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Negative spaces of Mumuye figure sculpture—style and ethnicity

Espaces négatifs des sculptures Mumuyé : style, sculpture et ethnicité

Richard Fardon

Thanks are due in Cambridge to Nicholas Thomas, and particularly to my host in the collection, Rachel Hand, whose guidance was essential at the time and has remained so subsequently, as well as to Josh Murfitt for his photography. I am also grateful in Oxford to Jeremy Coote, David Zeitlyn, and Chris Morton; at the British Museum to Lissant Bolton, Elizabeth Bray, John Giblin, Jim Hammill, Julie Hudson, and Chris Spring; to Toni Wolstenholme at Jersey Heritage for a copy of Brice-Smith's will; and for advice on images to Valentina Bandelloni at the Scala Picture Library in Florence on behalf of the Met, and Nancy Frehse on behalf of the Fondation Beyeler in Basel. More diffusely I remained indebted as collaborator on the Benue art project to Marla Berns, and as collaborator on the Akiga Sai History project, to David Dorward. I greatly appreciated Françoise and Jan Strybol's help and acknowledge Jan's research; his latest book was published after this essay was accepted for publication and so has had to be referenced during revision rather than from the outset. Wim van Binsbergen's response to my question about the Mumuye divination kit was more extensive than I could have anticipated. Generous as ever, Jörg Adelberger discussed the Brice-Smith letter and Wurkun with me, and allowed me to use his summaries and the extracts of some documents relevant to it in the Nigerian Archives that I have quoted but not seen first-hand. Peter Mark's sympathetic editorial readings suggested improvements which I adopted with alacrity, as I have the opportunities for clarification noted by Michelle Gilbert and an anonymous reviewer. Melissa Kratz brought this essay into line with the journal's editorial conventions, for which I am most grateful.

- 1 When the British sculptor Henry Moore sketched a West African female figure shortly after its accession by the British Museum in 1922 (Fig. 1), he was struck by its enclosing arms, later commenting how '... the carver has managed to make [the figure] "spatial" by the way he has made the arms free and yet enveloping the central form of the body'.

1

Figure 1: British Museum Af1922,0610.2



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- 2 His observation was echoed by Frank Willett in the popularizing work *African Art* describing this and two other figures, one of them an, in other respects largely dissimilar, male figure that had been collected and donated with it (Fig. 2). ‘A remarkable feature of the style is the way in which the arms and even the abdomen [...] are used to enclose space within the sculpture.’²

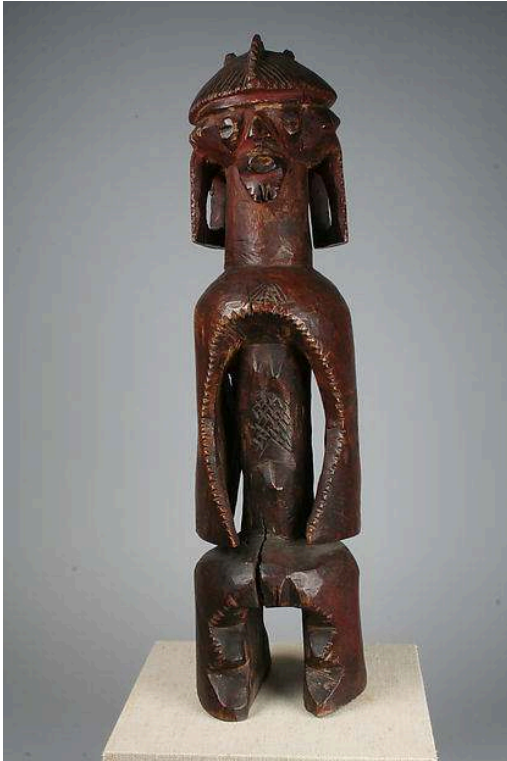
Figure 2: British Museum Af1922,0610.3



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- 3 The third figure, a second female, in Willett's accompanying photographic illustration (Fig. 3) enfolds space with particularly rigorous symmetry: the outer surfaces of its legs, arms, elongated earlobes and elaborate coiffure use the full width of the column of wood from which it was sculpted. Wing-like arms enclose a space which has been excavated to create a torso more slender than the neck.

Figure 3: Metropolitan Museum 1971.206.281



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- 4 As the caption to Willett's photograph confirms, the three figures were similarly sized (45 cm or a little taller). With a provenance specified only as having been formerly in the collection of James Crabtree (about whom I know nothing more, though his is a surname more common in the USA), so far as I am aware, 1960 was the only occasion when this third figure was displayed together with those from the British Museum during an Arts Council exhibition held in London, before the attribution of such figures changed from Chamba to Mumuye.³ Willett's photograph was presumably taken then. A decade later, this figure would enter the collection of the Metropolitan Museum through the Rockefeller Bequest.
- 5 Again echoing Henry Moore's cue, the strongest claim to a distinctive handling of space in what, since the later 1960s, have been identified as Mumuye figure sculptures was made recently by the art historian Frank Herreman, 'The use of negative space between the arms and the torso represents *the most important plastic feature* of a Mumuye figure.'⁴ Beginning as an artist's observation about an unfamiliar artwork, negative space has become a characteristic attribute of figures attributed Mumuye ethnicity.
- 6 Negative spaces are not absences but positively delineated, fully present voids. The description feels apt not just for style but more generally for the historical study of Mumuye arts. For over forty years, these three figures constituted the sum of metropolitan evidence for Mumuye figure sculptures, although they were not recognized as such until the late 1960s when a 'Mumuye style' was delineated in the context of examples flooding into Europe from Nigeria. What is at stake in the discovery of an ethnic style? Previous writers, including myself, have not always taken sufficient care to distinguish the issues involved. Even if these cannot all be resolved

currently, if ever, they nevertheless require response. ‘Mumuye style’ is an artworld concept. Supposing it is a valid generalization about the features of Mumuye artworks, then what are the local aesthetics and practices that reproduce it recognizably? Do these local considerations correspond in any respects with outsiders’ observations of style? Mumuye is an outsiders’ ethnic term that the Mumuye themselves adopted in self-identification under specific circumstances of encompassment. Quite whose term it was initially is not clear, but in some contexts Mumuye came to see the resemblances among themselves as others saw them.⁵ Like other peoples of Adamawa, for instance, they mobilized an ethnic argument to claim some degree of autonomy in matters of colonial and postcolonial governance. This Mumuye identity subsumed identities they continued to use in other contexts to identify, discriminate and name themselves on the basis of locality which coincided to varying degrees with other differences of language, dialect and culture. ‘Mumuye’ is a complex, historical identity used about and by the people it covered. What assumptions are made when the same term is applied to a thing or to a style? If these imply some notion of a Mumuye figure, carved by a Mumuye, in Mumuye style then they are cutting a lot of corners which are the concern of this Special Issue: history, methodology, and notably epistemology in the several senses of scholarly knowledge, Mumuye knowledge, and the possibilities of access for bearers of the first to the second of these.

- 7 To start with history, the thinness of early documentation makes worthwhile what might otherwise seem an excessively detailed, minor correction to the account already offered in the catalogue to a touring exhibition, *Central Nigeria Unmasked: Arts of the Benue River Valley*.⁶ There I suggested that the 1922 accession of the two figures in the British Museum later attributed to the Mumuye was the earliest recorded in any collection. I learnt this was wrong when Marla Berns alerted me subsequently to a pair of Mumuye figures in the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology accessioned as such thirteen years earlier. This seemed initially to require only a note of self-correction, but writing it reinforced my awareness of the under-conceptualization of the relationship between the ethnic term Mumuye when applied to people, and when applied to artworks themselves or to their style. The increasing sophistication of anthropologists’ analyses of processes of ethnic identification, that is to say of the ‘ethnicity of people’, found almost no echo in the ‘ethnicity of things’. The former was envisaged as historical, processual, contextual, situational and changing; the latter had an almost ‘search and replace’ relation to the essential fixity of tribal designations it was supposed to have superseded. This is understandable: discourse about objects requires classification within an encompassed order, such as a catalogue or accession register; objects need to have effectively fixed identities to perform in these discursive fields. Something similar might be remarked of people when, instead of asking about ethnic identifications in specific interactions, we ask how a state sees and classifies its population.
- 8 Hence, ‘Mumuye’ has come to label an iconic style of African sculpture. Think of the deployments made of the distinctively hooded, black (Darth Vader-like⁷) figures in the collections of the Fondation Beyeler and New York’s Metropolitan Museum.

Figure 4: Artist unknown; Cult Figure



19th or early 20th century; Wood with shiny dark patina, 99.0 x 20.0 x 26.0 cm with pedestal; Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, Collection Beyeler.

Picture: Peter Schibli. Reproduced together with official caption by kind permission.

Figure 5: Metropolitan Museum 1983.189



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- 9 These bold forms appeared alongside modern Western artworks in William Rubin's 1984 exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art, *'Primitivism' in Twentieth-Century Art*, and again when the theme of juxtaposition was reprised exactly a quarter-century later in the Fondation Beyeler's own *Visual Encounters: Africa, Oceania, and Modern Art*.⁸ Premonitions of modern masters of Western art have been sensed in these two brooding columns, as they have also been in the mass of the female figure in the British Museum that attracted Henry Moore, or the very different slender elongated figures that put viewers in mind of Alberto Giacometti.⁹ Because they are at once 'authentic' and exceptional, atypical of West African conventions—often asymmetrical laterally, flexed, and/or rotated axially in the torso—Mumuye are among the most widely reproduced and frequently referenced of West African artworks. Examples that the artworld considers 'masterpieces' are correspondingly, and eye-wateringly, expensive at auction. Three monographs have been devoted entirely to Mumuye figures since the turn of the century: two of them were predominantly researched from collections outside Africa,¹⁰ while the most recent was based on research undertaken predominantly in 1970–1972 in Nigeria by the author of a regional survey which also contains extensive coverage of Mumuye.¹¹ All but one of these works appeared after the 2011 *Arts of the Benue Valley* exhibition catalogue I referred to earlier, which needs updating in the light of them.
- 10 On occasions there is uncomfortable friction between artworld and ethnoworld knowledge. The coinage artworld has become conventional. I am using it very loosely here to refer to objects, experts and ideas circulating between such institutions as markets, galleries, and museums involving networks of dealers, collectors, and art

experts. The contrast with ethno-world is meant to evoke more or less distinguishable institutions within which the ethnographic, linguistic and historical contextualization of objects in both their original and subsequent uses takes place. The contrast is overdrawn, but for a purpose.¹² It allows me to remark just how awkwardly the claim the artworld might make that, ‘this is (or indeed is not) a Mumuye figure sculpture’ sits alongside the observation the ethnoworld might offer that, ‘the ethnic name, or ethnonym, Mumuye is not one Mumuye originated for themselves, although, over time, wider contexts of governance have led them increasingly to identify themselves by it.’ The artworld statement concerns a style of sculpture defined by generalization from a corpus of examples; the ethnoworld statement involves historical processes of ethnic identification and the various kinds of evidence we have for them.

