

## ***Surviving Works: context in Verre arts***

### ***Part Two, Chapter Five: Towards a Verre catalogue raisonnée***

#### **5.6: Anthropomorphic figures**

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## 5.6 Anthropomorphic figures

Compared to the large output attributed to some peoples of the Middle and Upper Benue, of which the Mumuye are the most celebrated, anthropomorphic figures considered to be in Verre style have turned up in relatively small numbers. Thanks to local trade, some of these in wood entered the art market attributed to Chamba and were only later reattributed. Brass figures have been attributed even more widely.

Verre figures in wood are found in both the assemblages that provide our primary evidence: from the early colonial period before the First World War, and from the early post-independence period from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s. Other than in their overall proportions, the wooden figures collected in the two periods differ markedly, which implies the earlier wooden figures did not have great longevity since none resembling them were collected half a century later. No figures in brass were acquired in the early period, which does not of course prove there were none, but we shall present other positive evidence to suggest that brass figures might be a later innovation.

For the earlier of our two periods, we know both when figures were collected, and that twenty-one of the twenty-four for which some record survives were brought in, most probably to Tchamba, from the communities around the then Kamerun-Nigeria border to be exchanged with the Frobenius expedition. We have more exact information in the case of the figures collected by Chappel, and to a lesser degree by members of the SUM, during the second period, and varying indications of the background to other figures that left the area around the same time and surfaced later in museum or private collections.

The numbers of Verre wooden figures, and the relatively slight attention paid to surface finish of the earlier examples, do not suggest that they were a medium of artistic expression similar in importance to brass, or, at an earlier period, to calabash decoration. We have relatively slight indications of how they were used. It is striking that the figures illustrated from the Frobenius collection are in male-female pairs, although only some of them look like pairs in formal terms. Figures collected singly appear all to be female, and to have been used by women, which contrasts with the exclusive use of wooden figures by men according to accounts of neighbours such as the Mumuye and Chamba. None of the more finely finished figures in Verre style were collected at the beginning of the twentieth century; these appear only from the middle of that century, just after a stylistic development in the sculpture of the neighbouring Chamba. While we cannot prove these two stylistic changes are related, the timing and proximity suggest they could be, not least because Verre made objects for sale to neighbouring Chamba. With these points in mind, we move to the evidence, in part to show how thin it is.

### ***The early colonial assemblage of Verre figures***

The earliest example so far located of a Verre figure in a German museum collection is in Hamburg, accessioned in 1910 from the military officer Franz von Stephani (Hamburg 186.10). We do not know exactly when it was collected, but von Stephani served in Kamerun through much of the German colonial period before the First World War. He was in the vicinity of Gurin in June 1903 according to his route shown on Moisel's map of Kamerun (D3 Garua), and he was a member of the Yola-Cross River boundary commission in 1907-8.<sup>1</sup> Either of these occasions might have brought him into contact with Verre. The accession card describes the figure as 47.5cm high and carries a contemporary illustration on its reverse that unmistakably corresponds to a more recent photograph. The lateral flexing of the torso is unusual but may simply retain the curvature of the wood from which the figure was carved. Shoulders and arms, and hips and legs, are in the form of a stacked pair of inverted horseshoes or U-shapes that are roughly similar in size. This formal conception, found with more and less symmetry, recurs with greater stylization in the sculptures of the Dowayo to the south, in what the literature describes as Namji dolls (Krüger 2003). These 'dolls', nowadays produced in large numbers for the international market, are highly decorated and frequently clothed, traits shared, though with greater restraint, with early figures in Verre styles. Abrus seeds have been used to highlight the hair, and to indicate where accessories would be worn around the neck, waist, ankles and wrists. The redness of the abrus presumably evoked the redness of brass (relative to black iron). It is also conceivable that some Verre women, like neighbouring Koma, reddened their tresses with oil and kaolin on important occasions. The short arms, hardly reaching beyond the waist, are characteristic of Verre figures and are consistent with the overall, double inverted-U configuration. This figure has a distinct neck element, but it is equally common for a figure's head to be attached directly to its torso. The figure's large feet allow it to be freestanding on separate legs, something we shall find also to be characteristic of brass figures. A stylistically close counterpart is to be found in an illustration of another female figure collected only a few years later by the Frobenius expedition (KBA 10457 (viewer's left), below).

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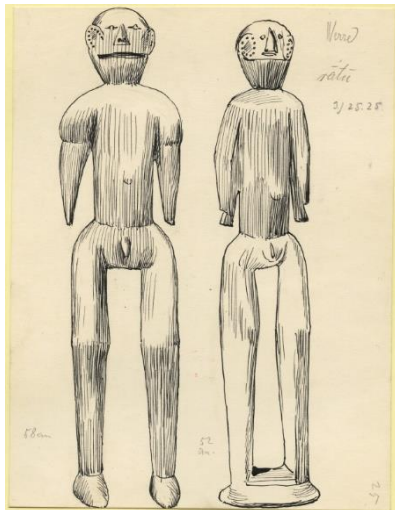
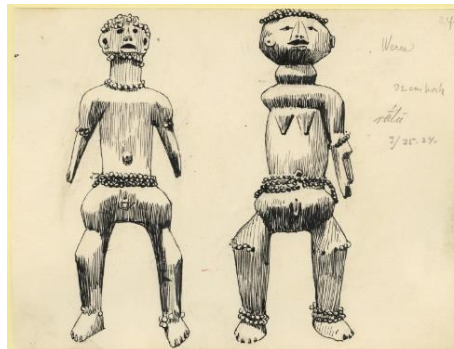
<sup>1</sup> Copies of Moisel's map may be found online at the Basel Mission Archive, <https://www.bmarchives.org/items/show/100203649>  
<https://www.bmarchives.org/items/show/100203650>

Hamburg **186.10** – 47.5cm

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

In 1911, the Frobenius expedition made the largest collection of Verre figures from the early colonial period. Twenty-one were inventoried (LF 840: 4813-33) under the Verre name of 'rātū' without further information, the closest match for which term in Blench and Edwards' 1988 Verre dictionary is *ráu* (s), *rát* (pl), defined as firewood although no other term for wood is recorded. As detailed in Appendix 3 and discussed in Chapter 3, Chappel's informants included the term *rap* (s), *rat* (pl), in phrases naming wooden figures: *wan marus rap* (s), *yanga maari rat* (pl).

Sketches survive in the Frobenius Institute archive for ten of the figures collected, arranged in five pairs, which have been roughly scaled here to reflect their relative height. The first three look as if they are pairs in a formal sense, while the other two differ formally. The numbers allocated in the field inventory made when packing the original collection (LF 840: 4813-33) cannot be related to the numbers given to the sketches (KBA) since these were allocated simply in the order that they were scanned. The Frobenius archive itself provides no information on the remaining eleven figures collected for which illustrations are lacking.

