

Surviving Works: context in Verre arts

Part One, Chapter One: The Verre

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PART ONE CONTEXT

Chapter 1 The Verre

Predominantly living in the Benue Valley of eastern middle-belt Nigeria, the Verre are one of that populous country's numerous micro-minorities. In their synthesis of British colonial administrative reports filed up to the First World War (1919: 357), Olive and Charles Temple put their population at (an unconvincingly precise) 18,440. This figure may include some non-Verre, since reported population figures derived from administrative divisions which only more or less coincided with ethnic groupings. Then again, some Verre would have lived outside the administrative division, including a few in small Cameroonian communities, so a figure of around or under twenty thousand serves to provide us with a rough order of magnitude just over a hundred years ago, during the decade when the first of our two assemblages of Verre objects was made. If population had doubled every twenty-five to thirty years, not an unreasonable guess, then it would have reached around forty thousand by the end of the Second World War, and seventy-five thousand when the second of our two assemblages was made in the mid-1960s after Nigerian Independence. Writing in 2018, Patrick Wiu provides a population for his people in Nigeria of 173-184,000 (2018: 76); although he does not cite a source, the figures suggesting a tenfold population increase over the century, presumably based on local government records, appear credible. If we cannot be precise, we do have an idea of the order of magnitudes in the last century and this.

Writing from only ten days of field investigations pursued in 1927, C.K. Meek, the colonial government anthropologist, echoes the Temples' report of a marked distinction between the Verre of the hills and of the plains. Those who lived in the hills had maintained a degree of independence from the Fulani until the British placed them under Fulani administration; the Verre of the plains had long been subject to the Fulani, the Temples referring to them as 'private slaves' of the 'Emir of Yola' (Lamido of Adamawa). While corresponding to superficial observations, these generalizations doubtless oversimplify historical and geographical complexities. Relations between Verre and Fulani would not have remained unchanged over the course of the century that had passed since the establishment of the Adamawa Emirate; and, while the Verre Hills might not have the strategic significance of the substantial plateaux of the Shebshi Mountains to the southwest, nor of the more precipitous Alantika Mountains to the southeast, they would have acted as some deterrent to Fulani cavalry. But there are obstacles to adding detail. Neither Fulani nor Verre identity was unitary, yet our historical sources only occasionally allow us to phrase issues other than in the ethnic terms of 'Verre' and 'Fulani'. Verre may have become an ethnic self-designation during the twentieth century, but it did not originate as such. Like several other contemporary peoples in the region, Verre

recognize cultural and linguistic differences among themselves that once precluded a singular shared identity or ethnonym. Reports of these differences are themselves not clear-cut, which may reflect the fuzzy circumstances on the ground as well as the superficiality of the accounts we have of them. While Fulani identity may have crystallized earlier, it also contained differences, notably in terms of named clans. From the very outset, Fulani leaders particularly in that part of Adamawa below the Benue spent as much energy fighting one another as they did in collaborating against non-Fulani.

Even if we were able to make consistent sense of the distinctions among themselves that Verre offered to enquirers, we would rarely be able to relate them to the provenances of material objects. When these are recorded at all, Verre artworks seldom have attributions narrower than to the contemporary ethnic group (and on occasions not even that). In short, while we would like to handle the relationship between artworks, styles and ethnicity with more subtlety, our sources usually prevent our doing so. When we describe objects as 'Verre' or in 'Verre style', it is important to bear in the mind, even if we cannot keep repeating it, the large gaps in our knowledge that comfortable use of these same awkward ethnic labels both for people and things can conceal. Recognizing all these limitations, what can we say about the Verre and their history?

Not only European observers but also their neighbours tended to make the same major division among the Verre. Chamba living to their south enjoy what anthropological literature usually calls an ethnic 'joking' (but is more precisely a licensed insulting) relationship with the Verre, whom they call *Moom*. The same term is the name of a patriclan of Verre origin in Chamba chiefdoms of the Shebshi Mountains to the west of the Verre Hills. In the Chamba Daka speaking communities of the Alantika Mountains, Verre living in the nearby plains, whom they consider more like themselves than the Verre hill dwellers, are distinguished from *Moom* as *Moom Jango*. As well as listing several dialects of Verre, the website *Ethnologue: languages of the world* applies forms of these two (apparently Chamba) terms, Mom and Mom Jango, to what is described as a difference of language.¹ Narrower descriptions of the linguistic variety within the small Verre population suggest dialectal variation within Mom and identify a tiny population, the Wom, who are considered ethnically Verre but speak a dialect of Chamba Leko (about whom, see Danbonna 1995). Some of this linguistic variety on the ground must have been affected by population movements under Fulani dominance of the plains. To anticipate a more detailed discussion, three considerations stand out. The Verre lived close by the original seat of the founder of the Adamawa Emirate at Gurin on the River Faro, and both his later capitals slightly to the west towards the River Benue: Ribadu in the