- 11 Applied to people and to objects, ‘Mumuye’ does not have identical meanings.¹³ Assuming that it does fall into the often-decried, but not on that account always-avoided, trap of ‘one tribe, one style’ thinking.¹⁴ Evidently, there ought to be a connection between two uses of the same word, but we can pursue at least two different responses to the question of how to think about it: the first might look, descriptively rather than judgementally, and retrospectively, to understand how the discursive relationship between two uses of the same term had evolved; the other, prospective and evaluative, would ask how the relationship might be understood best and then developed most productively.
- 12 That the two uses of ‘Mumuye’ have only a partial fit has been obscured by the under-documentation of both the people and their artworks. In these circumstances, the ethnic term has been called upon to perform the connective work between people and things necessary to fill the ‘negative space’ described earlier. A corrigible ethnohistorical record and a catalogue of examples, a virtual museum of Mumuye artworks, are basic needs if the current conflation of the identities of people and things are to be unpicked. Corrigibility is key. An online essay is more corrigible than one on paper, but it is still a cumbersome way to rectify what will not be the last factual error in our understanding, let alone to record differences in matters of opinion. A more biddable medium could be a lightly moderated, online *catalogue raisonné* combining a database of images, observations in situ, descriptions and provenances with commentary and an invitation to discuss, correct, and, where there was no agreement, explain differences of view and the reasons behind them. Intrinsically open-ended, it would provide possibilities for networking and supplementation that are not conveniently achieved by more books, or more articles like this one conventionally ending with a full stop. Doing so would help to turn retrospect into prospect.
- 13 The negative space around our understanding of Mumuye art makes it an ideal test case for such a project, and the development of online museum collection catalogues has made feasible research that seemed forbiddingly labour-intensive and costly even a decade ago.¹⁵ In the Mumuye case, the high proportion of pieces in private collections will require owners to appreciate that transparency about provenance is essential to recuperating the potential their possessions may hold for reconstructing a historical record. Such a catalogue would inevitably inflate some prices by providing ‘authentication’, but that cat is already out of the bag, not least given the number of exhibitions more or less exclusively devoted to Mumuye. Those who stand to profit by a catalogue would have an interest, beyond the potential for virtual repatriation of knowledge, to support the creation of one.¹⁶

- 14 That said, Mumuye figures (meaning figures described as Mumuye in style without prejudging the identities of their creators) have become troublesomely commonplace and difficult to 'authenticate'. The most straightforward reason has been remarked already: the record of collection or even observation of Mumuye figures in the field is modest; hence, there are few comparisons to guide us in an artworld awash with unprovenanced pieces. Several factors contributed to this state of affairs: living at the eastern end of what became the Nigerian Middle Belt, Mumuye were off the beaten track so far as both exploratory and colonial projects were concerned; hence the rarity of examples of their art collected or documented by Europeans before Nigerian Independence in 1960, indeed before the Civil War of Biafran secession in 1967–1970.¹⁷ Other changes notwithstanding, relative remoteness has been a persistent Mumuye characteristic, in relation to: the conquering Fulani emirates of the 19th century, the early colonial project of conquest at the outset of the 20th century (when the Mumuye fell just on the British side of the pre-First World War Kamerun-Nigeria border),¹⁸ and British colonialism in the first half of the 20th century. Relative remoteness has persisted in the post-Independence period, when the communications infrastructure in this eastern border area has remained poor by standards elsewhere in Nigeria.
- 15 Mumuye sculpture came to intensive international attention near contemporaneously with the Nigerian Civil War, when local research was made impossible at the same moment that more intensive ethnographic and art-historical enquiries had begun. Early exhibitions of Mumuye figures in Europe, notably in Paris at the Galerie Majestic in 1968, whetted collectors' appetites for sculptures in the same style. From around 1966, European art dealers based in Cameroon, or connected to Cameroonian networks, had received Mumuye sculptures via African 'runners' who ventured into the soon-to-be war-torn country to buy pieces at knock-down prices from local people whose willingness to sell was likely to have been compounded of hardship, and conversion to world religions which anathematized their historical practices.¹⁹ I heard in neighbouring areas of Chambaland in the mid-1970s that artworks their owners were unwilling to sell had on occasions been appropriated for sale by members of world religions, relatives and neighbours whose economic self-interest handily coincided with religious imperatives. The runners did not acquire all their works directly from villages; local market towns acted as secondary centres of sale (the administrative and commercial centre at Jalingo played this role for Mumuye).²⁰ When the Civil War ended in 1970, the entire Benue River Valley had been substantially drained of sculpture, including most of what the artworld now considers its finest works.
- 16 The uneven connection of the region to wider currents of change also accounts for a second complication facing the artworld: the continuation of local production of Mumuye sculptures into the second half of the 20th century. Effective, foreign commercial demand was augmented by the policy adopted to counter it at the Jos Museum. The then Museum Director, and he was not alone in Africa in this policy, bought objects from commercial intermediaries because, as he explained to me shortly afterwards, it was the only way for him to prevent their export. Surviving accession records consulted in Jos show that the Nigerian Federal Department of Antiquities acquired large numbers of figures in batches from, judging by their names, Hausa middlemen in the 1970s.²¹ Their condition suggests most of them were unused, made with a view to immediate sale. The large-scale export of Mumuye pieces from Nigeria during the Civil War ran down the reservoir of older works, and if any remained they

may have been sold more profitably eastwards into Cameroon and the international market. As if all this was not sufficient complication, at least some of the Cameroonian runners operated out of Fumban, the capital of Bamum, where the artisan quarter developed a capacity to produce artworks in various ethnic styles to make up shortfalls in supply.²² (In the 1980s, by analogy with clothes ordered from fashion plates in magazines, it was possible to commission a sculpture in Fumban on the basis of an illustration, which accounts for the backs of figures being on occasion less confident than their fronts, and their sizes differing widely given that illustrations are difficult to scale). Together these factors go some way to explain why Mumuye figures in the market are so numerous and varied compared with the slight record of provenanced pieces. More recently it has been rumoured that not all Mumuye figures are even made in Africa.

- 17 These facts complicate practically what must always in principle be vexed questions of authenticity. How to answer when asked whether a sculpture was an authentic Mumuye figure? Presumably it needed at least to meet the stylistic characteristics felt by the artworld to typify Mumuye style. But even that minimal test raises questions: who proposed the style criteria, when, why, and on what bases? The answer to ‘when’ is, relatively recently; and one short part-answer to ‘why’ is, in order to distinguish Mumuye sculptures from Chamba. The crucial contribution was Philip Fry’s formal stylistic analysis of Mumuye figures published in 1970, which drew connections between the, then recent, exodus of pieces from Nigeria via Cameroon into France and Belgium, and the field researches that the anthropologist Mette Bovin and art historian Arnold Rubin had begun shortly before the war in the mid-1960s. But style is not the only answer that enquiries about authenticity typically anticipate. Was the carver Mumuye? Was he, and so far as we know carvers were all men, identifiable? Was the piece made for a ‘traditional’ purpose? Does it show signs of use? And, relevant to both of these, when was it made? More often than not there was nothing to go by in responding to these questions other than the object itself, or just a photograph of it. Hence the tendency to fall back on style, risking the circularity of a typical Mumuye sculpture being identified by reference to a corpus of sculptures selected because they typified Mumuye. While there might be an aspiration to (also) understand Mumuye sculptures in terms of the documented ethnoworld they came from, overwhelmingly the evidence of these sculptures derived from the artworld they had entered. What kinds of knowledge help us relate the two?
- 18 The observations we have of Mumuye sculptures in situ, while they fall well short of the published results of extended ethnographic research in some other parts of the region, are essential resources. Since I surveyed these up to the end of the first decade of the current century, Jan Strybol, who was a team member, and Frank Herreman have added to their English and French language publications based in part on the unpublished fieldnotes (1970–1972) of the ‘Benue Valley Expedition’ led by Albert Maesen and staff from the Musée Royal de l’Afrique centrale de Tervuren in collaboration with the Nigerian Federal Department of Antiquities.²³ Survey ethnographic research has principled limitations particularly when made into initiatory knowledge systems, like those of the Mumuye and the wider region, that were transmitted experientially more than by explicit exegesis. Each cult or initiatory society had its particular micro-culture, which makes generalization fraught. Even names for wooden figures seem to have varied according to their use. This is particularly unwelcome news for the artworld practice of attaching a single local

language label translating ‘figure’ to examples.²⁴ The most substantial recent addition to our knowledge is Jan Strybol’s specification of field sightings for several pieces now in private collections.²⁵ He has also added the names of several hitherto unknown carvers to those known to Arnold Rubin.

- 19 At greater remove from the field, we may derive insights from the provenance of objects, that is to say from everything we know about the history of ownership of particular pieces, which also, inevitably, bears on their commercial value. A databased *catalogue raisonné* might initially have a cut-off date not long after the end of the Biafra War, to preclude the unmanageable profusion of sculptures carved subsequently (and not always by Mumuye) in direct response to commercial demand. Helped by dealers’ recollections and records, the late art historian Christine Stelzig [Kron] and I undertook a technologically primitive effort on similar lines for a type of Chamba figure that revealed how, via their intermediaries, on occasions European dealers acquired batches of objects that had been collected together in the field;²⁶ so, if one object could be connected to its provenance it provided clues to the others. Information can also be inferred from the materiality of the objects: the type of wood from which they were carved, their colour and patina, the marks of the tools used to carve them, the thusfar hardly explored possibilities of dating them by scientific analysis of their physical properties, and so forth. Style and features, to which I return in conclusion, may give grounds to identify resemblances that potentially indicate a narrower locality than the contemporary ethnic group, or a workshop, or the hand or signature feature of a particular carver, or some particular function figures performed. Jan Strybol’s demonstration of a style specific to one area of Mumuye land (the Kpugbong group) is an encouraging example of success in this regard.²⁷
- 20 Given the scant likelihood of the pieces themselves returning to Nigeria, collating a commentary from these resources seems to be the only form of (intellectual and virtual) repatriation currently feasible. It would require considerable effort in a shared, corrigible medium, to which interested Mumuye might want to contribute. In this spirit, though not in the suggested medium, I offer a commentary on the record of the earliest (so far) documented donation of Mumuye figures to a museum. Objects other than figures were included in this donation, and the same donors made gifts to other collections. So the network of relations that put the figures in a historical context of necessity also leads us towards other objects, events, peoples and, thereby, research projects that others may wish one day to pursue.

Eight Mumuye pieces: The colonial officer who collected them, and what we learn thereby about early colonialism

- 21 In 1909 a young colonial officer, H.M. Brice-Smith MA, Assistant Resident, Muri Province, Nigeria, collected at least eight objects attributed, and note the plural form, to the Mumuye ‘tribes’. Six of these eight were soon donated to the (then) Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (now Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology) of his Alma Mater at the University of Cambridge. Four of the six are described in three accession records, the other two in only one of them. These objects and their attribution would have been germane to discussions of Mumuye style in the 1960s had the authors been aware of them.²⁸ The complete listing occurs in a supplementary

accession register, the *Blue Book*, which covers the years 1910–1915 when the museum became overcrowded in its original building on Little Street, Mary’s Lane, before moving to a new building on Downing Street. This sequential set of entries is the fullest of the three and corresponds to the original object labels where they survive, so it was most likely to have been the source of the other two accession records.

BB 1911 195-196 Two chalice-shaped bowls of fine clay: household utensils for keeping corn, tobacco etc.

BB 1911 197-198 Two heads [*insertion in same hand*, of a cock?] of conventionalized animals, roughly moulded in clay. “Deities, placed in the various shrines over the country which preside over the crops, births, deaths, etc of the tribe.”