**KBA 10453** (58cm left; 52cm right)**KBA 10454** (both 32cm)**KBA 10455** (35cm; 39cm)**KBA 10456** (44cm; 47cm)**KBA 10457** (59cm; 51cm)

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

In the hope of tracing the onward journeys of the ten figures illustrated and the eleven which were not, we looked for Verre figures in the surviving records of the erstwhile German ethnological museums. Curators helped us to identify sixteen accession records of figures attributed to Verre and with provenance to Frobenius: four in Berlin; four in Leipzig; one in Dresden; and seven in Hamburg. The Leipzig Museum transferred two of the figures it accessioned to Berlin, so these sixteen records probably represent only fourteen pieces, or two-thirds of the twenty-one Frobenius collected. There are challenges fitting the records to the surviving sketches and objects. In a few cases, the surviving object itself or its accession record corresponds to a sketch in the Frobenius archive, but in most the relations between these traces are less certain. German ethnological museum collections and their records were disrupted and, in parts, destroyed during the Second World War, and the subsequent partition of the country had consequences for collections that have taken time to redress. Where the best efforts of curators have been unable to locate any records, then figures must be assumed either to be lost or, more optimistically, to remain unidentified for the time being

in museum stores. Given these challenges, the relatively small number of examples, and the possibility the record can be improved, we assess the museum records individually by accession number, beginning with the collection of the Berlin museum. The results of this exercise are tabulated in conclusion.

Berlin III C 29348 (E 422/1912/) female figure 51cm (not extant); while this is the same height as KBA10457 (viewer's right), which is not accounted for elsewhere, the Berlin accession record does not mention what are presumably abras seeds affixed to much of the surface. On this ground, we are inclined to list it with the figures lacking illustration and now lost.

Berlin III C 29349 (E422/1912/) female figure 46.5cm; although stylistically it closely resembles a female version version of the male figure in KBA 10453 (left), that figure is considerably taller (58cm). It is most likely to be one of the figures for which either no illustration survives in the Frobenius archive or none was ever drawn.



Berlin III C 29349 (E422/1912/)

(Clicking on the image will open a higher quality version)

Berlin III C 29351 (E 422/1912) described as a female figure of wood, glass beads, and raffia, 46cm, transferred from Leipzig Museum. This is the figure with unusual stomach scarification sketched in KBA 10456 viewer's right (47cm) now having lost some of its beads and skirt, as well as part of one foot.





Berlin III C 29351 (E 422/1912), **KBA 10456** right (previously Leipzig **MAf 23170 MVL**)

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

Berlin III C 29352 (E 422/1912/) female figure of wood, brass, and abrus precatorius seeds, 32.5cm, transferred from Leipzig Museum. While KBA 10454 (right) is decorated with abrus seeds and is 32cm tall, no brass elements are obvious, and the accession record might have noted the absence of a right arm. So this is likely to have been one of the figures of which no sketch survives in the Frobenius Archive.

Leipzig Museum accessioned four Verre figures under the name 'ratu', but apart from the heights of two of them, very little information survives, and none of the figures is extant in Leipzig. The heights recorded in Berlin for the two figures transferred from Leipzig were respectively 32-32.5cm and 46-47cm. These measurements do not correspond to the two more complete records in Leipzig, so they most probably belong to the two slight Leipzig records, supposing that the figures were no longer available for measurement having left to Berlin when those records were made. The Leipzig records are:

MAf 23162 MVL – 36cm in height, which does not correspond to the height noted on any of the ten sketches of figures in the Frobenius archive.

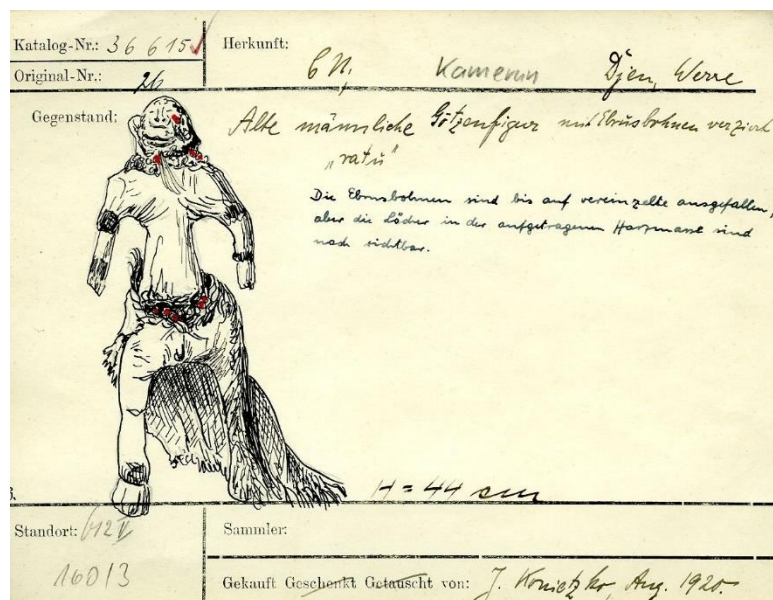
MAf 23166 MVL – 60cm in height and partially covered in resin and abrus seeds. KBA 10457 (left) is a candidate only because it meets this description, and is 59cm high, and is not accounted for otherwise.



MAf 23170 MVL – no height is provided but it is described as decorated with abrus seeds. Simply on this basis, KBA 10456 (right), now in Berlin (Berlin III C 29351), would be the obvious candidate for this.

MAf 23171 MVL – no information; simply by default this might be Berlin III C 29352 because it was transferred from Leipzig.

Dresden Museum acquired one figure, now missing, from the dealer J. Konietzko in August 1920 that is certainly from Frobenius (and is given the name 'ratu'). 44cm in height, and described on its accession card as male with abrus seed decoration and skirt, this must be KBA 10456 (left); the right-hand figure as we noted is in Berlin where it arrived from Leipzig.



Dresden 36615



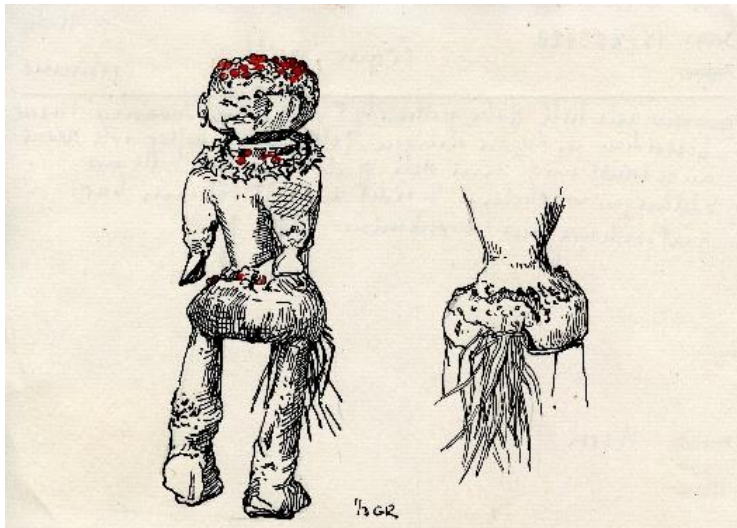
KBA 10456 (left)

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

Hamburg Museum received seven figures collected by Frobenius, accessioned in 1917, for which uneven documentation remains. Six sketches have survived, and these differ in drawing style in ways that might be significant to a researcher with a specialist knowledge of the authors of the collection's accession records. In only two cases, can we definitely identify these pieces with the sketches in the Frobenius archive; in four cases we can be sure the pieces were not sketched; and in the remaining instance we know nothing about the figure beyond it being 'large' (above 40cm to judge by slightly inconsistent uses of the terms 'grosse' and 'kleine' in the accession records).

Hamburg 17.20: 119 – a 'large' figure (presumably larger than the next which is described as 'small', so maybe 50cm like the similarly described 17.20: 121). Only a reference number remains with no accession card.

Hamburg 17.20: 120 – a 'small' female figure, 38cm high. Supposing it subsequently lost some of its beadwork, this is probably KBA 10455 (right) which is noted as 39cm on the sketch.

