

Surviving Works: context in Verre arts

Part One, Chapter Three: Documenting the early post-colonial assemblage – 1960s to 1970s

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Special Issue

Vestiges: Traces of Record Vol 7 (1) (2021)

ISSN: 2058-1963 <http://www.vestiges-journal.info>

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Chapter 3 Documenting the early post-colonial assemblage – 1960s to 1970s

Objects were acquired in far greater numbers during the second period of intensive collection from the Verre than the first. The culture of collection also changed in the intervening years. Based on the evidence we have assembled for the entire early post-colonial assemblage, whereas the earlier collection was amassed on the initiative of European expeditions, by the 1960s Verre brassworks had begun to circulate in local and then national circuits in the hands of Nigerian dealers. The regional trade in Adamawa was in Verre hands, but the wider national trade probably involved Hausa dealers, who sourced their wares through Verre intermediaries living in the larger and more accessible Verre settlements. The sheer quantity of material in movement contrasts sharply with the decades of British colonialism from the 1920s to 1950s when, aside from Cullen's donation to the Lagos Museum and the two oversized pendant beads entering the Wellcome Collection, we have been unable to document any acquisitions by major collections.

Danish Lutheran missionaries of the then Sudan United Mission (SUM), later Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, headquartered since their arrival in the region in 1913 at Numan among the Bachama some 50 kilometres from Yola (Nissen 1968: 51), were among the earliest European purchasers of the Verre brassware that was offered to them by traders. At least some of the Bachama and related Bata communities had themselves been clients for Verre prestige brassware during the earlier decades of the twentieth century, and presumably had also been so in the nineteenth century. Because their own metalworking traditions are not well documented, we are unable to say with confidence which of the items collected from Bata or Bachama were made by them and which they had bought from the Verre. Other metalworks likely to have been made by Verre came into SUM hands via their mission station in the Alantika Mountains, at Tantile among the Koma, immediately east of the Verre. Retired SUM missionaries in Denmark have recently been assembling Verre brassworks collected in the mid-twentieth century with a view to displaying them in the gallery planned for the local archive of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria under construction at Samba in Verre country, just south of the Adamawa state capital of Yola. Thanks to their sharing images of these materials, we know that the range of object types in the collection assembled by members of the SUM was very similar to others amassed around the same time.¹

A second, diffuse, source of evidence for the state of the market in the 1960s derives from the acquisitions made by other private collectors working at the time in Nigeria. Some of the Verre objects they bought and took home have subsequently found their way onto the international market through galleries and dealers. Thanks to the information provided to us,

¹ Aside from brief contact in 921, the Danish SUM was not active among the Verre until 1949. 'Despite much persecution of the evangelist and converts, a prayer hut was raised at Uki in 1951' (CAPRO 1992: 379). The congregation increased subsequently.

we know that these private collectors also acquired a similar range of materials to that in the SUM collection, which in turn is consistent with the major resource to which we turn now: a collection of Verre objects made for the Jos Museum in Nigeria by one of the co-authors of this volume.

Chappel's collection for the Jos Museum

Tim Chappel worked for the Nigerian Federal Department of Antiquities between 1963 and 1967, initially as an ethnographer based at the National Museum in Lagos, then from late 1965 posted to Yola to make an Adamawa Collection destined for the Jos Museum. Objects collected for two and a half months between 14 October and 31 December 1965 were subsequently accessioned at Jos as items 65.J306.1-627. Museum accession dates referred to the calendar year of collection rather than to the year of an item's formal registration at the museum, which happened only after pieces had been transported there in bulk, and once there was an opportunity to process them. Further collection occupied periods of the following year between 4 January to 26 December 1966, and the works acquired then were subsequently registered at Jos as items 66.J11.1-820. Verre works accounted for roughly two thirds of the total of the 820 accessions in 1966 (and because not every registered accession consisted of a single object, the total of objects would be greater). Given the scale of the collection that has passed to the successor organization, the Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments, it is not feasible, as we could for the brassworks in the early colonial assemblage, to investigate items individually in our main text; we have instead constructed an accession list from all the documentation available to us in Appendix 1. This is likely to contain considerably more information for most entries than would have been recorded in the accession ledgers of the Jos Museum.

By steps, evidence of a regional footprint for Verre brassworks drew Chappel to collect from the Verre directly. An initial phase of field collection in Adamawa in late 1965 had concentrated on surveying areas to the north and west of Yola, including Bata settlements, particularly those around Song. Although Chappel acquired brasswares at this time, none of them was attributed by his informants to the Verre. This was to change in February and March 1966, when his attention shifted to Bata settlements south of the River Benue, both east and west of Yola. While many of these 'southern' Bata claimed their forebears to have produced their own brass items which they had brought with them when they migrated from Demsa Poa, others acknowledged that Bata had ceased to practise brasscasting and bought their later brassware from Verre specialists. A few days in February 1966 were crucial.

Chappel had followed these leads a few miles south of Yola to the Verre village of Tuki, at the northern foot of the Verre Hills, on 17 February where he acquired a first group of Verre artefacts (66.J11.98-111). Although brasscasting was not, or no longer, practised there, his informants left him in no doubt that the brass items he purchased had been made by Verre.

Two days later, on 19 February, he visited the Bata settlement of Nzoboliyo (in Bata; Njoboli Wambo in Fulfulde), a short distance southeast of Yola, where there was a discussion about the decorative ornaments worn by a bride during a wedding ceremony (*ngajie*, Bata). When dancing, the bride carried two decorated gourds (*gboy ngajie*, Bata – never it was said made of brass, *damse*, Bata) and wore horns (of the animal called *bomilie* in Bata, equated to *kwantarafa* in Hausa, hence, a reedbuck; its horns that would be carved in ivory if the bride was a chief's daughter), a beaded mask (*dambodie*, Bata) as well as brass armlets (*wule* [s.], *wulce* [pl.]) of which Chappel acquired three examples (66.J11.113-5, costing 5/- each). All those present were firmly of the view that the armlets were of Verre manufacture: formerly, the substantial cost of a single armlet would have been one white and one indigo gown. No one knew how the armlets were made, maintaining that the Bata did not make brass objects but always acquired them from the Verre, customarily at a place called Lolli, beyond the village of Uki, which is in the northern Verre Hills. They were unaware whether brasscasting continued there. A man from the Bata settlement of Bolki claimed there was a time when blacksmiths cast in brass in Bolki, but they did so no longer; he believed that they had been instructed in this process by Verre, and he had been told that no beeswax (*topo junmace*, Bata) was used but only 'mud'; but as he was unclear what else this might involve, it was apparent that he lacked direct knowledge of lost wax casting techniques (specifically that wax models needed to be clad with clay to produce moulds).

On 21 February, two days later, Chappel visited the hamlet of Bakaka, near Gengle (in Mayo Belwa District), to the west of the Verre Hills. People there, who self-identified as Genglefa, claimed to have migrated from the Verre Hills following conflicts, to settle with Bata. Although still sharing 'the same customs' as the Verre, they had adopted a language closer to Bata and no longer spoke Verre, communicating with them in Fulfulde, still then the lingua franca. When the Bata left the area, the Gengle came under the authority of the Fulani. Asked about brass (*sɔki*, in Genglefa), informants said that they thought some old women might have one or two items tucked away. Chappel purchased some brass ankle bells (*jagolong*, Genglefa) for 14/- said to have been bought from Bata 'when we were together on the hill' (66.J11.150), as well as a woman's iron dance wand (*kikem*, Genglefa) costing 5/-, said to have been made by a local blacksmith (*wesasi*, Genglefa) (66.J11.151). Iron (*sesasi*, Genglefa) was reportedly sourced from sediment (*tama*, Hausa) collected from the river after flooding. While they thought that both Bata and Verre had brasscasters among them in the past, Genglefa informants were uncertain whether this was still the case. Another two days later, taking us to 23 February 1966, now in the Bata settlement of Jerang, Chappel bought two women's brass armlets for £1 each, about which he could learn only that they were of Verre origin (66.J11.158-9). Over the course of a week, field evidence was mounting up to suggest the important wider role that the Verre had played in providing brassware to people living between them and the River Benue. To this we can add the evidence of Fr Kevin Malachi Cullen's notes which demonstrated that in the 1940s Verre had supplied the Mapeo Chamba, living to their south, with all their metalwares in both iron and brass. We have additionally

noted the presence of Verre metalwares among the Koma to the east. So, we can be confident that regional trade in metalworks radiated from the Verre to their neighbours to all four points of the compass; it is likely that the occasional brasswork also moved in the opposite direction to judge by presence in the Verre early post-colonial assemblage of objects that appear atypical in style or technique or both (for instance, 66.J11.220).