¹ The Summer Institute of Linguistics lists Verre dialects as – 'Mom Jango, Momi (Ziri), Gweri, Bai, Wombi [adding that] Mom Jango and Momi are probably separate languages.' Verre is an Adamawa language, hence related to the languages of such neighbours as the Chamba Leko, Dii (Duru), Dowayo and particularly Koma Gimme [or Koma-Gimbe]; in the SIL classification this runs (from widest to most specific membership) – 'Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, North, Adamawa-Ubangi, Adamawa, Leko-Nimbari, Duru, Voko-Dowayo, Vere-Dowayo, Vere-Gimme, Vere' (Eberhard, Simons and Fennig 2019; <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/ver>)

1830s, and Yola from 1841, now the capital of Adamawa State in Nigeria. Hence, Verre, along with Bata, were the peoples caught up in the initial phases of the jihad who were closest to the heart of subsequent consolidation of Adamawa. Logistically, as we noted already, the Verre Hills are exposed relative to the larger and higher mountain ranges to the south, moreover, Verre communities were small and uncentralized. Third, and in part in consequence of these factors, the Verre were the southernmost peoples directly under the control of the Lamido of Adamawa or his close family members. To their south, most of the Chamba, Koma and Pere lived in or around territories allocated or just claimed by Fulani chiefs (*lamibe*) who, while nominal subordinates of the Lamido, belonged to families that on occasion challenged his precedence, in part on the grounds that they had been installed there before leadership of the jihad was conferred on Modibbo Adama. It was they, rather than the Lamido, who expanded southward in search of wealth, territories to annex, and people to enslave. Twentieth-century border demarcations between British Nigeria and first German Kamerun and then French Cameroun are complex when examined in detail, but their overall effect was to cut off the largest of these expanding southern and eastern Fulani lamidates from the capital of the Emirate and from their fealty to the Lamido of Adamawa.

The Adamawa Emirate – 1800s

Histories of the Fulani state make scant reference to the Verre before the twentieth century, but the circumstances confronting Verre during the preceding century were largely of Fulani making. The jihad of Usman dan Fodio, which was to result in the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate (in what are now northern Nigeria and Cameroon and a smaller part of southern Niger), is usually dated from 1804; the British conquest of Sokoto occurred a century later in 1903. The history of Adamawa, the easternmost of the Sokoto emirates spans most of this period. The earliest events recalled involving the Verre and Fulani slightly pre-date the jihad. Kirk-Greene records an oral tradition that some Fulani under their leader (*ardo*) Ardo Jobdi had clashed with the Bata. They withdrew for safety into the Verre Hills only descending, under Ardo Haman, when asked to do so by the Verre who feared conflict with the Bata. This group of Fulani settled in Gurin on the west bank of the Faro in 1804 (Kirk-Greene 1958: 128-29), and among them was the learned Modibbo Adama, the future Lamido of Fombina. If this tradition has any foundation, then territories populated by the Verre were at the heart of the new emirate from its outset, and they were to remain the southern limit of the territory controlled, more or less directly, from the capital. Stephen Okshi Domdingnus's account echoes the overall impression of phases of conflict between Verre and Fulani in recollections that some Verre ascended the hills when they realized the Fulani were taking their property and stealing their children to sell into slavery; others remained in the plains at the foot of the hills. But the Fulani pursued them because they were reliant for food on the Verre, and so the hill Verre took up arms to drive them back (1978: 23).

Modibbo Adama had returned from Sokoto with a flag to prosecute jihad in 1809 and reigned until 1848 when he was succeeded by one of his sons, Lawal. The most direct evidence we have of the events that followed may be a document given to Martin Njeuma in 1966 during his research in Yola by a descendant of Lamido Katsina, a prominent Hausa leader in Adamawa. The original of this document, presumed to have been in Arabic, would have been translated into Fulfulde and Hausa for dissemination. Only the Hausa translation could be located, but Njeuma was convinced of its authenticity. Dated to 5 Muharram 1225 in the Hijri calendar, which Njeuma equated to 1809 in the common calendar (though 2 February 1810 seems to be the contemporary conversion), the original Hausa text and its English translation contain an exhortation of particular interest.