**Hamburg 17.20: 120** - 38cm**KBA 10455** – right 39cm

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

Hamburg 17.20: 121, a 'large' female figure, 50.4cm tall, accessioned as 'ratu', which does not correspond to any of the ten sketches in the Frobenius archive and so was presumably one of the eleven figures not sketched. Its overall form corresponds to the stacked pair of inverted-U's described earlier, although with a distinct neck element. The feet have the pronounced heel extensions, presumably for stability, that we shall see on Verre brass figures. To judge by the surviving resin, it was ornamented with an abrus seed necklace and bracelets, as well as abrus hair, although few seeds survive, and it retains a waist band and rear covering, as well as a small lower lip ring.



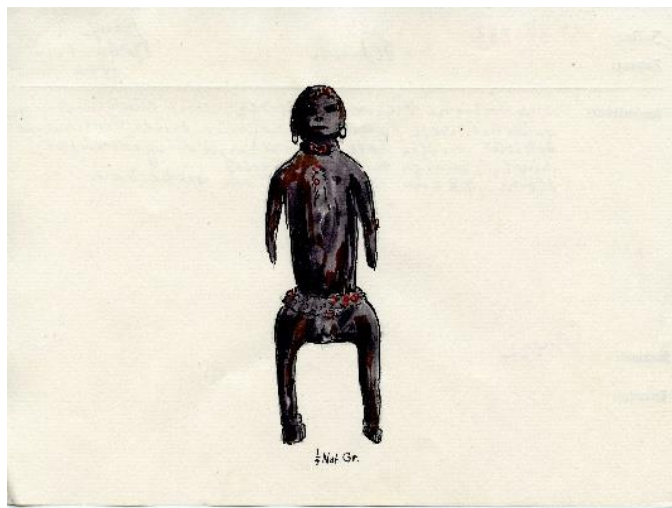


Hamburg 17.20: 121

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

Hamburg 17.20: 122, described as a 'large' male figure, although only 42cm tall, with iron rings in its ears, and abrus seed decoration. Like the last, this figure does not correspond to a sketch in the Frobenius archive; it was bought from Frobenius (with an item number 2820).

Sketches of this figure and the next show both to have been short necked and in the double inverted-U form.

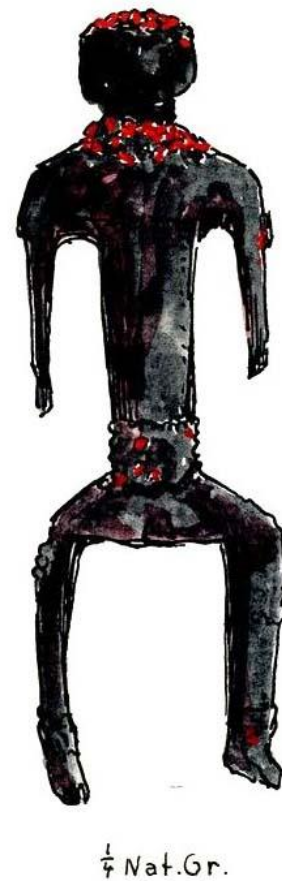


**Hamburg 17.20: 122**

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

Hamburg 17.20: 124, a 'small' blackened male figure, 41cm tall, with abras decoration, bought from Frobenius (with an item number 4824). This is another figure not to be found among the Frobenius archive sketches.





**Hamburg 17.20: 124**

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

Hamburg 17.20: 125, a 'small' female figure of 30cm, with waist and anklet beads (illustrated as blue) as well as some abrus seed decoration in a cranial crest of hair. Another figure not identifiable among the Frobenius archive sketches.



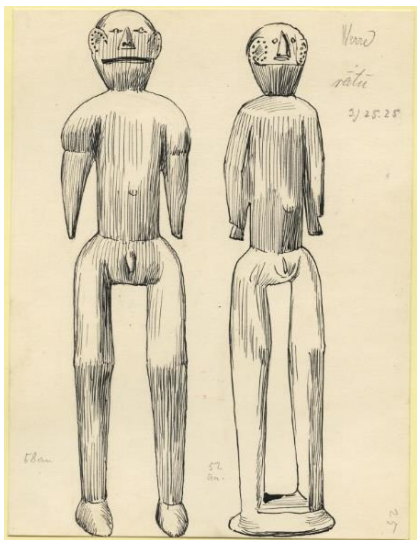
**Hamburg 17.20: 125**

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

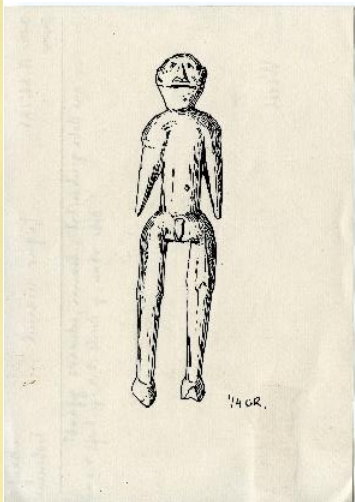
Hamburg 17.20: 126, a 57cm 'large', unusually long-legged, male figure that, on the basis of both its accession sketch and more recent photography, does correspond to one of the illustrations in the Frobenius archive (KBA 10453 (left)) despite a discrepancy of 5cm between their recorded heights, and a broken toe. Arnold Rubin (UCLA Fowler Museum, file card) remarked on multiple piercing around the rim of the ear, possibly with nails, and holes at the bottom of the ear apparently for rings. The short arms are particularly schematic with a muscular swelling at the shoulders. The surface was good with superficial carbon, perhaps from smoke. Rubin noted Konietzko as the intermediary through whom the figure reached Hamburg.







KBA 10453 (left)



Hamburg 17.20: 126



Hamburg 17.20: 126

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

Frobenius Archive Sketch	Museum Accession	Museum Reference
KBA reference and height	Record/Sketch/Height	Current status
KBA 10453 left – 58cm	none	?
KBA 10453 right – 52cm	Hamburg: accession sketch and photograph, 57cm	Hamburg 17.20: 126 - <b>extant</b>
KBA 10454 left – 32cm	none	?
KBA 10454 right – 32cm	none	?
KBA 10455 left – 35cm	none	?

KBA 10455 right – 39cm	Hamburg: accession sketch, 38cm	Hamburg 17.20: 120 - <i>lost</i>
KBA 10456 left – 44cm	Dresden: accession record and sketch, 44cm	Dresden 36615 - <i>lost</i>
KBA 10456 right – 47cm	Likely to have been previously Leipzig MAf 23170 MVL; Berlin, 46cm, photograph	Berlin III C 29351 (E 422/1912) - <b>extant</b>
KBA 10457 left – 59cm	Could be Leipzig MAf 23166 MVL – 60cm	Leipzig - <i>lost</i> ?
KBA 10457 right – 51cm	(Berlin III C 29348?)	?
Not illustrated (unless KBA10457 right)	Accession record, 51cm	Berlin III C 29348 (E 422/1912/); <i>lost</i>
Not illustrated	Accession record, photograph, 46.5cm. Similar to KBA 10453 left, 58cm, but over 10cm shorter	Berlin III C 29349 (E422/1912/); photograph; <b>extant</b>
Not illustrated	Leipzig MAf 23171, 32.5cm; transferred to Berlin	Berlin III C 29352 (E 422/1912/) - <i>lost</i>
Not illustrated	Accession record, 36cm	Leipzig MAf 23162 MVL - <i>lost</i>
Not illustrated	No accession record, 'large'	Hamburg 17.20: 119 - <i>lost</i>
Not illustrated	Accession record, photograph, 50.4cm	Hamburg 17.20: 121 - <b>extant</b>
Not illustrated	Accession sketch, 'Item 2820 Frobenius', 42cm	Hamburg 17.20: 122 - <i>lost</i>
Not illustrated	Accession sketch, 'Item 4824 Frobenius', 'small'	Hamburg 17.20: 124 - <i>lost</i>
Not illustrated	Accession sketch, 30cm	Hamburg 17.20: 125 - <i>lost</i>
Plus at least two more		

