

Surviving Works: context in Verre arts

Part Two, Chapter Five: Towards a Verre catalogue raisonnée

5.2: Personal Ornaments

Tim Chappel, Richard Fardon and Klaus Piepel

Special Issue

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

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

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

PART ONE CONTEXT

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

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

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

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

PART TWO ARTS

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

Chapter 5 Towards a *catalogue raisonnée*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

APPENDICES

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

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

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

Appendix 4 Leo Frobenius’s unpublished Verre ethnological notes and part inventory ([HTML](#) | [PDF](#))

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

5.2 Personal ornaments

Verre pleasure in personal ornaments in brass a century ago is attested in various ways, including the early statement by the Temples (drawing upon 'official reports' from Captain C.V. Boyle and Mr. G.W. Webster) that their women 'wear a lot of beads, bangles, and anklets of jingling brass' (1919: 359). The neck, waist, ankles and wrists of female wooden figures collected around the same time are encrusted with abrus seeds, the redness of the seeds echoing that of copper alloys. Brass personal adornments which are present in the small early colonial assemblage become numerous in the larger early post-colonial assemblage. The brass clapper bells surveyed already, which were among the most expensive of prestige goods and strongly associated with women, are related to other personal ornaments in ways we discuss further below.

Brass beads

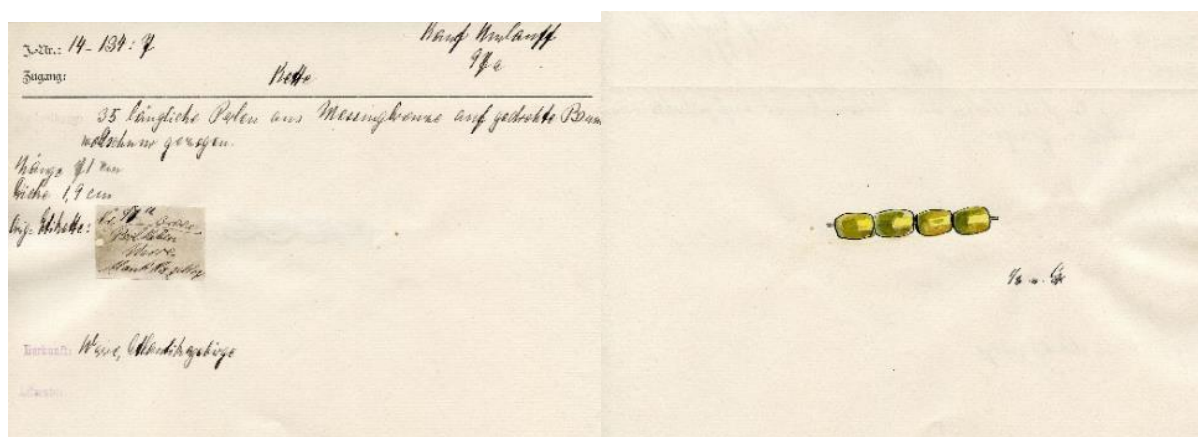
Beads, strung to be worn around the neck or waist, were the most commonly collected of items in brass. The overwhelming majority of them were accessioned without a Verre term, but, when they are named, we find one of two terms applied to them: *fɛ* (**345, 758-60, 763, 813**) or *mule* (**108**). While these terms might denote necklaces and waistbands, as we thought initially, we have come round to the opinion that they are more likely to distinguish beads that are smaller and more tubular in shape from those that are larger and more rounded, a distinction that substantially overlaps rather than coinciding exactly with which types of bead may be worn as necklaces and which as waistbands. In the Chappel collection, 23 sets of beads were accessioned as waistbands (**108, 158-59, 173, 276-77, 279, 286-87, 298-302, 320, 331-32, 345 fɛ, 356, 368-69, 684, 721**), and another seven as necklaces (**719, 758-60, 763, 813, 819**), though the distinction may not be clear cut, particularly where miniatures worn by children are concerned.

The earliest collected examples of strung, brass beads were two sets acquired by the Frobenius expedition; they are smaller and plainer than at least some of the beads Chappel collected in the mid-1960s. Beads emerging onto the market in subsequent post-colonial decades have generally become bulkier, and in some cases are decorated with striations or ornamented with protuberances. What looks like a trend might be accounted for most plausibly in terms of: adaption to the increased availability of copper alloy scrap, a reduced demand from Verre themselves for brasswares, and the development of modest wider demand attracted by the exotic.

