

Surviving Works: context in Verre arts

Appendix 4: Leo Frobenius's untranslated Verre ethnological notes and part inventory

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Preface and Acknowledgements ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

PART ONE CONTEXT

Chapter 1 The Verre ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

Chapter 2 Documenting the early colonial assemblage – 1900s to 1910s ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

Chapter 3 Documenting the early post-colonial assemblage – 1960s to 1970s ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

Interleaf ‘Brass Work of Adamawa’: a display cabinet in the Jos Museum – 1967 ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

PART TWO ARTS

Chapter 4 Brass skeuomorphs: thinking about originals and copies ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

Chapter 5 Towards a *catalogue raisonnée*

5.1 *Percussion* ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

5.2 *Personal Ornaments* ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

5.3 *Initiation helmets and crooks* ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

5.4 *Hoes and daggers* ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

5.5 *Prestige skeuomorphs* ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

5.6 *Anthropomorphic figures* ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

Chapter 6 Conclusion: late works – Verre brasscasting in context ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 The Verre collection in the Jos and Lagos Museums in Nigeria ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

Appendix 2 Chappel’s Verre vendors ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

Appendix 3 A glossary of Verre terms for objects, their uses and descriptions ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

Appendix 4 Leo Frobenius’s unpublished Verre ethnological notes and part inventory ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

Bibliography ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

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APPENDIX 4 Leo Frobenius's untranslated Verre ethnological notes and part inventory

Apparently it was Frobenius's practice for extracts from the field journals kept by members of his expeditions to be collected by ethnic group and typed up in preparation for composition of his published accounts. The technique, once the reader is aware of it, is apparent in the episodic character of the final versions themselves. The typed-up notes on the Verre following the Frobenius expedition are slight, reflecting the lack of success in securing informants remarked in the main text. There was to be no chapter on the Verre.

This translation of the document held in the Frobenius Institute Frankfurt, catalogued as LF 660, retains original spellings (hence Verre is transcribed as Werre). A number of presentational changes have been made: African language terms have been italicized, which is not the case of the original; punctuation and format have been adapted from the original which is a listing; matter in square brackets has been added while that in rounded brackets is original (including the question marks, which are likely to remark on the illegibility of the handwritten notes being copied).

* * *

LF 660 - Leo Frobenius, *Aethiopien Kameruns. Vereinzelt Notizen über verschiedene Stämme* [Ethiopians of Kamerun: summary notes on various tribes]

5. *Werre [Verre]*

The Werre [Verre] call themselves *Django*; they call the Komai [Koma] *Koba*, the Batta *Batta*, the Dakka [Chamba Daka] and Tschambe [Chamba Leko] *Sambenjare* or *Tsambenjare*, the Namdji [Dowayo] *Djerrepa*, the Baschami [Bachama] *Djerre-ma*, the Fulbe *Sambe* or *Tschambe* (!), the Kanuri *Kolljenn* (which is also the name that the Fulbe use of the Kanuri).

* * *

The king [*König* in the German original] is *ghan* (the emblem of his rank is a tunic made from goat skin). The high priest is *risu*. The diviner is *ganna*: he tells a person's fortune using seven stones: these are arranged in two lines, four behind and three in the front; then he picks them all up and casts them; next he contemplates their position, takes each one and looks at it; then he formulates an answer to the question posed to him. They call this way of fortune telling *pinni*.

The smith is called *tiba*. Above his fire there hangs the head of a bird. After the harvest every farmer gives him a bundle of sorghum as a gift.

The circumciser is called *naba*. He performs his office every seventh year. His circumcision knife

is called *æ*. For the occasion, he is dressed in leather. The appearance of the lads is very peculiar with the iron neck holder [i.e. crook hooked around the back of their necks]. (See the sketch book.)

If no rain comes, the *ganna* [diviner] goes to a mountain together with the old and young men carrying beer, each of them is equipped with a tobacco pipe and tobacco. They all smoke vigorously and blow their smoke to the east. The *ganna* sprinkles beer in the same direction and also drinks some of it.

The dead are buried in a seated position covered in cow hides, their legs stretched out in front of them, body upright, the head leant back so that the face looks upward, and the hands 'on the trouser seams'.

The Werre are strongly split into dialects, and their customs have been shattered by the Fulbe.