What can we generalize from these early examples? The obvious comparisons would be with sculptural styles that were predominant among some of their neighbours. Most Chamba figure statuary we know to have been carved by this time was columnar in conception, often to the degree that arms and legs were hardly separated from the trunk of the body if at all (Fardon and Stelzig 2005). Mumuye sculptural style was similarly columnar but with greater subtraction of material so that form was defined by angular negative spaces (Bovin 2011, Fardon 2011, Herreman 2016, Fardon 2019). Neither Chamba nor Mumuye columnar anthropomorphic forms bore close relations to the natural proportions of human bodies, frequently emphasising features of the head, hair or face disproportionately. Compared with these, Frobenius's group of Verre figures are typically more rounded and less angular in conception; they are also less obviously columnar and more suggestive of bodily volumes; ranging in height between 30 and 60cm, their bodily proportions are, relative to those styles, predominantly more naturalistic. With a single exception in the illustrations of the Frobenius collection (KBA 10453 (right) which has feet joined on a stand), Verre figures are long-legged

with slightly flexed knees that end in robust doll-like feet. Torsos are similarly long, and in about half the cases, the heads of figures attach directly to their bodies without necks. Arms are short; in many instances hardly reaching the waist. While the figures have gendered features, neither primary nor secondary sexual characteristics are heavily accentuated. Decoration is common, notably with abrus seeds, but also with trade beads, metal ornaments, and on occasions also clothing. Bands of abrus occur where hair ornaments, necklaces, belts, bracelets and anklets in brass might be worn. The heads of figures are not invariably modelled, like Chamba or Mumuye counterparts, to indicate elaborate coiffures, helmets, or elongated earlobes, though the tops of the heads of some of them are reddened with abrus seeds. Overall, the figures are unflexed, even rigid, and stand squarely facing the viewer, arms held stiffly at their sides. As already noted, the most common overall conformation may be summarized as a stacked pair of inverted U's or horseshoes. The arms forming the upper inverted U hardly overlap the hips of the lower inverted U, and they often end short of them in a way more reminiscent of the style of Dowayo than Chamba or Mumuye figures. Frequently, the two inverted U elements are similar in height providing the figures with approximate vertical as well as horizontal symmetry; however, the hips and legs may alternatively be either lengthened or shortened relative to the shoulders and arms, without the other stylistic features being altered greatly.

We know of three more Verre figures acquired in the same year as Frobenius's by Olive MacLeod, later Temple, when she visited Yola in 1911 on her journey to the grave of her fiancé. Her passage, facilitated through networks of colonial officers resulted, as we have seen already, in a heterogeneous collection picked up *en route* (see Chapter 2). In the absence of contrary indications, we assume it was through her contacts in Yola that she acquired her Verre figures either directly or on the market. The account of her travels she wrote on return does not suggest she visited areas south of Yola, including the Verre Hills, and the attribution of figures to the 'Duru-Verre' supports the impression that the collection was acquired through intermediaries, since the Duru (also Dourou in French, more commonly Dii nowadays, see Chapter 6) lived well to the south of Verre, then in Kamerun. Her collection was dispersed between several museums over a period of years after her return. To the best of our knowledge, she collected no Verre figures other than the three donated to the British Museum. The similarities between these figures and some of those collected by the Frobenius expedition are striking. Two, apparently female, figures are very similar in overall form, notably in the short arms, the absence of narrowing at the neck which gives the impression of a head sitting directly upon the shoulders, and the sturdy feet. Ornamentation is also similar. There are resemblances between these and several of Frobenius's sketches (for instance, KBA 10456 left or KBA 10457 right) but the closest are with a pair of similar stature, one of which has a buttock covering (KBA 10455 left and right; compare the right-hand figure with British Museum Af1913,1013.13). The white marking on the second figure below is not original but a slight bloom on the wax in which abrus seeds were originally embedded, most having by now fallen out. The Temple donation was made via Sir Reginald MacLeod of Vinters, the family home, in Maidstone, with a note on this figure transcribed by Arnold Rubin as,

'Female image from Verre juju house; Yola. A monkey? It is believed that the souls of the dead sometimes enter monkeys; this example was only obtained after months of endeavour' (File card, Fowler Museum UCLA). There is no other corroboration of this belief, and the rear appendage might as well be construed as an ornamental buttock cover as a literal tail, however, the reference to the image coming from a 'juju house' differs from the use by women when dancing documented a half century later by Chappel. Quite who undertook 'months of endeavour' is unclear given that the MacLeod-Talbot party did not spend months in Yola.



British Museum **Af1913,1013.11** Female figure (ritual) made of wood, metal, seeds (abrus).  
Acquired Yola, Duru-Verre, donated by Mr and Mrs C.L. Temple 1913, 35.7 x 12.3 x 7cm  
(Clicking on the image will open a higher quality version)



British Museum **Af1913,1013.13** Front and rear. Female figure (ritual) made of wood, hair (animal), seeds (abrus) in wax medium. Acquired Yola, Duru-Verre, donated by Mr and Mrs C.L. Temple 1913. 39.6 x 14 x 9cm.  
(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

The third figure collected by Olive MacLeod and now in the British Museum is in the alternative style we have recognized from the Frobenius figures: relatively elongated in overall form and with a distinct neck. Although taller than this figure (between 47 and 59cm as compared to just over 42cm), examples comparable in form among the documented Frobenius figures include that extant in Hamburg (17.20: 121), and two sketches (KBA 10456 right, and KBA 10457 left). The earliest accession of which we know, the figure collected by Stephani and now in Hamburg (186.10), is another example of this Verre figure style. In common with other figures, this once had abrus encrustations in places where brass personal ornaments would be worn.





British Museum **Af1913,1013.12** Female figure (ritual) made of wood, metal.  
 Acquired Yola, Duru-Verre, donated by Mr and Mrs C.L. Temple 1913. 42.4 x 8.7 x 7cm.  
 (Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

### ***The early post-colonial assemblage of Verre figures***

The relatively few figures collected in the early post-colonial period show continuities and differences from those in our earlier assemblage. Continuities would include figures being freestanding on chunky feet, having more naturalistic proportions of head, limbs and torso than those of their neighbours, and retaining the overall form that may be described as two inverted-U's or horseshoes. Except for one pair collected by Chappel, later figures are in the more elongated of the two styles we can distinguish, at least as polar tendencies, in the early colonial assemblage. Even the squatter figures do not lack necks. The finish of both forms seems noticeably finer than the earlier figures, perhaps a consequence of new tools, particularly files which were reportedly used to finish brassworks, and the development of a regional market, and the figures are consistently more strictly symmetrical laterally. Ornamentation continues to be a concern for the artists.