Chappel's growing awareness of the significance of Verre metalwares, and the evidence that older specimens were being traded actively, pointed to the urgency of making a collection from what remained in Verre hands on behalf of the Nigerian museums. Disappearance of Nigerian heritage, whether by destruction or sale abroad, was the particular concern of Kenneth Murray, the prime mover in the establishment of Nigerian national collections in late colonial times. Murray had become the first Director of the Antiquities Section in 1946, having been discharged from the army as Surveyor of Antiquities in 1943. In 1953, he oversaw the Antiquities Ordinance and the establishment of an Antiquities Commission. The Jos Museum had lately opened to acclaim under the direction of Bernard Fagg in 1952, and it was Fagg who succeeded Murray in 1957 of what, in the following year, became a government department (Eboreime 1995; Hellman 2013, 2014). In 1964, Murray had come out of retirement to fill the gap in staffing occasioned by Fagg's departure in October to become Curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, only its third since 1891. Murray relocated the department's Nigerian headquarters from Jos, where Fagg had moved it, back to Lagos. In response to artworks leaving the country, what by now had become the Nigerian Federal Department of Antiquities had established the 'Antiquities Squad' to register known dealers (predominantly Yoruba and Hausa) and require them to offer any antiquities they acquired initially to the Lagos museum. This move was bolstered by attempts to intercept works exported without authorization and by urgent collection on the ground, although the scale of the second was constrained financially. As the mission statement of the time had it, 'The primary purposes of the Department of Antiquities are the protection and preservation of Nigerian Antiquities: it is only secondarily a department for ethnographic research. The preservation of the actual object must take precedence over the recording of its purposes, whenever the two are incompatible.' Notwithstanding their job titles, 'ethnographers' like Chappel were primarily required to purchase objects, and in practice to do so from their own salaries and reclaim expenditure monthly, a procedure that proved more burdensome as salary payments became irregular with the onset of civil war. Occasionally, given other buyers prepared to pay more for them, this out-of-pocket practice meant objects were priced beyond the reach of the museum. Nonetheless, Chappel assembled a substantial collection that he considered likely to include a high proportion of the objects that remained still in Verre hands. While obliged to prioritize collection, when opportunities presented themselves Chappel asked his intermediaries to provide him with terms for objects and some account of their form and functions.

Leaving aside the few Verre pieces collected earlier from the Bata, as we have seen, collection directly from the Verre of brass objects was initiated in Tuki on 17 February 1966

(66.J11.98); and the last Verre object was bought from Cholli (Meek's Solli) on 26 December the same year (66.J11.820). Despite absences from Yola to deputize for the Curator in Jos for two weeks between mid- to late-February, and again for two to three weeks in wet season between August and September, collection did not abate. Pragmatically, Chappel decided to collect through the network of contacts willing to supply him from a few accessible villages, notably Cholli and Tuki, otherwise visiting only the market town of Karlahi, Ragin and possibly Uki (see Appendix 2). Chappel's regular vendors were persuaded to bring pieces to Yola, whether or not he was present, for him to assess, either immediately or on his return, for purchase before they sold them elsewhere. Almost two-thirds of the items sold to Chappel for which the name of a vendor was recorded came via only five of around thirty vendors; the same men gave him most of the information on traditional price, use and so forth we summarize in Appendix 1. While we are aware of the likely shortcomings of reliance on the verbal accounts of intermediaries, not least a leaning towards the formulaic when responding to similar questions posed repeatedly, this information is nevertheless richer than anything recorded previously, or indeed subsequently.

By the mid-1960s, the few brasscasters Chappel met, or heard about, produced on commission; whereas in previous times, they recalled being able to sell whatever they made. The older pieces with which Verre were now willing to part were not being replaced in local use. The hike in local demand that had occurred in the two decades between the World Wars had wound down with the conversion, particularly from the 1950s, of younger members of the community to the world religions and with changing standards of conspicuous display. Nonetheless, Chappel was able to take a pair of photographs, probably in Yola market, of older Verre women, who continued to dress in a style by then considered traditional.



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

From Chappel's fieldnotes, which were the basis of reports submitted to the Federal Department of Antiquities, we have constructed an accession list for the five hundred plus Verre pieces he collected over fifty years ago (Appendix 1). Among several limitations on our research, the most obvious is that none of us has been able to consult the surviving records, or objects, held in the museums in Lagos and, particularly, Jos. Future researchers should also be aware of problems that arose earlier because collection and accession coincided with the onset of Nigeria's civil war. Except for some of the materials collected in 1965, registration of the Adamawa collection was completed by Chappel in Jos late in 1966 and in early 1967 before his departure. The copies of contact prints reproduced in Appendix 1 were taken at this time by Chappel. On the instruction of Allen Bassing, a later record was made of all items by the museum's photographer. Chappel received copies of at least 252 of the 627 items collected in 1965, but only 53 of the 820 items collected in 1966, among them just four from the Verre (109, 158, 165, 173).² Moreover, the photographs did not invariably carry accession numbers to match them with object records. Events in Nigeria were accelerating the departure of staff of southern origin from Jos who were important in technical and administrative services; the upshot is that the photographic record we have of the Verre

² Not all items were available to be photographed: decorated gourds and coiled basketry mats were retained in Yola, as were those brasswares about which Chappel wished to check with his informants a final time.

collection in Jos consists largely of the images Chappel himself was able to take before his departure, when the condition of both his camera and film stock had deteriorated. We have tried to make good the lacunae where we can: together with his wife Carolyn Bassing, Allen Bassing, when Acting Curator at Jos Museum, installed a display cabinet of predominantly Verre, Adamawa metalwork during 1967 of which Carolyn sent three photographs to Tim Chappel at the end of that year. We have endeavoured to relate as many as possible of the items then on exhibition to our accession list (compare Interleaf and Appendix 1). Arnold Rubin and Nancy Maas's slightly later research on the Nigerian museum collections have both been invaluable. Rubin's photographs were archived at the Fowler Museum UCLA after his death, while Nancy Maas generously sent us the original file cards of all her detailed Verre notes and sketches made in Lagos and Jos in 1974. We reproduce both these sources with the relevant items in Appendix 1. Notwithstanding these additional resources, we still lack illustrations for a majority of the Verre pieces collected in the field, and this absence is almost complete in relation to some important object types, among which we particularly regret two distinctive Verre brassworks: ornate brass-handled daggers and brass prestige hoes. To compensate these absences, in these two cases and others, in Part Two we shall selectively draw in similar objects in private and museum collections that we believe were collected roughly contemporaneously with Chappel's. Our method involves us in some duplication: as well as listing the entirety of objects Chappel collected in order of their accession together with whatever illustration and information we have about them in Appendix 1, we also include those of the objects we can illustrate in the formal comparisons of object types in Part Two.

For the remainder of this chapter, we shall explore what Chappel's notes, cued by Verre objects collected, tell us about Verre society.

