

BERNARD DE GRUNNE

LEGA



LEGA



BERNARD DE GRUNNE
2013



Illus. 1 : Lieutenant Alfred Rahbeck 1874-1898 first collector of Lega ivory figurines in H. Jenssen-Tusch, *Skandinaver i Congo. Svenske, Norske, og Danske Maends og Kvinders Virksomhed i den Uafhaenige Congostat*, (Scandinavians in the Congo. Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish men's and women's activities in the Independent State of Congo) Copenhagen, Gyldendalske, 1902-1905, p. 208



Fetischbilleder.
(Af Lt. Rahbeks Samling)

Illus. 2 : Lega ivory figures collected by Rahbeck before 1898 in H. Jenssen-Tusch, *op. cit.*, 1902-1905, p. 122

On Lega Style

Bernard de Grunne

The Lega inhabit a forested area of irregular polygonal shape of the Kivu region of the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and number about 225,000 individuals. Although the Lega are not organized into a state system, their sense of historical and cultural unity rooted in a common language, common historical experiences, common genealogical charts and a common set of basic institutions and values is very strong.

The Lega form a stateless society. There are no hereditary chiefs. The relatively simple segmentary lineage system, however, is complicated by the hierarchically organized *bwami* association, whose authority and power are widespread.¹

Sculpture such as the ivory statuettes presented here are the privileged possessions of members of the *bwami* association which dominates the social and cultural life of the Lega. According to Biebuyck, *bwami* is so integrated with all aspects of Lega thinking and living that it must be very old among the Lega. He believes that its fundamental structure and organization seem to antedate the emergence of the Lega as a distinct people.² It also may be assumed that artworks have been used in *bwami* since its earliest inception since on notices striking parallels with the role of artworks in associations thriving elsewhere among Lega-related populations also indicate the great age of the traditions.³

As Biebuyck remarked, *Bwami* is also an arts club for it patronizes the fine arts. It is also a school of art because it creates, produces, uses and explains thousands of pieces of sculpture.⁴

Therefore, an art history of the Lega ivory statuettes cannot be analyzed through the lens of political entities such as the case with the great styles of the Hemba statuary which are symbols some of the great founding ancestors of their chiefdoms.

One of the most climactic *kindi* rites featuring a vast display of ivory figurines is called *kinsamba* which alludes to a multitude of white mushrooms. Indeed when all the ivory images are placed on mats in front of the *kindi*, looking like a "shining mass of white mushrooms"⁵ the *kindi* proceed with the oiling of the figures.

When the owners of individual important ivory figurines die, the statue is displayed on their tombs. Exposure of the figurines on a tomb gives them a mystic dimension since they are impregnated with the vital force of the deceased. When another initiate is seriously ill and the normal pharmacopeia fail to save him, he is given water in which surface dust rubbed from the figurines has been mixed. The patient is said to drink the *maginga*, in order to absorb some of the vital force contained in the ivory statue as sacred object intimately associated with their living and dead owners.⁶

Lega ivory figurines are small and generally range in size from 5 to 30 cm, although a few examples are known that can be up to 38 cm tall. The average size of a Lega ivory figure, calculated using the measurements of 565 published examples, is 14.8 cm, and only twenty-six figurines exceed 20 cm.⁷

Ivory is the highest-ranking material used by the Lega. Being a precious material, the size of the figurine is directly proportional to its importance. Some especially large and old figurines were thought to be the "mothers" and "masters" of lesser objects and can only be kept by a *kindi* of superior intelligence and moral strength. Because of their uniqueness they play a crucial role, are kept for the entire ritual community and are always made of old heavily patinated ivory.⁸ Anthropomorphic figures also rank higher than ivory spoons, axes, knives and the like.⁹

¹ Daniel Biebuyck, *Lega Culture. Art Initiation and Moral Philosophy among a Central African People*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1973 :46

² Daniel Biebuyck, *The Arts of Zaire, vol.II, Eastern Zaire*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986, p. 205

³ Biebuyck, 1986 :210

⁴ Biebuyck, 1973 :66

⁵ Biebuyck, 1986 :58

⁶ Biebuyck, 1986 :63

⁷ In the Jay last collection, Fowler Museum Los Angeles, I have counted 62 ivory and bone figures with an average height of 13,8 cm. Cfr. Elisabeth Cameron, *Art of the Lega*, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, Los Angeles, 200. There are 931 Lega pieces at the M.R.A.C., Tervuren of which 423 are ivory or bone figurines. Biebuyck who had studied all ivory and bone figurines in the M.R.A.C. collections noted already that more than half of the figures (280) measure between 10 and 16.6 cm Cfr. Biebuyck, 1986, op. cit. p. 41. and Aline Van Dam, *Etude des collections de Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale de Tervuren concernant la société du Bwami chez les Lega*, Bruxelles, U.L.B, Mémoire de Licence, Faculté de Philosophie et lettres, 2001-2002, pp. 179-318. In my own files, I have another 80 ivory statuettes.

⁸ Biebuyck, 1973 :172

⁹ Biebuyck, 1973 :165



Illus. 3 : Lega ivory statuettes in the Late Geometric Style in C. Delahaize, *Les Warega*, Bruxelles, 1909, plate 103



Illus. 4: Lega ivory statuettes in the Late Classical Bibendum Style in C. Delahaize, *Les Warega*, Bruxelles, 1909, plate 103

An ivory figure that leaves the atelier of the carver is unfinished because it lacks the shiny reddish and yellowish patination that comes with usage of prolonged and repeated treatments with ointments. The figurines are rubbed with a form of castor oil (*mombo*) plain or mixed with red powder and then polished to a shine with *lukenga* leaves and perfumed with *bulago* scent. This process is called *kubongia*, meaning to bring in harmony, to produce unison. The initiates give the figurines the same treatment with oil, red powder and scent as they give their own body. For the Lega, the glossiness and the paleness of the reddish and yellowish hues that are the basis of patination are definitely the highest canons of beauty.¹⁰

Lega ivory anthropomorphic figurines display such formal variety and stylistic diversity that it is very challenging to classify them according to style or atelier. Lega figures have very few distinctive stylistic features such as hairstyles, scarifications, gestures or carved status symbols. They show parsimony of expression and succinctness of forms which fits admirably the mystery surrounding the uses and meanings of them in a closed initiation context. Heads can be round or flat with many showing the classical concave heart-shaped faces while others show a straight plane. Single formal features such as the eyes, noses, ears, mouth, neck, torso, legs, breasts or genitalia show a wide variety. The surface decoration is often non-existent or restricted to a few basic motifs such as blackened dots, engraved circle-dots and linear designs presented in rows of dots or circle-dots or lines that slanted, crossed or arranged in a triangular or herringbone motif.

The numerous styles of figurines cut across different regions and autonomous communities in Legaland. Similar forms recur in different regions and groups. For instance, Biebuyck collected from sixteen *kindi* initiates belonging all to the same Mumwa clan sixteen ivory and bone sculpture showing the entire spectrum of formal variation of Lega art. This group of sixteen sculptures demonstrates that stylistic markers could be invented by certain groups and could spread to other parts of the country because persons, sculptures and rites travelled. During rites initiates could see other models and be inspired by them if they were artists.