Jos Museum, Nigeria

66.JII.664

66.JII.665

66.JII.709

66.JII.720

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

This much is apparent from the four figures in two distinct styles collected for the Jos Museum in 1966 by Tim Chappel. Unlike the pieces surveyed up to this point, we have some indications of their purpose, and in each case, unusually for what we know of the wider region, women's activities are cited as the occasions for their use.

A pair of figures, identified as male and female (**664 & 665**) and similar in overall form to what are known to the international art market as Dowayo or Namji 'dolls', were carved by a Verre man, Modari of Cholli, then aged around forty-five, and bought from him on 28 October 1966. Modari told Chappel he was the only person in Cholli carving such figures, which he had copied from those he had seen an old man carving. They were held by girls during the *Dei-ki*, or female initiation rites, most particularly at the *Zangazaar* ceremony (derived from the term for a beer strainer), which was also an occasion for brewing and drinking beer. The term 'doll' may not be inappropriate given their use as surrogate, or prospective, children, the same as that reported from the Dowayo (Namji) living to the south. There are some overall similarities between these wooden figures and the single clay figure Chappel collected, which has a unique arrangement of arms. The significance of the figure and its posture were a matter of disagreement between the vendor and other informants. According to the vendor, such figures represented men but all the old ones had been destroyed, and they were held by girls when they danced at cult ceremonies (Fieldnotes 5: 113). But other informants claimed that although made by women, who were the potters, they were used by senior men who would hold the figure in the right hand with the words 'I am holding my friend' (Fieldnotes 7: 63).



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(Clicking on the image will open a higher quality version)

The other two wooden figures collected by Chappel (**709** & **720**) are more obviously a development of earlier, freestanding, Verre figures in terms of their overall proportions, relatively short straight arms, longer torso (now with prominent navel), with hips, legs and substantial feet in an inverted double horseshoe or U-shape. The fine finish and sharp detailing of the heads and facial features, with pierced ears and heavy brows, are innovations, as most strikingly are the straight-ridged hair tresses apparently substituting for the abrus encrustation of some earlier figures.

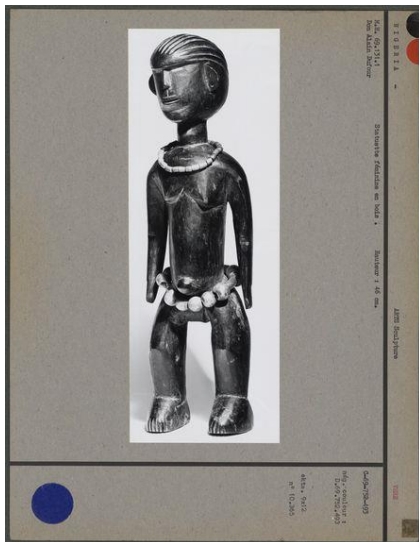
Called *won marus rap* according to Chappel's informants, the less decorated example (**709**; for a 1969, photograph taken at Jos Museum, see Fardon and Stelzig 2005: 123, figure 20a) had been bought in Cholli by an intermediary on Chappel's behalf but carved in Tɔza, a place just north of the small town of Karlahi, which is home to one of a local, seven-day cycle of markets. In common with the first two figures, Chappel was told this would be carried by a woman, dancing after the *Gangni* male circumcision ceremony (Fieldnotes 5: 25). It might also be loaned from a grandmother to her grandson who would be told, 'This is your future wife: if you run away she will leave you and go to someone else'. Chappel learnt that this use of wooden figures was restricted to non-smiths in the areas of Tɔza, Gɔgara and Guriga in eastern Verre land. Rather than a child, the figure appears to be that of a young woman. Figures in Verre styles were bought for inclusion in Mapeo Chamba cults, suggesting that the proximity of the workshop to a market was not fortuitous, and that similar figures could be made to serve different purposes.

The second, more ornamented, figure Chappel collected in the same style (**720**; for a 1969 photograph taken at Jos Museum, see Fardon and Stelzig 2005: 123, figure 20b) was bought

directly from a woman *Marus*, or licensed jester, in Uki (on 12 November 1966). She had bought it, like the previous figure, from Tōza, about seven years previously (circa 1959) because she had seen others dancing with such figures. ‘This is my child. My real children are for work: this one is for play’ (Fieldnotes 5: 25). But on return to Uki, where hers was the only example, she claimed to have been pestered by other non-*Marus* women who wanted to borrow the figure to hold at festivals but were not permitted to own their own, hence her willingness to sell it.

Figures in this style, and so similar as to come from the same workshop at the least, and possibly by the same hand, entered the market and museums from the mid to late 1960s onwards.

Two female figures, both in excellent condition, and differing substantially in height, were donated to Paris museums by the art dealer Alain Dufour and, on its foundation, passed into the collection of the then Musée du quai Branly. The first, and taller, was donated by him in 1969 (49cm), the second in 1970 (29cm) (see also Fry 1970: 6, figure 3; Fardon 2011: 245, figure 8.14). Given that the figures would have passed through the hands of local dealers before reaching Dufour, these dates are consistent with those for the figures collected by Tim Chappel and suggest carving activity in this style during the late 1950s and early 1960s.



Musée de l'homme 69.131.1



MQB-JC 71.1969.131.1 (49x13x16.2)



(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

MQB-JC **73.1970.1.1** 29x8.1x7cm 352gr

Two very similar figures are documented in the archive of Karl-Ferdinand Schädler.<sup>2</sup>

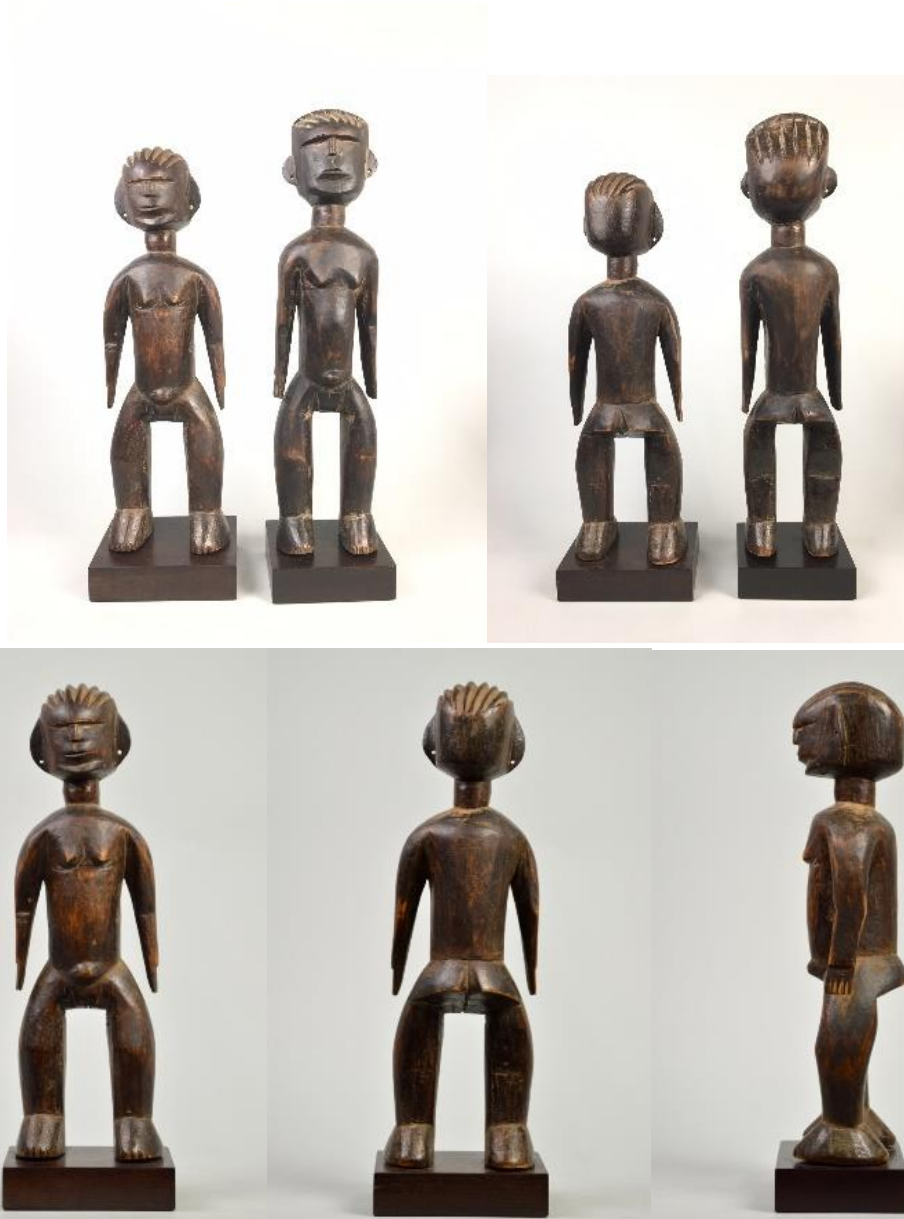
Schädler archive **Q1.01.1900**      Schädler archive **Q1.02.4692**

