

# THE AFRICAN COLLECTION of the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences

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A dramatic Dogon horseman stands beside rows of Congo fetish figures. Among arrows, spears and canes hangs a pair of intricately carved ceremonial paddles from Benin. Sophisticated Senufo heddle pulleys lie in a drawer with weaving tools of rough simplicity. This extraordinary mixture of the rare with the commonplace is the essence of the African Collection of the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences. Superimposed upon a motley accumulation of travellers' souvenirs, purchases from international expositions and an assortment of religious fetishes gathered by missionaries from their converts are many magnificent pieces chosen specifically by Chauncey J. Hamlin, President of the Society from 1920 to 1948. It is these pieces, for the most part, which give the varied anthropological collection its examples of the best in the tribal arts. Most of the accompanying illustrations are Hamlin gifts.

At the turn of the century, the Society owned only a few African pieces. Plans for the Pan-American Exposition to be held



1. MALE FIGURE. BAGA, GUINEA.  
WOOD, 26 1/2".

2. AFRICAN ROOM, MUSEUM OF THE BUFFALO  
SOCIETY OF NATURAL SCIENCES, 1902.

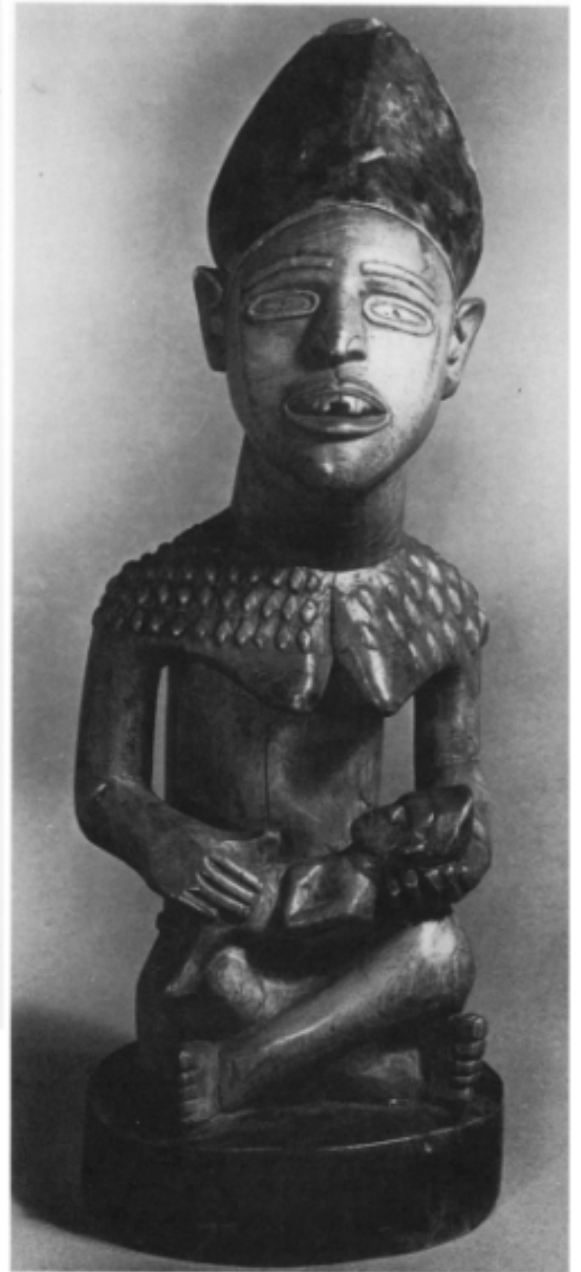




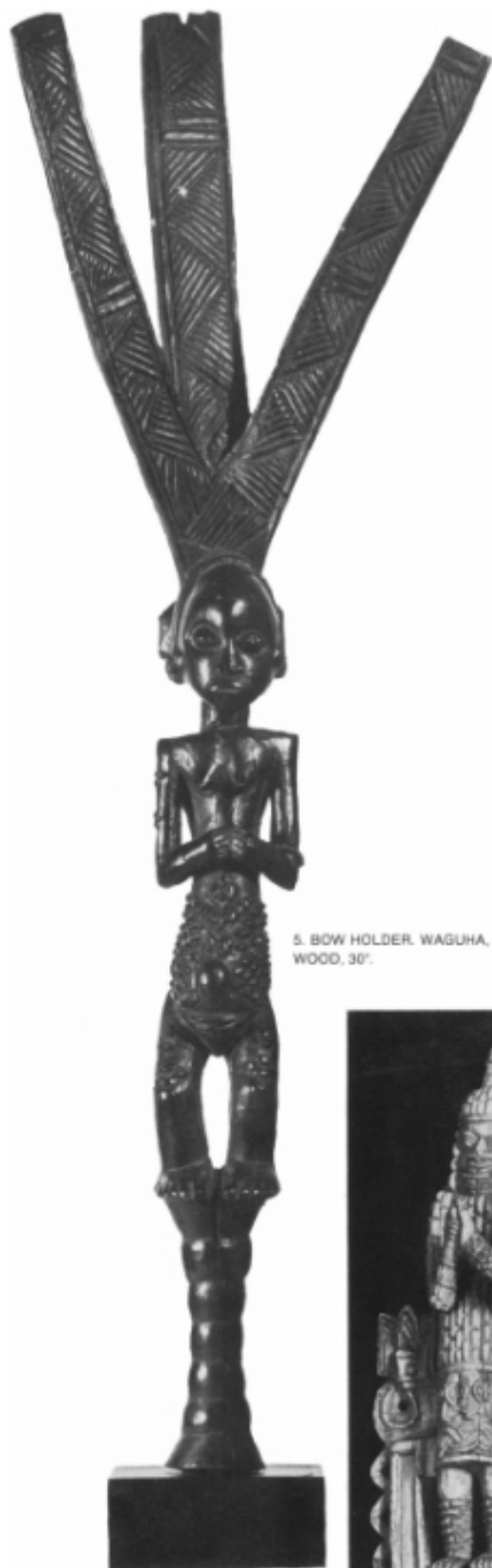
3. CHAIR, BAJOKWE, SOUTHERN ZAIRE.  
WOOD, 24 1/2".

in Buffalo in 1901 suddenly presented an opportunity to acquire a valuable selection of material from West Africa and the Congo. Under the sponsorship of several members of the Society, the French explorer, Xavier Pené, assembled a varied exhibit of "weapons, implements, musical instruments, idols and curios" as described in his brochure to be displayed in a "Museum" at the Exposition. All of this material was to become the Society's property at the close of the Fair. The Bakongo fetish figure with magic bundles front and back (Fig. 17) was originally exhibited in the Pené collection.