Alfred Rahbeck (a Danish officer, born in Aarhus, Denmark, 1874- killed in Kabambare, 1898), who was a sous-lieutenant in the Dhanis E.I.C. expedition of 1898 in Kabambare was the first discoverer of Lega ivory figures in 1898.¹¹ (Illus 1 & 2)

Commander Charles Delhaise, a member of the Dhanis military punitive expedition against the mutineers in 1896, was in charge of the Kabambare section from 1905 to 1906 and finally in command of the territoire Warega between 1906 and 1909 and nicknamed *bwana Muzuri* (good master).¹² He was the first to publish a detailed monograph titled *Les Warega* in 1909 where he illustrates seven Lega ivory statuettes (illus. 3 & 4)¹³

¹⁰ Biebuyck, 1973 :179

¹¹ Biographie Coloniale Belge, Tome II, 1951, p. 797 and H. Jenssen-Tusch, *Skandinaver i Congo. Svenske, Norske, og Danske Maends og Kvinders Virksomhed i den Uafhaenige Congostat*, (Scandinavians in the Congo. Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish men's and women's activities in the Independent State of Congo) Copenhagen, Gyldendalske, 1902-1905, p. 122

¹² Nicolas de Kun, «L'art Lega,» in *Africa Tervuren, XII*, 1966, p. 123

¹³ Charles Delhaise, *Les Warega (Congo Belge)*, Collection de Monographies Ethnographiques n°V, Bruxelles, Albert De Wit, 1909, illus. n°103.



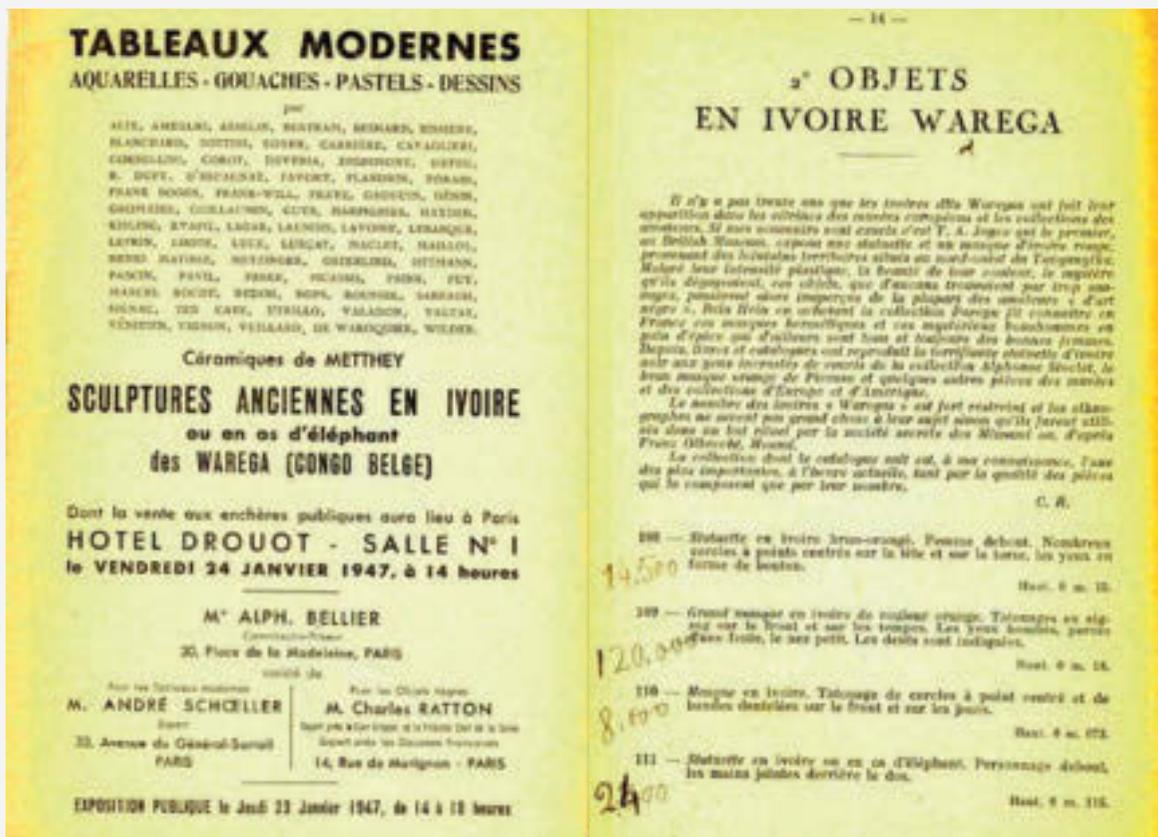
Illus. 5 : On the right, Henri Pareyn and his wife Cesarina Deraedt with on their left their good friends Théo Rijs and his wife Alice Snollaerts (sister of Germaine Snollaerts, wife of Odillon Pareyn son of Henri Pareyn)



Illus. 6 : Photo of part of the Pareyn collection offered at auction on December 8 & 9 1928 at the Grand Hotel, Antwerpen

The first Western admirer of Lega ivory art was unquestionably Henri Pareyn (1869-1928 see illus 5) who also became the preeminent dealer of Congolese art from 1900 to 1928. He was also the primary source for many of the greatest Pre- 1930 Lega ivories which he sold directly to Bela Hein, Tzara, Guillaume, André Level, Louis Carré and Ratton and as to the museums of Tervuren and Antwerp. He never travelled in Africa and would buy mainly from travelers and sailors coming back from Congo on the regular steamship lines arriving in Antwerpen. French dealer Charles Ratton considered that the Pareyn collection was the best source for the art of Congo.¹⁴

¹⁴ André Level, *Souvenirs d'un collectionneur 1920-1950*, Paris, 1959, p. 59



Illus. 7

Charles Raton also appreciated the beauty and importance of Lega ivories and he owned some exceptional Lega ivory masks and figurines. He describes them as “petits bonhommes en pain d’épice”. His short introduction to an un-illustrated auction catalogue in 1947 at Hotel Drouot, Paris of a very fine collection of 29 Lega ivories is the first (very short) essay on Lega art I know of and is worth quoting:

“It has been only since less than 30 years since the so-called Warega ivories have appeared in the showcases of European museums and private collectors. If my memory serves me well, it is T.A. Joyce who was the first curator to exhibit at the British Museum an ivory figurine and a mask with a red surface, coming from the far away territories of the Northeast of the Tanganyika. Despite their plastic intensity, the beauty of their color and the mystery they provoke, these pieces, that some found too savage, were overlooked by the majority of aficionados of “art nègre”. Bela Hein, by purchasing the Pareyn collection, promoted in France these hermetic masks and these mysterious little gingerbread statuettes which are actually always feminine. Since then, books and catalogues have reproduced the terrifying black ivory figurine with eyes inset with cowries shells from the Alphonse (actually Adolphe) Stoclet collection, the beautiful red ivory mask from the Picasso collection and a few other pieces from museums and private collections in Europe and the U.S.A.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Charles Raton, «Introduction» in Hôtel Drouot, *Tableaux modernes et Sculptures Anciennes en Ivoire des Warega*, Maître Alphonse Bellier, Paris, 24 janvier 1947, p.14

Some of the ivories presented in this catalogue came through the hand of Belgian dealer Lepage. Jean-Pierre Lepage (1921-1994) started his career as a decorator in the late 50's in Brussels. He married twice and had two daughters Béatrice with his first wife and Sylvie from his second wife Anne (born van Remoortele). He was quite close to Belgian expatriates who worked in Eastern Congo and the Kindu region such as Corombokis, Alexandre Safiannikoff (1903-1988), Nicolas Kun de Kozma ; Alexandre Prigogyne, Dr. Georges Roccas (Cobelmin) Sacré, André Rasquin and Dr. Schyns and Desjardin.

These *anciens coloniaux* would rent apartments from Lepage when they came back to Belgium on vacation. According to the Sablon oral traditions, one day Lepage called René Withofs to show him a Lega ivory mask sent by Prigogyne to his sister who was a tenant of Lepage. The purchase by Withofs of this mask encouraged Lepage to buy more Lega material. As one can see from photos of his vitrines in his gallery illustrated with figures 13 and 14, Lepage then moved to a large gallery on 17 rue de la Régence in the Sablon area et would call Willy Mestach to look at all the Lega material sent back by these colonials. Lepage became the source in Belgium for great Lega material until the early 80's selling to Belgian collectors and to American dealers such as John J. Klejman and Merton Simpson of New York.