The same period has seen a growth in the market offer of what we are calling 'oversized pendant beads'. While it is possible that such pendants were made before the mid-twentieth century, we have yet to find an example accessioned earlier than the two that entered the British Museum in 1954, although these might already have been in the Wellcome Collection for as long as two decades, or the Cullen donation to Lagos in 1946. The name for these outsized beads, *wela cheede*, is also that of a ball-shaped ornament with a surface of cowry shells, two examples of which we can illustrate from Chappel's Jos collection. It seems likely that the brass version replaced the ball of cowries as a display of wealth: *ceede* is a term

borrowed by Verre from Fulfulde in which it means both cowry and price/money. Oversized beads were worn by women on their left hip or buttock, the place where a baby would be carried supported by the left arm, or a brass clapper bell worn. Recall that the shoulder decoration of most TYPE 1 brass bells was described by the term *mule*, by which informants also designated the rounder type of beads used in heavy waistbands. Analogy is drawing together the beads on a woman's waistband, the *mule* pattern around the dome of a bell, and the same pattern repeated around the middle of an oversized bead, which also resembles two bell domes pointed away from one another and joined by a 'beaded' seam. Oversized pendant beads could be considered as hybridized skeuomorphs in their fusion of inspirations from clusters of cowries worn as wealth ornaments, and from waist beads, further channelled by the beads becoming the decorative patterning on bells, and the pendants being worn in the place of bells. Dancing with these symbolically suggestive objects on their hips, women would play on the female associations with the shape of cowries, the location of oversized beads or bells on the left side (contrasting with men's association with the right), and with the wealth of women's reproductive powers. Large beads must have enjoyed a considerable vogue, Chappel collected so many of them that he eventually had to refuse further offers to sell him more. Almost all were offered as singular objects, which is how we see them worn on his field photographs (see Chapter 3): as individual beads suspended on ribbons of cloth. A few were strung as the centrepieces of sets of beads, but these appear to have been smaller than the increasingly bulky, oversized pendant beads that have entered the international market in later decades. The pendant bead in these recent versions is typically undecorated other than at its 'beaded' edge and strung together with large, ornamented, round beads.

We know of two strings of brass beads collected by the Frobenius expedition. That acquired by the Hamburg Museum (**97a – KBA 02991**) consists of thirty-five, similarly sized, plain, oval beads, with an overall length is 80cm, made up of individual beads just under 2cm.

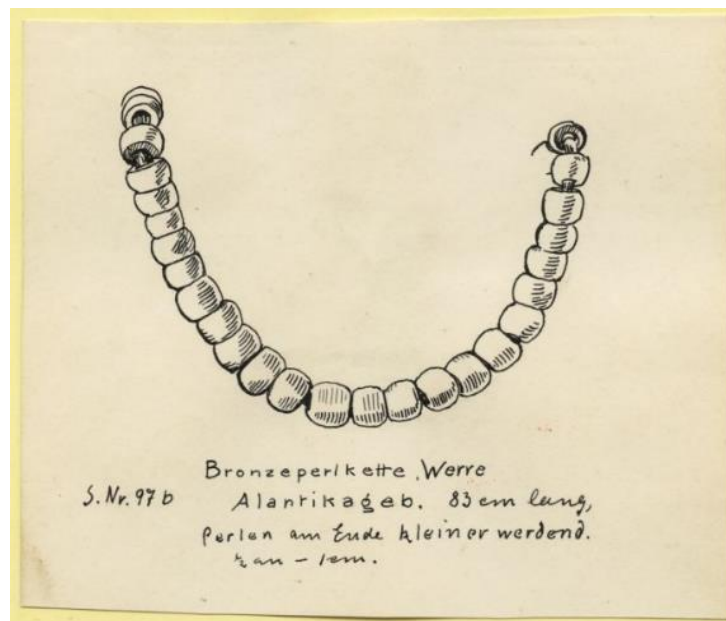


Hamburg 14.134.7

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

The whereabouts of the second set is currently unknown, but a surviving sketch (**97b – KBA 02990**) provides an overall length similar to the first set, specified as 83cm, but with beads at most half the length, suggesting that if it was beaded throughout its length, this set must have had at least double the number of beads of the first, although the artist has represented only

a section of them. Their tubular form is shared with the stone, ceramic or glass beads common throughout West Africa which presumably inspired them.