Do not attack, that is make raids, on the pagans unless they break faith with you, as God's book says.

Furthermore, I enjoin you not to conquer the pagans of the Batta and Verre or enslave their children. Because even if they oppress you, you are forbidden to retaliate in force and recover by force whatever they have seized from you. But if God grants you victory over them you must let them live their own lives and not disperse them completely and if they ask for peace you should agree. (Njeuma 1974: 67 Hausa and English; 1978: 247-48 English version only)

We might wonder how aware Usman dan Fodio would have been of precise circumstances on the ground somewhere that lay a journey of around 700 miles away; perhaps Adama informed him specifically; but, whether or not the entire Hausa version dates from the early nineteenth century, citing the Bata and Verre in relation to Gurin is indicative of their intimate relationship. Sources generally concur that Adama's position was initially weak: he was a learned man and not a warrior, and his own clan was not numerous in an area where the Fulani clan chiefs already present valued their independence. As well as winning over some of the Fulani chiefs, and marrying the sister of Modibbo Hamman of Gurin (presumably the same as Kirk-Greene's Ardo Haman), Adama gained the backing of the Bata chief of Kokumi (also recalled as the name of an aggressor Bata chief concerned in some northern Chamba traditions) whose people bred horses and forged weapons, while 'the early Bata allies of the Fulbe [also served] as guides for expeditions and, at times, as spies upon other Bata groups' (Abubakar 1977: 55-56). Between 1811-25, the Bata were forced to submit or emigrate, and attention shifted to the Verre in the Alantika Mountains who 'accepted the Amāna offered them', that is submitted to protection. The centre of military activity then moved south to the Chamba communities, where one of the Chamba leaders threw in his lot with the Fulani (Abubakar 1977: 59-60). This pattern of local alliances was to be repeated many times during the early phases of the jihad. In terms of our interest here, the significant point is the likelihood that both as farmers and metal workers, at least the more easterly of the Verre became part of the Emirate regional system from an early period.

In 1841, after the period spent in Ribadu during the 1830s, Adama transferred his capital a little further west to its present site of Yola above the River Benue. It was there, three years after Adama's death, that the traveller Heinrich Barth met his son Lawal in June 1851 (Barth 1965 [1865] II: 182). Lawal was to be succeeded by his brothers Sanda (1872-1890), and then by Zubeiru (1890-1901) whose reign ended in the year of the British-led assault to 'capture' Yola. Hence, Barth's observations coincided not just with the mid-century but with the mid-period of Adamawa as an emirate of the independent Caliphate. He observed that,

Slavery exists on an immense scale in this country, and there are many private individuals who have more than a thousand slaves. In this respect the governor of the whole province is not the most powerful man, being outstripped by the governors of Chám̄ba and Kóncha – for this reason, that Mohammed Lowel [Lawal] has all his slaves settled in rúm̄de or slave-villages, where they cultivate grain for his use or profit, while the above-mentioned officers, who obtain all their provision in corn from subjugated pagan tribes, have their whole host of slaves constantly at their disposal; and I have been assured that some of these men have as many as a thousand slaves each under their command, with whom they undertake occasional expeditions for their masters. I have been assured, also, that Mohammed Lowel receives every year in tribute, besides horses and cattle, about five thousand slaves, though this seems a large number. (1965 II: 190-91)

Barth includes the 'Wére' among the 'tribes' around Adamawa 'partly within, partly beyond its boundaries, but in a certain degree of subjection' (1965 II: 197-8). This vagueness seems to have been due both to Barth's inability to witness circumstances first-hand, thanks to misunderstandings with the palace, and to the anarchic mid-nineteenth century state of much of Fombina (the 'South', of which Adamawa designated that part under greater emirate control).