A chronology on the birth and flourishing of Lega anthropomorphic sculpture in ivory can be divided into four periods:¹⁶

- The Archaic Style: A. D. 1650- 1700
- The Early Classical Style A.D. 1700-1750
- The Classical Styles A. D. 1750 -1850
- The Late Classical Geometric Style A. D.1850-1940

The Archaic Style

The characteristic stylistic features of this Archaic Lega style are stocky proportions, thick muscular legs set well spread apart, short diminutive arms, large size (above 20 cm for three of the five), a very worn and eroded surface sometimes almost fossilized in appearance.

A remarkable example illus. 8 of this style was collected by Henri-Emile Decerf before 1940.¹⁷ The Decerf figurine also presents large flat circular shaped feet, the bent legs, the slight turn of the torso and head suggesting movement.

As to its chronology, I would suggest that this Archaic Lega style appeared sometimes circa A.D. 1650. This early date is based not only on the Decerf figurine which has been dated by C14 to A.D. 1624-1636, making this figurine the oldest Lega ivory known but also on the very eroded and almost fossilized surface and patina on other figures belonging to this style. Because of the durability of ivory, its small size and portability allowed a few archaic pieces possibly carved further north of the actual heart of Lega territory to be carried by migrating Pre-Lega populations to Legaland.



Illus. 8

¹⁶ See my essay in Marc L. Felix, *Black Hands White Gold*, Brussels, vol. VI, 2013, forthcoming

¹⁷ Henri-Emile Decerf, was an early collector of Lega. Some of his collection is photographed in the archives of the M.R.A.C. . There is a bi-frontal figurine in the M.R.A.C. inv. n° 59.35.2 published in Biebuyck, 2002 cat. 108 . The Lega figure kakulu ka mpito from the Vander Straete collection (J. Cornet, *Art de l'Afrique Noire, Bruxelles*, 1972, p. 259, n° 138 came from him in 1958 as well the Lega figure in the Willy Mestach collection (Marc Felix et alii, *Willy Mestach. L'intelligence des formes*. Bruxelles, 2007, cat. n° 62, p. 176



Illus. 9

The Early Classical style

For the Early Lega style, I have singled out an exceptional piece, formerly in the collection of Charles Ratton. This figurine (Illus.9) was purchased by Charles Ratton probably in the 1940 /50's possibly from Belgian dealers such as Marcel Dumoulin, Edgar Beer ou Gustave Dehondt.¹⁸

This figurine is among the tallest ivory Lega figurine known at a height of 28 cm. Its formal characteristics include hyper-extended narrow torsos, long legs with thighs, calves and feet indicated by three stacked lozenges, triangular-shaped heads with beak-like features, arms semi-detached from the torso. The treatment of the back of figures is also very similar with the spine indicated by a deep vertical gouge.

Differentiating male from female figurines is not easy with Lega statuettes but the presence of small pointed breasts suggests that it represents a woman.

The Ratton figure has a date of manufacture of A.D. 1720 +/- 25 years and since the ivory of other figures from this group look also quite ancient ,almost fossilized, one can with a certain degree of confidence identify this small group as the Early Lega Style going back at least to the 18th century. The shape of the face with its triangular plane could have been a source of inspiration for Lega artists who created the latter development of the Lozenge-shape Face Aviator style.

The Classical Styles

I am including at least six different figural styles and many unique sculptures: all the figures in the Bibendum style forms the largest category, discrete groups by other artists and workshops forming their own style as well as a large number of unique sculptures which never formed into a stylistic unit but which stand out in the corpus of Lega sculpture.¹⁹

These unique pieces for which I have found only one example can be called an *hapax legomenon*. An Hapax legomenon is a literary expression found only once in texts by Greek and Latin authors from the Antiquity.²⁰ These figurines are each one of a kind sculpture by virtue of its great size, remarkable formal qualities and prestigious provenance. A perfect example of an Hapax Legomenon is the famous and mysterious Stoclet figurine (illus. 10) described by Ratton as "this terrifying black ivory figure with inset cowrie shell eyes".

Another example would be figure n° 7 belonging to the Classical Lega Period suggesting a northern Ubangian style influence from the northern Ngbandi/ Ngbaka stylistic region by the oval shaped-head with a facial plane at a slight angle, the large head, the thin and pointy arms, the scarification marks on the forehead.²¹



Illus. 10

¹⁸ It was first published in 1986. Cfr; Jean-Louis Paudrat et alii, *Ouverture sur l'art africain*, Paris, Musée des arts décoratifs, 1986, p. 56, n° 46

¹⁹ This style was singled out as the Rounded Style in the hundreds of sculptures he examined by Daniel Biebuyck, Cfr. *The Arts of Zaire, vol.II, Eastern Zaire*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986, p.47. "Bibendum" refers to the mascot or "Michelin Man," the internationally recognizable symbol of the French tire company founded in 1898. Cfr. Bernard de Grunne, "Master Hands of the Lega: The Bibendum and Aviator Styles," in *Tribal Art*, N° 50, Autumn/Winter 2008, p. 132-137

²⁰ Cfr. Claude Augé, *Nouveau petit dictionnaire Larousse illustré. Dictionnaire encyclopédique*, Paris, Librairie Larousse, 19290.p.1126

²¹ See for instance Ngbandi statuettes and masks in Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers, *Ubangi. Art and Cultures from the African Heartland*, Mercatorfonds, Bruxelles, 2007, cat n° 3.4 & 3.5 p.114, n° 4.55, p. 179 n° 4.36, p. 169

The famous Tzara figurine fig. 2 possibly purchased by Tzara from Pareyn circa 1928 moves away from the classical canons of Lega styles. It probably belongs to the Muzimu subgroup around Kamituga. The rectangular face with gaping mouth reminds us of a Lega wooden monkey mask published by Felix.²² The arms, unusually short, are bent with the hands resting on the chest above the diminutive breasts.

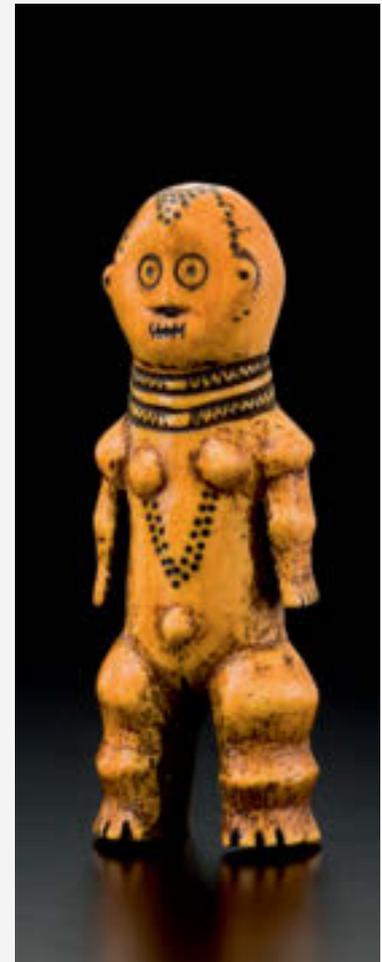
Figure 6 collected by Major Laurent between 1902 and 1910 for the famous African art collection of Alex van Opstal owner of the C.M.B.(Compagnie Maritime Belge) is part of a group of seven figurines which are stylistically related and which I named the Van Opstal Master. Among its stylistic traits are the manner in which they carved the arms with this dynamic zigzag pattern, the modeling of the face with the signature iconographic element of the scarification pattern on the forehead, a roughly rectangular-shaped cross-hatching of rows of small bumps in relief.