BB 1911 199-200 Two figures [*insertion in same hand*, in wood] “not actually worshipped, representing departed ancestors whose presence brings good fortune to the family”

(*Blue Book* 1910–1915, University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology)

- 22 The Brice-Smith donation predates Lilley’s to the British Museum by over a decade and includes what must (for now) be considered the earliest figures attributed to Mumuye to have been collected in the field.²⁹ The presence of direct quotation marks in the original accession entries suggests that Brice-Smith may have written about his donation to Baron Anatole von Hügel,³⁰ the founding curator of the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology; however, no communication between them that might shed further light on the circumstances of the gift has yet been found in the accession correspondence for the period.
- 23 There are other avenues down which to enlarge the context of the gift. Although he is not among the better-known colonial collectors, at least three further donations are found elsewhere under Brice-Smith’s name. In 1939, five years after his retirement, he gave a collection of objects to the British Museum that was augmented posthumously in 1972, probably by his sister, with an item from Benin. Six framed photographs,³¹ probably dating from the 1920s, were archived after his death in the Royal Commonwealth Society Library (now also in Cambridge). Furthermore, some of Brice-Smith’s letters home to his parents were given to the Rhodes House Library and are preserved at the University of Oxford’s Bodleian Weston Library.³²
- 24 Brice-Smith appears, though not as a strongly delineated character, in the full translation of Akiga Sai’s *History of the Tiv* under his Tiv nickname Makondo, and is the subject of a brief biographical entry by David Dorward in the editorial apparatus.³³ Together, and probably not independently, these sources provide an outline biography that I summarize and supplement from a copy of his will held in the Jersey archives and from searching readily available, online records of births, marriages and deaths for the (helpfully uncommon) surname Brice-Smith.
- 25 Hugh Middleton Brice-Smith was born in 1884, the son of the Reverend Brice Brice-Smith (1854–1937) and Mrs. Kate Emily Brice-Smith (1854–1946), and educated at Pocklington School, in Yorkshire. This *may* have been the first generation to hyphenate the surname (depending on whether a Rollo Brice-Smith [1886–1964] fits into the genealogy as a younger brother or as a cousin). Hugh entered Queen’s College, Cambridge, graduating in 1906. After joining the Colonial Administrative Service, in January 1909 he was posted as an Assistant Resident to Katsina Ala in Northern Nigeria, where he served in Muri and Kano Provinces until transferred to Benin, in Southern Nigeria, in February 1917. That October he was promoted to Second Class District

Officer, later acting Magistrate (1921 and 1922), and served mainly in Zaria Province, where he was appointed District Officer, Zaria, in 1925. Brice-Smith was made Resident of the Southern Province Provincial Administration in 1929 and retired aged fifty in 1934, the same year his first wife Ethel (1887–1934) died. In 1935 he remarried in Horncastle, Lincolnshire, to Marjorie Emma Lorn Campbell (1887–1969). At the time of the donation in 1939 to the British Museum his address, or presumably that of his parents, was recorded as Homeringham Rectory, Horncastle, Lincolnshire. His will, which suggests there were no surviving children, separates the perhaps substantial assets of his first wife Ethel, which revert to her family after gifts and annuities, from his own assets, the residue of which after gifts are left to his second wife, and on her death to his surviving brother, Harold Francis (1889–1972), and to his sister, Margaret Constance (1891–1989), who was apparently childless. Harold's son, John Middleton, who was also Hugh's godson and presumably took his middle name, is the only member of the next generation mentioned by name, though his siblings are also unnamed beneficiaries. Another sister of Hugh's, Kathleen Maud, is noted together with his parents in arrangements for the upkeep of graves in Lincolnshire. Until shortly before his death in a Sussex nursing home on 3 June 1967, Brice-Smith had been living in Clive Court, a 1920s mansion block in Maida Vale, west London. His estate of £133,000, including that of his first wife, was substantial, being worth around two and a quarter million pounds at today's prices.

- 26 Insights into the earlier years of this career can be gained from the surviving letters Brice-Smith sent to his parents but, while they cover the period when—for convenience what I shall call—his Mumuye collection was acquired, they are silent on the collection itself. Nonetheless, the values of the period are vividly conveyed in a description (with a sketched map)³⁴ of the 'Wurkum Patrol', a nearby engagement lasting from 11 May to 2 July 1909, and one of six military operations on similar scale according to the *Northern Nigeria Report* for that year. Following the *Report*, 'The patrol was composed of one officer, one British non-commissioned officer, and 84 rank and file. The object of the patrol was to settle the Wurkum country, which was in a disturbed state. The enemy's losses amounted to 40 killed, our casualties were *nil*' (letter of 1914, p. 20). Brice-Smith expresses regret at missing this attack ('the fun' or 'scrap') at Gwomu in the hills above Muri (avowedly to 'punish' inter-village raiding between Gwomu and Bambuka) on account of being ordered to return to headquarters at Muri to arrange to send back 'chop' to the troops, as well as to transport part of a fine levied on Bambuka, including a bundle of 42 poisoned spears and a buffalo hide shield (letter of May–June 1913 p. 13 et seq. Brice-Smith, H.M. Mss s 1845).³⁵ The engagement he missed is relevant both to the Mumuye, who were subjected by similar military action, and because some of the spears in his later donation to the British Museum are identified as Gwomu.
- 27 Two years earlier, the 1907 demarcation of the section of the Kamerun–Nigeria border between Yola and the Cross River, undertaken jointly by British and German forces, had been another flashpoint. On the British side, Lt. Col. Whitlock of the Royal Engineers, accompanied by the Assistant Resident Boyle (replaced in his day-to-day role by Brackenbury, of whom more below) and by 20 members of the West African Frontier Force, was further assisted by an officer and 40 men with a maxim gun, and around 500 carriers. The impact of such a contingent, augmented by the German forces, must have been considerable.³⁶ It was apparently felt most in the south of Mumuye country where Yakoko was attacked. The Mumuye of Zinna, already settled in the plains, were more amenable. The early report cites Yakoko and Zinna and others as tribes that are

'Mumyes' [sic], demonstrating that colonial nomenclature had yet to stabilize in the region.

12. Assistant Resident Brackenbury reports that the Zinnas all brought food for the troops and received payment in cash, they appear now to 'understand all about cash' though their regular currency is iron rods, known locally as 'tagi', which are of the value of six for 3d.. This would appear a sure sign of the acceptance of civilization by these people who have till lately been unapproachable. All these tribes, Zinna, Yundams, Batisu, Yakoko appear to be Mumyes, differing little from each other in language; they 'pierce the ears in the same terrible way and wear the same iron ornaments'; the Zinnas 'all smelt iron and weave a loosely knitted cloth with patterns of black and white stripes – the colour is made with charcoal and a particular kind of earth. They are keen farmers and have asked for cotton seed Unlike the majority of Mumyes their villages are all on the plains. In spite of a particularly dry season their crops are very flourishing – a chief informed me that they were anxious to avoid diseases which they feared the Hausa would introduce.' 'the Zinnas dislike the Fulanis intensely'.

13 He [Brackenbury] gives an instructing account of the Yakoko and Batisu. The former place he states, is under a nominal paramount chief and consists of 14 wards which form an almost continuous ring round the fort of Yakoko hill. The population 'must be at least between 5000 and 7000, probably 10,000 The country for a radius of 4 miles round is cleared of bush the Fulani have never succeeded in getting a footing in Yakoko ...' [...]

14c Operations in the hill tribes to the South and West referred to above: action was forced on us by the work of the Boundary Commission which covered ground hitherto unoccupied by us, and there was danger of the feelings of the natives being alienated or themselves punished for submitting to the British.

Sanction was received at the end of November, and in December an account took place at Yakoko in which 12 of the enemy were killed, but the work could not be thoroughly undertaken till the troops were free from the duties of escort to the Commission. The operations which are of arduous nature are being conducted at the time of writing: the O[fficer] C[ommanding] Capt. Brown, Lt. Dillon,³⁷ an N[on].C[ommissioned].O[fficer]. with 70 men and a maxim are doing the work, with Assistant Resident Brackenbury as Political Officer. It has been arranged that the troops will occupy the district for some time after the operations are completed.

(J.M. FREMANTLE, 'Annual Report for the 12 months ending December 1907', Yola Prof SNP 7 – 1481/1908)

- 28 This was not the last of military subjugation. The *Gazetteer of Muri Province* describes Mumuye as 'the most backward tribe in Muri Province' (1920: 24) and makes specific mention of 1909, the year in which Brice-Smith acquired his Mumuye figures.

The Mumuye country was first traversed by Mr. Barclay with a patrol under Captain Baker, from Yola, in 1901–1902. It was visited again and "opened up", in 1909, since when there have been annual patrols, all of which have encountered opposition, more or less serious.

(1920: 25)

- 29 The Annual Report on Muri Province in the Nigerian Archives for the following year, 1910, records that,

62 The ½ Company "B" 2/N.N.R. originally at Ibi was early in 1910 transferred to Muri town in the Lau Division.

63. The only occasion on which Military force has been necessary against any tribe was during the patrol of this Muri detachment in the Mumuye Country. There were no casualties on our side. This Country and the Wurkun tribes are now again being visited by a patrol to show that our occupation is a permanent one and to deal with a slight recrudescence of lawlessness whereby the trade routes were imperilled.

(SNP 7:- 1317/1911, Annual Report No. 71 Muri Province 1910 – C.F. Rowe Acting Resident, p. 66)

- 30 This account is expanded in the Muri District Assessment Report of 1913, which makes specific mention of Brice-Smith in the context of ‘opening up’ the Mumuye in 1909.

Para 5. MILITARY PATROLS. The country was first opened up in 1909 by A.R. Brice-Smith accompanied by Captain Robinson and a strong patrol. Advantage was taken of the patrol to assess them. In 1910 (April) the tax for the first time was collected with considerable difficulty and force was used on more than one occasion. In 1911 and 1912 two more patrols traversed the country under Mr Haughton and though a little opposition was met with, the general demeanour of the pagans showed a great improvement. In July 1912 the District was traversed by A.R. Haughton with an escort of 20 police and most of the Country was assessed, but there yet remain 4 villages in the South eastern portion of the District which offered considerable opposition and in consequence the assessment of these villages was abandoned as it was considered unsafe to proceed further into the interior without a stronger escort.

(SNP 10: 115p/1913 Assessment Report)

- 31 Unless the ‘traversal’ of 1901–1902 picked up any sculpture, Brice-Smith’s acquisitions in 1909, which coincided with all that is covered by the euphemism of ‘opening up’ the country, would seem to have been the earliest opportunity, after the Boundary Commission of 1907, for a colonial European approaching from the east to encounter Mumuye material culture in place. Questions that would have been posed during ‘assessment’ about religious beliefs and practices may also have provided the opportunity to make the collection. The 1913 Muri District Assessment Report, which could draw also on Haughton’s assessment, specifically cites wooden figures:³⁸

12. A JUJU house is enclosed by a circular Zana mat [i.e. fencing poles to which are attached panels of woven, grass matting, hiding the interior from view] and consists of a small roofed hut in which are stored wooden images ranging from 2 to 5 feet high representing male and female figures and the various requisites used at the religious ceremony.

Inside these Zana matting enclosures of spirit groves, are held the discussions of the secret societies and initiation ceremonies where the boys are exercised so as to become inured to hardship. One of the tests of manliness is to undergo a flogging until blood is produced. During this period he is also tattooed. Initiation ceremonies are also observed with the girls whose main object is to prepare them in their domestic duties when they become wives. Both societies are kept rigidly apart, and neither dare penetrate the mysteries of the other under penalty of death.