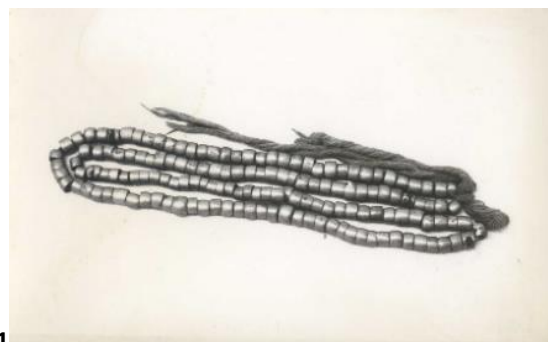


KBA 02990

We are well provided with photographs of the sets of beads Chappel collected and so feel able to state that their variety is slight, bounded by larger and smaller examples of *mule* and *fε* such as those below (for further illustrations, see Appendix 1).



721



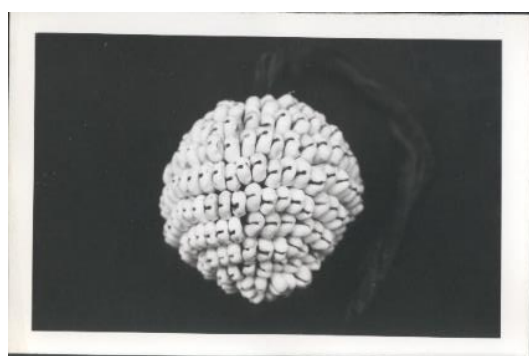
719

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

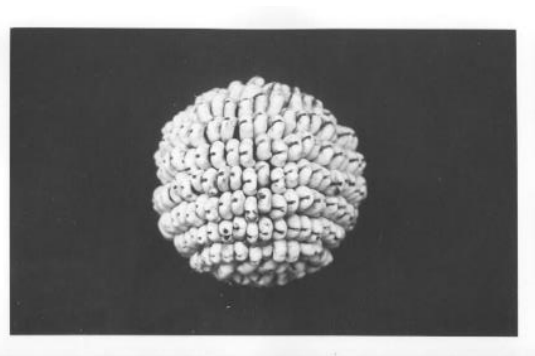
We are not able to illustrate the variant described by an informant as *mule werinis*, which apparently involved ornamental pieces threaded between round beads (684). We speculate that these might be beads with protuberances similar to pipe rings. Unlike the more ornate beads attributed to the Verre in later years, we note that the strung beads collected by Chappel do not obviously have surface patterns, nor are they embellished with protuberances. This suggests that the elaboration of later beads may have been driven by a non-local market.

The relationship between larger beads, *mule*, cowry ball pendant beads, *wela cheede*, and oversized brass pendant beads is easily appreciated once they are set alongside one another.

The resemblance is avowedly intentional. One of Chappel's informants claimed that only *Gazabi* had such cowry ornaments; the *Tibaai* saw *Gazabi* women wearing them at the ceremony of *Zangazaar* and decided to copy them in brass (Fieldnotes 7: 6).



343



412

We are unable to say much about relative dimensions from the photographic record, although we might note that **813** (below), which, unusually, is strung as a set, may be under 10cm in circumference to judge by the small beads that complete it. Otherwise, we only have images of outsized beads singly. The dimensions of the pair of 'buttock ornaments' acquired by the British Museum (Af1954,23.1492.a-b) from the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine (Wellcome Collection 29095) are recorded to be: a) $2\frac{3}{4} \times 3\frac{3}{4}$ inches/7x9.5cm, b) $1\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$ inches/4.5x7cm. The measurements are consistent with the estimated diameter of **813** and considerably smaller than those more recently offered on the international market, including a larger pendant bead strung with large round beads acquired by the British Museum in 1971 from a trader identified as A.U. Baba (Af1971,15.3).¹

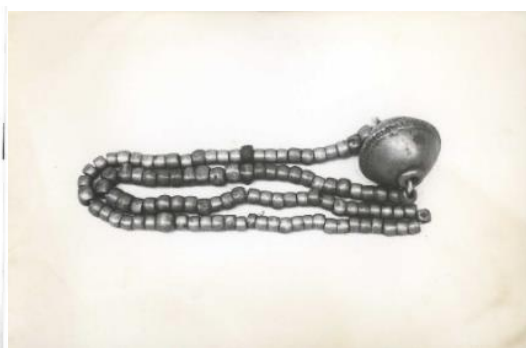
The method of attachment of pendant beads documented in field photographs is seen with **104** (below). These two outsized beads (**104** and **813**), together with **106** have a second band of decoration inside the row of *mule* around their edges.