Bibendum Style figurines have a body with rounded lines, a spherical head and massive, bulging detached arms and legs. Circles with dots denote the eyes which are generally slightly asymmetrical as they are never perfectly lined up, the nose is small and somewhat rectangular, teeth are indicated by small vertical notches on the upper and lower lip, and the breasts and navel protrude. Surface decoration include a double or sometimes single strand necklace around the neck carved as a double row of zigzag with tow variants, sometime perfectly circular sometimes ending in a v-shaped central point, and rows of tiny dots decorate the sides of the face, the navel or on the torso. I am postulating that bibendum style figurines always represent women since small conical breasts are always indicated.

In my essay from 2008, I had originally listed fifteen statues in this Bibendum Style which I have expanded to thirty figurines and more could surface.²³

It is difficult to designate the holotype of this style, i.e. the single specimen designated as the type of a species at the time of establishing the group but the figure (illus. 11) collected by George Passau fits this model.²⁴ The Passau figure with its round head, cylindrical torso and up-right flattened back, straight arms, conical breasts and muscular legs is typical of the Bibendum style. It also has a two strand necklace, V-shaped scarification marks on the abdomen and a triangular set of scarifications made of rows of points on the upper skull.

Within the Bibendum style, some Lega artists drifted towards another Bibendum sub-style which I called the Rahbeck Master.²⁵ Figure 3 collected by Rahbeck in 1897, is the first Lega ivory figure to be collected in Legaland by a Westerner. It does show some age and wear but has kept its light beige coloring. It has slightly asymmetrical eyes and typical scarification marks on the top of the skull. He carved three or possibly four figurines in a style very close to the Bibendum style. The main formal differences are the following: the body is more elongated and narrow, the head more oval in shape than spherical, the legs are longer. In terms of surface decoration, one finds the same scarification designs of rows of small dots on the head and the torso and necklaces with one or two strands.



Illus. 11



Illus. 12

²² Marc L. Felix, *Maniema*, Munich, Fred Jahn, 1989, Fig. 17, pp. 86-87

²³ Bernard de Grunne, «Masterhands of the Lega: The Bibendum and Aviator Styles,» in *Tribal Arts*, n° 50, Autumn Winter 2008, pp. 132-137

²⁴ Passau was an engineer from l'Ecole des Mines de Mons belonged to the Passau-Barzin mission financed by the C.F.L (Chemins de Fer des Grands Lacs) to create a geological survey of the huge zone of 55.000km² of the Maniema in ten months. Cfr. René J. Cornet, *Maniema. le pays des mangeurs d'hommes*, Editions Cuyppers, Bruxelles, 1952, p. 322

²⁵ Rahbeck collected in 1897 two ivory figurines which surfaced very recently from his estate. Cfr. Maison de Vente Bruun-Rasmussen, Copenhagen, auction 1209, 28 February 2012, lots 557 & 558.



Illus. 13

Moving away from the Bibendum style, illus. 12 is an unpublished Lega figurine sold to the Barnes foundation by Paul Guillaume in 1926. The general canon of the Bibendum style is used by this artist but it is not as balanced and elegant as other examples and the modeling of the head drifts towards exaggeration.²⁶

The Late Geometric Style.

The Geometric Style Which I had initially called the "Aviator" style has been thought to be a late development in Lega art even if some figurines in this style were collected very early. Delhaise already published two figurines in this style in 1909 and another example, defined as a prototype by Biebuyck was bought by the M.R.A.C. from Pareyn in 1917.²⁷ At least twenty figurines in this style have been identified in private collections and six are known at the Tervuren Museum.²⁸

The first figurines (see illus 3) in this style were collected by Charles Delhaise circa 1902 and published in 1909. I have not been able to trace their current owner but from the poor quality B/W photo from his monograph, they appear to be probably of a pale white color and very similar to three figurines from Tervuren.

A figurine from M.R.A.C. inv. n° EO1951.11.11 (illus. 13) is probably one of the oldest statuettes from this style. Made of massive ivory, it is well balanced, it has striated arms, only two rows of vertical rows of dots on the torso but is the only one with three necklaces and has a very fine deep orange patina showing traces of a long ritual use and worship.

Late Geometric Style figurines such as fig 5 are thinner with a more geometrically designed torso, and with the arms and legs always rendered in a lozenge shape, somewhat stretched at the top. Cowrie shells are sometimes attached to the top of the head with black vegetal paste or carved in low relief. The majority of the statuettes are hollow in the center.

Like the Classical Bibendum Style, the eyes are indicated as circles around dots, and the noses are rendered with nostrils in low relief. The arms and legs hang straight down along the body and tend to be semi-detached. Statuettes are always adorned with rows of black dots on the front and back of the torso, as well as on top of the head. On the neck are scarification designs, consisting of rows of dots or engraved zigzag patterns.

To conclude on the art history of Lega ivory figurines I would like to postulate that the Bibendum style must be considered the Classical style of the Lega.

Let us start with a definition of Classicism. The word "classic", or "classical", in modern European languages has shifted in meaning throughout history. According to the 11th edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, the term classic, used in literary analysis, derives from the Latin epithet *classicus*; a *scriptor classicus* is contrasted with a *scriptor proletarius*²⁹. The metaphor is taken from the sixth-century Roman writer Severius Tullius, who divided the Roman people into classes: those in the first called *classici*; the next, *infra classem*; and those in the last, *proletarii*. The label "Classic" is accordingly applied to a person of the first rank.

26 Two Lega figurines (Barnes inv. n° A 163 and inv. n° A 151) were purchased by Barnes from Guillaume for a total of FF 30.000, a very large sum for the time.

27 M.R.A.C. inventory number 19 983, gift of Secretary General Nicolas Arnold. The M.R.A.C. made three purchases from Pareyn, in 1911, 1917, and 1924. The 1917 purchase was made under Arnold's name to avoid its passing into German hands. Cf.P. van Schuylenbergh and F. Morimont, *Rencontres artistiques Belgique Congo, 1920-1950, Enquêtes et documents d'histoire africaine* 12, 1995, Louvain-la-Neuve, p.36, note 63.

28 M.R.A.C. inventory numbers 19 983, 32 497, 32 498, 38 596, 44 692, 55.11.11, and 55.134.160. Heights between 14 and 16 cm.

29 *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, New York, 1910-11, vol. V, p.448

In English it appears in 1599 in the phrase “classical and canonical”, which was used to mean “of the first rank and authority”. Its meaning expanded to include anything which has order, balance or restraint in the fields of art, architecture or literature.

The word then shifted meaning to denote anything pertaining to certain periods of Greek and Roman cultures that were recognized as having an authoritative excellence, i.e., the “Classics”. In the nineteenth century with Goethe and Byron, “Classical” referred to a style that was measured, balanced, restrained, as opposed to the more effusive “Romantic” styles. With the publication of Heinrich Wolfflin’s study *Classical Art* in 1899, the term became an art-historical reference to the arts of the Cinquecento during the High Renaissance in Italy. Here Classical art refers primarily to the use of elementary vertical and horizontal major axes of direction, and to the primitive full-face and pure profile aspects. Secondly, it uses the fundamental principle of effect by contrast and the clarity of presentation where multiplicity can be seen as a coherent unity in which the parts fuse into an inevitable whole³⁰.

In the field of African art, Margaret Plass offers a restrictive definition of Classical Art. For Plass, only African art that is pure, i.e., unaffected by non-African influences, can be called Classical³¹. As such, it must derive from a tradition in which each artist expresses only the aesthetic and religious values of his own tribe, never trying to escape from its influence.

