living at Kpatobu, Baoma.
- 156 'Nyoko Wa', Nanyahun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 36, Soweï Fatmata Lansana keeper; c. 1960, bought at Yomandu, Baoma and attributed to Manowulo 'now dead'.
- 157 'Manda', Njombohun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 39, Soweï Mariama Suleiman keeper; c. 1940.
- 158 'Gbenge', Mende Kema, Jaiima-Bongor, h 34.5, Soweï Hunon keeper; c. 1940, bought at Gelehun, Small Bo, attributed to Sowo Gande.
- 159 'Boya', Pelewahun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 35, Soweï Tiange Adu keeper; 1924, attributed to Manowulo who sold it in the village.
- 160 [Soweï mask], Kpakuma, Jaiima-Bongor.
- 161 'Gbate', Kpitima, Jaiima-Bongor, h 38, Soweï Matu Amara keeper; c. 1920.
- 162 'Yimö', Baka, Jaiima-Bongor, h 39, Soweï Fatu Tèngbè keeper; c. 1951, bought in the village from itinerant carver.
- 163 'Gbema', Soogoma, Jaiima-Bongor, h 40, Soweï Kema Maaajo keeper; c. 1930, attributed to Vandi Sona.
- 164 'Jèbo', Nyandehun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 36, Soweï Ami Songeya keeper; c. 1915.
- 165 'Ngomo', Koribondo, Jaiima-Bongor, h 38, Soweï Tia Musa keeper; c. 1930.
- 166 'Ngigula', Nyandehun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 34, Soweï Mariama Dèvè keeper; c. 1962, bought in the village from an itinerant carver.
- 167 [Soweï mask], Kpakuma, Jaiima-Bongor.

Cat. No.

- 168 'Nyoko', Yabaima, Jaiima-Bongor, h 33, Soweï Lusi Lahai keeper; c. 1950, a malejoweï.
- 169 [Soweï mask], Kpakuma, Jaiima-Bongor.
- 170 'Ngolia', Koribondo, Jaiima-Bongor, h 34, Soweï Mahata Lamin keeper; c. 1964, bought in the village from an itinerant carver.
- 171 'Wotè', Walihun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 35, Soweï Wuyata Wotè keeper; c. 1930, attributed to Vandi Sona.
- 172 'Ngolia', Pelewahun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 29, Soweï Matta Amara keeper; 1945, bought at Manowo, Small Bo from a carver who came from Nongoba, Baoma.
- 173 'Gbujuhun', Baka, Jaiima-Bongor, h 35, Soweï Fattu Tèngbè keeper; c. 1940, bought from an itinerant carver, attributed to Vandi Sona.
- 174 [Soweï mask], Bendu, Jaiima-Bongor.
- 175 'Kpiahu', Nyandehun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 30, Soweï Mariama Dèvè keeper; 1936, bought at Komende, Soa, attributed to 'Daoda'.
- 176 'Vanja', Hegbema, Jaiima-Bongor, h 39.5, Soweï Musu Lawaihun keeper; c. 1910.
- 177 'Yimö', Pelewahun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 37, Soweï Naaso Miji keeper; c. 1910, attributed to Safa Sowo Gande from Nongoba, Baoma.
- 178 'Navo', Ngobebu, Jaiima-Bongor, h 40, Soweï Ami Vandi keeper; c. 1935, bought in the village from an itinerant carver.
- 179 'Ngongo', Nyandehun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 34, Soweï Ami Songeya keeper; c. 1910.
- 180 'Ngoto', Njombohun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 37, Soweï Musu Saba keeper; c. 1940.
- 181 'Dugba', Mano, Jaiima-Bongor, h 38, Soweï Mami Moifore keeper; c. 1925, a malejoweï.
- 182 'Kabo', Koribondo, Jaiima-Bongor, h 37, Soweï Ami Kombe keeper; c. 1905.

Cat. No.

- 183 [Sowei mask], Bendu, Jaiima-Bongor.
- 184 [Sowei mask], Kpakuma, Jaiima-Bongor.
- 185 'Wango', Koribondo, Jaiima-Bongor, h 40, Sowei Ami Nuyaba keeper; c. 1910.
- 186 [Sowei mask], Kpakuma, Jaiima-Bongor.
- 187 'Jebo', Pelewahun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 37, Sowei Tiange Adu keeper; c. 1964, bought in the village from an itinerant carver.
- 188 'Gbate', Mano, Jaiima-Bongor, h 35, Sowei Mattu Kpèègbou keeper; c. 1946, bought at Bendu, Jaiima-Bongor.
- 189 'Nama', Gbaama, Jaiima-Bongor, h 39, Sowei Mami Tifa keeper; 1965, bought at Telu from itinerant carver.
- 190 'Wube', Laoma, Jaiima-Bongor.
- 191 'Gbèngè', Kponima, Jaiima-Bongor, h 32, Sowei Moyatu Koroma keeper; 1957, bought from an itinerant carver named Safa Sowo Gande from Bambara chiefdom, Kenema.
- 192 'Vanja', Ngodi, Jaiima-Bongor, h 37, Sowei Isata Dabo keeper; 1968, bought from itinerant carver 'Sowo Gande' from Segbema, Tunkia.
- 193 'Gbate', Ngodi, Jaiima-Bongor, h 37, Sowei Isata Dabo keeper; 1968, bought together with Cat. 192.
- 194 'Sabè', Ngombu, Jaiima-Bongor, h 36, Sowei Gbujahun keeper; c. 1957, bought at Bonthe.
- 195 [Sowei mask], Bendu, Jaiima-Bongor.
- 196 'Kutè', Doobu, Jaiima-Bongor, h 31, Sowei Kadi Kuteo keeper; 1963, attributed to Foday Lahai.
- 197 'Ndima', Ngodi, Jaiima-Bongor, h 30.5, Sowei Kema Yata keeper; 1963, bought in the village from an itinerant carver.
- 198 'Yimö', Juhun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 36, Sowei Safula Jiogba keeper; c. 1969, carved by Ansumana Sona after he moved to Kenema.