M. Pené's expedition also brought Africans from eleven tribes to live in an "African Village" on the Midway at the Exposition. They carried with them their household utensils, weapons and tools, and lived in huts built by them of materials brought from Africa. The weavers, gold workers and ivory carvers among the Africans gave demonstrations of their skill and created many pieces of 'African' art in Buffalo, New York. Ivory tusks were



4. FEMALE FIGURE WITH A CHILD.  
BAYOMBE, SOUTHERN ZAIRE. WOOD, 12 1/2".



5. BOW HOLDER. WAGUHA, EASTERN ZAIRE.  
WOOD, 30".



6. IVORY CARVING.  
BENN, NIGERIA. 7½".



7. EFFIGY CUP. BAWONGO, CENTRAL ZAIRE, WOOD, 7¾".

carved in spiralling relief processions of men and animals. On some of these tusks in the Society's collection, the procession surprisingly includes Buffalo streetcars and, in one case, the American Indian Chief Geronimo, who was also appearing on the Midway. When the exposition closed soon after President McKinley's assassination on the fairgrounds, the Society received the "Museum" collection. It also purchased most of the material from the African Village from M. Pené, who needed the money to transport ninety-eight Africans back to their homes. All of these acquisitions were displayed in an African room at the Society's Museum in 1902 (Fig. 2).

During the next thirty years, several large private collections were given to the Society. Typical of these were the Melville and Bond-Nelson Collections, the first assembled by two missionary sisters working in Angola and the second by a Buffalonian living and working in Johannesburg. Both include weapons, textiles, musical instruments, tools, decorated calabashes and baskets. In addition, the Bond-Nelson Collection contains many exceptional examples of beadwork from South Africa (Back Cover). Because of such gifts, the Society now owns large amounts of material demonstrating the minor arts and design in weaving, metal and beadwork. The Melville and Bond-Nelson baskets, plus those from the African Village and later contributions from travellers to Liberia and the Congo, make up most of the present collection of over 100 African baskets. In each case, these examples of tribal crafts were originally gathered and preserved because of their use in a particular culture. They are only recently being displayed for their artistic value.