Tibai and Gazabi

While the relation between smiths and farmers is crucial to understanding Verre society, reconstructing it is complicated by the fact of it changing, partly in consequence of alterations in its wider regional context. Meek described Cholli, also Chappel's main point of contact, as a village, among others, inhabited entirely by smiths, recording a version of the term we have transcribed as *Tibaas* (s), *Tibai* (pl) for smiths; the same term that appears in all our sources from Frobenius in 1911 to the most recent dictionaries. Chappel's informants contrasted *Tibai* with *Gazabi*, who were not smiths, so by default farmers; this latter term does not appear in other Verre word lists, and Chappel suspects it may already have been falling out of use. Apparently unknown to contemporary Verre,³ it does resemble a term in Koma Gimbe, a closely related language, which Michel Dieu transcribed as *gézibē* with the sense of 'diviner, healer' (Dieu and Perrois 2016). Adrian Edwards quotes his informant James Deka's statement that, 'The blacksmiths do not know medicines' (1991: 324). To add to a puzzle that is easier

³ According to Aliyu Umaru's communication to Tim Chappel in 2021.

to pose than to resolve: neighbouring speakers of Adamawa languages most closely related to Verre have a term for smith based on a root *lam-*, Bata and Bachama have *kila*, and Chamba Daka has *kpe*. In 1966, recalling circumstances around two generations earlier, which is to say at least in Meek's if not in Frobenius's times, Chappel's Cholli informants, described their village not as inhabited entirely by smiths, as Meek claimed, but as consisting of two physically separated, endogamous social groupings: *Lams* (s), *Lami* (pl) and *Tɔj* (s), *Tɔri* (pl). In the predominant account, *Lami* were smiths and *Tɔri* non-smiths. Given that *lam-* is a root form of smith in other Adamawa languages, it seems legitimate to wonder whether *Tibaai* is an innovation. The fact of the term *Tibaai* being more inclusive than blacksmith invites further speculation whether this category somehow reflected the growth in number of those working copper alloys. Blench and Edwards record the meaning of a verb *tiikwa* as 'to smith', which might be related to *Tibaai*, but even it was, to understand the derivation we would need to know what Verre included in the verb 'to smith', whether specifically the percussive action to forge by pounding or more broadly to shape metal.

Many African languages, like the Verre's Mapeo Chamba neighbours, call copper alloys by a compound term for red metal/iron; by contrast Verre, and, apparently by borrowing also Koma, have a term for copper alloy (both noun and adjective) based on the root *suk-*, which as a verb probably means smelt, or melt. Brassworkers are thereby related to an activity different in quality to that of the forge, the preeminent place of hammering, but not dissimilar to the activity of smiths as smelters. Unfortunately, we have no information on which we might base a comparison of the iron smelting furnace and brasscasting, but the possibility of their being aligned symbolically does seem *prima facie* to be strong.

The contrasting term in the smith-farmer pair, *Tɔri* or *suchlike*, may contrary to *Tibaai* have narrowed in sense. Edwards recorded the term *toz* (s), *tori* (pl) as the title of the priest, male or female, responsible for the main agricultural rituals (1991: 312-13, 316-17); the same title was claimed by Chappel's informant Yakubu (see below). These indications connect with Dieu's definition of the Koma *gézibē* and with the Verre *Gazabi* for non-smiths, who unlike smiths are said to know about medicines. The difference between metalworkers, who master the rituals to transform metals, and those who carry out the rituals ensuring the well-being of people and crops seems to be the consistent contrast made irrespective of variations in the paired terms.

Although he was enquiring when blacksmithing was in decline, Edwards, who had substantial comparative experience of West and Central Africa, was impressed by the absence of either special ritual prerogatives or marked avoidances affecting smiths beyond non-intermarriage, separate burial and not eating food cooked in the smithy (1991: 315). This relatively unmarked status compared to smiths elsewhere might result from Verre smiths, both brass and iron workers, having become so numerous in the past as not only to occupy their own discrete settlements, but in some respects to have formed a distinct society. Because they worked with metals rather than plants, smiths were said not to know about medicines, which typically have a plant base. Chappel collected an extended account of

medicine collection from Yakubu, titled *Toj*, one of his Gazabi vendor informants, and the similarities with the collection of ores by smiths, described below, are striking. The medicine, *tēt* (s), *tēt* (pl), was essential for the agrarian rite of *Bus Kabili* (10 November 1966, Fieldnotes 5: 127-32, with reference to 66.J11.696 *buna* (s), *bunut* (pl), medicine bag).

There are three ingredients in the medicine. The first are a kind of root, *dinga* (s), *dingut* (pl) (*lekki ginaji*, Fulfulde; *magani hauka*, Hausa) provided by the *zam* spirits 'from under a stone/boulder'. They must be collected in the middle of the night. The collector must wear no clothes, nor wash beforehand, nor sleep with his wife the night before. He leaves in secret, without his wife being aware, speaking to no one during or about his journey. Before departure, he rubs certain leaves on his body, *tebi* (s), *tebai* (pl) (*gufudo*, Fulfulde, compare Taylor, 1932: 68, *gubudo*, a prostrate herb: *Ceratotherca sesamoides*; *kerkechi*, Hausa). The *zam* [spirits] dislike the odour of these leaves which also prevent snake bites. If he displays any fear on his way to collect the roots, the *zam* will not allow him to proceed. To test him, they send their 'children': snakes, large monkeys and hyenas. He carries particular leaves in his hand, *badange* (s), *badani* (pl) (*duku jaladde*, Fulfulde; *gwan dan daji*, Hausa, *Anona senegalensis*); so long as he is holding these leaves, the *zam* cannot harm him. He will then beg the *zam* three times to permit him to take the roots; although they will depart to allow him to achieve this, they hide hoping to catch him unawares on his return journey. So, he must return by a different route. He will also collect the second ingredient: some earth from the place the *zam* were resting and where the roots were found, *but zamdit* (s), 'ground for *zam*'. He must be careful to put the ingredients in an animal-skin bag (such as that collected for the museum) as the *zam* are enraged by anything white, whether bag or cloth, or anything else. If they do manage to catch a person returning with these ingredients, they will kill him. *Zam* cannot talk; they look like 'small boys with no heads, and smooth bodies.' They may be male or female and they are intrinsically 'bad/evil'. At the same time, they are classified as the 'brother of *Do'os*', because everything for *Do'os* comes initially from *zam*, including both medicines and brass. The third ingredient is *gbaara* (s), *gbari* (pl) (*kwandule*, Fulfulde), a non-root ingredient, taken neither from the hills, nor from the *zam*, but locally available (compare Taylor 1932: 41, *duli*, Fulfulde, red weed, *Striga senegalensis*). While other Gazabi may use the second and third medicines, only he is able to use the biggest of them, *dinga* roots.

The medicine is cooked not immediately but when required. Then it is taken to *gbaar* (s), *gbati* (pl), 'shrine' with upright stones, *tul* (s), *turi* (pl) (compare Blench and Edwards 1988, *gbaar*, stone circle used for ceremony). The medicine is placed in a hole at the shrine and a stone placed over it. He (Yakubu in this instance) will then announce to the people of the village that he has done his work and that the rite of *Bus Kabili* (s) can take place. This happens once a year, in November; Yakubu decides exactly when, as did his father and as will his son. His title is, *Toj* (s), *Tori* (pl). Nobody

in Cholli may eat the new corn until *Bus Kabili* has been performed. If the rite is not performed, crops will fail the following year, and everybody will starve. His payment for preparing the medicine is seven baskets from the new harvest of guinea corn or groundnuts.