Cat. No.

- 199 'Mbambè', Nanyahun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 36.5, Soweï Jami Sami keeper; 1967, bought in Telu, Jaiima-Bongor, carved by Ansumana Sona.
- 200 'Nyapo', Telu, Jaiima-Bongor, h 38; kpowa joweï (uninitiated soweï mask) owned by Paramount Chief Foday Kai and commissioned by him from Ansumana Sona about 1963.
- 201 'Sawa', Juhun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 36, Soweï Sata Musa Kai keeper; 1961, commissioned from Ansumana Sona.
- 202 'Gbate', Gbangema, Jaiima-Bongor, h 39.5, Soweï Ngagba keeper; 1966, commissioned from Ansumana Sona.
- 203 Unfinished soweï mask, photographed at the house of the carver, Ansumana Sona, 17 May 1972; commissioned by a Soweï from Manowa, Pèjè, Kailahun.
- 204 'Ngolia', Telu, Jaiima-Bongor, h 39, Soweï Jenne Kai, keeper; c. 1960, carved by Ansumana Sona as an exact copy of a damaged mask made by Vandi Sona.
- 205 'Keba', Ngombu, Jaiima-Bongor, h 36, Soweï Nasi Kondo keeper; c. 1955 (?), bought in Bonthe.
- 206 [Soweï mask], Kpakuma, Jaiima-Bongor.
- 207 'Njagba', Gbaama, Jaiima-Bongor, h 43, Soweï Sata Aruna keeper; 1968, bought at Kenema, attributed to Lahai from Nongowa, Kenema.
- 208 'Magbe', Blama, Jaiima-Bongor, h 50, Soweï Kpejo keeper; 1970, bought in Kailahun district.
- 209 'Yönga', Buma, Jaiima-Bongor, h 40, Soweï Gboi Yama keeper; 1927, commissioned from a carver from Kakua chiefdom.
- 210 'Vaji', Pelewahun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 36, Soweï Tiange Adu keeper; 1935, attributed to Sowo Gande from Foindu, Lower Bambara, Kenema.
- 211 'Binda', Telu, Jaiima-Bongor, h 34, Soweï Wuya Lagula keeper; c. 1942, attributed to Bogbundo from Nyandeyama, Tikonko, Bo.

Cat. No.

- 212 'Gbamboi', Ngodi, Jaiima-Bongor, h 40, Soweï Isata Dabo keeper; c. 1918.
- 213 'Tumbe', Gbaama, Jaiima-Bongor, h 36, Soweï Jenne Jabati keeper; c. 1957, bought in the village from an itinerant carver.
- 214 [Soweï mask], Kpakuma, Jaiima-Bongor.
- 215 'Bana', Mbawomahun, Jaiima-Bongor, Soweï Pomo Ngombe keeper; c. 1943.
- 216 'Gbendi', Njombohun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 40, Soweï Yata Samalu keeper; 1966, bought at Banda, Bumpe, Bo from an itinerant carver.
- 217 'Gbate', Madina, Jaiima-Bongor, h 38, Soweï Sama Momoh keeper; 1964, attributed to Bifa Momoh, then living at Madina, Jaiima-Bongor.
- 218 'Jèbè', Nagbena, Jaiima-Bongor, h 40, Soweï Mami Jenge keeper; 1968, bought at Hoya, Kwamebai-Krim, Bonthe, attributed to Jèkobi.
- 219 'Dèmè', Ngombu, Jaiima-Bongor, h 48, Soweï Nasi Kondo keeper; c. 1952, bought in Bonthe.
- 220 'Yama', Nyandehun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 33, Soweï Ami Songeya keeper; c. 1935.
- 221 'Mundu', Sulehun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 43, Soweï Sata Koroma keeper; c. 1910.
- 222 'Haku', Sulehun, Jaiima-Bongor, h 38, Soweï Mariama Haku keeper; c. 1952, attributed to 'Sona'.
- 223 Religionskundliche Sammlung der Universität Marburg 446.af.251, h 38, purchased 1964.
- 224 Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford 1957.7.01, h 45.7, on loan from Malcolm H. Green. (Photo courtesy Pitt-Rivers Museum, University of Oxford).
- 225 Liverpool 12.1910.12, h 38.5, 1910, gift of Mr. A.C. Williams per A. Ridyard.
- 226 Gonde, Nyandehun, Luawa, Kailahun, h 33, Bendu Alihu owner; 1971, made by Jegboi from Mende Kelema, Luawa.

Cat. No.

- 227 Gonde, Mende Kelema, Luawa, Kailahun, h 47, Gbesè Amara owner; 1971, made by Jusu Jegboi.
- 228 Gonde, Foyama, Jaiima-Bongor, h 39, Siatta Jenbe owner; c. 1940, bought already carved at Kimi, Mano Bunjema, Pujehun, carved by Beloko, now dead.