- 32 The six Mumuye pieces Brice-Smith gave to Cambridge belonged to a donation that also included six ‘Munshi’ or Tiv items, consisting both of weapons (a pair of bow-string pullers and a circular hide shield) and Tiv valuables (two flat pieces of iron and an ornate axe head).³⁹ Brice-Smith served in Tiv country shortly after the patrols in Wurkun and Mumuye areas, by which time armed conflict was being succeeded by more routinized administration, which presumably explains the greater variety of Tiv objects than Gwomu.
- 33 There is also a mixture of weapons and other materials in the donation of over fifty objects that Brice-Smith made in 1939, to the British Museum. A high proportion of these are specifically dated to the two years 1909 and 1911. The objects acquired in 1909 include six spears from Gwomu in the Wurkun Hills, about one of which the accession record notes:

‘This spear was used by a young warrior in an attack by the pagans of Gwomu, Wurkum Hills, R. Benue, N. Nigeria, on a British patrol in 1909. The shaft was bound

with grass by the youth's sweetheart, who instructed him to return it to her steeped in the blood of the enemy. The young warrior was killed in the action.'

(British Museum Af 1939, 07.41)

- 34 This spear connects the event also recorded in the 1909 *Annual Report* and the letter describing the military engagement that Brice-Smith wrote to his parents. Brice-Smith's handwriting is difficult to decipher in parts, but his account gives vivid insight into the (in)sensibilities of a 25-year-old, colonial officer of the period.

During tea I had a full account of the "scrap". Gwomu on hearing of their fine had a long discussion with Chongo (Lo) vide previous letters, and some of their allied villages to the W[est]. Lo said "We have never paid to the Filani [Fulani] and, I should certainly not to the white man. We will be charmed [?] to come and help you not to do so". So fortified with copious drafts of gea [local beer] and doses of JuJu, Lo and Gwomu and others swore a solemn compact and prepared to teach us our position. They apparently stationed an ambush of bowman (they are really spearmen) on the path E[ast], but unfortunately Feneran [Lieutenant in charge of troops] chose path W[est]! They had a short talk (E [The Resident K. V. Elphinston] and the Gwomurians) and G[womu] refused to let us in and so they had to be moved out of the way and they were! There was one exciting incident. Carlyle [Assistant Resident] had the narrowest of shaves. He had been behaving like a fool and bolting around with a revolver. Finally on reaching the crest at C [referring to a point indicated on the accompanying sketch map], with one man he tried to assault P [another point indicated on sketch map]! and was rushed by 12 frenzied savages. Having got well on in front he completely masked the fire of E's men. E was ordering him back and he was yelling to E to "come on". Fortunately E just in time got in a volley that accounted for 10 of the 12, 1 [one] fled and the 12th proceeded to come to close quarters with C. C then retreated and took refuge behind a convenient hut. The pagan did the same on the other side and they both proceeded to edge round it. As it happened they came out on the same side 8 feet apart and the savage was just throwing his spear when C shot him. The spear left his hand as he dropped. If C had missed or been a second late he would [undoubtedly?] have been "skewered". Also the spears are poisoned the length of the head. E and F and C then had breakfast and finished the affair afterwards. G[womu] ran to the four winds some actually reaching Djen and Bandawa on the Benue bank! About 400 men tried to hold the hill. This all may sound very exciting but these shows are really very tame and the mater may bear in mind that the risk is nil. The rifles never let them get much inside spear range. In fact in the attacking force of 70 noone was touched and the show was "quite a good one" as these affairs go. It is only when people like C begin to play the fool that they run any risks. F was very annoyed as if a white man had been touched it would have been a serious thing for all concerned. Lots of people disapprove of affairs of this sort but what else can you do? This place had made life a misery for the whole neighbourhood for years. They were invincible practically in tribal warfare and defied us to move them. If we said "very well sit down and keep quiet" and had gone away, they would not have done so, and the neighbourhood would have said we were frightened of them like everyone else. As it is they will never want another dose. The effect on the surrounding tribes was magical. Lo and Bambuka fell over themselves in their hurry to pay the fine. Deputations have since come in from all sides to pay their respects. Djen and Bandawa at least 10 miles distant, Borok, Kulgari, Bambuka and others. Henceforth the roads in their country will be safe and other pagans in time will come down from the hills and farm in the plain. I noticed the effect when I went to Bambuka 2 days ago, but of this more anon.

- 35 It seems possible that the young warrior shot by Carlyle was the owner of the spear bound with grass by his 'sweetheart' that came, via Brice-Smith, to the British Museum. The items other than spears identified as Gwomu in the same donation are also

weaponry: a pair of shields accessioned as ‘perhaps’ in hippopotamus hide (19 and 21 inches) though Brice-Smith’s letter refers to shields in buffalo hide (Af 1939, 07.11-12). Taken together, these sources suggest that this group of eight pieces of Gwomu military equipment derives entirely from the ‘Wurkum patrol’.

- 36 A further seventeen Brice-Smith objects in the British Museum that were collected from Tiv in 1911 are, as in Cambridge, noticeably more varied: weapons are represented alongside domestic items (a Dane gun with added leatherwork, four spears and a spear sheath, a dagger, but also two ornate spoons, two tobacco pipes, and what may be tobacco accoutrements—snuff inhaler, tweezers, knife and sheath, tool, tongs).
- 37 The two Mumuye objects donated to the British Museum that Brice-Smith collected in 1909, described as “Mumuye” pagan clubs’, are intriguing. The considerably heavier of the two (Af1939,07.14 – H53.2cm, W22.2cm, X6.5cm), has an ‘elaborate crescentic’ head with smoothly scalloped, carved grooves, and a small leather thong at its end (presumably to suspend it, since it would not fit over the wrist). The lighter of the two is identical in length (Af1939,07.13 – H53.2cm, W14.5cm, X3.7cm) but carved without ornament, and with a thong at the end of its handle made from vegetable fibre. In short, the more substantial of these clubs looks to be the prestige version of which the slighter is a basic instance. Mette Bovin cites clubs as weapons used by Mumuye.⁴⁰ These two may have been designed for combat, but despite deep patination associated with prolonged handling, neither has the kind of damage that use as a weapon might occasion, and only the heavier of the two seems to have the heft to inflict serious harm. So, it seems at least likely that were used in performance for display.

Figure 6a: British Museum Accession Register 1939

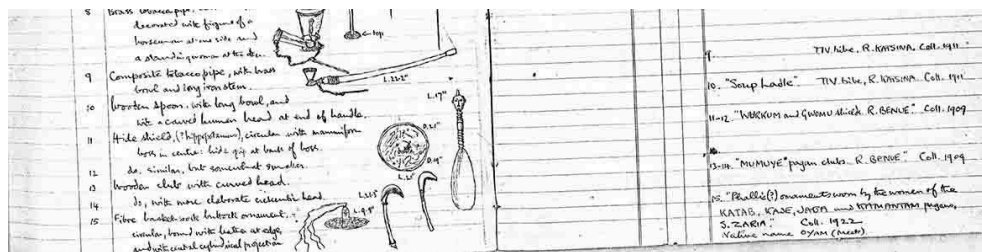


Figure 6b: British Museum – Mumuye clubs (Af1939,07.13 & 14)



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The material evidence of the Brice-Smith and Lilley Mumuye donations

- 38 What might the objects themselves tell us? The Mumuye figures in Cambridge form a pair, the male taller than the female. Sculpted in a style now considered to be characteristic of Mumuye, they lack the freedom of what the artworld considers the finest examples. Both figures realize a negative space between inner and outer columnar surfaces which is traversed by the navel. The surface of the outer column of many Mumuye figures at their widest is composed of the outsides of their shoulders, arms/hands, hips, and legs/feet, and on occasion, also of the helmet/hair or earlobes; the inner column, created by subtraction from the outer, includes the face, neck and torso. Protruding navels crossing the negative space created are common, particularly in stockier figures, which suggests that this feature may have been motivated in ways of which we are as yet unaware.

Figure 7: Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology E 1911.65 (female, viewer's right) E 1911.66 (male, left)



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- 39 Uncommonly for the region, sexual detail, whether genital or secondary, is absent or understated in Mumuye figures, which makes their intended gender difficult to determine for outsiders. The female Cambridge figure has three parallel lines incised on the under-surface of its hip which seem to represent labia. These lines, fully visible only if the figure is held upside down, are barely apparent in illustrations, which makes it difficult definitively to support the impression that this is unusual. The gender of Mumuye figures is more commonly indicated by embellishments, consistent with the widespread conception of full adult gender as a cultural achievement. In the Cambridge case, the head of the female figure is decorated with a raised circle at its crown, presumably indicative of a hair style, while its pendant side flaps are stretched earlobes. The uprightiness of both figures is accentuated by their slightly bulbous necks being thicker than, and almost as long as, their torsos, traits which, along with only slight bodily rotation and minimal right-left asymmetry, restricts the impression of fluid movement that the artworld values in what would, on that account, be considered finer examples. We know too little about Mumuye aesthetics to say whether this is a judgement they would have shared. The upper third of these figures might suggest an overall phallic form, something remarked of other sculptural styles in the region but not suggested previously of Mumuye. The black surface is thin, consistent with a single coat of stain or light singeing (a technique observed by Jan Strybol), through which bare wood shows in several places;⁴¹ the earlobes of the female figure, and the incised circular eyes and mouths full of pointed teeth of both figures have been left purposefully uncoloured. No patina from handling is evident, nor any damage, nor residue from offerings; in short, they are as pristine as century-old figures can be, and

must have been acquired as new by Brice-Smith. Without their exceptional provenance, in themselves the pair of figures would be unexceptional and correspondingly difficult to authenticate.

- 40 The female of the Cambridge Mumuye figures was illustrated in all three editions of Margaret Trowell's *Classical African Sculpture* as Plate Vb where, contrary to the Cambridge accession record, it was attributed to Chamba.⁴² This was a common misconception at the time of publication, arising from cursory readings of the documentation accompanying Lilley's donation to the British Museum of figures collected from a Chamba-ruled chiefdom. Given that she acknowledges research in several other collections, I have no explanation why Trowell did not identify the provenance of the figure she illustrated. She does not list the Cambridge Museum among those in which she worked. Whether she knew about Brice-Smith's field-based attribution to the Mumuye but was persuaded to change it, or, which seems to me more likely, was herself provided by some third party only with an illustration lacking a source, remains for now undecidable. I cited Trowell's illustration when writing on Mumuye for *Arts of the Benue Unmasked* but could not discover its source, and did not know it had a male partner which has apparently not been illustrated previously.⁴³
- 41 One of the 'two heads [*insertion in same hand, of a cock?*] of conventionalized animals, roughly moulded in clay' is currently misplaced, perhaps that described as resembling a cockerel in the accession register. Like the extant example it may be the spout to a pot. Likeness to a cockerel, which judging from the question mark may be a suggestion not based on Brice-Smith's original documentation, is not attested in the later literature on Mumuye pottery. The most extensive source on the subject, Jan Strybol, illustrates from his fieldwork an anthropomorphic pot of a sort used by healers and diviners to hold medicines; its spout is modelled after a human head with a crest (of hair) that might easily be mistaken for a cockscomb.⁴⁴ The other anthropomorphic conventions of the entire pot—indentations interpretable as scarification and a navel—correspond to features of Mumuye figures (Tervuren MRAC 71.55.21). Strybol elsewhere illustrates a bird-beaked vertical mask of a type he witnessed in performance, so we need to keep an open mind about the misplaced Cambridge piece given that the same formal conventions were carried over between different types of Mumuye object, and specifically between masks and ceremonial pots.⁴⁵ The extant pottery head, clearly the neck and spout of a large beer pot, is a hybridized animal combining elements of a toothy bushcow (its horns broken off) with features of human adornment—a striated cranium and sagittal crest representing braided hair. These well-documented beer-pot spout heads are formally similar to theranthropic (that is to say fused, composite animal-human), horizontal Mumuye masks. Arnold Rubin and Jan Strybol both witnessed the ceremonial smashing of such beer pots, each meant for one of the recent dead, during annual Mumuye funerary rites.⁴⁶

Figure 8: Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology E 1911.67



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- 42 The other two objects in the donation are goblet-shaped, stemmed vessels in clay. Their accession note describes them as mundane storage vessels, and Jan Strybol illustrates similar goblet-shaped vessels, called *pido*, collected from a Mumuye sub-group described as atypical in some aspects of their material culture.⁴⁷ He was convinced that ritual pottery was generally commissioned rather than purchased openly in the market.⁴⁸

Figure 9: *Pido* stemmed vessels, together with cooking pots, on sale as domestic ware at Kunzang market, 1971.