also reproduced in Fardon and Stelzig 2005: 123, fig. 20e.

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

<sup>2</sup> Schädler published Q1.02.4692 in related works (Schädler 1975: 189-90; 1994: 376f; 2009: 599). According to the van Rijn Yale Archive (Yale-Archive-No 0105197-01), the figure was offered at auction by Christie's in London (8 November 1977, lot 226) and subsequently by Galerie Wolfgang Ketterer (6 May 1978, lot 354). Stelzig and Fardon were indebted to assistance from Karl-Ferdinand Schädler and Guy van Rijn when using these images previously (see, Fardon and Stelzig 2005: 123, fig. 20d & 20e).

Another two figures, in the same style and in remarkably pristine condition, emerged recently from a cache of materials stored in Manhattan since the early 1970s of which the dealer Amyas Naegele kindly advised us. They had belonged to Sidney and Gae Berman whose dealership was incorporated in 1969 but they had not come onto the market until recently. The left-hand figure (in the first image) is 15.7 inches (40cm) according to its details at auction.<sup>3</sup>



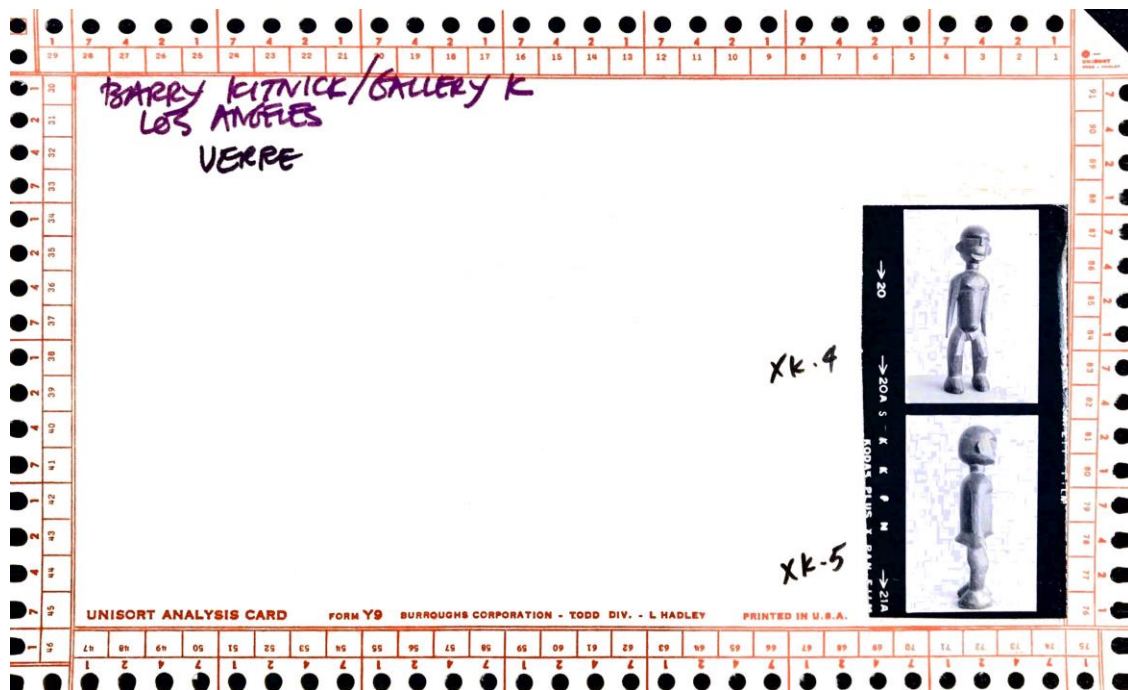
**Amyas Naegele Gallery**

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

Further examples are to be found in Arnold Rubin's archive, including one photographed by him and attributed to Barry Kitnick's Gallery K in Los Angeles (Rubin Object Image Cards, Fowler Museum UCLA), and a photograph of two figures without attribution.

<sup>3</sup> Zemanek -Münster lot 183 <https://www.tribal-art-auktion.de/en/auctions/object-detail/standing-female-figure-3046819/>





Left: an unannotated photograph in Arnold Rubin's archive at UCLA, related to his research on the Arts of the Benue River Valley (<https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/13030/kt3p300607/> Rubin papers, Box 11 : <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/kt3p300607/>)

Centre and right: Verre 0089625-01 & 02 Yale Archive; the same figures; the damaged ear suggests either these two or the left image have been flipped.  
(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

These figures, and in all likelihood others of which we are unaware, are likely share a provenance to the same carver(s) working in Tōza, in the orbit of Karlahi, and active for a period that includes the late 1950s and 1960s. As noted already, Karlahi is one of the markets of the seven-day cycle of markets used by the Chamba of Mapeo, whom we know to have been purchasers of Verre wares, which leads to a further connection. In an earlier work, Fardon and Stelzig (2005) presented a corpus of works associated with the name of Soompa, a Chamba Leko carver who remained active into the 1940s, and whose volumetric figures represented an innovation in Chamba sculpture. It seems more than coincidental that we can



date the Tɔza statuary to the decade following that when Soompa was carving. Although Soompa's works are more animated, particularly in their energetic flexing of all four limbs, there are similarities of scale and form between them and the Tɔza figures.



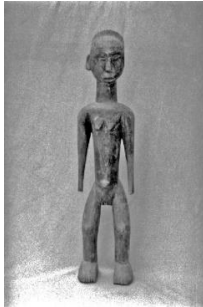




Soompa c. 1940 Private collection Brussels

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

The Tɔza figures differ in retaining the seemingly frozen limbs of earlier Verre sculptures, as well as their notably short arms but, like Soompa's figures, they are finely finished, unlike the rough-hewn character of earlier Verre figures. Perhaps the availability of new tools and a small international market encouraged these developments.

