

Surviving Works: context in Verre arts

Part Two, Chapter Five: Towards a Verre catalogue raisonnée

5.4: Hoes and daggers

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5.4 Hoes and daggers

What the crook, a modified skeuomorph of the sickle was to the male initiate, the hoe and dagger were to mature women and men. The hoe is associated with reproduction and fertility; the knife with the violence of cutting; and the crook mediates the two symbolically. Or, at least, this unnuanced symbolic reading is the best we can derive from relatively thin sources. While we have indications of the importance of the crook at initiation, and we know that initiates, if they had access to one, might wear a brass dagger at the dances preceding the actual circumcision, none of our sources provides much indication of the uses of prestige hoes. Men apparently owned and displayed them as an indication of wealth, but did women display or dance with them? We can cite only one informant on this subject citing a particular occasion or form of women's dance (see below).

In formal terms, as skeuomorphs respectively of sickles and hoes, crooks and brass hoes have similarities: both are long-handled, curved farming instruments, and their decoration and occasional ornamentation also resemble one another. When brass hoes were displayed on the person, they are said to have been hooked over the shoulder, rather than behind the neck like crooks. As we shall see, there is also a suggestion of formal differences between women's and men's brass hoes, or at least of there being differences that are interpreted as gendered by some informants, all of which gives the impression of a symbolic conversation that we hear only in snatches going on between the properties of age and gender invested in these devices. Brass-handled daggers, with brass scabbards, while also prestige skeuomorphs, remain functional: their iron blades able to cut or stab like other knives, although they would presumably be used more frequently in ceremonial than mundane contexts. Daggers are decidedly male accoutrements, worn on the right hip, or suspended down the back of young men undergoing the ceremonies preparatory to initiation.

As he did for crooks, Chappel collected numerous examples of brass hoes and knives, but we are similarly not well provided with illustrations of them. The early colonial assemblage contributes only a single example of a brass dagger and no brass hoes. Does this imply brass hoes were an innovation? Another question we cannot answer definitively. James Wade (personal communication) has documented brass hoe casting among the Fali, and Fischer has attributed dancing hoes to the Kapsiki and Daba (Fischer 1987: numbers 65-69) which suggests a Highland distribution, which is also shared by brass-handled daggers. Nonetheless, in the light of the field evidence to be examined below, at least some Verre brass hoes and daggers seem sufficiently distinctive to risk turning to otherwise unprovenanced examples of both to provide additional illustrations.

Hoes

Agricultural hoes, *tul* (s), *tula* (pl), can be specified as iron-bladed, *tul furan* (s), *tula furani* (pl), though this would hardly be necessary unless in a context when they might be confused with brass hoes, *tul suktundal* (s), *tula suktuni* (pl). Chappel collected 18 brass ceremonial hoes, as well as two mundane iron farming hoes, for Jos Museum, but the only indications we have of their appearance, aside from his own acquisition notes, are a couple of sketches by Nancy Maas, a photograph of the two examples included in a cabinet of Adamawa metalworks displayed at the Museum in 1967, and a photograph from Arnold Rubin's archive of one Chappel's acquisitions which is not identifiable without an accession number. Chappel additionally collected a double-bladed, ceremonial iron hoe (*tul furundal* (s), *tula foni* (pl)), probably the example exhibited in the same Jos cabinet. It is a sufficiently longstanding object for one very similar to have been collected by the Frobenius expedition in 1911. Brass skeuomorphs of such double hoes are also found: one, for which we lack accession details, probably in the Jos Museum but not collected by Chappel, and another in a private collection.

Brass hoes are variably close to their originals. Farming hoes are made in two parts. A socket in the hoe's iron blade grips the point of a wooden handle that has been carved from a robust branch forked at a slightly acute angle; thanks to this elbow, when the hoe is wielded, its blade chops into the soil.



KBA 06403

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

A minority of brass hoes mimic this mechanism closely, the blade and handle being cast separately and then hafted, either by pressure or with a rivet. Others, although made in a single casting, represent the joint of the farming hoe in raised relief and the internal volume of the socket by a swelling in the blade. In many single-piece castings, however, this mechanism is indicated only sketchily or not at all. While it is unwise to be too definite when reliant on photographs, it seems that the brass hoes that are less faithful to their originals may also show less wear, and additionally may be covered in a more uniform surface

patterning of spirals. If this supposition is borne out, then it would suggest a mimetic drift from brass hoes based on a wooden and iron prototype or 'original', to brass hoes that were copies of other brass hoes, and that increasingly shared a repertoire of decorations common across a range of brass objects.

To start with our very few provenanced examples: the handles of brass hoes vary in form, some having more pronounced curves or more angular elbows, as well as in decoration, but they are relatively similar in length (roughly 25 to 30cm). The handles end in a knob, often but not invariably solid, which, by analogy with a similar device on circumcision crooks, may have phallic significance. Surface decoration of handles predominantly takes two forms: banding that most probably represents whipped cord bindings on a wooden original (called *nengtabungs* in the fieldnotes quoted below) and the ubiquitous brass spirals arranged in rows. A minority of decorated handles have additional ornaments: either horns that project from their elbow, effectively turning the angle of the hoe handle into an animal's head – identified as a reedbuck in some of the examples collected by Chappel – or a head placed on the back of the handle with sweeping horns that attach to it forming a loop. This latter is an ornament we have already seen on the back of a single brass crook.