8. MASK. BAULE, IVORY COAST. WOOD, 14".



9. FEMALE FIGURE WITH A CHILD.  
BALUBA, EASTERN ZAIRE.  
WOOD, 18".

The Society moved into its current home, the Buffalo Museum of Science, in 1928. President Chauncey J. Hamlin, who was responsible for the new building, participated in the planning of every hall. When plans were formulated for a Hall of Africa, for the first time specific items were sought for the African Collection which now numbered about 1500 pieces. The first purchases were media of exchange, and with these were Ashanti gold weights acquired from Spink and Son of London and Weyhe of New York. The collection today includes 88 weights, some of geometric design or in the forms of birds, insects and animals, and many using the human figure to illustrate a fable or proverb.

Chauncey Hamlin was a passionate collector who became a connoisseur of African sculpture in the 1930's. He began to buy pieces from European and American galleries in 1938 and 1939 which would build a collection of the finest quality. Among his first gifts to the Society was a Bajokwe chair carved with many figures frozen in activity (Fig. 3), in great contrast to the calm simplicity of the female figure supporting the Bajokwe stool (Fig. 19) acquired the same year. The chair and an excellent Bayaka handle mask (Fig. 16) were purchased from van Lier of Amsterdam, the stool from Walshot of Brussels. One of the pieces he selected in 1939 from Charles Ratton in Paris was a rare Baga figure (Fig. 1). A Baule mask (Fig. 8), a Baluba drum, a Dogon equestrian figure, Kuyu and Ekoi heads, and a bronze staff top from Benin are only a few of his early donations. They indicate the great variety in the works which Mr. Hamlin added to the collection at this time. Exchanges with other museums were also arranged to supplement these purchases. A Mangbetu

box (Fig. 14), reputedly collected by the Lang-Chapin Congo Expedition in 1915, was an exchange item from the American Museum of Natural History in 1939.

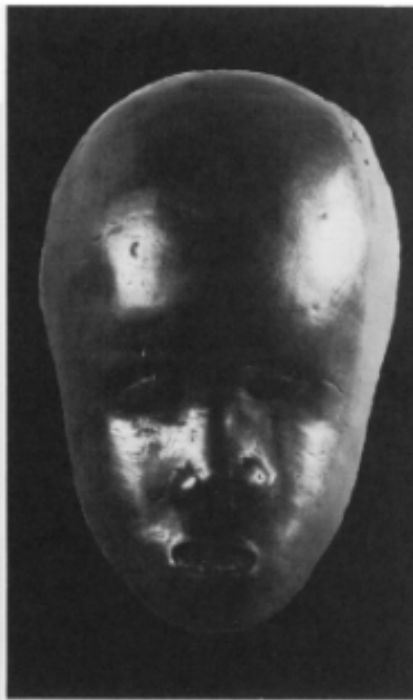
In 1938, Chauncey Hamlin began a long association with Guillaume Dehondt of Brussels. Two of his first purchases from this well-known art dealer were the graceful Waguha bow holder (Fig. 5) and the Bayombe female figure holding a child (Fig. 4). Both are outstanding examples of the best in the sculptural tradition of these tribes. M. Dehondt had just been commissioned to assemble and arrange an exhibition of African art for the Belgian Pavilion at the New York World's Fair of 1939. For this he used both his own collection and material from the Musée du Congo Belge, Tervuren. Because of Mr. Hamlin's friendship with Dehondt and the Colonial Commissioner, Leopold de Waelhans, this exhibit from the Belgian Pavilion was displayed on loan at the Buffalo Museum of Science at the close of the Fair. In a coincidental repetition of the Pan-American Exposition experience, much of this material was sold to the Society to offset the expenses of the exhibitors at the Fair. Representative of the fine sculpture purchased from this Belgian loan is the powerful Baluba female figure carrying a child on her back (Fig. 9). A Bawongo effigy cup with detailed scarification and expressive face (Fig. 7) was also purchased from the Belgian loan.



10. FUNERARY VESSEL. ANYI, IVORY COAST.  
CLAY, 13".



11. GRAVE FIGURE. ANYI, IVORY COAST.  
CLAY, 13".



13. HEAD, FON, DAHOMEY.  
HOLLOW BRONZE, 7".

12. KUDUO, ASHANTI, GHANA.  
BRASS, 9 1/4".



14. BOX, MANGBETU, NORTHERN ZAIRE.  
BARK AND WOOD, 20".

When the new Hall of Africa at the Buffalo Museum of Science was opened in 1941, the Belgian loan was exhibited with 351 of the best pieces from the Society's collection. The remarkable Fon head of hollow bronze was purchased from Pierre Matisse of Paris for display at the opening (Fig. 13). For the first time, the collection was not presented solely as an ethnological exhibit. The Hall "...contains many treasures and gives one a comprehensive view of the sculptural genius of the African..." said Mr. Hamlin in his speech at the opening of the exhibition. The African works were at last recognized and displayed as art.