104



106

813 with tubular beads *fɛ*

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

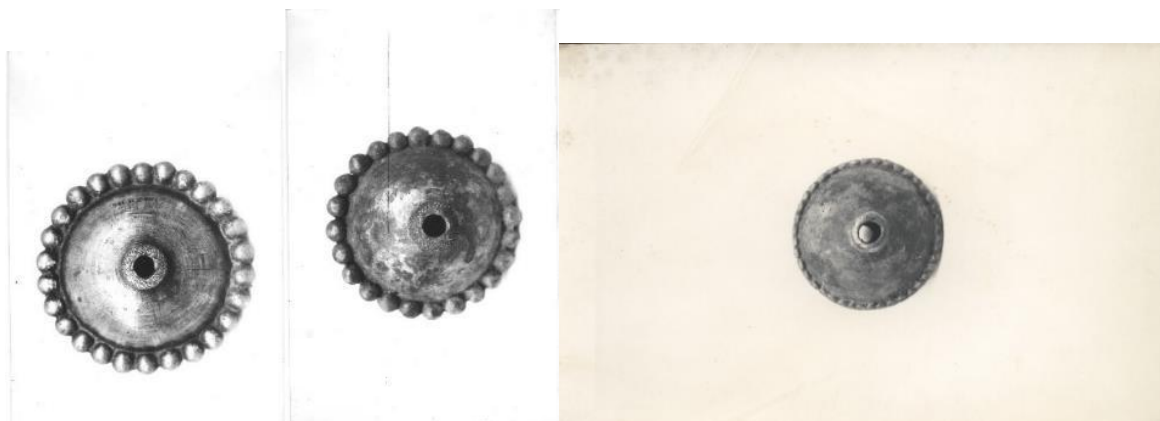
¹ For similar examples in the Tropen Museum Amsterdam, see AM-388-9 and AM-492-352, the second with two large beads: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/526338> <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/527516>

This second decorative band is also visible on what is apparently a miniature bead set designed for a child, although we cannot establish the origin of the photograph from Chappel's personal archive. At least one of the round beads (right, central) appears to be a crotal.



Numbered 985.7.26434 on reverse

Most pendant beads, including those transferred to the British Museum in 1954, lack additional decoration, as in the three Jos examples below.



106

164

165

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

While not conclusive, the evidence we have supports the view that pendant beads increased in size from the middle of the twentieth century, and that they were strung together with beads that themselves became larger and more ornate. We lack evidence to

decide whether this represents a late style preferred by Verre women, or the response of intermediary traders to their judgement about wider market demand.

Metal bands: cuffs, bracelets and rings

On the assumption that the terms used to name metal bands by Chappel's Verre informants indicated differences that were meaningful to them, our first task is to assess the range of three such terms: *pɔŋgan*, *wan*, and *maas*.

The term *pɔŋgan*, occasionally with other descriptors, occurs 24 times in the accession records of Chappel's collection (a further 15 accessions of bracelets, cuffs or rings are not given a Verre name).

430, 521-24, 563, 564, 592, 599-601, 606, 611-12, 644, 651-52 (*pɔŋgan suktunkak*),
656, 660, 681 (*sa'sai*), **737** (*Tibaai sa'sai*), **755, 762** (*sa'sai*), **774-75**