Verre [smiths]

The smiths – *tiba* – form their own caste and marry only between themselves. They smelt their iron ore themselves which they find washed up in the river sands and they provide no insight into this activity to third parties. It was possible to learn, that the ore – *motu* – was smelt in pits – like the Nupe – and that the air was blown through a twin bellows without valves – *janu – teba* – (?) – which was made from fired clay or wood. The furnace is *luru tiba*: the smithy *roru* is round with secco (matting) walls. The fire, *ra*, is fed by charcoal, *tora*, and constantly pumped by the same bellows as used for the iron smelting. The following tools are used: a stone anvil – *pindu* – (no iron anvil); an iron hammer [*Schlegel* original German] – *nititikpu*; tongs – *tikpu*; chisel – *gotiba el*; file – *bui* – (?)

The products made are:

farm hoes – *jischu* – with a socketed blade

wood axe [*Holzaxt*] – *riratu* – with a socketed blade

wood hoe [*Holzacker* – distinguishing an adze?] – *sanuko* – with socketed blade

sickle – *ganza* – with a socketed blade

hairpins – *kuntscha*

bow puller – *nitak*

razor blade – *pont jo*

tweezers – *gat ju* – for pulling thorns

knife – *e* – with cross section

sword – *koba* – with iron guard and iron pommel

arm rings – *wundu* – used by men and women

ankle rings for dancing – *kerre* – for men

flint iron – *ratona*

Verre pottery

The potter – *womawi* – does not have to be the wife of a smith. The clay – *landa* – is mixed with goat droppings; the woman sitting on a small stool uses a pot sherd as potter's wheel to form the vessel, smoothing the inside with a stone and the outside with a sorghum stork, and patterns it with a blade of grass. After drying for a half a day the pot is coated inside and out with a red clay wash and smoothed again with a stone. After three days drying the pots are fired for an hour in piles of 20-30 interspersed with wood and straw. The sprinkling with *Parkia* water is unusual.

- 1) cooking pot – *bikok* [silhouette sketch of rounded pot with wide flared neck]
- 2) cooking pot for beer – *bala i* [ditto, of pot with straight sides and wide mouth]
- 3) water pot – *ji* (plural *jinu*) [ditto, flagon shaped pot]
- 4) beer pot – *ji woa* (like 3)
- 5) food bowl – *tengu* [ditto, of open bowl]
- 6) filterpot for water – *kuru* – [ditto, of wide pot with slightly flared mouth] filled with ash with a hole in the bottom [arrow points to bottom of outline]

Verre weaving

The construction of the Werre loom – *nitu palatschinu* – resembles that of the Komai [Koma].

weaver – *jere pilatschinu* [variant spelling is original]

shuttle with spool – *datingbela*

comb – ? – heddle – ? –

bobbin – *nikaschilu*

thread – *jilu bulu*

Only white cloth is made – *jalu – bumu*. Dying with indigo is not practised.

LF 840 Frobenius Institute Frankfurt: Verre handlist

Below is a transcription of the surviving handlist of Verre items packed for shipment. As our main text explains, we know this is not an exhaustive listing because there are surviving brasswares, decorated gourds and weapons that do not appear, and there are indications of other objects that were collected but have not been traced which we note at the end. The original transcription features three superscripts: a dash, a small u-shape or cup, and an acute accent. The acute accent can be combined with the dash and cup. The dash may have signified a long vowel; the cup a short vowel; and the accent what was heard as a stress or high syllable. We have not attempted to reproduce them. As well as an English translation, the note in square brackets cites the relevant sketch of the object in the Frobenius Archive where one can be identified. On occasions the Verre term is more legible on the illustration. Many items were collected in multiples reflecting the sponsorship of, or potential market to, several museums.