William Fagg considers all of African art to be Classical, as opposed to Romantic, in the sense that it is accepted by its society, whereas the Romantic artist pursues his vision as a revolt against society. William Rubin,³² on the other hand, defines Classical African sculpture as highly refined, often with intricate workmanship, beautifully polished or patinated surfaces, and a restrained stylized realism. He includes Luba and Baule sculpture as examples of this category and contrasts it with the rawness, geometry and more extreme invention of form seen in the Mumuye, the Songye or the Mbole styles. More recently, the art critic Adam Gopnick defined the art of the Dogon as “Classical” since it is among the most familiar to the Western eye³³.

The next step is to identify the factors that define Classicism in fifth century B.C. Greek art and see if they can apply to the *Leda* style of the *Leda* ivory statuette. Oddly enough, finding an in-depth analysis of Classicism in Greek art history is not easy. It is a word widely used but seldom explained by art historians. One of the most penetrating analyses of Classicism can be found in Pollitt’s *Art and Experience in Classical Greece* (1972). Since we are analyzing human sculpture, we will focus mainly on classical Greek sculpture, as opposed to other achievements in architecture, painting or literature.

Among the main achievements of Greek Classical sculpture was the representation of movement such as Myron’s *Discus-thrower*), and the *contrapposto*, with the harmony of counterbalancing forces suggested by the arrangement of the parts of the body in a chiasmic scheme (as in the *Doryphoros* of Polykleitos). This is in strong contrast with the hieratism of *Leda* statuette. Although the sculptor Phidias must be credited with the creation of the prototypical standards for the representation of divinities that balanced the sense of being emotionally disengaged from, but at the same time conscious of, the human condition,³⁴ it is the sculptor Polykleitos, however, who seems conceptually closer to *Leda* artists.

Indeed, Polykleitos is remembered as the foremost exponent of the principle of *symmetria*; “commensurability of parts” in art. He wrote a treatise known as *The Canon*, in which he sought to demonstrate that such philosophical qualities such as “the perfect, the good or the beautiful” can only be expressed through the harmony of parts in sculptural forms and geometrical proportions. He started with the human figure organically differentiated into torso, limbs and parts of limbs, and tried to ascertain how these parts related to each other and to the whole. As Pollitt

30 Heinrich Wolfflin, *Classical Art*, New York, 1959, P.256

31 Margaret Plass, *The Classical Art of negro Africa*, Duveen-Graham, New York, 1957

32 William Rubin, ed., *Primitivism in Twentieth Century Art*, New York, 1984, vol. I, p.17

33 Adam Gopnick, *Out of Africa*, in *The New Yorker*, 22 march 1993, p.100

34 Jerome Pollitt, *Art and Experience in Classical Greece*, Cambridge, 1972, pp.99-100



Illus. 14 :
Lega ivory spoon
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.
Height: 13 cm



Illus. 15 :
DAN Spoon, wood
Ivory Coast,
Height: 46 cm
Provenance:
• Collection Max Pignat, France



Illus. 16 :
Alberto Giacometti, Spoon Woman, 1926

explains: “the goal of Polykleitos’ system of *symmetria* was to describe an ideal nature in man. He also concentrated on harmonizing opposing force.”³⁵ Polykleitos’ approach worked so well that although no original sculpture by his band survives, one can easily “feel” the presence of a harmonious system in the numerous Roman copies of his work.

Interestingly enough, the origin of his canon with its focus on numerical proportions for the human body was probably musical and came from the Pythagorean school, which was active in the sixth century B.C. It was their observation that harmony in a musical scale, which can be expressed in a limited group of mathematical numbers, has a spiritual value that leads to the contemplation of the “divine”.

According to Biebuyck, the Lega also use a very specific canon of three sizes for the proportions of their ivory sculptures: the length of the middle finger, the length from the top of the middle finger to the base of the knuckle and the length from the top of the middle finger to the wrist joint which for my noble hand amounts to more or less to heights of 10, 15 and 20 cm.³⁶

I would like to postulate that the Bibendum style actually represents the ideal of female beauty among the Lega. According to Biebuyck’s research, the Lega admire the female qualities of straightness of the back marked by the spinal column’s concave wedge, the heavy rounded buttocks, the tumescences on the upper arms and legs caused by tightly worn bracelets (on the upper arms and wrist) and bangles (between the knee and the angle) and the flay stomach. In the ideal pose for women walking or dancing, their arms hang straight down along the body, the hands open but the fingers slightly bent inward.³⁷

35 Idem, P.108

36 Daniel Biebuyck, *The Arts of Zaire*, vol. II, Eastern Zaire, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986, p. 41

37 Biebuyck, *op. cit.*, 1986: 64

Among the many ritual ivory implements used by the Lega, the ivory spoon figure 17 stands out as an amazing formal invention by Lega artists. Only two African cultures, the Dan in Ivory Coast and the Lega have independently created such a brilliant conceptual jump in sculpture. For the Dan, the bowl of the implement forms the “belly of the spoon, pregnant with rice” and is danced by the most hospitable woman of her village during the festival for merit.³⁸

The Lega spoon figure 17 is part of a very small corpus of ten anthropomorphic spoons where the full human body with arms and legs become the handle of the spoon while the head become the bowl of the spoon. In this corpus, figure 17 is similar to illustration F from the Frankfurt Museum while figures A, B, C are reminiscent in their treatment of the torso and pointed arms in a zigzag shape to an ivory figure by the Brissoni Master collected by Biebuyck.³⁹ According to Biebuyck, Lega spoons symbolize women. The convex-concave forms of the bowl-shaped receptacle of the spoon symbolically stands for the back and lap of a woman.

During the rites of the *bwami*, the spoon is picked up in dance movements just like with the Dan spoons and turned to show the shallow then the convex part of the bowl. It is also used in an enactment of the ritual skinning of a dead elephant and also in the poison ordeal. It is also used to scrap some bark from the central pole of the initiation house after which the spoon is placed in the mouth of the wife of a Kindi preceptor. Spoons, both multifunctional and polysemous are suggestive of a women.⁴⁰

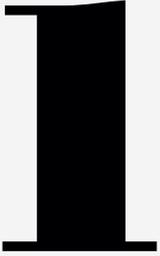
The Lega spoon from the Art Gallery of Ontario (illus. 14) reached out even more conceptually with the bowl as stomach just like the Dan spoons and connects us with Giacometti’s *Spoon Woman*, 1926 by intensifying this idea. The naturalistic form of the African spoon where the image of the woman is almost nothing but womb become more abstract and reaches a universal message.

In conclusion, despite conventional wisdom to the contrary, many very specific styles of Lega figurative ivory statuary have been identified ranging from the 17th to the late 19th century. The definition of style is linked to the notion of a first, or primal object, one that represents an important creation or a central invention. Great masters all created such “first” objects, which gave rise to the production of elaborate systems of replicas, reproductions, copies, reductions, transfer, and derivative objects that follow in the wake of important artistic endeavor.