In one instance, there is additional specification of the permitted users (smiths, *Tibaai*) and in three cases, that one included, of decoration (with crotal beads, *sa'sai*). We have only two illustrations of these objects: a photograph of **563** shows it to be a small decorated, cylindrical bracelet remarkably like others collected by the Frobenius expedition a half century earlier; the sketch of **651** reveals it to be a large arm cuff similar to those Chappel collected from the Bata before beginning to visit the Verre, some of which might have been made by Verre smiths (see Appendix 1). While we cannot know definitely which of the remaining acquisitions belong to which type, it is more likely that crotal decoration would be welded to the central section of a cuff than to a bracelet (hence **681**, **737**, and **762** are probably cuffs), and given their much larger size, it also seems likely that cuffs were more expensive than all but the most intricate of bracelets (though it has to be admitted that price variation is not very marked among *pɔŋgan*). If the term *pɔŋgan* is to include both bracelets and the much larger cuffs, then it seems likely to have referred to the shared characteristic that these bands are cylindrical and rings, that is round in cross section.²

The second term, *wan*, occurs with at least 27 of the circular objects collected by Chappel. In the cases when we know what they looked like, they indeed differed from those named as *pɔŋgan* by being round in cross-section, which is to say by being rings rather than bands. These rings were made in iron and as well as in brass, and the term *wan* was also used of ivory bangles. In this respect, and on the limited basis of the instances we know about from Appendix 1, *wan* differs from *pɔŋgan* which occurs only of objects in brass. Personal ornaments make up the majority of the objects to which the name *wan* was applied, but the class included ring-shaped headloading pads, and the brass skeuomorphs of these used in

² Cuffs are not characteristically Verre, though those with extensive spiral decoration might be. Chappel collected at least 15 examples from Bata, see 65.J306: 222, 347, 350, 351, 373, 433-35, 443, 444, 445, 493, 494, 610, 611. They also occur in collections made from Mandara Mountain peoples, including Fali and Kapsiki. We note below that some cuffs were described as anklets on accession.

some ritual contexts instead of the mundane version to support a round-bottomed pot or bowl so that it stood upright.

Listing occurrences of the term *wan*, with variants and compounds, suggests that most of the variation may simply be a matter of inconsistency in transcription (including *wal*, *wan*, *wand*, and agreement with the qualifier for ‘brass’, *suktunu*, *suktundal*) which a Verre speaker would resolve quickly.

107 (*wal*), **179-85** (*wan*), **420** (*wand suktunu* – a brass pot ring), **489** (*maas wan bogorɔs* – women’s iron bracelet), **581-84** (*wal suktundal* – women’s brass ring), **605** (*wand suktundal* – brass pot ring), **617** (*wand’na* – men’s brass arm [*na*] ornament), **702 & 703** (*wan bi* – women’s arm band; **703** was photographed on three occasions pressed into use as a pot ring for accession photographs, from which we know it was cast in brass with the same prominent knobs on its outer edge that are identified as *mule* beads when they appear on bells and pendants), **812** (*wand na* – illustrated as an openwork manilla-shaped bangle).

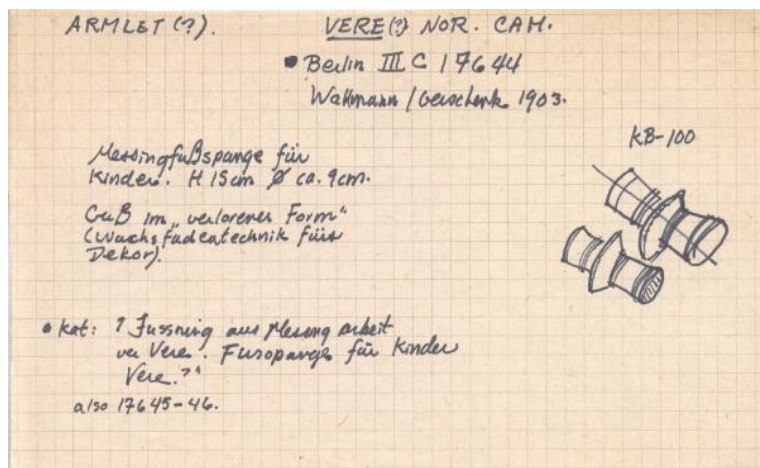
In another eight cases, a bracelet or bangle is identified in the accession record to be in ivory, with the observation that such items may not be of Verre manufacture: **631**, **653**, **659**, **693-5**, (both serrated for *Tibaai* and unserrated for *Gazabi*), **756**, **757**. We have illustrations of none of these.