Inheritance in both marriage communities, whether smiths or farmers, was partible: fixed assets, like the compound, were inherited from father to son, but moveable properties were inherited from a mother's brother by his sister's son. Endogamy meant that wealth remained within the community despite partible inheritance; a close marriage partner was preferred; only a man's mother, sisters, and the daughter of the sister of a common mother were considered unmarriageable; marriage with the daughter of a paternal half-sister was described favourably. Recall that Meek recorded two forms of marriage differentiated by high and low brideprice, of which only the former transferred the right to filiate children to a man. His observation is corroborated by a Verre author (Wiu 2018: 80) and by Edwards (1991: 312). While it is proper to be cautious of deriving practical consequences from recollected rules, if something like these practices were followed by a reasonable proportion of people then, over time, they would have the effect of concentrating wealth, including wealth in dependents, within closely and multiply related groupings of individuals. This possibility gains interest from the fact of Chappel's informants consistently differentiating brasswares according to whether they were for the use and/or ownership of smiths or farmers. The more ornate, larger, and therefore more costly pieces were identified as being for the smiths. The notion of an endogamous group of smiths creating objects in copper alloy for their own use may seem curious, but smiths previously made up a large proportion of the population and, in addition to their fellow Verre, as noted already, they supplied the Fulani (Edwards 1991: 313), as well as some communities of the Bachama, Bata, Chamba and Koma. By the mid-1960s, demand for brasswares had collapsed, and along with it so presumably had the viability of communities composed solely of smiths. Edwards noted that smiths were by the 1980s scattered among agricultural communities, remarking specifically the disappearance of a 'blacksmith community at Mayo Seni in the southern end of Verre country' (1991:313) which would seem to refer to the same area that Cullen noted as the source of metalwares for the Chamba of Mapeo in the 1940s. The communities on the western and southern edges of the Verre Hills would have been close to the Fulani centres subject to Yola, notably Hibango and Ubawo/Nassarawo. Wiu attributes the loss of metalworking skills, particularly in brass, to domination and exploitation by the Fulani with the support of colonial powers (2000: 19), but it seems as likely that Verre metal workers would have thrived in locations exposed to the Fulani in the nineteenth century because there was demand for their products from Fulani as well as non-Fulani, and their relative decline was a consequence of a general fall in this demand for metal works, and particularly for brassware.

To judge by the accounts offered by some of Chappel's later informants, at one time there may have been sufficient demand for brassware that some casters, although identified as *Tibaai*, did not forge in iron at all. The Fulani were recalled as having supplied the bulk of brass

raw material in the form of items to be recycled, but Chappel was sufficiently inclined to give credence to detailed accounts of copper mining to justify two attempts to obtain samples of ore in 1966 (and a third recently reported later). In the course of these efforts, several conversations with metalworkers (in Ragin in November 1966) were written up in Chappel's notebooks. None of the informants was a native of Ragin; they had all had moved down from the hills.

Yasaruma,⁴ who had come to Ragin from Gurinati to work as a brasscaster (interviewed on 1 November 1966; Fieldnotes 5: 23) claimed that although his father, from whom he learnt his skills, had sourced ore 'from the hills' it had become 'too difficult' to continue and he did not himself know how to do so; instead, he melted down old items, particularly *mule*, the large beads worn by women as hip pendants. One of the crooks Chappel collected had reportedly been cast by Yasaruma at Ragin (66.J11.613). Three weeks later, Yasaruma provided a detailed description of casting a bell (21 November 1966, Fieldnotes 6: 5-7).

A clay core is built up around a 'tube' of grasses bound together with clay (*wops*) composed of soil and cow dung; this is the same material that is used to construct granaries or to coat the inside walls of rooms. This core is sun dried before being shaped further with a knife. Wax is applied in wide strips, and then decorative motifs are added, for instance using threads to design spirals (*ga*). Excised patterns, such as those on daggers, are cut out at this stage of modelling rather than later. Only 'yellowish' honeybee wax is suitable for this modelling (*disa wasi*); black wax, produced by earth bees, would crack when heated. The beeswax has previously been warmed in water so that impurities sink leaving only pure wax on the surface. The same clay that was used to make the core is next applied in a thin layer over the wax mould and sun dried. To cast the bell, an inverted crucible is made of the same clay and fixed to the head of the mould. Brass, consisting of Fulani rings and other old brass items, which has previously been melted down is placed into the crucible which is then sealed with clay so it can be inverted and placed upside down on the fire for two hours for the brass to melt. Buried in a hole under the fire is a medicine including *wan go'os* (s), *wanga go'yi* (pl); glossed as 'oil of leopard', this substance has been taken from a leopard kill, though its more precise character was obscure. With a fresh sapling that has been partly stripped and bent to form pincers, the heated mould is turned the right way up so that the melted brass can displace the wax. The casting is then left for half an hour before water is sprinkled onto it; another hour is allowed to pass before

⁴ It is noticeable that many of the personal names of smiths begin with *Ya*- which we thought might be a title or other appellation. Temple earlier noted a 'high priest' Yakunor who serves the 'great god' Yakumam (1919: 357). In response to Chappel's enquiry in 2021, Aliyu Umaru suggested that *Ya* was the title bestowed on members of the prestigious cult *Burkutu*, one of the *Do'os*, joined on payment of four goats, ten sacks of grain and large quantities of beer, and bestowed only after the wounds caused by undergoing a severe lashing to the chest had healed.

the mould is broken open. In the past a short, broad-handled knife with a leaf-shaped blade was used to finish the object; 'nowadays' a file is used instead.

Like Yasaruma, Yakbaruk, a brasscaster who had come to Ragin from Togaro (interviewed on 1 November 1966; Fieldnotes 5: 23, 37-38), recycled brass objects for his castings. Although he identified as a *Tibaai*, Yakbaruk said he was only a brasscaster and not a blacksmith. He had learnt the work from his father and thought a man should do either one or the other type of metalwork, but not both. He believed, although he did not explain on what basis, that Verre had been brass workers before they became iron workers, and that brass work was a 'better' thing than iron work. While this is implausible for Verre smiths generally, it raises the possibility of a time when some non-smiths nonetheless became brasscasters, a phenomenon reported from the Dii to the south (see Chapter 6). Like Yakbaruk, he claimed his father had mined local copper alloy ore and volunteered some knowledge of the ritual this involved. Before departing to the hills, his father would take dog faeces and place them on the fire, sitting over it until the odours penetrated his skin. After this he would neither wash, oil his body, wear clothes nor sleep with his wife. The *zam* spirits at the mine, smelling the dog faeces, would leave so that he could take what he wanted. Turning to his own brasscasting, when he was working, Yakbaruk said, no one other than his son was allowed near him or to speak with him. A 'big medicine' (*tet gbikak*, Verre; *lek jannanga*, Fulfulde, see Taylor, 1932: 122, *lekki*, potion, medicine) was made from the roots of two trees (*dike* and *su* in Verre; for which Fulfulde and Hausa equivalents were not known). These roots were buried in a hole on top of which the fire for smelting was made. The medicine kept away the *zam* who would otherwise spoil the work in revenge for the theft of their material.

A third informant, Ɔfa Kila⁵ about fifty years of age (interviewed 21 November 1966; Fieldnotes 6: 1) had come to live and work in Ragin from Lolli, 'on the hill', where he had been born. Although he identified as *Tibaai*, Ɔfa Kila had arrived at Ragin as a brasscaster and had learnt iron work from other blacksmiths only after settling there; he considered Ragin, like Uki, to be a *Gazabi* settlement. Ɔfa Kila offered a detailed description of the precautions taken when collecting ore for brass casting.

Marks were made in red ochre (*kaadam*, Fulfulde) between the big and second toe of the right foot, on the forehead and on the left shoulder: when *zam* spirits see a man bearing these marks 'they will be made aware of his intentions'. The miner must not sleep with a woman for three nights before departing, nor wash during those three days, because when washing in the river he might stand where someone else, who has recently slept with a woman, has just washed, so that man's 'dirt' washes off onto him. The miner leaves home at 5 a.m. so that nobody may see him going; in his right

⁵ *Kila* looks like the term for smith in languages including Fulfulde.

hand he holds twigs from a tree that has an odour repellent to *zam*, called in Verre *deses*, or *dersers*, (*yotere*, Fulfulde, cf. Taylor, 1932: 238, *youtere*, mistletoe [W.Indian], *Loranthus Pentagonia*; *kause*, Hausa). Brass ore 'belongs to *zam*' – is given to them by 'God', so only if the appropriate rituals are carried out will the way be 'open', and the collection of mineral ore be possible. According to Ɔfa Kila, Verre stopped taking ore 'from the hills when the Fulbe came' because it was easier to buy brass (*jamdi [njamndi] bodejum*, Fulfulde lit. 'red iron', see Taylor, 1932: 96, 17; *jangkarfe*, Hausa) from them and melt it down.