Photo: MRAC Tervuren (courtesy of Françoise Strybol)

- 43 The stemmed vessels were described to Strybol by informants as used for making ‘soup’, which in Nigerian English usually means the sauce to accompany staple foods. But whether these goblets were used to cook is unclear, since they do not appear to have been designed to be heated, and the collected pieces show no signs of the effects of exposure to cooking fires. The Cambridge goblet with a spiral stem, if it has been kept as collected,⁴⁹ contained five shield-shaped, calabash chips, incised with different numbers of spots, as well as eleven large, shiny seeds, probably palm nuts. This looks like a well-used divinatory apparatus (*Blue Book* 1911.195).⁵⁰

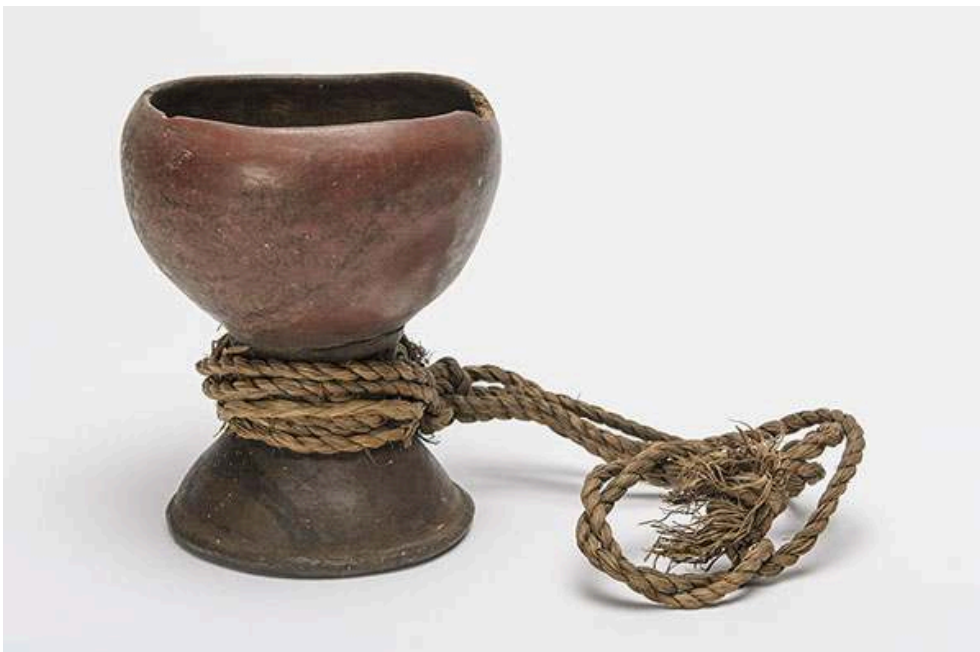
Figure 10: Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology E 1911.195



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- 44 The second stemmed bowl (*Blue Book* 1911.196) has a (flammable) rope attached to it which precludes use as a cooking pot and suggests the possibility that it also might have been carried to or stored in a ritual context.

Figure 11: Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology E 1911.196



© The Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

- 45 Even if the Cambridge accession notes quoted a letter of donation from Brice-Smith with information from the interviews carried out for an ‘Assessment Report’ in the

wake of ‘opening up’ Mumuye country, as we saw already, the circumstances of all this do not encourage confidence in the knowledge transmitted. These circumstances had changed to some degree by 1921 when Assistant District Officer E.S. Lilley made the small collection that included the four wooden figures he donated to the British Museum in 1922. That these have occasioned confusions is unnecessary since the record for once is clear.⁵¹

- 46 Lilley had made his collection while touring the northeastern-most part of early 20th-century Chambaland, then administered from the Chamba-ruled chiefdom of Binyeri (or Biinyeri, since the initial /i/ is a long vowel, but not Bunyeri, *pace* Herreman).⁵² Lilley’s donation to the British Museum included a part copy of a document called, ‘Historical and ethnological notes on the Chamba people of Dakka’, the full version of which I read in the Nigerian National Archives in Kaduna (Yola Profile J8) forty years ago.⁵³ Two of the figures in his donation formed a gendered pair in a typical ‘Chamba’ columnar style and appeared to be new.⁵⁴ The other two did not match, which would not have precluded their being used as a pair. As explained in more detail elsewhere, the fact of collection in a Chamba-ruled district led to these pieces also being attributed to ‘Chamba’ when they were first published.⁵⁵

Figures 2 & 1



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- 47 The male is generally considered a masterpiece, of ‘Mumuye’ style. Its design incorporates an open-worked tripod in its abdomen, a device, as Herreman has subsequently pointed out, that is shared by two wooden idiophones.⁵⁶ It was otherwise thought unique, but recently Strybol has illustrated a similar, and similarly sized (48 cm compared with 47 cm), more weathered figure from a private collection with the same tripod element, which he had seen in the field in an area close to Binyeri.⁵⁷ Whereas the Lilley figure has a straw inserted laterally through its nose, that illustrated

by Strybol has an alternative, upright nose ornament also found in early photographs of Mumuye women.⁵⁸

48 Although I previously described the tripod device of this figure as forming part of its hips, that interpretation created a problem of redundancy because the figure's lower section consists of hips and notched legs in conventional Mumuye, indeed regional, style. It strikes me as more likely that the tripod device is enclosing, as Willett wrote, an abdominal negative space, the positive outlines of which connect the internal and external surfaces of the figure, thereby expanding the sculptural function, already noted, played by the navel in many examples. The navel, at least for Mumuye women, was often at the centre, hence the focus, of elaborate patterns of scarification. I also wondered earlier, as does Strybol of the similar figure, whether the extension of the central ridge of the torso over this tripod feature might represent a penis, but if the tripod encloses an abdominal space, then this would be open to question, notwithstanding a willingness of Mumuye sculptors to rearrange the human form radically. While obvious primary or secondary sexual characteristics are absent, the solid headdress, and the absence of perforated earlobes, would make this figure male.⁵⁹ It shows signs of age in a dark, rich patina that is equally dense over the stub of the damaged right arm. The face and headdress have traces of white colouring which once may have covered them entirely, and in addition to the straw inserted laterally through its pierced nose, the figure is ornamented with a necklace of alternating light and dark blue tubular beads. All these features suggest an extended period of use before collection, making the figure in all likelihood at least as old as those collected new a dozen years earlier by Brice-Smith.

49 The second figure that Lilley collected, the female sketched by Henry Moore, is not in the canonically Mumuye style of the first. It has evident primary and secondary female characteristics and is at least relatively unflexed and symmetrical. It was undamaged on collection but its rich patina and the white colouring of incised areas of the face suggest use before collection. A counterpart male figure in similar but less angular style, not necessarily by the same hand, was collected by Roy Sieber in 1958, and this closely resembles a yet less angular figure in a private collection (that of Jean-Pierre Lacoste).⁶⁰ In his recent account, which is enlightening in several other respects, Frank Herreman attributed to me the view 'that the [female Lilley and male Sieber figures] are of Chamba rather than Mumuye origin', and that I reject the Mumuye attribution on stylistic grounds; his collaborator Constantine Petridis added that I both refute the attribution of this figure to Mumuye and believe the carver to be Chamba.⁶¹ None of this is the case. Like them, and like everyone else, I have no idea who carved this figure. With apologies for extended self-quotation, the crux here is the confusion that arises with the application of the same ethnic terms to people and to sculptural styles. This extract distils the essence of the argument that is being misconstrued.

As Philip Fry noticed in his insightful review, the short-leggedness of this [the female Lilley] figure made its proportions closer to Chamba figures ... This putative 'pair' of figures [i.e. the female Lilley and male Sieber figures] is gendered by their genitalia, a feature typical of Chamba volumetric figures rather than Mumuye figures, suggesting either that the sculptor was not Mumuye or was versed in a non-Mumuye idiom ... Reattribution of both these pieces to Mumuye has been represented as a correction of Lilley; however, Lilley's original report provided as exact provenance as we possess for any Mumuye figures, which, just as he recorded, were collected in a chiefdom ruled by Chamba ... in a multi-ethnic community such as Binyeri in the 1920s, it is far from clear how the question [of attribution] might

be resolved or quite what it means. The periodic ‘corrections’ to Lilley reveal *the poverty of trying to fit sculptures into an ethnic grid that was hardly meaningful at the place and time they were in use.*⁶²

- 50 Some of the conventions of figures like the Lilley female and Sieber male figures (for instance, their proportions and their gendering by feature and colour) resemble those of Chamba-style volumetric figures as much as they do Mumuye. This volumetric style, which became common only among some northern Chamba,⁶³ is similar in these same respects to Verre figure sculptures, unsurprisingly given they are not just neighbours but in places their clans are intermingled. An influence of cast brass figures, such as made by Verre smiths, on the rounded volumetric style is conceivable. So, these are not characteristics confined to particular ethnically defined styles but features common to the styles of some of the figures used by several ethnic groups in the same region.
- 51 An additional problem complicates the attribution of any of these artworks to specific ethnic groups. Both Mumuye and Verre were originally outsider terms; they ignore variations of dialect, locality and culture that are important to the people so named (as, for instance, Zinna and Yakoko areas for Mumuye). And if this was not complication enough, as Jan Strybol also emphasises, several other small ethnic groups in the region are known to the ethnographic record by little more than name, but he suggests that, like their neighbours, they also had sculptural traditions. The northwest corner of what is now considered Mumuye land is particularly complex in this regard, and Strybol raises the possibility of the tall, lanky figures from this area not being Mumuye.⁶⁴ Such complexities demonstrate the importance of not conflating an ethnonym that has been applied to a sculptural style with the ethnicity of an artist.
- 52 In common with several other Chamba chiefdoms in the area of the northern Shebshi Mountains, Binyeri, where Lilley made his collection, was founded by the settlement of Chamba-led raiding bands, composed of the various peoples they picked up, operating back and forth over the mountains and surrounding plains during the 19th century. Coming from the east, Chamba clans would have encountered Verre en route, and finally installed themselves alongside Tola, Tiba, Dandi and Mumuye. This mobility was unexceptional but of the same kind as the early movements of raiders who went on to establish much larger kingdoms, like Bali Nyonga in the Cameroon Grassfields or Donga, with which the founders of Binyeri had been in touch, in the plains south of the Benue River, communities where people and stuff from different clans and places were mashed up in new political, performative and aesthetic configurations.⁶⁵ Hence, it is not odd for the Lilley collection to include a pair of columnar figures in southern Chamba style, a masquerade in western Chamba style, a male figure in Mumuye style, and a female in a style more difficult to pin with a label, all with the complex resemblances we have been discussing. The assemblage considered in its entirety relates unproblematically to what we know of its ethnoworld, even though it plays havoc with artworld style categories.