The third term for circular ornaments, *maas*, seems, like *wan*, to name a ring, but to be restricted in its application to small rings. It occurs most frequently in the accession list applied either to the decorative rings that women added to their smoking pipes, or less commonly to finger rings. Other than adorning a tobacco pipe, we have no illustrative materials to assist identification. Some decorative pipe rings had protruding knobs, these were described as *deesire* (*s*), *deesirei* (*pl*) (**347**, **396**); beads similar to these are now found on the bulky waistbands offered on the international market, suggesting the possibility they have been repurposed or provided the model for later decorative beads.

In accession notes, rings called *maas* rings are specified to be in iron or brass. Iron: **177-8** *maas kulang* (**178** ‘with knob’), **190** *maas kulang*, **512-14** *maas* (three women’s little finger rings in iron). Brass: **347** *maas suktunjas*, **396** *maas kula suktunus*. In addition to these are the rings for which no Verre term was recorded: **275** (pipe ring in iron), **280-2** (pipe rings, material unspecified), **284-5** (pipe rings, material unspecified), **307-319** (pipe rings, material unspecified), **351** (mouthpiece for a pipe described as a ring), **357** (tobacco pipe together with brass ring), **363-6** (pipe rings, material unspecified), **402-4** (‘ornamental rings’).

Most ornamental bands, we may conclude, belong to one of three categories: *pɔngan* cylindrical bracelets and cuffs, *wan* larger rings (not including the largest pot rings), and *maas* small rings. Unfortunately, very few illustrations of the numerous pieces acquired by Chappel are available to us.

We have found three examples of cuffs in early colonial period collections. The earliest, gifted by the colonial officer Waldmann to the Berlin Museum, is described as a 'Fussspange' for children.



Nancy Maas note

Berlin III C 17644 (Maas archive)

The central ornamental band appears to consist of tiny crotals, perhaps functional rattles but if not then at least copying the distinctive opening splits of crotal bells. The accession note for this object, like the next, describes it as a child's anklet, and given a diameter of 9cm this may have to be considered as a plausible alternative, or addition, to our default description of such pieces as arm cuffs.

The British Museum's similar but plainer version, derived from Olive MacLeod Temple's 1911 travels, is also described as an 'anklet (with bells) made of brass'; the crotals in this case are evidently functional, and the copper brass alloy is unusually dark.



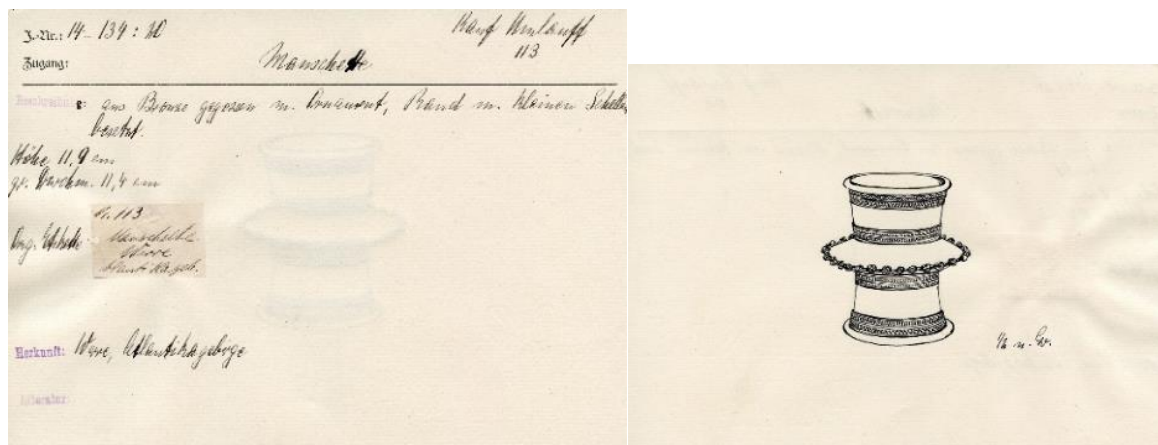
British Museum Af1913,1013.22

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

The similarity between the Berlin cuff, also with a band of crotal bells, and that illustrated from the Frobenius expedition is striking (Frobenius Archive – **KBA 02988**), although this piece is slightly shorter (12cm). Rather than an anklet, it is described as a man's cuff [*Manschette*] in brass. It was acquired by the Hamburg Museum (14.134.20) via the dealer Umlauff in July 1914.