Although nominal overlord of Adamawa, Sokoto was distant and recognized primarily through a tribute in slaves paid annually. Fombina was the major frontier of expansion of the Caliphate in its later phase when unceasing campaigns of conquest and razzia, enslavement and plunder were carried out. At an elite level, this campaigning was led by those who were ethnically Fulani (or *Fulbe*), but their armies were composed of a motley collection of those willing, or obliged, to lend their arms to the next phase of expansion. Leapfrogging aggression saw rapid expansion to the south and east. No attempt at conversion among non-Fulani is documented and successfully doing so would have run counter to the predatory goals of unfettered exploitation and territorial annexation.² Furthermore, the leaders of the Fulani

² For instance, early in the reign of Lawal, a campaign was launched against Bagale, north of Yola. A siege lasted from 1851-53, and the population was resettled ('... he utterly defeated them, not one of them was left', East 1935: 41), allowing attention to be switched to the Bata of Demsa slightly to the west, 'He [Lawal] founded slave settlements and small towns on the River Namtari; they worked on their [Lawal's "raiding" warriors'] farms, put their ponies to pasture round the lakes, and grazed their cattle' (East 1935: 39). The Lamido gave great wealth to one Mallam Abubakar, who composed a praise song for these events, culminating in the verse, 'Those who were slain were slain, and the rest were made captive. There is food this year for the

who established themselves as Chiefs (or *lamibe*), and were nominally subordinate to the Lamido of Adamawa, in practice toed his line to varying degrees and periodically clashed with one another. This was particularly true of the previously independent chiefs who founded the large southern lamidates. At the mid-century, as Barth noted, several of them were more powerful militarily than their overlord, as demonstrated by the fact that even communities close to Yola, like the Verre, could be described as only partly within the Emirate's boundaries.

The southward thrust of Fulani expansion in Fombina had to follow the course upstream of the Rivers Faro and Deo, easy country for horses and cattle.³ Fulani leaders set up their chiefdoms to the south of Gurin: in Tchamba, in the territory of the Chamba Leko, Haman Sambo, whose warlike reputation reached Barth's ears, had replaced Malou Hé (or Héwi) who had sought co-existence with the non-Fulani; and in Koncha the Pere had been conquered under the leadership of Hamman Dandi (also known as Hamman Gabdo). Although not the only lamidates, these two were the seats of the 'governors' noted by Barth in the mid-nineteenth century to enjoy a high degree of independence from Yola. Both continued their southward momentum: the capital of Tchamba was eventually moved to Tibati, while Fulani from Koncha founded Banyo among the Buti and then Gashaka; and these two ruling families themselves came to blows later in the century. Control over such southern outliers from the capital of the Emirate was exiguous, and, in recognition of this, the later campaigns undertaken directly from Yola were directed predominantly to the north or the immediate environs of Yola rather than south.

Immediately west from Gurin and west of the Rivers Faro and Deo, the Alantika Mountains are impenetrable to cavalry and their fastnesses allowed some enclaved Koma and Chamba to retain a degree of independence from direct Fulani control throughout the nineteenth century, though they were periodically subjected to raids and probably tithes. However, west of the Alantika Mountains and south of the Verre Hills lie the Nassarawo Plains, a terrain more easily brought under Fulani control. Kirk-Greene writes that the move of his capital from Gurin to Yola allowed Adama 'to press home his campaigns against the Verre and Bata tribes' (1958: 132) by establishing settlements that encircled the Verre Hills. That this account conflicts with traditions of collaboration and of submission noted earlier is less disconcerting when we recall that events concerning diverse populations are being recalled in terms of singular ethnic identities. Modibbo Adama installed two of his sons to control the plains, to the west Hamidu at Hibango (Nyibango) and to the east Bakari in the old capital of Gurin, on condition that they

vultures and hyenas!'. He received 'three of every kind of thing', which are enumerated as a list of animals and then, 'of every tribe of pagans [*habi*] in the land of Adamawa, also he received three each: Bata, three women and three men; Vere, three men and three women' (East 1935: 41).