In 1974 Jos Museum was to acquire four more wooden figures, probably together given their almost consecutive accession numbers and from a dealer intermediary (74.J41.194-6 & 200; see Fardon and Stelzig 2005: 77, figure 14 a-d). While there are similarities in conception between these and the Tɔza figures which suggest a knowledge of them, they are clearly not by the same hand. The overall proportions may be similar, but the carving is less sharp, and its detail reduced, notably in the representation of plaited hair, which is carved only superficially and supplemented by a lateral or vertical crest. In the early 1970s, the Museum had reacted to the outflow of artworks during and immediately after the Nigerian Civil War by purchasing directly from Nigerian dealers more than, as previously, in the field. Acquisitions were made with no more information than an ethnic attribution. The four figures, which might be by the same carver given their similarities, were attributed to Chamba rather than to Verre, so most probably came from the region between the Karlahi market and Mapeo, west of the Alantika Mountains, where Verre and Chamba are neighbours. They are in what we can recognize as a Verre style irrespective of the ethnicity of their carver, which is by now almost certainly unknowable. The museum's curators were likely to have relied on the attributions made by dealers, which presumably varied since we find that a figure accessioned a year earlier, in 1973, and which other than for its ridged hair plaits is very similar to these four, was catalogued as Verre.

	Jos Museum 73J.59.3A Female figure with tresses	
75 cm	Jos Museum 74.J.41.194 Female figure with tresses and lateral headcrest	
62 cm	Jos Museum 74.J.41.195 Female figure with tresses lateral headcrest	
63 cm	Jos Museum 74.J.41.196 Male figure with sagittal headcrest and indistinct hair features	

48 cm	Jos Museum 74.J.41.200 Shorter female figure with tresses and lateral headcrest	
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(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

Wooden figures have been attributed to Verre on the basis of style more recently, and there is some evidence for continuation of carving during and after the 1970s, probably for use in more isolated communities (like those of the Koma) and elsewhere for direct sale to outsiders.<sup>4</sup> However, we lack field provenance for these more recent exports.

### **Brass figures**

As well as wooden figures, a few figures in brass have been attributed to the Verre. There are no examples in the early colonial assemblage; the first we hear of brass figures is in 1946 when Father Kevin Malachi Cullen wrote a note to accompany his donation to the Lagos Museum collected from the Mapeo Chamba and cites the presence of a Verre brass figure of a 'very old woman, sitting, about eight inches high' in the major Chamba cult of *karbangi* ('Karbongi'). He would, he writes, be unwilling to secure this 'central juju' even if he could, but he hoped to get a copy (see Chapter 1). We have, however, seen no evidence that he succeeded in his intention, and no figure resembling his description has come to our attention. Material evidence of Verre brass figures dates from two decades later when two figures entered the Jos Museum collection via the Sudan United Mission. Whether donated

<sup>4</sup> Fardon heard of a young Chamba who had taken up carving during visits in the first decade of this century, and similar reports reached Klaus Piepel via the linguist Ulrich Kleinewillinghöfer. 'According to a Koma elder, Yari, from the south-eastern neighbor of the Verre, who made inquiries among the elders of his region with photographs [of Verre figures in Klaus Piepel's collection], there are also Koma clans in Nigeria who could have such figures, particularly the Maani, who are also responsible for the rain. There is also a Chamba man who makes such figures and sells them (to strangers), which is why such figures have already been seen. Whether they have or had a ceremonial meaning for the Chamba, no-one could say. Neither is it known whether the Verre have such, and what meaning such figures could have for the Vere.'

'According also to a Beiya Koma, one of the three southern Koma peoples, who as a former employee of Michel Dieu, René Gardi and Eldridge Mohammadou was involved in ethnological studies in the entire area of the Alantika Mountains and visited various mountain villages on the Cameroon side in preparation for a presidential election, such figures are made by a Chamba for sale. Nothing is known about any significance among the Verre south of Yola. But he saw such figures in the Gimme rain shrine (also known as Kompana) in the southern Alantika Mountains.' Ulrich Kleinewillinghöfer (Mainz) personal communication 13 August 2015 to Klaus Piepel.

to the museum or confiscated at Kano airport is unclear (see Appendix 1), but they had reached the Jos Museum by 1966 when Chappel saw them before he began field collection. They were in all likelihood then recently arrived and awaiting registration since he found no accession numbers for them and recorded them under the names of Toft and Hansen. These two figures in brass neither resemble one another nor have strikingly close resemblances to any wooden figures collected from Verre. Only one of them has a convincing Verre provenance by virtue of its close resemblance to figures bought by Chappel.<sup>5</sup>

This male figure, over 32cm in height, wears an apron (under which Chappel remarked detailed anatomical features) and a cap. The figure carries both a sword on its left side and a dagger on its right. The naturalistic bodily proportions, other than the large feet to make it freestanding and similarly enlarged hands presumably to provide symmetry, might be argued loosely to resemble those of some Verre wooden figures. Chappel would collect two more brass figures that were similar in style in the field both of them female. This remains the only male brass figure known to us.



**Jos – Toft Hansen**

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

<sup>5</sup> The second Toft Hansen figure to reach the Jos Museum, although similar in height to the first (30cm), differed with respects both to style and proportions (see, Appendix 1, and Interleaf for illustrations). It might be argued to be Verre with Dowayo stylistic affinities, given some resemblance to the wooden figures **664** and **665**. But we can provide no provenance to support this hypothesis. Alternatively, the Jos attribution to Verre might have been inferred only from the fact of it arriving at the museum together with the previous figure, in which case it may have originated elsewhere, including the Cross River. This brass figure has some formal affinities with a 'clay' figure attributed to the Verre now in the Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, **73.1996.1.9** where it was acquired from the Barbier Mueller Collection, 13.2x25x6cm, 578gr. However, as well as bearing no resemblance to any example with field provenance, this figure was previously published by François Neyt as a bronze in the context of a discussion of Tiv copper alloy figures (1985: 203, Figure IV.52). Given such uncertainties of record, we have preferred to exclude these figures from the present discussion.

Chappel's first female figure (**753**) bought in November 1966 shares its distinctive bodily proportions, slight stoop from the waist and flexed knees, as well as its large feet and hands with the Toft Hansen figure. At almost 34cm, it is similarly sized. The attention to the head, in this case probably an elaborate coiffure, as well as to brass personal ornaments around the neck and waist are also reminiscent of the male figure's cap and weapons. The facial features are notably similar.



753

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

A second female figure acquired later in December 1966 (**801**) also shares the proportions and posture of the last, and at 30cm is similar in height. It was attributed to Yawam of the village of Lainde, who was also recalled by the same vendor, Hamman of Tuki, to have made a brass beer jar, *yerk suktunu* (**802**), and by another vendor, Abila, to have cast a brass-handled dagger (**648**). Presumably this is the place that Cullen noted as the source of the brassworks he collected in Mapeo made by the Verre blacksmiths of 'Laindai Boi', 'a peak on the S.W. corner of the Verre Plateau'. Given that the names of Verre smiths and brasscasters hardly occur in Chappel's notes, it seems reasonable to attribute significance to the recollection of both a place and a name. Yawam was spoken of in a tense that suggested he was still living in 1966, describing him as a smith, *Tibaa*, a senior elder, *donda gbijaas*, and possessed of the particular powers of those called *Marus*. In many detailed respects, as well as in its overall form, this figure (**801**) is highly reminiscent of the last (**753**), notably in its ornaments around the neck and waist. There seems to be a strong likelihood the same maker, Yawam of Lainde, was responsible for both. On the basis solely of photographic evidence it is tempting to attribute all three figures to him, however, Chappel recalls that the first of these three castings he saw was finer than the two he collected later. Rather than being by another



hand, this might with equal plausibility suggest the two female figures were products of Yawam's later years, even perhaps his response to a fresh demand.