Recuperating the watershed decade, mid-1960s–1970s

- 53 Remarkably slight additions were made to the ethnographic or collection record on the Mumuye during the roughly half-century between these two early collection events and the exodus of Mumuye sculptures from the mid-1960s.⁶⁶ The Temples, as we have

seen, anthologized some materials recorded by colonial officers in the course of their administrative duties, and C.K. Meek, the colonial government anthropologist, based a chapter of the first volume of his *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria* on brief enquiries.⁶⁷ Mission magazines occasionally featured photographs. There are just a couple of indications of other Mumuye figures outside Nigeria. The best documented was discussed earlier, that exhibited in London in 1960 with the British Museum Lilley figures and now in the Metropolitan Museum (Figure 3).⁶⁸ Herreman illustrates a figure from an unnamed private collection with strong similarities to this in overall form and the detail of its head.⁶⁹ Less intricately decorated than that in the Metropolitan Museum, consistent with later collection it shows more wear. If the recorded dimensions are correct, however, this second figure is almost double the height of the first (at 80.5 compared with 45 cms). This paragraph just about covers the sum of ethnographic information about Mumuye amassed during four decades of colonial rule.

- 54 The situation transformed in the decade between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s. Mette Bovin spent some weeks in Zinna (Zing) in 1964 and, on return to Denmark, in 1966 held the first Mumuye exhibition at the Moesgård Museum in Aarhus. She returned briefly to continue research in 1968. Arnold Rubin's doctoral research predominantly concerned the Jukun, but he visited Mumuye in October 1965 (and returned in April 1970 and February 1971). The year 1966 marked the beginning of the accelerated outflow of Mumuye sculpture via Fumban in Cameroon; 1968, the year after the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War, saw Michel Huguenin's and Edouard Klejman's celebrated exhibition of eighteen sculptures at the Galerie Majestic; the acquisition of a Mumuye figure by the Musée de l'Homme in 1969 (MH 69.22.1) was followed by the scholarly attention attracted when Philip Fry undertook detailed, formal analysis of 53 examples of Mumuye figure sculptures.⁷⁰ Albert Maesen's team undertook research from 1970 to 1972, although the results from this appeared only later thanks to Frank Herreman and Jan Strybol. Notwithstanding this activity on the ground and in the artworld, by 1978, Arnold Rubin would write of the lost opportunity to map local and regional variations in the form and style of Mumuye figures before their 'illegal exportation on a massive scale' during the Nigerian Civil War.⁷¹ What more can be done with the resources that decade produced?
- 55 The ethnographic record has been reanalysed extensively; if the objects themselves are to speak, then a necessary step must be to reconstruct and inventorize the outflow of Mumuye sculptures during the critical decade. The figures passed through the hands of a relatively small number of well-known dealers, whose names have been cited on several occasions, most recently by Herreman, noting the particular importance of Philippe Guimiot's archive.⁷² Despite the obfuscation that Herreman reports on the part of African runners, who did not wish competitors to know their sources, the European dealers' records should at least indicate which pieces left the region together (see also note 19 here for an interesting exception).⁷³ Philip Fry's sketches of style features are sufficiently detailed to identify many of the figures in his fifty-plus sample with later published photographs from (often anonymous) private collections.⁷⁴ A dozen such figures were, until its 2008 dispersal, in the collection of the architect Pierre Parat.⁷⁵ Frank Herreman's reference to his 1979 master's dissertation, in Flemish, suggests that might hold some of the keys.⁷⁶ The Yale-Guy van Rijn database holds a large number of photographic images, while the online subscription service Artkhade apparently has

410 Mumuye figures in its past auctions database.⁷⁷ The material is there if it can be accessed and organized.

- 56 Given an inventory with provenance and current whereabouts, the creation of a catalogue, or virtual museum, could begin with the material properties of the sculptures that made up the outflow of the years around the Nigerian Civil War. In the narrowest sense, we might note the woods and colourings used by Mumuye carvers: for instance, the accession record of the Tishman figure in the Metropolitan Museum specifies *Detarium senegalense*, but I am not aware, for instance, whether we know the wood used for the comparable figure in the Fondation Beyeler or others that are argued to be by the same hand.⁷⁸ Jan Strybol has recently provided field observations about the range of woods that sculptors he witnessed employed.⁷⁹
- 57 Moving from materials to form, building on Fry's observations, art specialists have outlined the basic morphologies of figures in Mumuye style, separating variations in their three main sections: head and neck; shoulders, trunk and arms; and the hips, legs and feet.⁸⁰ Most Mumuye-style figures are not distinctive in all three of their sections: the hips, legs and feet commonly have the single notched-knee shape shared by the Cambridge, British Museum and Metropolitan Museum figures (Figures 1, 2 & 3), which is regionally distributed. A minority, particularly of the taller figures, play on this idea by multiplying the notches. The enclosing shape of the arms of many Mumuye figures are also a regional feature that can vary in execution from raised relief on the torso (for instance in Wurkun style) to the creation of substantial negative space as in many Mumuye-style, but also in some Chamba-style volumetric, figures. The stylized treatment of the head, and particularly of the ears and coiffure/cap, stand out as distinctive among the particular features the artworld attributes Mumuye style. Such characteristics of their three parts might usefully be correlated with one another and with the overall scale of the figures. Neyt has generalized that figures tend to be discontinuously distributed in size between small 15–30 cm, medium around 50 cm, and large 90 cm and above.⁸¹ If this can be demonstrated for a large sample, then we might find it correlated with the uses to which the figures were put. Mumuye sculptural style has further been characterized as particularly free in stretching the regionally shared conventions. This is something a catalogue would allow us to investigate with more exactitude, so that Mumuye does not act simply as a positive label covering the negative stylistic space created by the features not-Chamba, not-Jukun, not-Wurkun, not-Verre ... etc.. Closer study may well lead to some deconstruction of the singularity of the Mumuye style label. Jan Strybol has suggested plausibly that there are stylistic features, particularly, to judge from his examples, of the willowy figures not previously documented from the field, that may be characteristic of peripheral groups or even of less-known Mumuye neighbours (he cites Minda, Waka, Yendang, Yoti and Jessi).⁸² In this connection, it might be significant that runners coming up northwards from Fumban in Cameroon would have been likely first to have scoured western areas served by the roads beyond Jalingo to Lau and Pantisawa.⁸³
- 58 Both distinctive overall forms and signature features have been picked out to argue for narrower resemblances. Bernard de Grunne provided a lead in identifying the hand of a particular Mumuye carver in three figures, including two of the most celebrated (those illustrated here as *Figures 4 & 5* in the collections of the New York Metropolitan Museum and the Fondation Beyeler).⁸⁴ I sought to build on his argument by noting that these two pieces shared with a third the distinctive handling of the hands and wrists (not

present in the third piece de Grunne proposed, which had deeply notched arms lacking defined hands).⁸⁵ In similar vein, Frank Herreman has identified and beautifully illustrated several other cases of plausible resemblance between figures that may be indicative of particular sculptors, workshops, or local styles.⁸⁶ Used cautiously, the notion of an artist's signature can be productive, but it may appear only in some of the works of identifiable carvers. The Fowler Museum permitted reproduction in the catalogue of *Central Nigeria Unmasked* of the entirety of Arnold Rubin's field photographs of Mumuye figures from their archive. Rubin had been told that several works were by a sculptor named Nyavo; but, if these attributions were correct, the works themselves were strikingly unlike. Contrarily, Jan Strybol illustrates striking resemblances among figures by different hands from the same small area of Mumuye country.⁸⁷

- 59 Finally, for now, we might wonder whether all stylistic features will turn out to be signatures of artists or localities. Throughout the region, similar figures served a variety of representative purposes, for instance as general or specific ancestors, as dangerous spirits and so forth. My impression at the time of my Chamba fieldwork was that figures were not commissioned for a purpose but put to a purpose after they had been bought, already made, from carvers. But this was the twilight of Chamba historical religion, and most of figures sold were not being replaced. For an earlier period, there are some contrary indications. In notes from 1944, which I consulted in the mid-1970s when they were kept at the Mapeo Catholic Mission, Father Malachy Cullen, who was a Chamba speaker, reported the belief among Mapeo villagers that there existed a hut in the ritual centre of Yeli or Dayela, a place only a few miles away which most villagers feared to visit, that contained figures representing the deformations of disease or lacking limbs. Yeli was particularly credited with control over smallpox. Chamba in Mapeo refused, he wrote, to buy figures on which the eyes or facial scars had already been incised in case they carried smallpox contagion. I did not learn what they looked like, and I suspect my interlocutors did not know themselves, but rumours of the destruction of smallpox figures in a compound fire were the cause of a panicked attempt to recapture some smallpox spirits during my own fieldwork. With due caution about overstressing regional similarities, there are Mumuye figures which recall these accounts of deformity. Herreman illustrates one such covered with incised circular spots and carved serrations which have no obvious explanation except as sores.⁸⁸ Another figure, apparently by the same hand, lacks bodily markings but has braids only to one side of its head, and both figures have what can only be construed as multiple navels, or perhaps hernias.⁸⁹ Serrations are not uncommon: the Metropolitan Museum figure (Figure 3) that we know to have been exported before 1960 is covered with them, although another that formally resembles it has no similar features below the head.⁹⁰ Herreman also illustrates three elongated figures which each lack an arm. Since there is no evidence of damage after the pieces left the workshop, is this simply a matter of a sculptor's slip made good, as Herreman suggests, or were deformed figures required for some cults and commissioned as such?⁹¹ Indeed, might some features of other Mumuye figures be intended as deformities?

In closing

- 60 The Mumuye case, I suggested in introduction, is not just a negative space stylistically but also empirically, an extreme example of disparity between artworld renown and ethnoworld documentation. Issues are highlighted glaringly rather than with the nuance that we would find if we were, say, discussing Yoruba artists. What conclusions are worth drawing?
- 61 It would be tedious and unreadable instead of ‘Mumuye’ to write pedantically if not parodically of ‘the people called Mumuye by outsiders who over time have adopted this identification for themselves in some contexts’. But that is who they are, and when reading or writing the ethnic term Mumuye it matters to keep its historicity in mind. Similarly, it would be clumsy to write always of ‘figures in what Western scholars have defined as Mumuye style’ rather than simply of ‘Mumuye figures’. But the relation between Mumuye ethnicity and Mumuye style is not one of simple correspondence. The terms, as I put it earlier, have largely spent their time in different discourses. There is historically no singular Mumuye to have been the collective agent of Mumuye style. Arguments couched in these terms lead nowhere. Not only because we lack the information to settle them, but because they arise from a misuse of terms and discourage attempts at precision. And yet, even knowing this, it is difficult to take account of it in the face of the institutionalized resistances of conventional classificatory practice, written and spoken expression, museum display, and market practice, which in concert gravitate towards reification of ethnic entities and conflation of them with artistic style. This is not only an academic or external matter. What I earlier called artefactual ethnicity (the ethnic labelling of things) becomes an available marker in processes of ethnic identification by people. The idea of all this as a singular problem in search of a solution itself is illusory given that processes of identification are not static, and that part of what they react either towards or against is an existing state of classification.
- 62 Mumuye style is in part difficult to pin down positively because it arose as the label for a negative space. Scholars with first-hand knowledge of the area have underlined intra-Mumuye differences as well as the existence of micro-minorities that would not be considered Mumuye at all. Those who have familiarity with some other parts of the region, but not with the Mumuye, which is my case, see regional similarities. As Peter Mark helpfully summarized for me in response to this paper, this is not a matter of fuzziness around the edges of ethnic categories but of fuzziness at their every level.
- 63 Virtually all Mumuye art of which we currently know is likely to have been created in the 20th century, yet it would be classified as ‘precontemporary’ in conventional artworld terms. Contemporary is not just a chronological category but an evaluative judgement of the relation between artworks and the artists’ consciousness of their era. In that sense, self-consciously ‘traditional’ works may be judged to be contemporary art. But there is no evidence of such motivation in the case of Mumuye artworks which related either to religious concerns that are receding or have disappeared in Nigeria, or to the demands of 20th-century markets. Whatever ethnoworld knowledge was recorded about these Mumuye arts and their purposes has been mined exhaustively in recent years. My account of the background to the Brice-Smith collection shows that some modest contextualization may remain to be added. Improving a scant Mumuye record in this way is satisfying and serves to illuminate other parts of a network of

collections, such as those to which Brice-Smith contributed, but its impact is unlikely to be transformative. The onus lies elsewhere: in the artworld which has profited handsomely from the market in Mumuye figures. In the absence of a catalogue, or manipulable virtual museum, of the artworks attributed to Mumuye that left Nigeria between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s, empirical analyses cannot be grounded and generalizations about similarities in material, scale, form, style, provenance and so forth cannot be debated and interpreted. The objects cannot speak. In this extreme example, there is a clear need for collaboration between those who see things predominantly from the artworld and those who view them from the ethnoworld; otherwise we have done just about all that is possible with the resources available.