38 Eberhard Fischer and Hans Himmelheber, *The Art of the Dan in West Africa*, Zurich, Museum Rietberg, 1994, p.123-127

39 Biebuyck, 1973, *op. cit.*, plate 82

40 Daniel Biebuyck, *Lega Spoons*, in Herman Burssens et alii, *Liber Memorialis Professor P.J. Vandenhoude*, Rijksuniversiteit Gent, 1983, pp. 51-61



Head

Ivory

Height : 12,5 cm

Provenance :

- Baron Freddy Rolin, Brussels, before 1975
- Marie-Eliane d'Udekem d'Acoz



2

Figurine

Ivory

Height : 16,5 cm

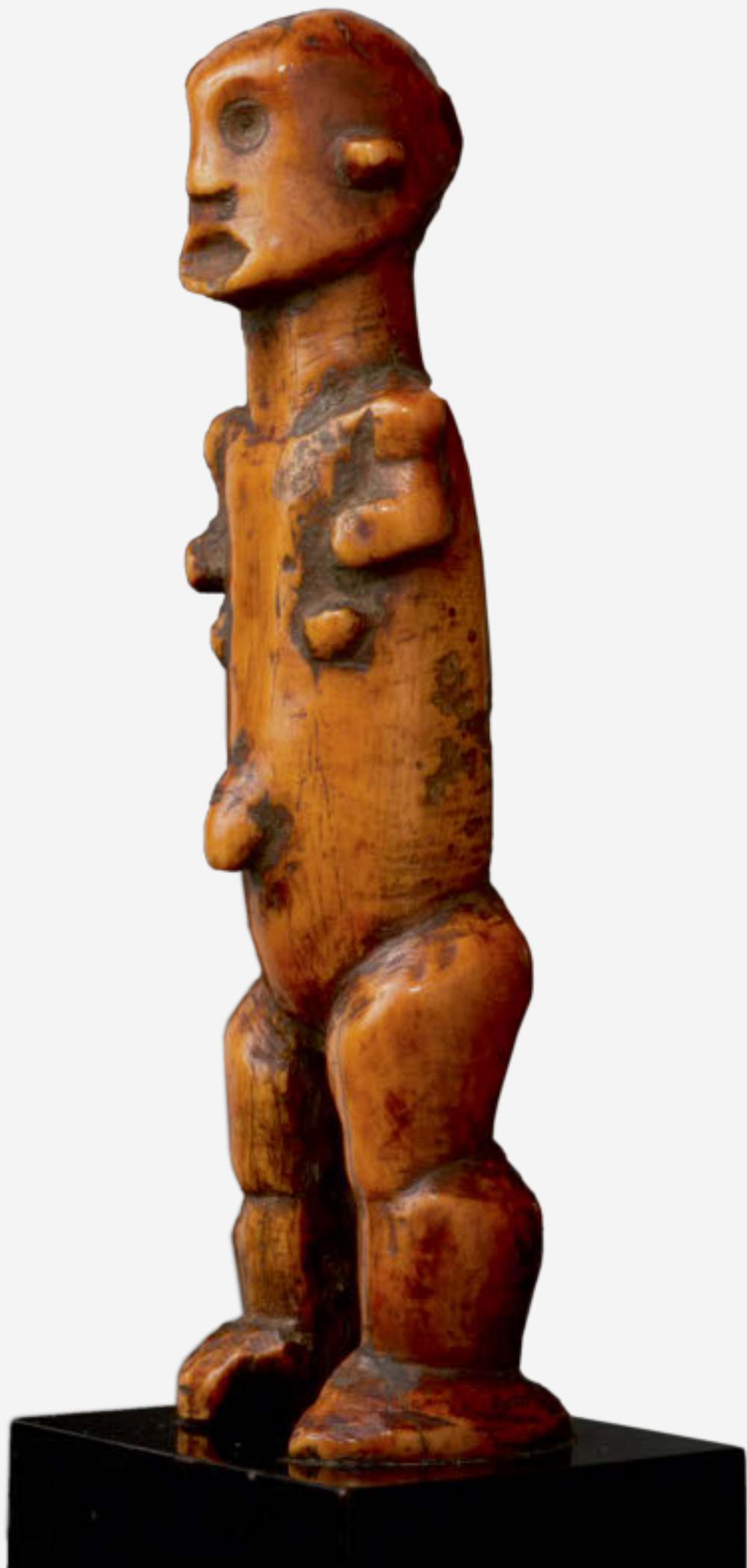
Provenance:

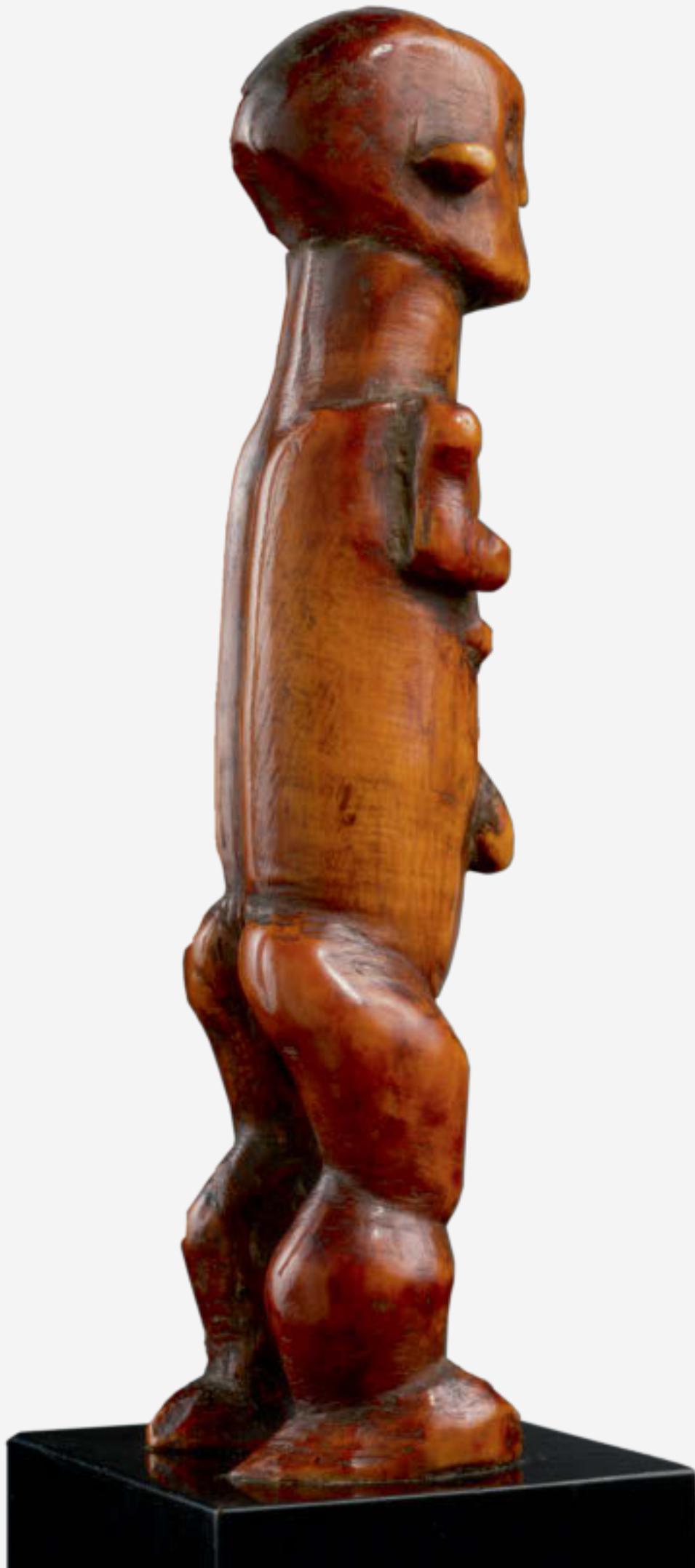
- Henri Pareyn, Antwerpen, before 1925
- Samuel Rosenstock dit Tristan Tzara, Paris, before 1930
- Galerie Leloup, Paris, 1994
- Collection Michel Boulanger, Liège

Publications :

- Stephen Chauvet, "Objets d'or, de bronze et d'ivoire dans l'art nègre," in *Cahiers d'Arts*, 1930, n° 1, p. 38, figure 49
- Raoul Lehuard, « La vente Tristan Tzara, » in *Arts d'Afrique Noire*, Hivers 1988, n° 68, p. 17
- Daniel Biebuyck, *La sculpture des Lega*, Paris, Galerie Leloup, 1994, p. 95, fig. 17
- Dick Beaulieu, *Belgium collects African art*, Bruxelles, Arts & Applications Editions, 2002, p. 138
- Daniel Biebuyck, *Lega. Ethique et beauté au cœur de l'Afrique*, Bruxelles, K.B.C. Banque, 2002, p. 157, fig. 98