The blades of brass hoes likewise differ in their shape and decoration. Some of this difference may be gendered. Chappel's most extensive fieldnote records his informants' views, and a specific reference to a dance with hoes.

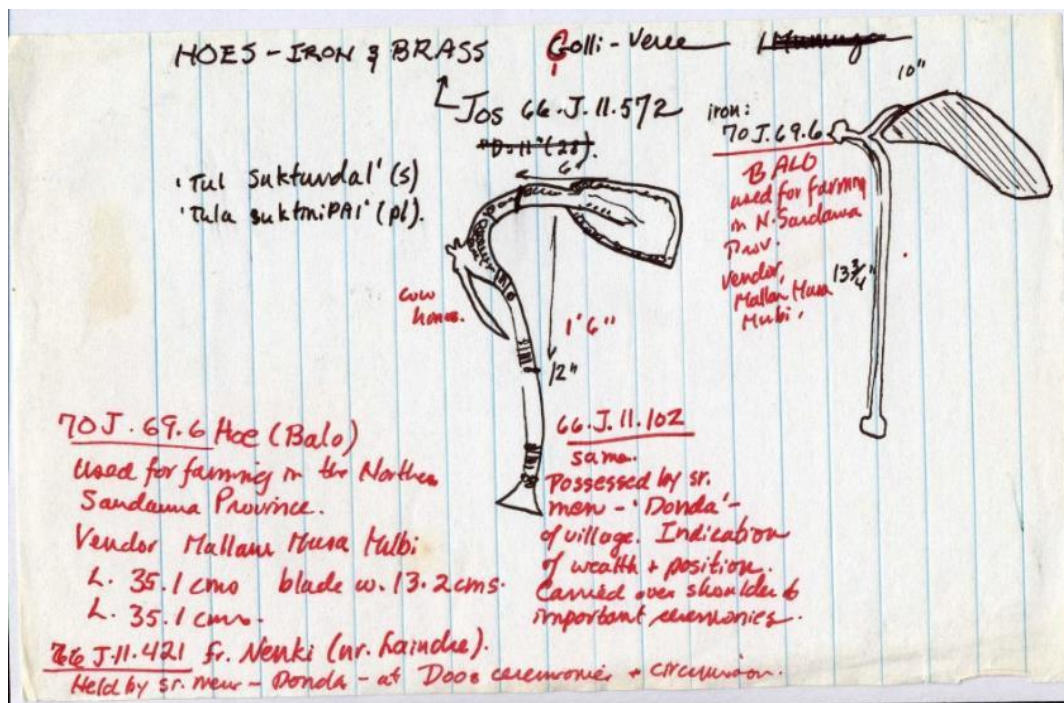
Gazabi [hoes] distinguished by shape of blade, also decoration, lack of [sketch of spirals] – instead *nengtabungs*. All for women only. Used for *Wala* dancing. Held in right hand. Only *baaba* [senior age grade] can own one: acquired through husband. Cost: 2 goats. [With reference to] **595** & **562**, commissioners will ask for *kwantaraŋi* [reedbuck] and most bring samples of what they want. Brasscasters do not have samples from which commissioners can choose. Those [hoes] for *Tibaai* are also for women only. Shape of blade [different]; also handles rather shorter. *Gazabi* prefer long handles. No distinguishing terms for the differently shaped blades. Only time used (with *pŋgan*) during *Seerkaana*. Cost: 2 goats. *Pŋgan* worn on left arm, *tul* held in right. Fieldnotes 7: 387-8.

Chappel recorded an informants' more specific view, offered in relation to **520**, that rounded hoe blades were for women, while squared-sided blades were for men. If his informant meant that all four corners of a man's blade had to be square, then we might point to the example placed at the front of the Jos display cabinet. But it is not clear this was the sense intended. The informant more probably referred to the orientation of blades: the blades of most examples we can illustrate are either rounded at the top and flat at the bottom, or else and contrarily, flat at the top and rounded at the bottom, which is closer to the shape of a socketed farming hoe. Chappel was told of **102**, the first he acquired, that a rich farmer might own many brass hoes, displaying them as a sign of wealth and prestige during his son's initiation. Hence, brass hoes may function as a representation of male wealth, although the chain of references may be predicated on an association between multiple hoes and polygyny: multiple wives providing the capacity to farm productively. In the absence of

detailed ethnography, we can only suggest associations that would merit exploration and comparison in the light of wider regional culture.

On one occasion, an informant identified a hoe as being specifically for *Tibaai* rather than *Gazabi* (smiths and not farmers), presumably on the same basis in this case as for bells: that it was larger and/or more elaborately decorated on its handle and blade.