A man earlier dispatched by Ɔfa Kila to collect an ore sample was present at this interview. His mission had proved futile because on going to the 'hole' he found that the *zam* had 'filled it in' with *wops*, the same mixture of clay and cow dung used to make moulds; he thought that the twigs taken with him had been old and dried and hence ineffective. Reluctantly, and after protracted discussion, he agreed to find fresh twigs and try again. The ore sample (*wutu wes* (s), *wuta wengbi* (pl)) provided from this second venture to the 'copper mines' (66.J11.687) was later sent to Thurstan Shaw at the University of Ibadan for analysis. Chappel subsequently also acquired from Ɔfa Kila what was alleged to be a sample of 'raw' copper alloy (66.J11.749) smelted from locally acquired ore 'a long time ago', *jumnet suktuntat* (s). A letter from Chappel to Thurstan Shaw (of which there is a copy in the UCLA Rubin archive, dated 27 January 1967) refers to 'two' ore samples (but not the smelted sample which was retained in Jos) being sent to the University of Ibadan for analysis, with results that Chappel recalls were reported to have been negative. In 2021, however, samples of chalcopyrite (CuFeS₂) sourced from the Verre Hills were analysed by the Nigerian Institute of Mining and Geosciences with a result approaching 20% copper (and 10% iron), reopening the question of whether local processing to yield copper, or a copper alloy, was feasible before the increased availability of scrap made the effort required unattractive.

All the half dozen or so smiths or brasscasters with whom Chappel had limited contact reported that they had undertaken some farming activity as brass commissions became infrequent. Chappel was told that all the brass goods in Tuki had been inherited rather than bought, and they could cite only one man, Kombowal living at Lugere Delle some 12 miles distant, who might still be casting (Fieldnotes 1: 8-11).

Chappel noted another conversation with a blacksmith and brasscaster called Yabik from Maro, near Kesa, a place around three miles from Cholli, whom he met at Ragin (21 November 1966; Fieldnotes 6: 17-19) and who told him of *Yallabatus* (s), *Yallabati* (pl), an annual ceremony in honour of metal workers. Metalworkers' ceremonies were apparently becoming less exclusive. For instance, during *Baaka Do'os*, when a man of the *saari* age grade becomes a *dɔnda*, he must offer the priest, who is the next senior grade of *dɔnda gbijaas*, the best beer in his brass jar, *yerk*, 'for [on behalf of] *Do'os*'. In the past only smiths would have been invited,

but 'nowadays' (referring to 1966), he invites other *dɔnda gbijaas* of Kesa to join him as 'they are the same' (Fieldnotes 7: 42).

Taken together with individual histories of movement, the consistent impression is that by 1966 the once distinct communities of *Tibaai* had ceased to be viable, and smiths, now restricted almost entirely to working in iron, had moved into farming villages, and even begun to grow their own food, looking back regretfully to the time when they were so well paid in kind by their clients that they were the wealthier party. This transition may have been underway for over a generation if we recall Cullen's statement that brass goods were commissioned from Lainde Boi by Mapeo Chamba in the 1940s, and Edwards' reference to the survival of a smithing community in southern Verre country into the 1960s. Although Edwards found no particular fear of smiths, he recorded that non-smiths thought them 'very lazy people. They will not go to farm'; and he comments, 'This criticism evidently represents the view which farmers took of the non-farming blacksmiths of the past. Present-day blacksmiths [1980s] do in fact farm, and both blacksmiths and non-blacksmiths explain this as being due to necessity. Blacksmithing nowadays will not support them without an additional source of income, but apparently it did in the past' (1991: 325). Edwards concludes that 'blacksmiths were apparently more prosperous in the past in relation to other Verre and they were, presumably, the section of Verre society most respected by outsiders' (1991: 327). This scenario gives credence to the consistent discrimination made by Chappel's vendors between the largest and most decorated wares, usually said to have been made by the *Tibaai* for fellow smiths and their wives, and the less prestigious items which they sold to non-smiths.

The ritual life of brass

What were the purposes served by the brasswares retained within Verre communities? Africa south of the Sahara had no bronze age preceding its iron age; copper alloy was a prestige material contemporary with iron with its own particular properties and potentialities. In terms of the symbolic triad of colours – black, white and red – copper alloys contrasted with iron as red does with black. The brightness of copper alloy was valued rather than its patination; copper alloy objects were polished or abraded to shine in use. Copper alloys have plastic properties mid-way between pottery and iron. Pretty much anything that can be modelled in wax can be cast in copper alloy sheathed in clay. But once cooled, the resulting object has the permanence of iron, even if it lacks some of its functionality. We have spoken purposefully in these sentences of copper alloy given the, as yet open, question of the historic use of local ores. That said, the objects collected from Verre are likely all to be brass, a material that was not produced locally but involved communities in networks of trade. As we examine in Part Two, the overwhelming majority of Verre brassware consisted of skeuomorphs, versions in brass of prototypes first, and usually still, made in other materials; these remain recognizable even though the form and decoration of the brass versions may depart from their originals in some respects. There are at least two exceptions to this which

we analyse later: neither crotal bells (or simply crotals), nor brass bells with iron clappers have close all-iron prototypes in the Verre material repertoire; some of the oldest looking brass bells combine these forms thanks to their small crotal shoulder decorations. These two percussion instruments performed in ways not easily replicated by instruments made in other materials and on that basis may be considered uniquely copper alloy objects both formally and functionally. Across the remainder of its repertoire, the brass skeuomorph performed in the same way as its prototype but at a higher level in several senses: more expensive, more pleasing aesthetically, scarcer, and with a material relationship closer to the *zam* spirits who considered copper alloy materials their own. Access, either by purchase or loan, to the objects and their attributes was a matter of status: whether man or woman, youth or elder, smith or farmer, initiate or not, wealthy or poor, a close relative or not. These were the attributes foregrounded by Chappel's informants in their appreciation of the brass objects they brought to him.

Other than a few personal ornaments, brass objects were used only occasionally during the ceremonial events that punctuated either individual life cycles or the annual cycles of community life. Of the life cycle events, informants' accounts gave prominence to the circumcision and initiation of youths and then their later elevation to formal elderhood. There was wide participation in the sequence of rituals and ceremonies around the time of the new harvest. This was also the time when the meetings of the *Do'os* or cults resumed following abeyance during the wet or farming season. Given that circumcision, preparation for which began at the harvest ceremonies, also began the process of initiation into *Do'os*, the association between brass and cults was close, although not exclusive.

Most men's ritual activity took place within the context of *Do'os*, a term which has been translated in various ways. For Meek, *Do'os* was 'employed as a personification of all the occult powers' (1931: 431). In their dictionary, Blench and Edwards (1988) identify it with 'a class of traditional ceremonies associated with the development of traditional magical power'. Chappel's fieldnotes described *Do'os* as the direct source of all the beneficial aspects of life: good crop yields, health and the individual's age-grade related, social status. According to Clement Wiu, writing for his Bachelor Degree in Sacred Theology, '*Do'os* is a religious term for Juju or the gods. It is secret from women and children. Through *Do'os* refers to the gods worshipped, it also refers to those who take part in the worship, including the instruments used for sacrifice. The things used for worship and sacrifice are also *do'os*, the things used are also gods because they are to be kept secret', and these activities occur within the "shrine" *do-bu'uk*' (2000: 4). These definitions, in their different idioms, are likely all to be true if, as their Chamba neighbours would claim, Verre practices are similar to their own. If *Do'os* is the Verre counterpart to Chamba *voma* or *jubi*, or slightly further afield to Tiv *akombo*, then we are dealing with a multitude of cults with individual esoteric cultures entered by initiation, each with its cult apparatus and rituals, its place and schedule of meetings, and a particular range of powers over misfortunes it can both cause and cure. These cults do not meet during

wet season when crops are growing but resume before the harvest which they usher in and close with large-scale celebrations and dancing. If the analogy holds, then all the descriptions above would hold also: as Meek noted, the entirety of these diverse practices can be spoken about as a singular intentional (or as he put it personified) agency; as Blench and Edwards stated, cult practices involve a variety of ceremonies; and as Chappel was told, the cults were guarantors of good fortune, because they also controlled misfortunes. Each *Do'os* had its own name and belonged to a 'clan' which undertook its 'religious practices' at a particular place out of sight of women who must pay for purification if they witness any ritual or else risk the loss of their own life or that of a family member (Wiu 2000: 23). The age-related status categories for men were at the same time measures of their initiation into cults, with consequences which continued until their funeral rites. Chappel notes that an initiate might become a temporary *dɔnda* by making frequent offerings to *Do'os*, a hint that progression was not simply a matter of age (Fieldnotes 5: 28). The brasswares collected by Chappel included beer pots, rings and drinking vessels made specifically for the use of senior members of cults during their meetings, particularly in those cults belonging to smiths. This association recalls Cullen's testimony of the presence of a Verre-made brass figure at the centre of the most powerful of Mapeo Chamba matrilineal cults, *karbangi*.