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NOTES

1. H. MOORE, 1951, p. 95–96; quoted by R. FARDON, 2011, p. 265.
2. F. WILLETT, 1971, p. 148; quoted by J. STRYBOL, 2013, p. 158.
3. F. WILLETT 1971, 2002, p. 138, figure 140; discussed in R. FARDON, 2011, p. 262.
4. F. HERREMAN, 2016, p. 31, emphasis added.
5. Heinrich Barth lists ‘Momoyëenchi’ among the languages listed for him in 1851 as spoken in the Fulani Emirate of Adamawa; H. BARTH, 1965 [originally 1857], volume II, p. 198; J. STRYBOL, 2018, p. 7. The suffix suggests a Hausa term for a language in this instance (compare, *Hausanci*, Hausa language).
6. M.C. BERNS, R. FARDON, S.L. KASFIR, 2011, chapter 8, particularly p. 259–262.
7. See C. STELZIG, 2009, and <http://brunoclaessens.com/tag/mumuye/#.WS6ljMa1tpg>, ‘Star Wars and African art’ for the history of the analogy (last consulted May 2018).
8. C. STELZIG, 2009.
9. F. NEYT, 2006, p. 54; F. HERREMAN, 2016, plates 30–34, 35–41.
10. F. NEYT, 2006; F. HERREMAN with C. PETRIDIS, 2016.

11. J. STRYBOL, 2018 and J. STRYBOL, 2013.

12. By not using finer-grained distinctions, I am simplifying some complex issues, and ignoring others, in ways I would not if the distinctions were themselves my main subject. I specifically do not intend to suggest that all expertise speaks only from one of these two worlds of knowledge (museum curators typically straddle worlds), or that there are no power implications in the postures. While the line between art- and ethno-worlds can be very fuzzy both in principle and practice, the starkness of the mismatch between artworld celebrity and ethnoworld knowledge in the Mumuye case allows me to be unsubtle without fatally compromising the main focus of analysis, as would happen if I was equally blithe in less clearcut cases.

13. In the catalogue to the Benue River Valley exhibition, I distinguished between ‘artefactual ethnicity’ (the ethnicity attributed to the non-human things that human beings make) and the artefactual character of ethnicity (the ways in which human and object ethnic identities are made and remade). ‘Mumuye-style’ and ‘Mumuye’ are inter-related but they are not coincident; much of their time is spent leading lives in distinct discourses (in this instance, as the name of historical styles of figure carving in artworld discussions largely outside Nigeria, and as the name of a contemporary minority ethnic group within Nigeria). I return to these considerations in conclusion.

14. R. BRAVMANN, 1973; S.L. KASFIR, 1984. These two citations are conventional in the history of African art studies but, coming around the time of its first publication to this conversation from a background in the anthropological study of ethnicity, I was struck by the African art discourse of object-ethnicity lagging a couple of decades behind the anthropological analysis of personal-ethnicity.

15. An interesting literature is developing around the capacities of digital museums (e.g. C. HOGSDEN, E.J. POULTER, 2012) that invites us to think about other variants, like a Mumuye virtual museum that networked the digital facets of conventional museums together with Mumuye pieces in private collections.

16. C. HOGSDEN, E.J. POULTER, 2012, p. 278–279.

17. For detail, see R. FARDON, 2011, p. 259–262.

18. German colonial officers, or at least some of them, were more avid collectors than their British counterparts in this area. Greater numbers of Mumuye objects, like those from neighbouring Chamba, might have been collected had they found themselves in Kamerun. As it is, the area of Max Moisel’s map of Kamerun on which the name Mumuye appears is otherwise almost featureless (*Karte von Kamerun*, Sheet D2 Schebshi-Geb, 1912).

19. In this connection, a recent auction flyer (dated 14 June 2018, for a sale the following month) illustrates the images sent by a Cameroonian dealer, El Hadj Yende Amadou, in 1968–1969 of the Mumuye figures he had acquired in Nigeria. The flyer assures buyers that these works remained in a north German collection for almost fifty years before the present sale, <https://www.tribal-art-auktion.de/en/news-and-events/news-detail/well-documented/> last accessed May 2019.

20. Strybol notes that the runners largely confined their attentions to the lowland areas between Jalingo, Pantisawa and Lau, that is to say the western side of Mumuye country. Southeast of Lau on the Benue River there are several ethnic groups described by Strybol as ‘relic’ which he believes to have been the source of many pieces from this time. J. STRYBOL, 2018, p. 71.

21. In a recent interview (A. COSGROVE, 2018; the reference to which I owe to the flyer in note 19), Hermione Waterfield, then of Christie’s Auction House, recalls a visit to the Jos Museum around this time,

‘I never went to Africa with Bill [William Fagg of the British Museum], sadly, but he encouraged me to go to Nigeria. I stayed in Nigeria for three weeks, visiting first the National Museum in Lagos and then travelling north to Kaduna and Jos. In Jos, Angela Rackham [Bill Fagg’s niece] took me to the depot and in there were all the Mumuye figures stacked up on shelves. She said “*shhh*” and in the silence you could hear “*tick tick tick tick*”. You could hear the bugs chewing the

wood!

‘This is why a lot of the patina on old Mumuye figures is redone because they’ve had to fill up all the bug holes. Sadly there was one at auction that belonged to somebody I knew. Everyone was saying it was fake but it wasn’t, it had been repatinated, probably in Africa when all the bug holes had been filled. The problem was they wouldn’t come clean about it. If they had, it would have been proof that the piece was indeed old and true.

‘There are some Mumuye figures that were made for us because they ran out of course. In the mid-70s every American collector had to have at least one, if not half a dozen Mumuye figures. There weren’t enough to go round so they just made some more. They “replaced”.’

22. F. HERREMAN, 2016, p. 9; see also S. FORNI, 2015, p. 129–131 for a recent first-hand account.

23. R. FARDON, 2011; J. STRYBOL, 2013, 2018, previously 1985, 1998; F. HERREMAN, 2016, previously 1988.

24. For some of these various terms, simply among Mumuye ‘proper’, see J. STRYBOL, 2018, p. 72.

25. I am grateful to Françoise Strybol, who accompanied Jan Strybol, for confirmation that all the figures photographed in a Belgian studio for which captions specify a particular place were seen earlier in the field. She cites three exceptions (Figures 34, 42, 43) which are field photographs sent by local contacts not later than 1993 (personal communication May 2019).

26. R. FARDON, C. STELZIG, 2005.

27. J. STRYBOL, 2018, p. 92–100, 136.

28. *The Twenty-Eighth Annual Report of the Antiquarian Committee to the Senate and List of Accessions for the years 1910, 1911 and 1912* (published in April, 1914) described four of the six objects donated in a single entry.

NIGERIA 514-517. Two wooden figures of ancestors, and two large conventionalised heads of a cock and of an animal roughly moulded in clay. From shrines in which they were kept “to preside over the crops, births, deaths, etc., of the tribe”; *Mumuye* pagan hill tribes.

(1914: 19)

This published record looks like an abbreviated, and conflated, version of two handwritten entries in the *Accession Register* for 1911.

1911 65-66 Two wooden figures – “not actually worshipped, representing departed ancestors whose presence brings good fortune to the family”

1911 67-68 Two large conventionalized animals. “Deities placed in the various shrines over the country which preside over the crops, births, deaths, etc of the tribe [.]”

(*Accession Register* Volume 9, 1910-15, Ethnological, p. 12–13, 514–517)

29. But not the earliest date of field acquisition for works attributed to the Mumuye. The earliest of which I know is the 1907 ‘capture’ of a masquerade at Yakoko that was subsequently donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum Oxford in 1913 (M.C. BERNS *et al.*, 2011, p. 307). The donor was Kathleen Nora Dillon, presumably on behalf of her brother (Henry Mountiford Dillon, 1881–1918) who took part in an attack on the Mumuye in the course of the 1907 Anglo–German border demarcation. The fullest note on file in the Pitt Rivers Museum is written in the hand of the curator Henry Balfour (1863–1939), perhaps countersigned by or on behalf of Henry Dillon.

‘Captured in 1907 in Northern Nigeria at a place called YAKOKO in YOLA province (in a hollow tree) during an expedition against the MUMUYI pagans. YAKOKO is about their biggest town and it was the first time they had been visited. The juju is called locally JUMBI and is the woman’s devil. If a woman is to be punished he comes into the town and the women all run to their houses. He then goes to the house of the offender & brings her out and beats her [...]. [Signed in a different hand] “H M Dillon”.’ (personal communication from Jeremy Coote, June 2019)

‘Jumbi’ is not recorded as a term for masquerade in other sources, but masquerades had personal names of which this might, supposing it is even in Mumuye, perhaps be an example. Only two more masquerades were collected during the colonial period of which I know. These entered the British Museum in 1954 from the Wellcome Collection and are most likely to have been acquired

in Nigeria and brought home by colonial officers who sold them before 1936 to agents acting for the Wellcome Museum (see J. MACK, 2003). Wellcome pieces are difficult to provenance. My earlier discussion of the stylistics of Mumuye masks (in R. FARDON, 2007) was subsequently refined (in M.C. BERNS *et al.*, 2011) and would now need to be supplemented and corrected by Jan Strybol (J. STRYBOL, 2018, p. 46–69). As noted on several occasions in this essay, a corrigible shared database would help encourage an informed interpretive conversation.

30. <http://www.vhi.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/about-us/baron> (Last consulted May 2018)

31. Cambridge University Library: Royal Commonwealth Society Library, Framed photographs of Nigeria, circa 1920s, Y3043EE. <https://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/db/node.xsp?id=EAD%2FGBR%2F0115%2FY3043EE> (Last consulted May 2018)

32. Letters home from Nigeria, 1901–1919, with other miscellaneous correspondence, 1933–1966. <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/blcas/brice-smith.html> (Last consulted May 2018).

33. A. SAI, 2016, p. 243, 247, 256, 279 and 332.

34. Jörg Adelberger has published my full transcription with the original map and valuable further contextualization (J. ADELBERGER, 2018).

35. See J. ADELBERGER 1992 for uses of the Wurkum or Wurkun label.

36. A British perspective was provided by Whitlock in a paper delivered to the Royal Geographical Society in June 1910 and published that same year, although there is no specific mention of Mumuye (G.F.A. WHITLOCK, 1910).

37. Presumably the brother of Kathleen Nora Dillon, donor of a masquerade now in the Pitt Rivers Museum, see note 29.

38. Also in O. and C.L. TEMPLE, 1922, p. 290.

39. Accessioned in the *Blue Book* supplementary register as BB 1911.201-206A and also included in the published 1914 *Annual Report* as AR 1914.518-522.