The brass hoe sketched by Maas as **66.J11.572**, but which we are assuming to be **562**, illustrates many of the features discussed.¹ Maas's sketch suggests a socketed hoe, though it is not noted to be in two pieces, with a 12inch handle and a 6inch blade (c. 30 & 15cm). The blade has a rounded top and straight bottom edge with border ornamentation around all its edges. The handle is additionally ornamented with banding and has a horned creature below its hooked elbow, forming a loop identified by Maas as cow horns. Chappel's notes suggest it is more likely to be a reedbuck. The straight bottom edge would, following Chappel's informant, suggest a man's prestige hoe, and Maas does draw comparison with **102** and **421** both accessioned as male elders' accoutrements. Maas's iron hoe comparison (right) is from further north (the vendor coming from Mubi), so while formally striking, this is not the kind of farming hoe in use by Verre. That said, however, it does bear similarities to the double iron hoe collected from Verre (see below).

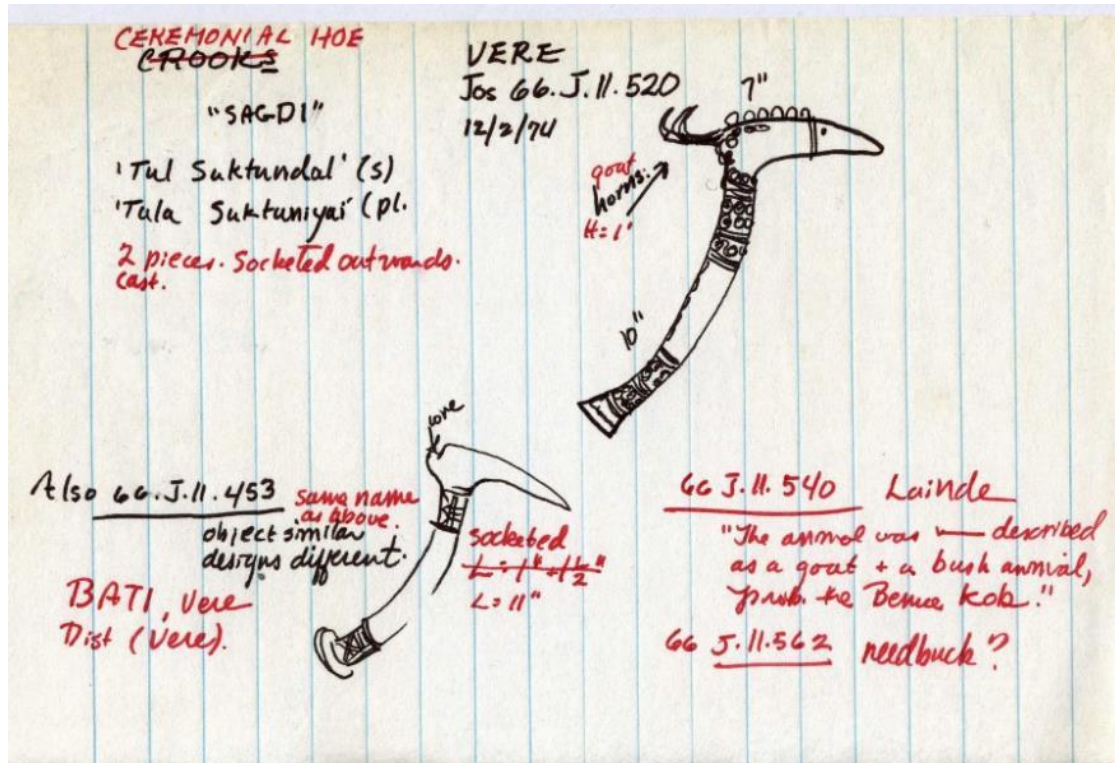


(Clicking on the image will open a higher quality version)

Thanks to another illustration of their handles by Nancy Maas, we know that the brass hoes **453** and **520** definitely were cast in two pieces, with animal horns at their elbows. The

¹ According to Chappel's notes, **572** should be a dagger, so there has been a slip in numbering somewhere. Not knowing where, it is simplest for us to assume the sketch is of **562** until this can be checked.

blades were not illustrated. The handle of **453** is 11 inches (28cm) with decorative bands; that of **520** is 10 inches (25.5cm), decorated with spirals and with horns annotated as belonging to a goat hence appropriate for a woman, whereas a man's hoe would have ram's horns. Other examples with horns are noted on the sketch as **540**, a ram according to Chappel, or possibly 'Benue kob' (more likely reedbuck) according to Maas's quotation, and **562**, also possibly a reedbuck.²



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

In addition to these three, another 15 brass hoes were collected by Chappel for which we lack illustration: **102**, **305** (with square end), **421** (held by senior men at ceremonies, Maas note), **429**, **434**, **435**, **436**, **452**, **540** (man's hoe with horns of a goat or Benue kob/reedbuck), **595** (horns, possibly reedbuck), **641**, **673** (price suggests brass but not explicitly noted as such), **688**, **768**, **800** (for *Tibaai* women). A photograph from Arnold Rubin's archive shows one of these, but its characteristics – cast in two parts, a decorated blade with a flat bottom edge, bands of decoration on the handle but no additional ornament – exclude only the three among those enumerated which we know to have had horns, hence we cannot identify it with an accession number.

² Herbert illustrates a Verre brass hoe, then in the Ernst Anspach collection (length 30.7cm), which is described as having an antelope head modelled at its elbow. The horns are swept back from the head to attach to the sides of the handle (1984b: 23 figure 39).