³ Among numerous sources see: Strümpell 1907a, 1907b, 1912, translated by Mohammadou 1982, which are foundational texts; Lacroix 1952; Froelich 1954; Kirk-Greene 1958; Njeuma 1969, 1978; Abubakar 1977; Mohammadou 1978, 1983 for oral traditions of the southern lamidates; Adama and Bah 2001 on Koncha. We follow Burnham (1979) in emphasising the regional networks of trade in Adamawa, including trade in slaves, for the persistent implications of which in Yola, see VerEecke 1994.

not succeed him as Lamido, a condition Hamidu later breached when he challenged the succession of his brother Sanda (Strümpell 1912, transl. Mohammadou 1982: 101).⁴ Hamidu was allocated the plains west of the Alantika Mountains, and Bakari the populations of Chamba and Koma in the mountains. The degree of their control was variable. Settlements in the plains typically consisted of non-Fulani villagers living under the authority of Fulani representatives of the lamidos, but the non-Fulani enjoyed greater freedom in the mountains. The Shebshi Mountains, which form the western barrier of the Nassarawo Plains, are less rugged than the Alantika Mountains but have more extensive high plateaux. When traversing the Shebshi Mountains, the von Uechtritz Expedition of 1893 (Kirk-Greene 1957), sponsored by the German Kamerun-Komitee, encountered gown-wearing, mounted horsemen emulating the Fulani but apparently independent of them (Passarge 1895).

So far as the Verre were concerned, while arrangements could not have remained unchanged over four generations, particularly as the Yola Fulani intensified their local control in the second half of the nineteenth century, the practical circumstances were that Verre living in the plains would have been subjected to whatever control the Fulani might have wished to exert, either paying tithes or else working for Fulani masters. Verre farmers in the Verre Hills may have been tithed less regularly, and some Verre may have opted to join Chamba or Koma to live in the more defensible Alantika or Shebshi Mountains. To return to our material interests here, some Verre already were, or increasingly became, skilled artisans providing a variety of manufactures to a regional market. Metalwork, both in iron and copper alloy, is the most striking and durable instance of a wider range of products.⁵ We lack direct evidence of the regional trade in metalworks during the nineteenth century, but it seems unlikely that Verre metalworks were not supplied both to the Fulani and to other people working on their behalf or tithed by them. Sources concur that there was a rapid expansion in trade under Sanda in the later nineteenth century which presumably also affected the opportunities open to Verre. We do know that Verre manufactures were collected in the early colonial period from locations in a regional system of exchange that included both Chamba to the south and Bata and Bachama to the north. The range of Verre production included more than metalwares. Decorated calabashes are too fragile to have survived in large numbers, but they featured extensively in this earlier assemblage. The same is true of pottery,

⁴ Rupert East recorded that Hamidu contested the succession of his brother Sanda on the death of their older brother Lawal in 1872. Hamidu is said to have 'collected the people of Vere' and tried to seize Yola by force, returning to Nyibango when he found this impossible, and where he died after a week (East 1935: 85). The seat of administration at Nyibango was moved eastwards across the border to Ubawo (later Nassarawo) with demarcation of the Anglo-German border, but Nassarawo subsequently found itself back on the British side of the boundary on the demarcation of British and French Mandated Territories, demonstrating just how flexible guiding standards 'tradition' and 'descent' might become under indirect rule (see Fardon 1988: 267-71).

⁵ Archaeological investigations might throw light on the extent of iron smelting and forging; but we are not aware of a survey to date. Meek (see below) suggests at least some metalworking was localized. The places of purchase are known for many of the objects collected by Tim Chappel in 1966 and we have included these data in Appendix 1 and tried to identify them on a sketch map in the hope they may one day be helpful for a ground survey.

which like calabash decoration was largely women's work. Various utilitarian items of basketry and matting may also have been traded, as they continued to be in later decades. An exception may have been carved wooden figures which occur in early collections but appear to have remained in Verre hands; but in the mid-twentieth century, by when they had undergone stylistic change, they also became traded items.

The colonial interlude – 1920s to 1950s

After the passage of Frobenius's expedition in late 1911 (the subject of Chapter 2), specialist, albeit very brief, investigations, were reported by C.K. Meek. Fulani governance of the Verre had been institutionalized by British indirect rule: Fulani District Heads (Meek cited three districts: Verre, Yibango [Nyibango] and Mayo Ini) were responsible to the 'Fulani Emir of Adamawa' and administered through Verre village-area heads (*arnado* singular) (1931: 414); Verre were supposed to use Muslim courts with a presiding Alkali, although in practice disputes were usually settled by respected elders who were also religious leaders (1931: 429). Meek blandly observed that, 'The Verre have been in contact with the patrilineal Fulani in recent times', and that, 'the patrilineal groups on the Verre hills have only come into close contact with the Fulani during the last decade' (1931: 413), statements that effectively dismiss the distribution of power during the nineteenth century to suggest that the British-Fulani system of indirect administration had been applied to a previously uncentralized and relatively autonomous Verre society. Verre, he reports, called themselves Jiri, distinguishing hill dwellers from plains dwellers (Jiri Gwage and Jiri Pai).