3

Figurine, Classical Bibendum style

Ivory

Height : 17,4 cm

Provenance:

- Collected by Lt Alfred Rahbeck in 1897



Fetischbiller.
(Af Lt. Rahbeks Samling)





4

Figurine, Classical Bibendum style

Ivory

Height : 11,8 cm

Provenance:

- Private collection, Germany
- Michel Koenig, Liège





5

Figurine Late Geometrical Style

Ivory

Height : 15,5 cm

Provenance:

- Jef Vander Straete, Lasne
- Sotheby's London, December, 2nd, 1985, lot 322
- Jean-Pierre Jernander, Brussels





6

Figurine

Ivory

Height : 13 cm

Provenance:

- Collected by Major Laurent between 1902 and 1910
- Collection Alex van Opstal, Rhodes Saint Genèse, before 1933, inv. n° 61

Publications :

- Joseph Maes « *Catalogue de la collection d'objets provenant du Congo Belge et appartenant à Alex Van Opstal* », la Maison Blanche, Rhodes Saint Genèse, 1933, n°61, p.8
- Frans M. Olbrechts, *Tentoonstelling van Kongo-Kunst*, Catalogus, Antwerpsche Propagandawerken, 1937, p. 34, n°630
- Jean-Baptiste Bacquart, « *l'Art Tribal d'Afrique Noire* », Assouline, Paris, 1998, p.148, n°4







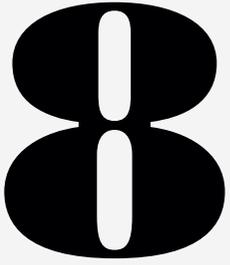
Figurine

Ivory

Height : 15,5 cm







Figurine

Ivory

Height : 17 cm

Provenance:

- Collected by a mining engineer from Cobelmin in 1969







Figurine

Ivory

Height : 13 cm

Provenance:

- Pierre Darteville, Brussels, 1980
- Comte Baudouin de Grunne, Brussels
- Private Collection



10

Figurine

Ivory

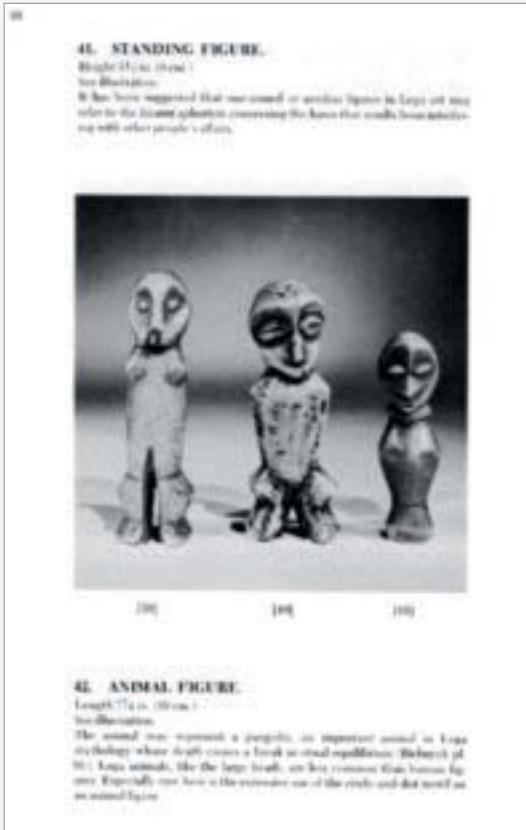
Height : 12 cm

Provenance:

- Baron Freddy Rollin Brussels, before 1977

Publications :

- Marie-Eliane d'Udekem and Marguerite Kobe, *African Ivories*, New York, F. Rolin & Co., 1978, p.





11

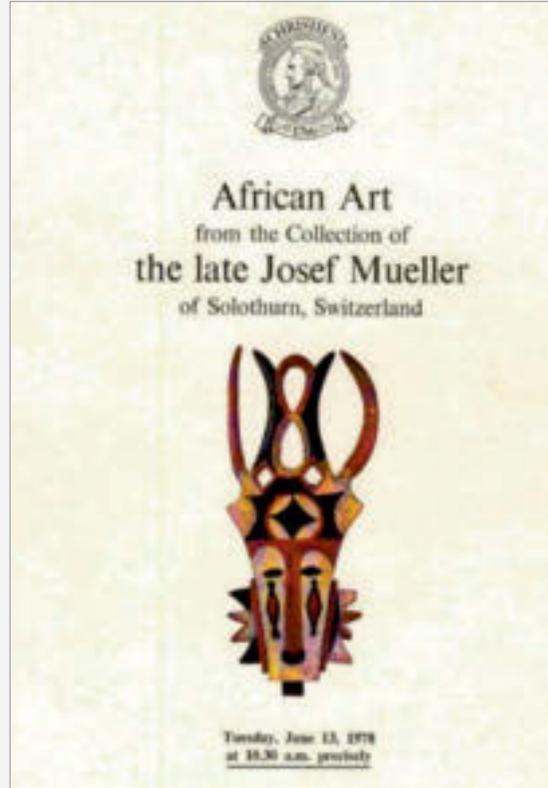
Figurine

Ivory

Height : 13,7 cm

Provenance:

- Jean-Pierre Lepage, Brussels, circa 1960
- Joseph Mueller, Solothurn (Christie's London, *African Art from the collection of the late Joseph Mueller of Solothurn, Switzerland*, June 13, 1978, lot 166
- Collection Lee Bronson, Los Angeles (Sotheby's New York, November 20th 1999, lot 173)





12

Figurine

Ivory

Height : 12 cm

Provenance:

- Collected by Alexandre Safiannikoff in the Babene chiefdom before 1950
- Jean-Pierre Lepage, Brussels, 1960's
- Vranken-Hoet Collection, Dilbeek



13

Figurine

Ivory

Height : 9,8 cm

Provenance:

- Jean-Pierre Lepage, Brussels, 1960's
- Collection Lise van Haeke, Brussels



Vitrines of Lega objects in the gallery of Jean-Pierre Lepage, in the late 1960's avenue de la Régence, 17, Brussels



14

Figurine

Ivory

Height : 11,5 cm

Provenance:

- Jean-Pierre Lepage, Brussels, 1960's
- Vranken-Hoet Collection, Dilbeek



Vitrines of Lega objects in the gallery of Jean-Pierre Lepage, in the late 1960's avenue de la Régence, 17, Brussels



15

Figurine

Ivory

Height : 13 cm

Provenance:

- Collected by Daniel Biebuyck in 1952
- Collection IRSAC, Lwiso
- Collection Carl Provost, Kinshasa, 1960
- Houston, Kuehnert Auction House, 1997
- Alain Naoum, Bruxelles
- Pierre Darteville, Bruxelles

Publications :

- Daniel Biebuyck, *Lega. Ethique et beauté au cœur de l'Afrique*, Bruxelles, K.B.C. Banque, 2002, p. 159, fig. 100



Lega Figurine called "Kadende" for the belemdino initiation, M.R.A.C., Tervuren, inv. n° 55.3.25 Height : 21 cm collected by Biebuyck in Pangi territory, Beia group, Chief Kabonge



16

Janus Figurine

Ivory

Height : 12,6 cm

Provenance:

- Collected by colonial administrator Emile Decerf before 1940
- Jef Vander Straete, Lasne
- Baron Freddy Rolin Bruxelles
- Pierre Dartevelle, Brussels
- Michel Koenig, Liège
- Michel Boulanger, Liège

Publications :

- Raoul Lehuard, « Michel Boulanger. Peintre-sculpteur et l'art nègre, » in *Arts d'Afrique Noire*, « Hiver 1996, n°100, p. 40
- Daniel Biebuyck, *Léga Ethique et beauté au cœur de l'Afrique*, Bruxelles, KBC Banque, 2002, p. 174, Cat. 117