Arnold Rubin UCLA

As well as two farming hoes in iron (**306**, **505**), Chappel also collected an iron double hoe (**495**), which is similar in conception to that we know from a sketch following the Frobenius expedition. We do not know whether the example Chappel collected is that pictured in a photograph from the Arnold Rubin archive, or another displayed on a plinth in the Jos Museum as part of the 1967 installation, which has a distinctive knob at the end of its handle.



Arnold Rubin Archive UCLA

KBA 10937

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



Central vitrine of Jos display cabinet 1967 – double hoe-bladed standing on plinth; brass hoes below

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

While it is difficult to make a three-way comparison, it looks as if the double hoe in the Jos display cabinet resembles the Frobenius hoe more closely than that in Rubin's photograph: the handles of both end in a knob; they apparently lack spirals at their elbows; and, although it is difficult to be certain from photographic evidence, the hoe blades appear to be flanged rather than socketed.

Two brass hoes are visible to the left and right foreground of the Jos display cabinet (above). That on the left shares some similarities with Maas's illustration (labelled **572** but likely to be **562**, see above), but it has more extensive spiral surface decoration of the handle than her sketch which shows bands. Reedbuck horns are also noted for **595** making that an identification worth checking. The hoe on the right has the square-sided blade described in accession notes as characteristic of men's hoes (**305** is specifically noted to have this feature). Given our crumbs of evidence, identifying numbered accessions is largely guesswork, but we can take away a sense of the variety of cast brass hoes that helps us address less well-provenanced, or wholly unprovenanced examples in other collections.

We turn initially to the collection assembled by missionaries of the Sudan United Mission because we know it was made, like Chappel's, in the early post-colonial period, mostly from traders visiting their station at Numan among the Bachama, or from pieces that came via a mission station at Tantile among the Koma of the Alantika Mountains. The collectors, and the years they were active in Nigeria, are noted below when, thanks to Elisabeth Holtegaard's documentation, they are known.

Two examples of two-piece castings share some characteristics: the handles, with pronounced elbows, have restrained bands of decoration which probably reproduce cord whipping, and solid end knobs; spiral decoration is confined to a single band around the edge of the hoe blade. One of the blades has a lower flat edge and curved upper edge, and this is reversed for the other, a difference we have noted that one informant of Chappel's associated with use by men and women.



SUM Jens Hebsgaard (1962-72 & 1978-82)



SUM Aarhus Collection

There are several single-piece castings in the SUM collection, two of them with a loop. Below is a hoe cast in a single piece with: a comparatively square blade, a loop at its elbow (perhaps in the form of the head of a reedbuck), and its handle entirely covered in spiral decorations, which continue around the edge of its blade.



SUM Kristen and Esther Vestergaard (1967-74)

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

Although not easily discerned, there appears to be a similar loop on the left-hand of the two examples below. That on the right looks to have the more finely cast handle with decorative bands and a solid end knob.



SUM Olga Grening (1950-78)

Two further examples of single piece castings have features that may be characteristic of later castings, some of them apparently made by the Koma; these include some, or all, of: hollow end knobs, pervasive spiral decoration, and scant attention to the socketing of the 'original' or prototype farming hoe. We suggested earlier that these might be interpreted as copies of brass skeuomorphs, than themselves skeuomorphs of the iron and wood prototype or 'original'.



SUM Aase Kristiansen (1958-83)



SUM Kristen and Esther Vestergaard (1967-74)

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

We can supplement what we know from the Jos and SUM collections with some examples from public and private collections, auction houses and galleries.

Single hoe castings with either horns or loop



Amyas Naegele Gallery, New York



Auction: Bonhams New York 14 November 2013, lot 185 (right)
(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

Two-piece hoe castings

The example below appears to have been cast in two pieces and has the curved blade that Chappel's informant identified as characteristic of women's hoes.



Charles Jones Gallery

An example from the Piepel collection is a particularly faithful skeuomorph of the agricultural prototype, but the shapes of both the handle and blade suggest the likelihood of it being a Kapsiki casting. We include it here for comparison.



Collection of Klaus Piepel – disassembled showing front and back of hoe blade
(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

Single-piece hoe castings

Among single piece castings with extensive spiral decoration, which are the commonest form, blades with a curved bottom edge appear more often than those with a flat edge.



Mark Clayton Collection
Galerie Frank van Craen, ex Herbert F. Rieser



Dallas Museum of Art 2013.37
David T. Owsley via Alconda-Owsley Foundation



Amyas Naegele Gallery, New York



Three examples: Klaus Piepel Collection
(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

Single piece castings with extensive spiral decoration and flat edged blades (see also, SUM Grening above).



Barry Hecht Collection



Bob Boyd Collection

Two examples of brass, double-bladed hoes, apparently produced as single pieces with loops on their handles are known to us. The photograph (below left) was provided to the American collector of Benue Art, Barry Hecht, by Arnold Rubin and seems to belong to the set of those he took in the Jos Museum. However, Tim Chappel did not collect a brass double hoe, and so if the piece is in Jos Museum it must have reached there by some other route. On the right is a piece in Hecht's own collection resembling the piece from Jos but with a coating of verdigris, copper acetate, formed by exposure to damp or water over a period of about a decade, although this process may be hastened chemically. It is unlikely this crust would have been allowed to form when a piece was in use, given that copper alloys are valued in Africa for their bright reddish character.