Following the fashion of the day in anglophone anthropology, as well as the need to furnish information of use to British indirect administration, in addition to administering a word list and outlining the variety of Verre communities,⁶ amongst which he distinguished ten, Meek concentrated his attention on describing kinship and social organization, which he found bafflingly diverse. In part, this difficulty derives from his attempt to fit Verre variation into distinct matrilineal and patrilineal types. Why this is impossible becomes clear from his comments on types of marriage which fundamentally divided between a high brideprice form (specified later to require payment of forty or more hoes, 1931: 417, comparable to thirty cited in Temple 1919: 359), which transferred the rights to filiate her children to a woman's husband, and a lower payment which meant those rights remained with a woman's father. Together with local movement, these variations in filiation produced patterns of local residence that did not correspond to lineages, that is, to either all or most matrilineage members or all patrilineage members living together, but instead depended upon the form

⁶ Meek reports that his investigations took him to three Districts: Verre (Gweri, Ugi, Bai, Boi, Marki, Togi, the last named including Chappel's main sites of collection at Tuki and Cholli), Yibango (Wom and Zango) and Mayo Ini (Kwoi, Lima and Donggorong) (1931: 414). His Verre wordlist is from Cholli. A brief word list from Wom reveals them to have spoken a dialect of Chamba Leko, included in the chapter on 'The Chamba' (1931: 385-87). It would take more detailed local knowledge than we possess to make all Meek's notes relevant to our enquiry here.

of marriage made by an individual and their parents, and their later choices about residence made with consideration to the connections arising from these.

Apart from one telling remark, Meek's account provides little guidance to assist our understanding of Verre artisanal production. The village of 'Soli' or Cholli, he tells us, was composed of smiths, 'Tibei' (or 'Tibas' as he transcribed the same term as item 29 of his wordlist, 1931: 440). As smiths they intermarried only with 'blacksmiths of the hamlets of Bubabiriji [Buba], Bop [Bopa], and Belimpa' (1931: 415, 423, Meek's own variant transcriptions in square brackets). This is our earliest evidence that at least some metalworkers were concentrated in communities of specialists rather being distributed in small numbers around agricultural villages. Co-residence of smiths is likely to have accompanied an intensification of production. Despite the considerable interest Meek otherwise shows in marriage institutions, he does not remark on what we know from the 1960s: that wives played a crucial role in Verre wealth display, particularly in brass. It might well be that this medium of display was less prominent in the late 1920s than it would be later, or perhaps Meek, whose research lasted only a few days, was not present on the kinds of occasions when brass was worn for adornment. His photographic illustrations of Verre show them with only modest personal ornamentation wearing small beads, some of which, because it is difficult to judge with certainty from monochrome images, might be in brass.

Understandably, given the brevity of his research, Meek's notes on religion are particularly impressionistic. He records the importance of circumcision and funeral ceremonies to the mobilization of kin ties (1931: 416), something still the case during Chappel's research in the mid-1960s. And he writes more generally of what are called 'Doos' shrines maintained inside dolmen-like stone enclosures. We are told that the 'Soli' Verre (recall that Cholli was a settlement of smiths) have cults of 'Do Gupse' (symbolized by a bag made of cow skin) and 'Do Tibas' (recall 'Tiba' means smith) which performed with horns made from straight sections of gourd terminating with a more bulbous gourd. 'Do Tibas' engaged in night-time activity, when the horns were accompanied by whirring iron bullroarers, and the shaking of iron rattles, composed of cylindrical elements suspended from a ring. As Meek himself notes, these instruments are identical to those of Chamba Leko *voma* cults and, we might add, the Chamba Daka *jubi* (Fardon 1991).⁷ But in some other respects, Verre customs are reminiscent of those recorded from the Dowayo. Corpses were wrapped in the skin of a cow killed for this purpose; Verre once had large numbers of 'pagan' cattle, by which Meek must mean the tsetse-resistant, humpless, dwarf cattle that were present before the Fulani brought their herds of zebu cattle (1931: 434). Like other peoples in the region. Verre buried their dead in reused, shaft and niche graves that were not backfilled, to allow skulls to be retrieved and preserved. Although patchy, Meek's observations are enough to recognize some Verre variations on familiar regional themes.