Verre communities were gerontocracies. Insofar as there were any purely political or administrative positions, these had been imposed, as the titles *Ardo* and *Jauro* suggest, by the Fulani and subsequently reshaped under British colonial rule. Verre men, whether *Tibaai* or *Gazabi*, proceeded, albeit in parallel, through the same named age grades that were reported to Chappel. The most junior grade was that of *wasas* (s), *yangi tuma* (pl) youths, who entered young adulthood at approximately seven-year intervals when the annual celebration of the guinea corn harvest with beer and dancing, *Seerkaana*, was also the occasion for youths to be circumcised. This rite of passage involved preliminary stages (*Jela*, which included beating, and *Gaaka Yalan*) culminating in *Gangni* (in full *Daaka Gangni*), the circumcision, after which the youths' status became *was* (s), *yangi* (pl). Subsequent progression depended upon initiation through stages into the Verre system of protective and punitive cults, *Do'os*. Via the rituals of *Baaka Do'os Banjas*, the circumcised youths would transition to being *saari*. In early middle age they became *dɔndas wajaas*; and when, at least in principle, they had witnessed around seven circumcision ceremonies since their own (roughly fifty years) they would become *dɔnda gbijaas*. Although they proceeded separately, the progression was the same for *Tibaai* and *Gazabi*, so that Chappel's informants could tell him the age grades of the metalworkers he had interviewed: the status of Yabik was *was*; Yamarum was *dɔnda wajaas*; while Yasaruma, Jfa Kila and Yawam were all *dɔnda gbijaas* (Fieldnotes 7: 54-5). However, if Chappel's estimates of his informants' ages were close guesses, and these statuses correct, then it would mean some individuals were reaching the highest grade of initiation in less time than the seven circumcision cycles specified to apply in principle, which is unsurprising given the formulaic ring to seven cycles of seven years. On the other hand, Chappel was told by his informant Samuel Cholli, Ardo Sambo's half-brother, that as the next *Gangni* would be the

seventh after his own, Ardo Sambo would soon qualify to become a 'proper' *dɔnda*, *dɔnda gbijaas*, a formulation that suggests a more literal approach.

Women's life course seems to have had fewer marked stages, although it must be kept in mind that Chappel's informants were overwhelmingly men. The scarification ceremony of *Dei-ki Peena* preceded marriage, and on achieving seniority women would be addressed as *baaba* (s), *baabai* (pl) which was both an honorific title for a female elder and a term for grandmother.

The occasions surrounding circumcision particularly called for the display of brassware. Chappel witnessed only one of the stages of the ceremony, and that involving a single boy. But his informants told him some of what happened more generally. Before they were circumcised, not only would the boys dance with the women for a final time but, as we see below, they would borrow brass bells and beads to be clothed like them. For the operation itself, the boys grasped a brass crook with both hands which they hooked behind the neck; and those who could borrow one had an ornate brass-handled dagger, in its equally intricate scabbard, suspended down their back, or else borrowed a brass figure.

Annual events clustered particularly around harvest (Cholli, 12 November 1966; Fieldnotes 5: 43-46, 49). Although Chappel witnessed only a single event in the sequence of rituals that continued throughout the harvest season, he was given a list of names of stages and performances. It would require further local guidance to resolve the etymological senses, if any, of the terms and the significance of the sequence in which they were performed, but it is sufficiently clear that the cycle of performances was extended and involved more and less esoteric episodes. One of the esoteric episodes described above in relation to medicines, *Bus Kabili*, may have either preceded or formed part of the first stage of the harvest cycle.

Whether *Ris Kaguri* referred to the ritual that was the precursor to the harvest or was also a covering term for the entire cycle is uncertain. *Ris Kaguri* involved procession to a *Do'os* shrine where men played tuned pipes made from five animal horns: four cow horns and a fifth from a reedruck. Dancing women circled the shrine, until after dark when led by Ardo Sambo, one of Chappel's informants, those attending proceeded outside the village, where Ardo Sambo planted his ritual staff in the ground which the dancers now circled. The objects connected to this ritual included a brass skeuomorph of a water pot said to be used by *Gazabi* women (66.J11.623), a brass double clapperless bell and a double iron clapperless bell both used by *Tibaai* (66.J11.677), as well as the set of the two-stop pipes played (66.J11.725-9) which were also recorded.⁶

⁶ The tapes of this and other recordings were donated for preservation to the UK National Sound Archive in 2020.

Gura Bai was the occasion for, or perhaps a description of, a night of singing and dancing. The antelope horn used during *Ris Kaguri* was replaced with two more cow horns to make up a set of six (66.J11.798-9). This configuration had apparently been adopted from the Koma.

Taaki, the third stage of the agrarian cycle of festivals took place at night during the time of the new moon; no pipes or drums were involved, only gourd rattles and iron bells to accompany women dancing. The occasion that Chappel witnessed at Cholli was punctuated by a speech delivered by Ardo Sambo dressed in the style of a Fulani wearing an indigo-dyed gown and turban, during the course of which, as well as advising that intimate liaisons be conducted in the seclusion of the bush, he asked those assembled to pay their taxes. Chappel collected a brass horn (66.J11.675) said to have been blown by a *Tibaai* to summon people in the event of emergency with the proviso that it might also be lent for a small payment to be blown during *Taaki*.

Maas Kataaki (or *Maas Ka Taaki*) is noted only insofar as it involved an early morning procession of youths around the village.

Nenga Kabusum took place at night, when the *Do'os* 'takes hunger and throws it away into the bush'; women must remain indoors throughout; it involves a deep-throated horn (gourd horn?), the beating of stones, gourds, and pots, as well as the whirring of wooden bull-roarers. The reedbuck horn in the *gura* set is played.

Seerkana – including *Wag Dees* dancing – takes place after the completion of harvest around January. Beer is again brewed for dancing. When there is to be *Gangni*, or circumcision, then *Gaka Yalan* takes place. Dressed in a yard of indigo-dyed local cloth, wearing beads around their waists and necks, and crotals around their arms and wrists in addition to bracelets, the initiates emerge to dance in public. Although there is no informant testimony on the topic, their appearance would seem to be feminized by these accoutrements. From this time onwards, having shed this dress, they may not sit with nor touch women and must eat from their own bowls.

Kusa Kabik – including *Wag Dees* dancing – occurs as the rain arrives and dancing takes place for the final time when the *Do'os* season is closed until the following harvest.