Jos Museum photograph (Arnold Rubin via Barry Hecht)



Barry Hecht Collection

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

Daggers/short swords and knives

Because they had the iron blade of a mundane dagger or knife, brass-handled daggers were more prosaically serviceable possessions than brass hoes. This apparently banal observation has a helpful corollary; daggers and their scabbards have evidence of intensive

use: blades may be broken or reduced to stumps by repeated sharpening, ornamental bosses may have detached and be missing, scabbards have lost their daggers, and daggers their scabbards, and so forth. An investigator with access to the many examples of brassware collected by Chappel might feel inclined for this reason to begin with daggers, since they would offer some grounds for guessing relative age. Because our investigations are restricted to surviving fieldnotes and a few images, this is not an avenue open to us. Of Chappel's thirty-eight items accessioned as daggers/short swords or knives, thirty were described as brass daggers; two of them lacked their original scabbards (**360, 608**); while there are two scabbards missing their original knives (**574, 674**). Another three daggers are listed without specification of their material, though the price paid for them is some indication of their style and whether they were in brass. We have photographs of very few of these, but their descriptions, and Nancy Maas's sketches, are suggestive of similarities with examples photographed in other museum and private collections that provide us with a basis to suggest a provisional typology.

Verre naming is another indication of significant differences among daggers and knives. In distinguishing daggers or short swords from knives we are following the accession record and not Verre naming practices. Two-edged blades that seemed relatively large, typically those with brass handles (*do'gur suktundak*), were accessioned as short swords. Smaller cutting instruments, that were either entirely iron or had wooden handles (*do'gur rap*) were accessioned as knives **411, 671, 710**. And there is a fuzzy area between these where only seeing the objects would help us to understand how a distinction was being made.

Verre informants called all these cutting instruments *wək* (s), *wəm* (pl); when circumstances called for it, they might distinguish between those with brass handles and scabbards (*wək suktundak* (s), *wəm suktunmam* (pl)), and those in iron (*wək dengbur* (s), *wəm dengbi* (pl)). In common with other objects, the more and less valued versions might be described as suited for use by *Tibaa*i or *Gazabi* (smiths and non-smiths). Other distinctions recorded among daggers and knives describe ornaments or decoration, which are occasionally related to specific uses. The overall variety suggests a playfulness in design as both those who bought these prestige objects and those who made them strove for distinction.

The decorative patterns remarked overlap those described already for brass bells, which make sense given decoration was readily copied between cast objects.

wək japs (s), brass dagger with a decorative motif resembling crocodile scales **676**; *wək ja* (s), brass dagger with the pattern, *ja*, like the plaited grass of a *zana* mat **577, 618, 669, 690**.

The names of several of the ornaments are cited in the names given by informants to the daggers.

wék ga-ga (s), **441, 464, 710** ceremonial knife used for *Do'os* ceremonies – *ga-ga* refers a double-spiral handle ornament when applied to an iron knife, and additionally to overall spiral patterning in brass; *wék ga-ga Tibaai*, a brass knife with spiral decoration and for smiths **710**; *wék ga-ga deesire* (s), a brass dagger with both double spirals and knob-like handle projections.

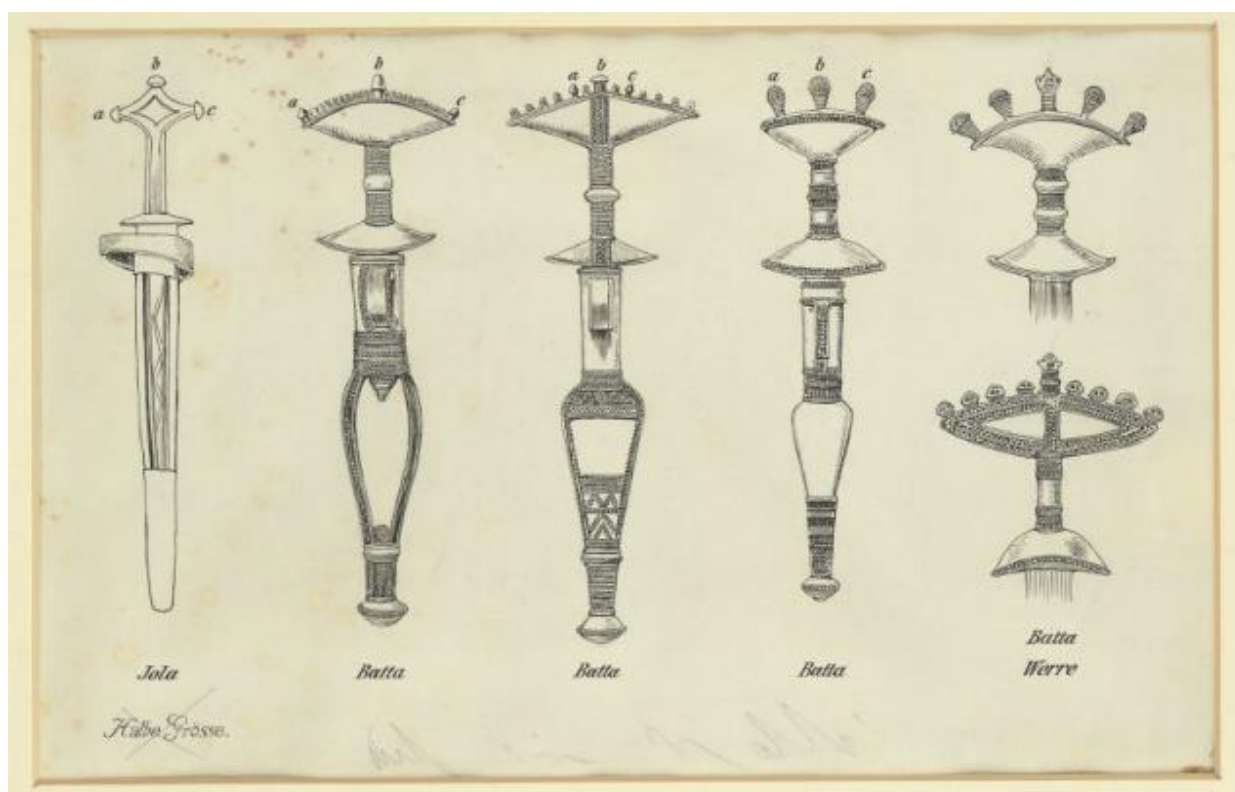
wék wan marus (s), brass dagger with an anthropomorphic head at the centre of its boss, **609, 619, 678**; further examples more specifically noted as a bearded man **534** and as a woman with distinctively plated hair, *wék sokol* (s) **610**. Other central ornaments are identified as animals, a Senegal gazelle **454** or goat **572**.