KBA 02988



Hamburg 14.134.20

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

Although differing from these three early colonial examples by the absence of crotal bells, the cuff donated in 1905 to the Braunschweig Museum by the German colonial officer Strümpell (*Handmanschetten*, Hecht 1968: 130 & 141, **VW 4.0-40/14**) displays four bands of half spirals within borders which we know to be characteristic of much Verre brasswork (the eight other arm bands donated together with this one, although not illustrated, are described as having a side opening, for which we do not have precedents in the Verre corpus (**VW 4.0-40/13a-h**)). Its decoration resembles that of Chappel's **65.J306.444** which was collected from Bata though not necessarily made there. The overall form does differ slightly in the cuffs being

flared and terminating in rings (see also **65.J306.73** for another, slightly different, instance of four bands of spiral decoration).



Braunschweig VW 4.0-40/14



65.J306.444

A third example can be illustrated from the collection of the Sudan United Mission, currently in Aarhus.



SUM

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

The wide distribution of these kinds of closed cuffs might be explicable by Fischer's reference, cited by Glar, to a pair of them (1987, figure 100) being bracelets of a kind given by the Fulani to their slaves to wear in war. As Glar further notes, this reported use is contrary to Wenté-Lukas's contention that such cuffs were worn by women. Glar's illustrations (2012: 13 'Stulpen', object numbers 9-12) of cuffs in a catalogue of Kapsiki works suggests either that Verre wares were traded widely or else that some of the cuffs cast by Kapsiki were indistinguishable from those made by Verre, down to the penchant for half spiral decoration (2012: 13, 9-10).

Another close convergence between pieces collected in the early colonial and early post-colonial periods is apparent from the next series of *pɔngan*. Frobenius acquired three bracelets of the same design but differently sized. We know the first only from its archival illustration (KBA 02941) but its design with two spiral motifs reappears on another bracelet now in Dresden's museum (33647), while a third, this time with four spirals, entered the Hamburg Museum (14.134.180). The three share a diameter measurement between 8-9cm.



Even from an overexposed and out of focus contact print, it is evident that **66.J11.563**, acquired for Chappel by the Village Head of Cholli, and identified as a woman's *pɔngan*, belongs in the same group.



66.J11.563

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

The categories of *wan* and *maas* are more difficult to illustrate. The only photographed examples of large rings identified as *wan*, in the Jos collection are two solid rings – **605** (see also **538** and **575**) and **703** (see also **546** & **802**) – serving as pot stands (although a dedicated pot stand would be termed *kal*); and an untypical openwork manila, which may not be a Verre casting although collected from them.



623 on ring 605



516 on ring 703



812

We are even less well served for the smaller rings, *maas*, for which we have no accession photographs at all. Two examples may be seen, admittedly indistinctly, placed at the centre front of the plinth, as well as mounted on the tobacco pipes, in this detail from the 1967 Jos display case.



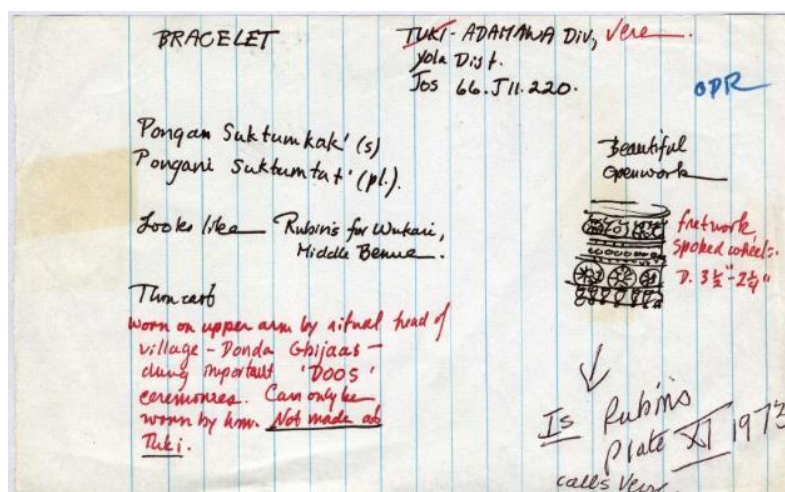
(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

Finally, we need to remark a few examples that do not fit readily into our account thus far of the three categories of circular ornament.