17

Anthropomorphic Spoon

Ivory

Height : 16,9 cm

Provenance:

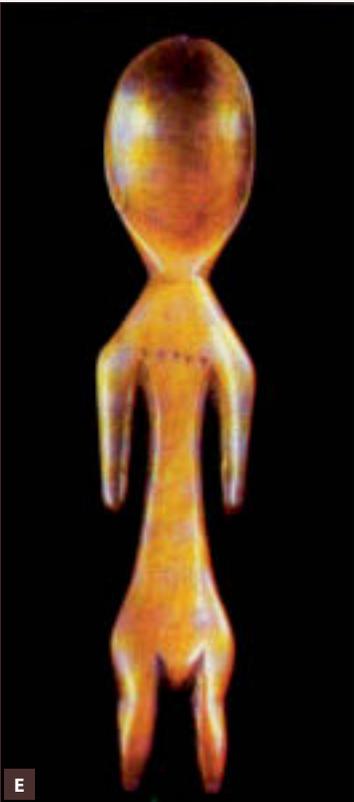
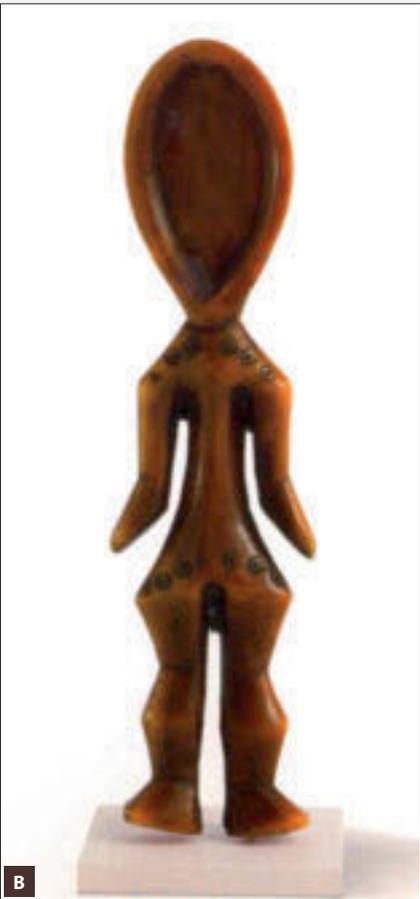
- Collected by Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Liebrechts before 1900
- Collection René Withofs, Brussels, 1955-1995, inv. n° RW 1024
- Collection Felix



Photo de Charles Liebrechts dans Major Ch. Liebrechts, *Souvenirs d'Afrique. Congo. Léopoldville, Bolobo, Equateur (1883-1889)*, Bruxelles, J. Lebègue & Cie, libraires-éditeurs, 1909, Frontispice



CORPUS OF LEGA IVORY ANTHROPOMORPHICS SPOONS



**A FOWLER MUSEUM OF CULTURAL HISTORY,
LOS ANGELES N° FMCH X 378**

Hauteur: 22,2 cm

Provenance:

Recoltée par Jean-Pierre Hallet vers 1960

Publications:

Ralph Altman, *Balega and other tribal arts from the Congo*, Dickson Center, UCLA, Los Angeles, 1963, fig. 13

Doran Ross, ed., *Elephant. The Animal and its Ivory in African Cultures*, Fowler Museum of Cultural History, Los Angeles, 1992, p. 297, illus. 14-3

B MENIL FOUNDATION, HOUSTON, TEXAS INV. N° X150

Hauteur: 17,8 cm

Provenance:

Récoltée par Nicolas de Kun à Lusumba en 1956

John J. Klejman, New York

John et Dominique de Menil, Houston, 1961

Publications:

University of Saint Thomas, *Humble Treasures*, Houston, 1966, fig. 23
Nicolas de Kun, "L'art lega," in *Africa Tervuren*, 12 (3/4), p. 95 illus. 31

Kristine van Dyke, «The Menil Collection,» in *African Arts*, 40(3), p. 39-44, fig. 14

Kristina van Dyke, ed., *African Art from the Menil Collection*, Menil Foundation Inc., Houston, 2008, pp. 202-203, n° 99

C COLLECTION PRIVÉE, USA

Hauteur: 15,2cm

Provenance:

Charles Ratton, Paris

Morris Pinto, Genève

D COLLECTION PRIVÉE, U.S.A.

Hauteur: 16,2 cm

Provenance:

Ancienne collection Patrick Dierickx, Bruxelles (Christie's London, *Important Tribal Art*, June 29, 1994, lot 133

E FELIX COLLECTION, BRUSSELS

Hauteur: 16 cm

Provenance:

Récoltée par D. Biebuyck en 1952

Ancienne Collection de l'IRSAC, Lwiro, R.D.C.

Ancienne Collection Carl Provost, Texas

Publication:

Joseph Cornet, *Art de l'Afrique Noire, au pays du fleuve Zaïre*,

Arcade, Fond Mercator, Bruxelles, 1972,p; 280, illus. 153

**F FRANKFURT AM MAIN, MUSEUM DER WELTKULTUREN,
INV. N° N.S.9020**

Hauteur: 20 cm

Publication:

Hans Himmelheber et Eberhard Fischer, *Plastik der Afrikaner*, Frankfurt, Museum für Völkerkunde, 1968, n° 65

G ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO, TORONTO.

Hauteur: 13 cm

Provenance:

Alain Guisson, Bruxelles

Pierre Dartvelle, Bruxelles

Bernard de Grunne, Bruxelles

Lord Thomson of Fleet, Toronto

Publication:

Jean-Baptiste Bacquart, *L'art tribal de l'Afrique noire*, Assouline,

Paris, 1998, p. 149, illus. 11

18

Spoon

Ivory

Height : 24,1 cm

Provenance:

- Belgian colonial administrator, before 1960
- Pierre Darteville, Brussels
- Michel Boulanger, Liège



19

Spoon

Ivory

Height : 19,4 cm

Provenance:

- Collected by Daniel Biebuyck in 1952
- Collection IRSAC, Lwiso
- Collection Carl Provost, Kinshasa, 1960
- Houston, Kuehnert auction House, 1997
- Alain Naoum, Bruxelles
- Pierre Darteville, Bruxelles
- Michel Boulanger, Liège



20

Spoon

Ivory

Height : 14,34 cm

Provenance:

- Alexandre Safiannikoff, Kamituga, circa 1940's
- Jean -Pierre Jernander, Brussels, 1970
- Peter and Veena Schnell, Zurich



21

Hammer

Ivory

Height : 18,7 cm

Provenance:

- Mr. Dujardin, de la Egypaco, Bukavu, 1960's
- Pierre Darteville, Bruxelles





Peg

Ivory

Height : 21 cm

Provenance:

- Jean-Pierre Lepage, Brussels, 1960's
- Michel Boulanger, Liège

Publications :

- Daniel Biebuyck, *Lega Ethique et beauté au cœur de l'Afrique*, Bruxelles, KBC Banque, 2002, p. 218, Cat. 171



23

Knife

Ivory

Height : 16,8 cm

Provenance:

- David Henrion, Sauvenière
- Michel Boulanger Liège



LEGA

This catalog was published by **Bernard de Grunne**
for *The European Fine Art Fair Maastricht* from March 14. to March 24. 2011

BERNARD DE GRUNNE

180 avenue Franklin Roosevelt
B-1050 Brussels | Belgium
Tel. : + 322 5023171
Fax : + 322 5033969
Email : grunne@skynet.be

© Bernard de Grunne

Photos :

© Roger Asselberghs-Frédéric Dehaen, Brussels

Graphic design, prepress,
printing and binding :


Snel
MORE THAN A PRINTER
www.snel.be

LEGA



BERNARD DE GRUNNE
TRIBAL *fine* ARTS