Other terms appear in their further descriptions, which may note the presence of crotals (*sa'sai*), or ornaments resembling a medicine container (*porg*) **577, 618**, or a funnel form like that of the ceremonial helmet for *Gazabi* initiates (*tongta*) **608, 676**.

The most prestigious of Verre daggers share features with the earliest example to be accessioned: that collected by the Frobenius expedition and now in the Dresden Museum (Accession Number: 33691). No original sketch of the entire dagger survives in the Frobenius Institute archive, but the number 112 appears on the Dresden accession card, which places it securely within the list of brasswares itemized by the expedition (see Chapter 2). The dagger entered the Dresden collection by purchase from the dealer Umlauff in September 1915. But for its enlarged, decorated, and ornamented pommel, the knife handle would be a near skeuomorph of its wooden counterpart. The pommel is ornamented with eight small crotals arranged symmetrically, four on each side of a central anthropomorphic boss, making nine ornaments in all. This hilt must be that at the bottom right of a diagram of six daggers identified as 'Jola', 'Batta' and 'Werre' in a plate that also illustrates a sword collected in Yola, and four daggers collected from the Bata. The Verre example differed in one formal respect from the four Bata hilts in having an inverted quillon (the cross-piece between the hand and the blade). In other respects, the resemblances with the daggers collected from Bata are close, something that would be explained readily if the Bata were acquiring prestige daggers from Verre smiths and casters. If the comparative illustration was based on original sketches that were not subsequently returned, that might account for their absence from the Frobenius archive. A dimension of 48cm (19 inches) appears alongside the Dresden accession record for the dagger in its scabbard, which is probably towards the higher end of sheathed lengths.



Dresden Museum 33691



EBA-B 00696

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

Quite how many of the daggers Chappel collected shared some of the characteristics of the Frobenius dagger cannot be established definitively. But we do possess some illustrations, as well as the evidence of purchase prices on which to base an estimate.

A photograph in the Arnold Rubin archive portrays a hilt with some resemblances to that in the top right of the illustration above. Like that hilt, it has an anthropomorphic boss flanked by two pairs of crotals that are somewhat larger than in the example to the bottom right. On the basis that it has a replacement, leather covered scabbard, this unidentified image from the Jos Museum collection may be **66.J11.360**. Because it lacked its original scabbard, it was purchased for a modest £1.