Even if we cannot describe their details, which in any case are likely to have varied locally between Verre communities, Chappel's notes indicate that the observances around harvest time were varied and protracted. The dances, beer drinking and *Do'os* rituals provided several opportunities for prestige brasswares to be displayed, either worn by women or used as paraphernalia of the cults by the *donda gbijaas* or senior elders. Blench suggests as many as thirteen steps were required to complete elderhood (1993: 1); a substantial investment underlining the importance of elderhood as a status for both smiths and farmers throughout

Verre land and indicative of it as a status both achieved by payment and ascribed by age. We have noted already the existence of Fulani titles like *Ardo* and *Jauro* in some Verre communities. Given the variable degrees of incorporation of Verre communities within the Adamawa Emirate from the early nineteenth century, some of these Fulfulde titles may be longstanding, while others probably arrived with incorporation into the apparatus of colonial indirect rule. Roger Blench's notes on Verre mention titles not found in sources other than Adrian Edwards, which, given their collaboration, is not independent: *gbanam gbare* chief of a clan (of which he specifies eight, although an informant Edwards considered reliable described *gbare* as a smaller, predominantly local group, typically containing around twenty adult men (Edwards 1991: 312)), *gban laze* a high priest, and *nor gbar* 'eye of the clan' (Blench 1993: 1). The last of these, the seer, is found among the neighbouring Mapeo Chamba with a similar etymology 'person with eyes'. The title *gban* for the leader responsible for some activity or function, though not a chief, is also shared with Chamba. The term *laze* does not appear in Blench and Edwards' dictionary, but must presumably refer in some way to the rituals for which the officer was responsible.

Two other titles among the Verre are comparable to roles found among the Verre's neighbours. Both Adrian Edwards and Roger Blench have drawn attention to the position of the rain maker among Verre, a role apparently adopted from the Bata. Following Blench, the most important rainmaker, or *Sas*, lived at Ragin (coincidentally, the place where Chappel had interviewed smiths), east of the Verre Hills (1993: 1). The first of them was Domda Longbas (*donda* or elder in the transcription adopted here), and the 'present' incumbent (1986-7) was the fourth, suggesting a late nineteenth century origin. In addition to controlling rain, he and his assistants were attributed control over a variety of scourges: 'measles, chicken-pox, scabies, eye-trouble and locust plague' (Blench 1993: 2). Edwards reports that the songs accompanying dances at sacrifices for rain continued to be sung in Bata since that was the language understood by the spirits involved (1991: 318). He recounts a myth of conflict between the rainmaker and the blacksmith over their respective powers, hinging on their recognizing the complementarity of fire to forge hoes and rain to grow crops (1991: 314). That the title was at most a century old when Blench and Edwards reported it, serves as a useful reminder that the 'traditional' society was not static.

For his part, Chappel was particularly struck by the *Marus* (*Maari* pl), a character type reminiscent of the powerful figures of disorder among the neighbouring Koma (Dieu and Perrois 2016, *màda* (s), *màdibe* (pl) presumably the same root). The term is used of men and women who behave eccentrically, on occasions outrageously, and by extension, it is used of anthropomorphic figures cast in brass, and of the cast heads that feature as central bosses of some brass-handled daggers. Excerpts from Chappel's 1966 notebooks shed some light on the relations between these instances, without clarifying them entirely. *Maari* 'know about medicines, non-*Marus* people don't' (Fieldnotes 5: 40-43); even in Cholli, where the *Tori* or priests outnumbered the four male and five female *Maari*, it is the *Maari* who lead all the

important annual rituals. Their anti-social behaviour, especially when dancing – it was claimed that they danced wildly and naked, while uttering nonsense – means ‘they are like *zam*’, the hill spirits associated with death and disease, as well ‘ownership’ of the mineral ores in the Verre Hills. ‘It is *zam* that kill people, and a *Marus* is always present when someone dies ... *Maari* do not fear *zam* because they are the same. As *Maari* come first in all *Do’os* work, they are very important people.’ The Koma similarly held that the lack of shame of the *màdibe*, flaunted in bared backsides and farting, was related to their ability to see whether the spirits of the bush were present in a place, a matter of particular importance during initiations. The limitations of ordinary mortals did not apply to them.

Broadening the skein of resemblances brings in the brass figures called *wan marus* which informants associated primarily with *Gangni*, the ceremonies around circumcision. Initially, Chappel was told that brass figures are always female because ‘they [brasscasters] don’t know how to make men’ or men were difficult to make (Fieldnotes 5: 26, 7: 32). In relation to the hypothetical case of a male figure, it was conceded that an initiate holding it might be told about such a figure, ‘This is your “friend”, and if you run away, he will laugh at you’, or ‘This is your [future] son, and if you run away he will laugh at you’. In later discussion of the topic, it was claimed that brass figures were only worn or carried by older initiates in their later teens or early twenties (Fieldnotes 7: 32). Three types of *wan marus* figures were distinguished on these occasions: 1) *wan marus kiis* (s), *yanga maari kitaki* (pl), a female figure, given to older boys/young men, representing the initiate’s ‘future wife’ (compare Blench and Edwards 1988: *waz* (s), *yangbi* (pl) + *kiiz* (s), *kii* (pl), wife), who would be told by the members of more senior age grade *saari*, ‘Your future wife is watching you and will laugh at you if you show fear. If you run away and leave this *wan marus* we shall kill you, so that you will never see a woman to marry’; 2) *wan marus yaas* (s), *yanga maari yaiye* (pl), a male figure (compare Blench and Edwards 1988: *waz* (s), *yangbi* (pl) + *ya’az* (s), *ya’ari* (pl), husband, males, men); 3) *wan marus gorks* (s), plural not recorded, probably with the sense of ‘friend’ – given, if at all, to younger initiates who would be told by the *saari*, ‘This is your friend. If you run or show fear, he will laugh at you’ (Fieldnotes 7: 29-31). In each of the three cases, the figure is represented as a witness to the behaviour of the initiate.

The figures are transferred on the death of the elder who owns them; this being the only other occasion with which informants associated them specifically. ‘When a *dɔnda* dies, a surviving *dɔnda* in the compound – or if there isn’t one, a *dɔnda* from another compound may be selected – takes the deceased’s brass *wan marus*, if he had one, and places it on the forehead of the corpse, saying to the figure (if male): “Your father has died: you must cry for him”; (if female): “Your husband has died: you must cry for him”. Afterwards, he will become custodian of the brass figure’ (Fieldnotes 5: 27). Such figures were said to be exclusively for the use of smiths. ‘*Wan marus* is not used by *Gazabi* “because they are not *marus* [people]. [If they have one then they] Will keep it only to lend to *Tibaai* for *Gangni*. No charge is made; done to help a friend, as when *Tibaai* borrow ceremonial daggers from another village”

(Fieldnotes 7: 19). If any person, including *saari* [*do'os* initiates], wish to acquire a brass ceremonial item, they *must* receive permission from the *dɔnda gbijaas*. (Fieldnotes 5: 33). The right to own items was reportedly, and in principle, linked to age status: *was* were unable to own any brass; *saari* might own bells; *dɔnda wajaas* were permitted to own all categories of brass with the single exception of *wan marus* figures, which were the prerogative only of the most senior, or *dɔnda gbijaas*.

Wooden figures collected by the Frobenius expedition were recorded simply as *ratu* (wooden), whereas those collected by Chappel were called *wan marus rap* (s), *yanga maari rat* (pl) and associated, as well as with *Gangni*, also with *Dei-ki*, the counterpart to boys' initiation carried out for girls (66.J11.664-5, 66.J11.709). This at least opens the possibility of a complex of *Marus* practices having been adopted from Koma in relatively recent times, or else spreading from the Verre communities closest to Koma. We noted a precedent for such an adoption with the rainmakers of Bata origin. The association between the figures, whether in brass or wood – one of Chappel's wooden figures was bought directly from a woman *Marus* (66.J11.720) – and the transgressive personality of the *Marus* might then have occurred with the increasing prominence of these people. A suggestion that remains speculative in our current knowledge.