Following World War II, Mr. Hamlin continued to purchase for the Collection as he travelled in Europe and corresponded with dealers. An excellent Benin ivory carving was acquired in 1944 from Ratton (Fig. 6). The potent animal fetish figure from the Lower Congo, with a magic bundle attached to the back and a dried monkey foot around the left front leg, came from Dehondt in 1946 (Fig. 18). In 1947, the beautifully carved box from Benin, reputedly a gift from the King of Benin to Sir Henry Galway in 1800 (Fig. 15), and a Bijogo covered bowl from the Bissagos Islands (Inside Back Cover) were purchased in London from Sydney Burney. In this same year while in Paris, Mr. Hamlin acquired a rare Ashanti *Kuduo* from Ascher (Fig. 12), and two of the Anyi funerary pieces in the Collection from the Galerie Carrefour. One of these is an expressive clay figure (Fig. 20), and the other an unusual pottery vessel bearing three heads, one containing the opening (Fig. 10).

The African Collection continued to grow from other sources during this period. However, most of the gifts were of more interest to an anthropologist than to an art connoisseur. Almost



15. COVERED BOX. BENIN, NIGERIA.  
WOOD, 20 1/2".

200 pieces collected by the Rev. and Mrs. Edgar Johnston in the Tshauppa River Region of the Congo include a variety of textiles, belts, brass ornaments, stools, bowls and many weapons. Dr. Frans M. Olbrechts, Professor of Ethnology and Primitive Art at the University of Ghent, donated a collection to the Society in 1955. Another array of seventy-three pieces including many weapons, baskets and drums was donated by Daniel W. Streeter. Meanwhile the "art" collection was receiving such gifts as an excellent Mende helmet mask carved with four faces and an unusually delicate Bambara antelope headpiece, both given by A. Conger Goodyear in 1961.

Because of increasing public interest in the African history of black Americans, the Women's Committee of the Buffalo Museum of Science sponsored a major exhibition from the Society's African Collection in 1969. Renovations in the Museum building had closed the Hall of Africa and only a small amount of the African material was on display at that time. This splendid exhibit was organized by Virginia L. Cummings, now Director of the Buffalo Museum of Science. Approximately one-third of the Collection, or 800 pieces, were mounted. The following partial summary of the illustrated checklist published for this exhibit will indicate the variety and depth of the Collection as a whole: 70 masks; 185 other works of wood including 67 figures and 29 cups, bowls and boxes; 137 works of metal including 37 pieces of jewelry; 37 horn and ivory pieces; textiles, weapons, musical instruments, beadwork, and bowls and figures of clay. The stylistic character of tribal art was especially apparent because of the cultural grouping of material from forty-nine tribes and several geographic areas.

Although this temporary exhibit has closed, much of the material from Cameroon, and from the Bayaka, Bambara and Bakuba has remained on display, as well as the Dan pieces and a collection of ghost masks from the Ogowe River Region. A new exhibit of African ivory carving has recently been put on display. Interest in African art has not lessened, but this collection must share limited exhibition space with other large anthropological collections.

The dual nature of the African Collection of the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences provides a rare opportunity for both the anthropologist and student of African art. The combination of varied ethnological gifts and Chauncey Hamlin's carefully selected purchases of the best examples of tribal art has created an outstanding research source. For the anthropologist, the relatively simple material of daily life is greatly enhanced by the presence of the finest examples of artistic creativity. At the same time, a variety of material from the same tribe provides a better understanding of the traditions, restrictions of custom, religious belief, and available materials which controlled the artist. A work of African art can then be evaluated not only by modern esthetic ideals but with the added awareness of its part in a specific culture. □

OPPOSITE PAGE: (TOP LEFT) 16. HANDLE MASK. BAYAKA, CONGO (KINSHASA). WOOD, RAFFIA, CLOTH, PAINT, 18". (TOP RIGHT) 17. FETISH FIGURE. BAKONGO, ZAIRE. WOOD, 7 3/4". (BOTTOM LEFT) 18. ANIMAL FIGURE. LOWER CONGO. WOOD, 6 1/2". (BOTTOM RIGHT) 19. STOOL. BAJOKWE, SOUTHERN ZAIRE. WOOD, BRASS STUDS, 11 1/2".