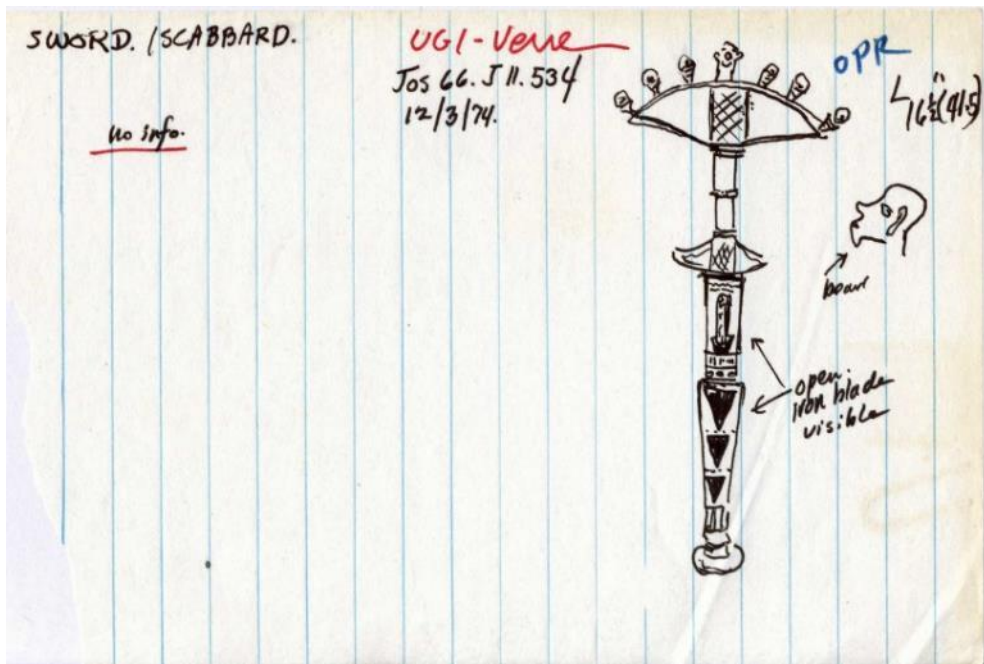


UCLA Fowler, Rubin Archive A1.10.16 – possibly 360

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

Complete brass daggers were at least twice this price. Earlier in his collecting, Chappel paid £3 or more for four examples (**304, 394, 441, 454**); the prices paid tended to fall as the buyer and sellers grew accustomed to one another; looking later in the collection for daggers costing more than £2, we find perhaps fourteen (possibly **503** for which we do not have an individual price because it was bought with two other items, **534, 544, 547, 572, 577, 578, 593, 601, 608, 618, 619, 746, 769**). These eighteen expensive examples are likely to be at least comparable in several regards with the Frobenius knife. We know only a few of them from illustrations, like Nancy Maas's sketch of **534** showing an anthropomorphic boss flanked to

either side by three crotals (bought for £2/5/-). In common with the Frobenius knife, its pommel is considerably larger than its quillon.



Maas sketch - 534

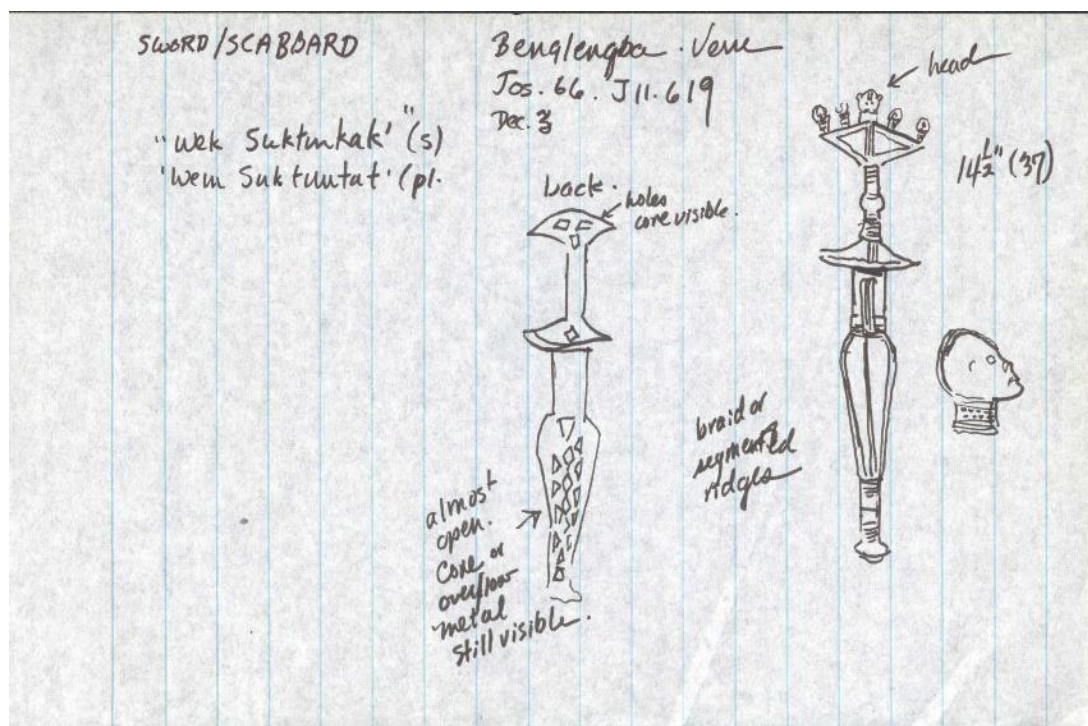
Most examples have pommels and quillons that are more similar in size, like **593**, bought by Chappel for £2/15/-, which has probably lost either two, or two pairs of crotals, which would increase its resemblance to the photograph we are supposing to be of **360**.



593

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

Maas's sketch of **619**, bought for £2/10/-, suggests another similar example. Note the *benglengba* decoration, described as braid or segmented ridges.



Maas sketch – 619

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

Even if they are not the same, the daggers sketched by Maas (**534**, **619**) significantly resemble those to the centre and left in the photograph (below) from Rubin's archive, with details of their pommels, which we have not been able to identify with accession numbers. While the central boss of the left-hand dagger is anthropomorphic, that of the central dagger has a beak-like feature.