Turning now to the daggers with anthropomorphic central bosses to their brass handles, *wɛk wan marus*, Chappel was told these were for the use of *Tibaai* only and then only at *Gangni* [circumcision]. Ownership was restricted to the two senior age grades, *dɔnda gbijaas* and *dɔnda wajaas*, who kept the daggers in their granaries but did not themselves 'wear' them. This is slightly contrary to another of Chappel's informants, cited above, who claimed ownership of such daggers was allowed only to the oldest grade. On the day of circumcision, an initiate might be loaned a dagger which was tied around his neck, so it hung down his back over his buttocks. The initiate danced with it through the village and then, before going to *gaa*, the place of circumcision, he handed the dagger back to *dɔnda wajaas*. According to other informants, daggers might be worn *only* by the children of smiths who were also *Maari*, hence only a small proportion of initiates qualified to borrow one; they danced naked except for the knife they carried. If there were insufficient daggers for those eligible, the *dɔnda wajaas* attempted to make up the numbers by borrowing them from another settlement. Those ineligible wear only a 'white gown', *ndilla (gudel)* (s), Fulfulde; *zani* (s), Hausa). *Gazabi* initiates, who have their own *Gangni* separate from that of the smiths, wear only large leaves and do not have the *Jela* stage (Fieldnotes 5: 35, 7: 16-17). It is worth remarking here another indication that smiths were wealthier than farmers, not just able to afford superior brasswares but also to own cloth gowns. We saw earlier, Bata from whom Chappel collected brass items recalled them being priced in gowns.

Very few of Chappel's informants were described as *Marus*. Apart from the woman from Uki who identified herself as *Marus*, and whose wooden figure (66.J11.720) he acquired, the

only others who self-identified to Chappel were the vendors Ardo Sambo, also chief of Cholli, and his paternal half-brother Samuel Cholli. The status of *Marus*, as well as the brass figures and knives that shared their name, seem all to have been perquisites of smiths, raising the question of whether the status itself had gained importance for the smiths as their products declined in importance and their communities ceased to be distinct residentially. More generally, Chappel's informants had a marked tendency to identify the objects they sold with status categories, primarily of age and gender, but also of smiths and non-smiths, and within the category of smiths, those who were and were not *Marus*. Even if participatory fieldwork might have discovered some flexibility in practice, this representation of their own society as based on status categories remains of interest.

Conclusion

In the course of collecting Verre objects, Chappel also gained insights into the society that had been their context. As all our sources concur, Verre societies were highly varied, and during the nineteenth century some of this variation must have related to the accommodations made by Verre communities with the ascendant Fulani powers. These are difficult, probably impossible, to reconstruct in detail now, but they must have differed for metalworkers and for farmers as categories, and within these according to their settlement in the hills or plains. The Emirate itself changed over the nineteenth century from what appear to have been inchoate early years, to later consolidation with the shift southwards of the competing Faro-Deo lamidates. The further changes that occurred during the colonial period could be documented better with access to the National Archives in Kaduna but, going on the basis of what we know, it seems that communities of smiths declined or indeed disappeared, and they did so in the course of movement of those communities still in the hills out into the plains.

Particular types of object are analysed closely in Part Two, so we offer only a few observations here on the likely historic changes in Verre production. Chappel's attention had been attracted in 1965 by the brass objects he encountered both in Bata hands and offered for wider sale, which had led him to collect brasswares directly from the Verre in 1966. This guiding interest cannot be ignored, but the overall composition of the collection is nonetheless interesting both in what it does and in what it does not contain. To start with an absence: despite Chappel's interest in decorated gourds (see Chappel 1977) being known to his contacts, not a single example was offered to him for purchase, an indication of how quickly an object in ample supply a half century earlier when Frobenius passed through could fall out of fashion. The evidence of decorated gourds survived only in brass skeuomorphs. All the types of brassware familiar from Frobenius's collection turn up in numbers in Chappel's collection. So, we find quantities of bells, differently designed bracelets and armcuffs, and an array of brass skeuomorphs (including those collected by Frobenius: daggers, fans, clapperless bells, crooks, drinking vessels). However, as well these object types also collected in the

earlier period, are some not found in Frobenius's collection, whether because of earlier oversight or later innovation we cannot know with certainty, although there are grounds to suggest there had been some innovation.

Among the most striking and numerous of these objects absent from the early colonial assemblage are the highly ornamented, prestige, brass hoes used for display and perhaps by dancers. Father Kevin Malachi Cullen had gifted one such to the then recently established Antiquities Section in 1946. Would the Frobenius expedition, or those intermediaries selling to them, have overlooked such distinctive objects had they been available less than a half century earlier? A frustratingly counter-factual question to which no definite answer can be made. A second 'missing' type of brass item is the pendant worn by women over their left hip in the form of an oversized brass bead of which Chappel collected numerous examples. This object shares its name with an ornament worn similarly that was composed of a globular cluster of cowries, of which it is a loose skeuomorph. There are good reasons to suppose these wealth objects were current between the wars given both the inclusion of a pendant in Cullen's 1946 donation and the likelihood that the two examples later entering the British Museum from the Wellcome Collection in 1954 may have been acquired two decades earlier.⁷ Again, if these pendants were as popular at the beginning of the twentieth century as they were between the World Wars, then why, so far as we know, was none collected then? Objects of personal adornment, like bracelets, armbands, waist and neck beads, appear to have bulked up over the same period, presumably on account of an increasing supply of brass raw material, but do these changes include the rise to popularity of this altogether new, bulky form of bead? Most intriguing are the brass figures we have discussed that make their first appearance in the later assemblage. Examples are scarce of these spindly, elongated figures, slightly stooped from the waist, with large, splayed hands and feet with spread fingers and toes. The wide feet allow the figures to be freestanding, which suggests that the hands were made similarly large to achieve symmetry. They are not obviously indebted to wooden figures collected in the early colonial period, or indeed those collected in the early post-colonial period. Notes accompanying Fr Kevin Malachi Cullen's 1946 donation describe brass figures bought by Mapeo Chamba for use in their cults of which he hoped to commission a copy. There is no evidence that he succeeded. Such a figure, about 8 inches in height, of a seated old woman with sagging breasts, was the central piece in the paraphernalia of the costliest of Mapeo Chamba matrilineal cults, *karbangi*. A rough sketch, confirming the written description, appeared in Cullen's field notes that were kept in the Mapeo Catholic Mission at the time of Fardon's fieldwork in 1976-78. Although Fardon attended the rituals of several *karbangi*, versions of which cult belonged to at least six Mapeo matrilineal clans, he saw no such figures, and nothing matching this description has subsequently become known to us from either public

⁷ These were accessioned in 1954 from the Wellcome Collection (where they were originally catalogued as 29095) and might have been in that collection since the 1930s, given that new materials were no longer acquired. Af1954, 23. 1492.a-b, brass cast pair of buttock ornaments, hollow and circular, threaded on a cord and hung from the waist made by the Verre. (a) 2.75 x 3.75 inches; (b) 1.75 x 2.75 inches.

or private collections. Found only among the Chamba living on the western side of the Alantika Mountains, *karbangi* was said by its adepts to derive its great power from combining the apparatuses of twelve other named cults. This synthesis of powers is likely to have occurred in reaction to the unsustainable proliferation of cults that accompanied the compaction of clans in the mountains, what Fardon analysed as a 'ritual involution' (1988). If the innovation of *karbangi*, or its proliferation by purchase between clans, occurred in the inter-war years, then the, so far as we know, unprecedented step of placing a brass figure at the centre of its apparatus, would have coincided with the expansion in some kinds of brass production and trade we are suggesting took place then.

Why might an expansion have occurred in the production of prestige objects that were desirable within local systems of ritual and status? Again, we can only speculate, but factors might include the relative peacefulness of between-the-wars colonial governance which allowed local farmers to exploit the plains without, by doing so, finding themselves obliged to transfer their surpluses to the Fulani. Brass raw material was also becoming more abundant, not just as scrap but with the withdrawal of manilla currency in 1948-49, so that potential demand for products was arose alongside potential capacity to meet it. And these economic developments were occurring while the impact of the Christian missions was felt only among the young, and among only some of them, and before the concerted drive to convert the non-Fulani of Adamawa to Islam which did not intensify until the early post-colonial period. Perhaps these conditions provided the grounds for a final efflorescence of Verre brass casting before local demand effectively collapsed by the 1960s.

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