⁷ Meek writes Verre cults when he clearly means Voma (1931: 434).

Meek remarks the distinctiveness of the Verre of Yibango (Nyibango), who call themselves 'Zango' and 'do not wear the penis sheath, having had cloth garments from ancient times' (1931: 423-4). For 'ancient times', we can probably read the nineteenth century. These must be the Verre of the plains who lived in the territories given by Adama to his non-succeeding son Hamidu, the people known to their Chamba neighbours as Moom Jango. Their dress is not the only regard in which they differ from the Verre of the hills. Meek found them the most patrilineal in custom of the Verre, among whom the maternal uncle played a very reduced role, which implies that full transference of rights to filiate children was the more common form here of the two types of Verre marriage. Nonetheless, partible inheritance was customary, fixed property passing to a man's son, but his portable wealth (livestock, gowns, harvested crops) to his sister's son. This was also the practice in Chamba communities, both Leko- and Daka-speaking, so adds substance to the Mapeo Chamba feeling that the Moom Jango were more like themselves than other Verre. While not overlooking the thinness of Meek's ethnography, inevitable given his brief sojourn among the Verre, the pattern of variation between the Verre of the plains and hills is coherent both with what we know about neighbouring societies and with the effects we might anticipate to follow from more and less close incorporation into the Fulani governance of the Emirate both before colonialism and during its earliest phase.⁸

Because we were unable to consult colonial records in the Nigerian National Archives, Kaduna, which probably shed light on the following years, we lose sight of the Verre for almost two decades until a donation that was made in August 1946 to Kenneth Murray of the fledgling Nigerian Antiquities Service. This consisted of sixteen numbered items (some in multiples) collected in and around the Chamba settlement of Mapeo at the western foot of the Alantika Mountains.⁹ Father Kevin Malachi Cullen, serving in the Catholic Mission there, was a keen observer of local religion, who made a substantial record of the ritual practices of his time (for his autobiography, see Cullen 2001). He wrote to Murray, '... it seems good, as the collection is for cultural purposes, that our mission do its bit by donating it', but included prices for information. Thanks to Nancy Maas's notes, we are able to identify the Lagos Museum accession numbers for most of these pieces (Lagos 46.29.1 et seq).

Objects in wood, using Cullen's enumeration, were: 1) a double figure (see Fardon and Stelzig 2005: 34-35, figs 3a), 3) the head of a masquerade (Lagos 46.29.3), and 5) one of two circumcision crooks, a wooden version (Lagos 46.29.20) that had leather thongs to which

⁸ The significance of differing marriage forms is supported by the dissertations authored by a later Verre scholar (Wiu 2000, 2018); see also Domdingnus 1978: 33 on the authority of her mother's brother over a wife, and Yasambus 2016 on the continuing significance of historic marriage forms.

⁹ Cullen sent a covering letter on 8 August 1946 along with 'Notes on juju and other articles collected amongst Verre and Chamba tribes, Adamawa Province' to Kenneth Murray. A typed copy of the original document (headed File B.22, pages 28-36) was retained by Tim Chappel. The information overlaps in many respects with a longer document, 'Notes on Mapeo Chambas, origins, customs, juju', of 1944, which was in the Catholic Mission Mapeo when Fardon consulted it in 1976, later reportedly transferred to the archive of the Yola Bishopric.

coins were attached (colonial coins being pierced centrally). All apparently made by Chamba. The various works in metal, by contrast, were sourced from the Verre, 'All these Chamba ritual objects are made for them by Verre blacksmiths, who are the only iron workers.' Cullen describes in detail: 4a-d) four sets of iron rattles, three of which differed primarily in size rather than in form (two of the four noted by Maas as Lagos 46.29.4 and 46.29.6). The largest set included a clapperless bell or gong, which had the same Chamba name as a 'hoe', because, Cullen reports, it was made by welding together the edges of two blades that might separately have been hoes; Cullen records he paid 11/- paid for these three rattles. A fourth, smaller, rattle set consists of three pairs of clappers (said to be male and female, the former distinguished by a 'waist') and an element resembling a sickle. Cullen records its name as 'vo', which is the name of the Mapeo Chamba cult of lightning. The same association between the sickle and lightning is also found in the dancing insigne of Mapeo priests: a sickle with a lightning, zigzag point. The wooden circumcision crook, 5) noted above, was called 'toma', translated by Cullen as 'scourge' (*tomaa*, whip, Chamba Daka), was bought together with a metal version made by Verre smiths. The final four metal items were: 12) a thumb ring in twisted iron for catching a bow string which Chamba call 'nuun-jara', 13) a bow puller also used by Koma, called 'lamma' by Chamba, 14) 'varra' a 'crooked iron bar nine inches long, curled at both ends' which causes swelling to the thigh and knee in another of the Mapeo Chamba cults or *jup*, and 16) a razor of the kind used by Chamba, Koma and Verre. No prices are quoted for what were considered lesser items. The single object in clay, 2) a miniature Chamba mask (probably a small, standing humanlike figure with a mask head), was also the work of Verre smiths.