Werre

4757-59	<i>ji schu</i>	Farmhacken [3 farm hoes; KBA 06403]
4760-62	<i>dja</i>	Biersieb [3 beer sieves; KBA 05050]
4763-66	<i>ja</i>	Lederner Essensack [4 leather food sacks]
4765-70	<i>kerre</i>	Fußtanzschelle der Werremänner [6 Verre men's ankle rattles; KBA 14967]
4771-73	<i>w/m/rundu</i>	Handring [3 hand rings]
4774-75	<i>fere ssu untu</i>	Frauenfussring [2 women's ankle rings]
4776-77	<i>njengschu</i>	Tabaktasche – Männerarbeit [2 men's tobacco-bags]
4778-87	<i>jinu</i>	Biertöpfe [10 beer pots; KBA 03450, 04003 66cm, 04004 84cm]
4788-89	<i>jinugo</i>	Leopardenbiertopf [2 leopard beer pots; KBA 04000 highly decorated 125cm, KBA 04002 decorated 88cm]
4790	<i>jibaschu</i>	Biertopf [beer pot; KBA 04001 decorated with small side spout]
4791-92	<i>goba</i>	Biertopf b. Tanz [2 beer pots for dancing]
4793	<i>kuru</i>	Biertopf b. Tode alter Frauen [KBA 03999 beer pot for the death of old women; with handle and two spouts]
4794-99	<i>bitaba</i>	Tabakpfeifen [6 tobacco pipes; KBA 05856 (2) clay and brass, 05857 (1) clay, 05858 (2) clay]
4800-01	<i>tingam bana</i>	Trommel [2 drums; KBA 09921]
4802	<i>balawi</i>	Trommel [drum; KBA 09923]
4803-05	<i>kussu</i>	Tanzkappe f. junge Leute [3 dance caps for young people; KBA 14866]
4806	<i>forra</i>	Horn z. Blasen b. Tanz [horn blown at the dance]
4807-08	<i>burku</i>	Tanzschelle [2 dance rattles; KBA 09732, double clapperless bell]
4809-11	<i>penja</i>	Kornkorb Männerarbeit [3 men's corn baskets]
4812	<i>jalagon die</i>	Lendenschurz f. Männer b. Tanz vorne zu schliessen [man's loincloth for dancing; to be closed in front]
4813-33	<i>ratu</i>	Holzfiguren [21 wooden figures; KBA 10453 (2), 10454 (2), 10455 (2), 10456 (2), 1057 (2)]
4834-39	<i>gulu</i>	Flöte [6 flutes; KBA 09176 40cm]
4840-42	<i>nossu</i>	Gebr. Lehmkugel z. Glätten d. Wänden [3 fired clay balls for smoothing of walls]
4843	<i>rya</i>	Harfe [harp; 'nja' KBA 09534 5-stringed harp]
4844-45	<i>girrata</i>	Blasinstrument [2 wind instruments; KBA 09177, 68cm, <i>ginala</i>]
4846-48	<i>bigetoko</i>	Trommeln (Sanduharsarg) [3 (hourglass coffin) drums
4849	<i>ratt</i>	gr. Trommel [tall drum; KBA 09943]
4850-52	<i>patu</i>	Tanzschelle [3 dance rattles; KBA 09480]
4853-55	<i>kaireme</i>	Tanzschelle f. Fuss [3 ankle rattles for dancing]
4856-58	<i>buno/baran (?)</i>	Lederschild [3 leather shields; KBA 06903]
4859-61		Schädel der Werre [3 Verre skulls]

4862-64 Ceremonienstöcke aus Eisen [3 ceremonial iron staffs;
KBA 09384 (2)]

LF 840 (later listing)

5207 *ragatu* Frauenstuhl d. Werre [Verre woman's stool]
5212a-d Knabenspielzeug der Werre, Djukun, Yoruba, Benin,
Fante (Goldküste) [boys' toys of the Verre ...]
5229 *nossu* Kugel z. Glätten der Wände Werre [ball for smoothing walls,
Verre; see also 4840-2 above]

Although we have as yet found no inventory, the expedition's collection in brass must have been listed separately from other objects, a conclusion we were able to draw on the basis of surviving illustrations and museum accession records in the main text. To guesstimate the entirety of the Verre collection made by the expedition, we would additionally need to add the decorated gourds attributed to Verre, as well as a collection of bows and arrows (see KBA 07732 Verre bows and arrows for an illustration), both also discussed in our main text, and other weapons including swords donated to Munich. A number of illustrations in the Frobenius Archive suggest a yet more extensive inventory.

KBA 02322 Koma weaver at loom (noted as similar to Verre and Chamba)
KBA 08316 loom weight
KBA 02368 *jalagondie* Stoff mit Musterbesatz ['cloth with decoration applied'; probably agama lizards]
KBA 05271 Lampe aus Didango- Were gebiet. Werrearbeit? 14cm [(goblet-shaped) lamp from Didango, Verre area. Verre made? (material not specified, pottery?); previously in Munich]
KBA 08314 18cm metal bracelet
KBA 08314 Chamba shield, similar to Verre [note duplicated reference number]
KBA 08315 small iron ring, coiled + cast brass? finger ring
KBA 08900 'Eis. Spannung Werre', *niditak*
KBA 08905 2 bow pullers
KBA 09371 *karenschi* – Tanzschelle Komai. Werrearbeit, 14cm [Koma double clapperless bell for dancing, made by Verre, 14cm]
KBA 10626 *tamba* – iron circumcision crook 30cm (illustrated as used by a youth)
KBA 10937 *jischu* – double iron hoe for dance

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