The most exceptional of these items is another openwork bracelet in brass, quite different from **812**, with two rows of suspended crotal beads (**66.J11.220**) for which a local term, *pat jangbi*, was elicited during Chappel's final check of materials with his main informants in December 1966. There is no other occurrence of the term and it does not correspond to that noted by Nancy Maas's during her research on the Jos collection (and its accession records) which is simply the usual term for a cylindrical bracelet in brass, *pangan suktunkak*. Whatever its name, the quality of casting skill needed to make this piece is striking. The wheel motif is found in castings from further west, and Maas notes that the bracelet was acquired in the village of Tuki but not made there. For the time being, we conclude that this piece (like **812**) might be evidence for wider regional trade, perhaps from the Tiv, or else for a discontinued Verre casting tradition.



Rubin 1973, Plate XI



Maas note

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

Assuming that the recorded terms are the same,³ several objects put in question our suggestion that *wan* and *maas* can be distinguished by their larger and smaller sizes. Both are accessioned as iron bracelets despite the term *maas* being used of them: **489** *maas wan bogorɔs* and **490** *maas yaaks*, respectively for women and men. were both accessioned as 'bracelet's but have the term *maas* in their Verre names. It seems more than possible that *maas wan bogorɔs*, includes a variant transcription of *bogarus*, elsewhere recorded to mean an iron leg rattle. The male counterpart, *maas yaaks*, probably includes a variant transcription of *yaaks*, initiate. Without knowing something about these objects, for instance whether they had attachments in the form of rings, further speculation is impossible.

³ We remind the reader that great claims are not being made for the transcription used here which entirely lacks tones.

The term *maas* also occurs twice in relation to tobacco pipes which, as we have noticed already, were ornamented with additional rings by women who could afford to do so. Although collected in numbers, we are not well-supplied with photographs of pipes, other than the three in the Jos display cabinet, there is an image from the Rubin archive which seems to belong to his Jos series. The upper example is probably **645**, *maas kulang*, an iron pipe with a frontal protrusion and an upper ornament that may be some, albeit unidentifiable, animal; the lower, brass, pipe with a stand and small phallic protrusion might be any one of several collected.



A second occurrence of the term *maas* occurs with **809**, *maas kula*, brass pipe bowl. This is described as a pipe for *Gazabi*, or farmers, and is decorated with a rope-like rim around the bowl and a frontal ornament which accurately represents the theranthropic (fused animal-human) head of the masquerade of the neighbouring Chamba with its distinctive bushcow horns (Fardon 1991, 2007). The accession note further associates it with the most senior of elders, and with the cult instruments of *Do'os*, but that is as far as we are able to explicate an intriguing object. It is not evident from the images, which are indistinct, how it would function as the bowl for a tobacco pipe given the apparent absence of any opening to insert a pipe stem.

**809**

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

A final loose end that might be resolved by Verre investigators involves an additional term for some type of bracelet, *kambu*. This occurs twice in relation to objects of which we have no images: **556**, a men's bracelet in brass, *kambu suktunjas*, was said by its vendor to have been bought at Wom, which would raise the possibility of the variant term being in a dialect of Chamba Leko. However, the second occurrence of *kambu*, **566**, a men's bracelet of unspecified material, was acquired by a different vendor at Jili. The two items were not sold to Chappel by the same vendor, precluding the term recorded being idiosyncratic to the seller, although it might have been elicited during Chappel's final check with selected informants in late 1966.

While listing personal ornaments, before moving on to those very specifically associated with ritual contexts, we should note the presence in the Jos collection of a variety of smaller items we are unable to illustrate, including decorations for the ears and hair.

This work is copyright of the Authors. It is published under a Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) that allows others to share the work with an acknowledgement of the work's authorship and initial publication in this journal. Images: copyright of the institutions as stated (all rights reserved).

Cette œuvre est mise à disposition selon les termes de la Licence Creative Commons Attribution (4.0 International <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.fr>) qui permet à d'autres de partager le travail avec une reconnaissance de la paternité du travail et de la publication initiale dans ce journal. Images: copyright des institutions comme indiqué (tous droits réservés).