801

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

A fourth figure, very similar to **801**, was offered for sale at Christie's (13 July 1977, Lot 161). The position of the hands differs, as does the length of the necklace, but in most respects the two seem uncannily close given that each figure made by *cire perdue* is of necessity cast from a unique mold. It is difficult to believe these two figures were not made by the same caster.





**Christie's 1977** 12¾inches/32.5cm  
(Clicking on the image will open a higher quality version)

Supposing the caster named by Chappel's informants as Yawam of Lainde was the maker of all four of these figures, it would appear that, as with the carver of Tɔza, we are dealing with a style created by an individual rather than a widely made type of object. Although Chappel bought the two female brass figures from different vendors, he paid similar prices for them and was quoted their 'traditional' price as the equivalent of a cow, which would put them among the most valuable of Verre wares. Another of Chappel's vendors, Yesufu, claimed to have sold the only male figure of the four we have been considering to an SUM missionary called Toft, presumably Absjørn Toft who had served in Nigeria relatively briefly between 1965-66 (Nissen 1968: 261, no. 161). This information corroborates the little we know of the back stories of these pieces. The wooden figures of Tɔza and the brass figures of Lainde were both innovations of the colonial period, which is to say late works in the history of Verre traditional art, and in this they also resemble the figures that Soompa carved for the Chamba of Yeli and Mapeo.

Whether other figures should be added to this group of four is difficult to judge from photographic evidence. A fifth figure with similarities to this group was published in an exhibition catalogue of 1973 with an attribution to the Bobo-Fing of Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), specifically from the region of 'Tanzila', which might easily have resulted from confusion with Tantile, the place name of the SUM mission station among the Koma where Olga Grening

collected brasswares, including a figure we note below.<sup>6</sup> At 30cm, this figure is of similar stature to all of those for which we have measurements, and it resembles them closely both in its overall form and details such as facial features, limbs and ornaments.



**Henri Kamer 1973**

(Clicking on the image will open a higher quality version)

A sixth figure and second possible addition to the group attributed to Yawam was offered for sale at Sotheby's in New York as late as 1999 when it was attributed to the Tiv. We do not know how long it had been in a private collection by then but, given the identity of the collector, this might well have been from the 1970s. The figure falls within the size range of the Verre figures under consideration, 30cm or thereabouts, and shares both their overall form and specific features such as ornamentation, facial features and limbs.<sup>7</sup> The same figure reappeared for sale twelve years later at Bonham's from a private New York collection, by when it had been reattributed to the Dan of Liberia.

<sup>6</sup> Henri Kamer, *Opper-Volta. Ausstellungskatalog*, Brüssel, 5-23. 9. 1973, p. 28. Height 12 inches/30 cm.

<sup>7</sup> Sotheby's, 19 November 1999, Lot 117. Height: 11¾ inches/29.9cm, or, 11½/29.2 cm; two slightly discrepant measurements accompany the image and descriptive text. From the collection of Gerard Schraeverus. Subsequently, Bonhams, 9 November 2011, Lot 280. Unsold in both cases.



**Collection Gerard Schraverus**

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

Another brass female figure was acquired by the SUM missionary Olga Grening, whose long-term station was among the Koma at Tantile. Elisabeth Holtegaard kindly sent us images she believes to have been taken by 1969. Grening herself attributed the figure to the Verre. Unfortunately, the quality of the photographs precludes detailed examination, and the object itself may have been lost following a domestic theft, hence we lack any indication of its dimensions. The pervasive spiral decoration of the body is dissimilar to the figures above, and we have previously noted it to be a Koma style trait in other objects, but Grening's attribution to Verre cannot be dismissed given her long residence in the region.



**SUM Olga Grening** – dimensions and present whereabouts unknown

(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

Another figure in brass, with earliest provenance to the collection of Maurice Bonnefoy, was published initially in a sale catalogue of 1971.<sup>8</sup> At slightly over 30cm, its height is again comparable to those of the figures in the Jos Museum. The same figure resurfaced in a Christie's sale in Paris in 2004, with a date of first exhibition of 1970.<sup>9</sup> It had been acquired in the Jalingo region, Jalingo being a town and regional administrative centre to the west of both the Verre and Koma which was an active secondary centre for the distribution of artworks in the 1960s, notably those of the Mumuye. So, a provenance from there is not an indication of where it was used. The figure subject is reminiscent of the Bronsin female figure below, although the eyes are represented differently, and it differs in height.

<sup>8</sup> Villa Hügel Essen, *Afrikanische Kunstwerke. Kulturen am Niger, Katalog zur Ausstellung 25. 3. - 13. 6. 1971*, Nr 262. 'Weibliche Votivfigur, Arme nach vorn frei hängend, Schmuckketten, markiert, ebenso kugelige Haare. Im Jalingo-Gebiet gefunden. Gelbguß, 30,5 cm. Sgl. Maurice Bonnefoy / D'Arcy Galleries Geneva.'

<sup>9</sup> Christie's Paris, sale catalogue, 4 June 2004, Lot 164. 'Statuette en Laiton – Nigeria. Représentant une femme debout, les jambes écartées, le bras placés devant le corps, les mains grandes ouvertes, la tête sphérique avec un nez triangulaire et des oreilles décollées, sous une coiffure en boucles stylisées, collier et ceinture perles. Belle patine d'usage. Hauteur: 31cm. Provenances: Maurice Bonnefoy, New York et Paris. Exposition : Kunsthaus Zürich 1970, no, N 42; Gemeentemuseum, La Haye, 1971, no. 222.'





**Collection Maurice Bonnefoy, New York and Paris – ex.: D'Arcy Galleries Geneva**  
 (Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

A final example entered the collection of Christophe Evers in Brussels from the dealers Martial and Alban Bronsin. The attribution to Koma deserves serious consideration since it is possible that this, and perhaps some of the other additional figures we have been discussing, are the outcomes of adoption by Koma of Verre brasscasting techniques. This and the Bonnefoy figure share a hairstyle in bobbles like that dressed with red caolin by more traditional Koma women into the twentieth century. At 24cm it is noticeably shorter than the other figures for which we have dimensions, and its proportions seem stockier. Like the Bonnefoy and Grening figures, it lacks the extensions of the feet beyond the heels, probably designed for stability.





**Collection Christophe Evers, Brussels, ex.: Martial Bronsin, Brussels**

(Clicking on the image will open a higher quality version)

Together with the three brass figures in the Jos Museum, these six brass figures make up a corpus of nine. There are probably more so far unidentified. Other than the Bronsin figure, which we know is shorter, and the Grening figure for which we have no dimensions, the other seven are all around a foot or 30cm in height. Without being able to view them except in photographs that vary in quality and have been taken from different angles, it is difficult to be certain that they are by the same hand, but we have pointed to a skein of resemblances in form and features sufficient to suggest that if not made by the same caster, they are too alike to have been made independently, and six of them are particularly close. The Grening, Bonnefoy and Bronsin figures may differ slightly in their proportions from others, but this is to judge only from photographs, and in any case variation in figures made by the same artist cannot be discounted.

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