In what is most likely to be a reference to the Frobenius expedition, Cullen remarks, 'As far as I know, no white man ever got these things except a German about 1910, as this part of Adamawa was formerly German territory. He took them by force.'

Cullen acquired several Verre brass works around Mapeo and was told that they had all been cast at Lainde Boi, a peak on the southwestern corner of the Verre Hills. Although small, this collection from 1946 is the most substantial made between our key collection dates of 1911 and 1966.

6) A brass 'ornamental specimen' of the 'double gong' (Lagos 46.29.18) used to lead the masquerade 'naam-balong banni' (*nam-gbalang baan*). We can expand Cullen's explanation of the reported derivation: *nam-* is the general term for a wild animal; *baan* is hoe because iron bells – but not brass bells – are made by welding together the edges of two hoe blades; *gbalang* is obscure but the two syllables might mimic the two pitches of a double clapperless bell, though that leaves open the question of whether the double bell is echoing the name of the masquerade, or the masquerade is named after its two-note bell signature. Chamba speakers of English attribute the descriptive term a sense of unruly. Cost: 10/-

7) A brass ceremonial hoe 'overlaid with circular design' (Lagos 46.29.17), meaning decorated with spirals. Cullen notes it 'chiefly represents property and prestige', whereas we shall see that such hoes were owned more widely by the wealthy among the Verre. Cost: 14/-

8) A brass bell with 'rose ornament' around the rim (Lagos 46.29.8). Used in dances; small versions are worn behind by dancing boys before and after circumcision. Cost: 9/-. See Appendix 1 for illustration; although the decoration consists of rows of raised points rather than a 'rose ornament'.

9) An old and worn brass necklace of beads made, Cullen believes from examining them, by winding threads of drawn brass (Lagos 46.29.9). Six small modern bells have been added (also made by the 'same thread method'). 'These are worn around the waist at dances to jingle.' Cullen's note that these bells are of the same type as those on the shoulder of the brass bell he collected confirms the reference is being made to crotals. Cost: 5/-

10) 'One of the brass arm bands, worn by women. These have been out of fashion for many years, if not generations, and I don't think any more are made. One seems to be bronze? These are more ancient than the hoes, and the ornamenting now popular amongst the Verre may have been introduced in recent years, as I believe the same kind of ornament is in vogue in the French Cameroons, around Fouban. But again, this kind may have been amongst the Verre always.' The object described seems to be a large cuff rather than a bracelet (Lagos 46.29.10; in brass according to Maas). Cost: 3/-

11) The brass sheath of a knife 'remarkable' for its ornamentation of 'plaited cords done in brass' (Lagos 46.29.11). Cost: 3/-

15) 'Brass ornament worn by Verre women on the hip when dancing.' Bought at Lamdoi Boi. The illustration suggests that this ornament was a hip pendant in the form an oversized bead based on a skeuomorph of a cowry cluster. These have been collected in large numbers subsequently. Cost: 4/-

The only other pieces of which we know with collection dates likely to be roughly contemporary with Cullen's collection are a pair of oversized pendant beads which entered the British Museum from the Wellcome Collection. Together with that collected by Cullen, these establish the presence of this item in Verre brasscasting repertoires of the mid-twentieth century, although they are absent from the collections that make up the early colonial assemblage as we discuss later.

Verre now disappear from the records at our disposal for two decades, until the 1960s when Kenneth Murray, to whom Cullen had sent his small collection, recently returned as Acting Director of the Federal Department of Antiquities, tasked Tim Chappel with making an Adamawa collection for the Jos Museum. We examine this early-post colonial assemblage in Chapter 3 but turn now to the first of our two assemblages, that from the early colonial period.

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