40. M. BOVIN, 2011, p. 373.

41. J. STRYBOL, 2018, p. 75.

42. M. TROWELL, 1954, 1964, 1970.

43. R. FARDON, 2011, p. 262.

44. J. STRYBOL, 1985, plate 33.

45. J. STRYBOL, 2013, p. 144–145; 2018, p. 667.

46. S.E. GAGLIARDI, 2011; M.C. BERNS *et al.*, 2011, p. 326 fig. 10.19, 320, figs. 10.22 & 23, 360-362, figs. F 12-14; J. STRYBOL, 1985, figs. 35 and 36.

47. J. STRYBOL, 1985, p. 43.

48. Personal communication, Françoise STRYBOL, July 2017.

49. The original accession note does not remark upon these contents, which leaves a real possibility they found their way into the goblet subsequently (whether before or after donation). That caution noted, there does not appear to be another accession record corresponding to these divinatory pieces (Rachel HAND, personal communication, July 2017).

50. Wim van Binsbergen examined these illustrations and suggested, in an extensive report, that the incisions were similar to those in divination systems that were widely distributed, both spatially and historically, of which they might be a peripheral and not entirely mastered example (personal communication, July 2017; copy at the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology).

51. Among the less taxing of these confusions to correct, Neyt, for no reasons given, attributes the donation that Lilley made to the British Museum, which was collected in 1921, to the German ethnologist Leo Frobenius, with a collection date of 1911. F. NEYT, 2006, p. 15, 17.

52. F. HERREMAN, 2016, *passim*.

53. Before the First World War, most Chamba were in German Kamerun, Binyeri and its surrounds being an exception. Lilley recounts oral histories of the 19th-century intrusion from the east of Chamba bands who came to dominate the local populations of predominantly Mumuye and Daka speakers, as well as periodically fighting among themselves. The British had very quickly recognized the Binyeri as the District paramountcy, thereby consolidating its power, albeit temporarily, a common occurrence under indirect rule. Several administrative reorganizations followed from the Anglo–German colonial border moving east with the demarcation of the Anglo–French Mandated Territories, and these eventually left Binyeri outside what would now be considered as Chambaland.
54. At the time of the co-authored account with Christine Stelzig these two figures were not accessible in the British Museum store, but inspection subsequently confirmed what we learnt from sketches in the accession record; see R. FARDON, 2011, p. 244.
55. R. FARDON, C. STELZIG, 2005, p. 70–73.
56. F. HERREMAN, 2016, p. 39, figures 23, 24; see also J. STRYBOL, 2018, p. 130–131 for discussion.
57. J. STRYBOL, 2018, p. 90–91.
58. J. STRYBOL, 2013, p. 158–159, 2018, p. 90–91; C.K. MEEK, 1931, plate 44 facing p. 459, reproduced in R. FARDON, 2011, p. 267.
59. Herreman dismisses the resemblance between the shape of the heads of some male figures and helmets, arguing rather that the helmets were inspired by idealized coiffures; F. HERREMAN, 2016, p. 34, fn 3. I do not know what evidence might resolve the questions of which, of hair and hats, inspired the other. But even if there was an answer it would not preclude the helmet being a male accoutrement, a notion supported by Mette Bovin on the basis of her ethnographic experience; M. BOVIN, 2011, p. 382. At an earlier period, men as well as women (or at least some of them) had opened and stretched earlobes (as we illustrated with a striking photograph from 1928, M. BOVIN, 2011, p. 269, plate 8.49; see also J. STRYBOL, 2018, p. 132). The fashion faded, apparently for men before women, and then for women in plains communities before those from the mountains. But these changes in fashion seem not to be reflected concurrently in the aesthetic considerations of carvers for whom female subjects were frequently (but not invariably) signalled by opened, enlarged earlobes, represented with or without inserted circular discs.
60. M.C. BERNS *et al.*, 2011, p. 260, plate 8.38. Lacoste is illustrated in F. NEYT, 2006, p. 157, plate 33.
61. F. HERREMAN, with C. PETRIDIS, 2016, p. 36, and p. 121, note 1. Petridis's comment is particularly wide of the mark since he supports his argument by reference to Jan Strybol's discussion of the male Lilley figure when the discussion concerns the stylistically different female figure; J. STRYBOL, 2013, p. 158. Both Strybol and I believe the male figure is in 'Mumuye' style, though Strybol has demonstrated that the tripod device was shared with Jukun; J. STRYBOL, 2013, p. 178–179. The sculptor of the male figure may well have been 'Mumuye' (however that translated a century and more ago), but Tola, Tiba and Dandi clans were also present there and so cannot be discounted.
62. R. FARDON, 2011, p. 259–262, emphasis added.
63. Contrary to Herreman's account of our work (F. HERREMAN, 2016, p. 9), the demonstration that columnar figures outnumber volumetric figures in the corpus attributed to Chamba was the crux of the argument of R. FARDON, C. STELZIG, 2005.
64. J. STRYBOL, 2013, p. 158, and J. STRYBOL, 2018, p. 122–126.
65. R. FARDON, 2006.
66. H.M. BRICE-SMITH, 1909 and E.S. LILLEY, 1921.
67. O. and C.L. TEMPLE, 1922; C.K. MEEK, 1931.

68. Cf. P. FRY, 1970, p. 8; R. FARDON, 2011, p. 262. A sixth early piece, present location unknown, was once in the collection of Helena Rubinstein (noted in R. FARDON, 2011, p. 263, about which I cannot yet add anything further).
69. F. HERREMAN, 2016, p. 60, plate 13.
70. P. FRY, 1970.
71. A. RUBIN, 1978, p. 108, quoted more fully in R. FARDON, 2011, p. 249.
72. F. HERREMAN, 2016, p. 9.
73. F. HERREMAN, 2016, p. 13, fn. 1.
74. P. FRY, 1970.
75. *Artcurial*, sale catalogue, 10 June 2008, p. 71–91.
76. F. HERREMAN, 2016, p. 11.
77. Accessed via <http://yvra.library.yale.edu/> and <http://artkhade.com/en>.
78. I am not aware myself of any physical dating of Mumuye figures. Neyt cites a 16th-century date for a Mumuye piece, supported by reference to an article identified only as appearing in *Art Tribal* 8 (Summer 2005); F. NEYT, 2006, p. 46–47, 172–173, fn. 29. Assuming that the journal referenced is *Tribal: The Magazine of Tribal Art* (later title *Art Tribal*), then the nearest regional match I could find in 2005 was an article by Bernard de Grunne, ‘Notes on a seated proto-Jukun seated terracotta figure’, proposing a dating of 1550–1650, which evidently has no bearing on Mumuye figures which are commonly attributed 19th-century dates, though this seems to be based on hunch or wish rather than the presentation of evidence.
79. J. STRYBOL, 2018, p. 74.
80. See for instance, F. NEYT, 2006, p. 48–61.
81. F. NEYT, 2006, p. 44, 47.
82. J. STRYBOL, 2013, p. 160.
83. J. STRYBOL, 2018, p. 75, 138 map, 141, fn. 80.
84. B. de GRUNNE, 2001.
85. R. FARDON, 2011, p. 256–269. A corrigible database would leave room for the subsequent speculation that de Grunne’s third piece might lack hands because it had been made by the same sculptor for a specific purpose that called for this feature.
86. F. HERREMAN, 2016.
87. J. STRYBOL, 2018, p. 95–102.
88. F. HERREMAN, 2016, plate 26.
89. Compare F. HERREMAN, 2016, plate 28.
90. Compare F. HERREMAN, 2016, plate 13.
91. F. HERREMAN, 2016, p. 112.

ABSTRACTS

Revisiting the attribution of figures to Mumuye, provides us with an opportunity to think about the effects of ethnic labelling on our appreciation of ‘precontemporary African art’. By virtue of not being typical, extreme cases throw more general issues into sharp relief. The mismatch between the renown and the documentation of precontemporary Mumuye art has few parallels. Mumuye figures are celebrated as icons of African sculpture by the institutions and personnel of

what we have grown accustomed to call the 'artworld', one that encompasses museums, galleries and auction houses; publications on Mumuye ethnography, language and history in what, for convenience, we can contrast as the 'ethnoworld' continue to draw upon research undertaken a half century ago or earlier. Artworld and ethnoworld discourses have diverged, even about fundamental questions of identity. What is the relationship, for instance, between the ethnoworld's understanding of Mumuye ethnicity and the artworld's use of the ethnic adjective in 'Mumuye style'? A handful of Mumuye objects were collected before the Nigerian Civil war (1967–1970) during which most of those the artworld would consider 'authentic' left the country. This emptying of the local reservoirs has created a negative space that invites efforts at repair, not least because, like other markets, the art market abhors a vacuum. Understanding the histories of precontemporary Mumuye artworks requires careful methodology and a realistic acceptance of the likely limits of knowledge. Scholarly attention continues to find value in existing documentation, though with necessarily diminishing returns. Interesting insights have also been derived from parts of the overall assemblage of artworks attributed to the Mumuye. If the artworld took lead responsibility for a *catalogue raisonné* that reassembled the decade-long outflow from the late 1960s this would enable a more systematic approach to what are currently piecemeal attempts to map formal resemblances in artworks.

Revoir le corpus historique des figures sculptées attribuées aux Mumuyé nous donne l'occasion de réfléchir aux effets de l'étiquetage ethnique sur notre appréciation de l'« art africain précontemporain ». Du fait qu'ils ne sont pas typiques, les cas extrêmes mettent en évidence des problèmes plus généraux. Le décalage entre la renommée de l'art précontemporain des Mumuyé et la faible documentation le concernant est un de ces cas presque sans parallèle dans l'art africain. Les figures Mumuyé sont considérées comme des icônes de la sculpture africaine par les habitants de ce que nous avons pris l'habitude d'appeler le « monde de l'art », ce qui comprend les musées, les galeries et les maisons de vente aux enchères. Alors que les publications sur l'ethnographie, la langue et l'histoire des Mumuyé — que, par commodité et en miroir, nous pouvons appeler le « monde ethnographique » — continuent de s'inspirer des recherches entreprises il y a un demi-siècle ou même avant. Les discours produits par le monde de l'art et par le monde ethnographique ont divergé, même sur les questions fondamentales de l'identité. Quelle est la relation, par exemple, entre la compréhension de l'ethnicité mumuyé par le monde ethnographique et l'utilisation par le monde de l'art de l'adjectif ethnique dans l'étiquette « style mumuyé » ? Une poignée d'objets mumuyé ont été collectés avant la guerre civile nigériane (1967-1970), mais c'est durant cette dernière que la plupart des objets que le monde de l'art considérait comme authentiques ont quitté le pays. Ce siphonnage des réservoirs locaux a créé des espaces vides qui invitent à des efforts de réparation, notamment parce que, comme d'autres marchés, le marché de l'art abhorre le vide. Comprendre l'histoire des œuvres d'art précontemporaines des Mumuyé nécessite une méthodologie minutieuse et une acceptation réaliste des limites probables de la connaissance. Les chercheurs continuent à trouver de la valeur dans la documentation existante, bien qu'avec des résultats nécessairement en baisse. Des études intéressantes ont également été produites à partir de certaines des œuvres d'art attribuées aux Mumuyé. Si le monde de l'art prenait la responsabilité de dresser un catalogue raisonné qui rassemblerait les œuvres de la fin des années 1960, cela permettrait d'aller plus loin avec une approche plus systématique que les actuelles tentatives fragmentaires de cartographie des ressemblances formelles entre les œuvres d'art.

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