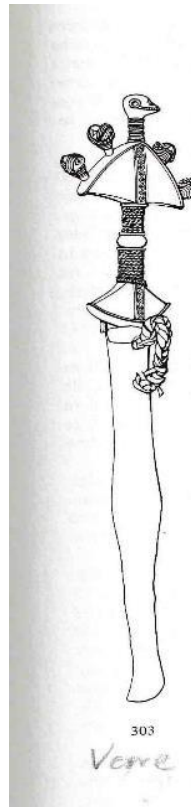


(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

Renate Wente-Lukas illustrates a dagger (1977: 227, figure 303) with a similar pommel decoration: a central boss of a beaked head, flanked by pairs of crotals, with a central band of decoration like that above left, with the more crescentic pommel of that on the right. Her text suggested the example is in the Linden-Museum Stuttgart,³ and while we have not seen

³ The text is unclear, since Wente-Lukas refers to Frobenius 1914 and to undated documents by Ankermann, neither of which appear in her bibliography. However, the plate cited from Frobenius (as S 355) is that we reproduce from the Frobenius Institute's archive (EBA-B 00696, see above). 'In 1914 Frobenius depicted

a photograph of it, the accession number 57723 corresponds to a dagger donated by Leutnant Hans Freiherr van Putlitz of the Schutztruppe in 1908. Wente-Lukas's illustration suggests an original, ornate brass scabbard may have been replaced, which is also the case for the similar dagger in Rubin's archived photograph (above UCLA Fowler, Rubin Archive A1.10.16).



Wente-Lukas 1977: 226, fig. 303; Linden-Museum Stuttgart 57723

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

Generalizing about these hilts, which we are designating **TYPE 1 Skeuomorph hilts** we can say that the hilt is a hollow casting similar in its overall shape to that of a wooden dagger handle, that is to say with a pommel at the top and a quillon, or cross guard, between the handle and blade. Below we see how the tang of the iron blade is fixed through the handle, its tip hidden by the central ornamental boss on the pommel. The pommel is the focus of decoration: it is typically larger, and on occasions substantially larger, than its quillon, which is roughly equal in size to that of everyday knives. The pommel of the Frobenius dagger is twice the width of its quillon and surmounted with a central anthropomorphic, ornamental boss with eight crotals arranged symmetrically. Both the handle and the pommel have raised bands of decoration. **534**, although with six crotals rather than eight, has many similarities. In addition to their scale, examples of this type vary in relation to: whether the central boss is

daggers made by the Bata and Verre using a brasscasting technique (S 355), and Baumann provided photographs of daggers or swords from the Dowayo, 'Fali-Margi' and 'Kongon' from northern Adamawa? (no date: 115); see Bata (Munich 18-7-47), Adamawa (Stuttgart 57723), Margi (Berlin 26589), Figs. 302, 303, 304. It is known that the groups cited belong to a bounded block of ethnic groups that either once used brasscasting techniques or continue to do so to this day' (translation of Wente-Lukas 1977: 226).

anthropomorphic or theriomorphic (that is, represents a person or some kind of animal), the number of crotals (some hilts are missing one or more of their original ornaments), and in the shape and decoration of the boss and quillon.

TYPE 1 Skeuomorph scabbards. When daggers with skeuomorph hilts are found together with their original scabbards these are also skeuomorphs. Conventional scabbards are made of different leathers over thin wooden side sheathings (nowadays sometimes cardboard). They fit the leaf shape of the dagger blade tightly flaring into a protective, more or less globular, protective chape at the tip. There is a hanger on the upper part of the scabbard to attach it to a belt. The Frobenius dagger is a good example of these characteristics, which are shared by the other three scabbards he illustrates. Such scabbards often have triangular excisions or indentations; Nancy Mass illustrates two such (534, 619). Given the excisions are made on one side of the scabbard only, they may be a feature common to most or all scabbards if we had illustrations of both sides for all of them. Excisions are likely, as well as being decorative, to reduce the likelihood of the iron blade rusting due to trapped moisture.

Several examples of similar daggers in museum and private collections fit into this type established on the basis of those collected in the field.

The most significant museum collection of Verre daggers known to us outside Nigeria is that of the Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac (MQB-JC) consisting of five examples acquired by Josef Mueller (1887-1977), later bought as part of the Barbier-Mueller collection of Nigerian art in 1996-7 by the Musée national des arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie and soon afterwards incorporated into the new museum. We are not aware of the exact dates when, or circumstances under which, these acquisitions were made by Mueller, but they are likely to be roughly contemporary with the collections made for the Jos Museum and by the Sudan United Mission. The ethnographic details entered on the current accession record derive from an essay supplied by Tim Chappel for the published catalogue of the Barbier-Mueller collection (see, *Arts du Nigeria* 1997: 296 signed with the initials E.F., Étienne Féau, and in the same volume Chappel 1997: 223-34), hence they should not be interpreted as independent corroboration of our account. Three daggers in this collection have some, or all, of the characteristics of our Type 1.



MQB-JC 73.1997.4.60.1-2; Dimensions and weight: 42x10.1x4cm, 602grammes
(Clicking on the image will open a higher quality version)

The hilt decoration is in higher raised relief than some examples, and there should presumably be a central boss on the pommel flanked by crotals. The scabbard chape feature is unusually small. We do not have an image of the reverse to know if the scabbard has triangular incisions.



MQB-JC 73.1997.4.59.1-2; Dimensions and weight: 42.2x14.12x3.03cm, 579grammes.

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

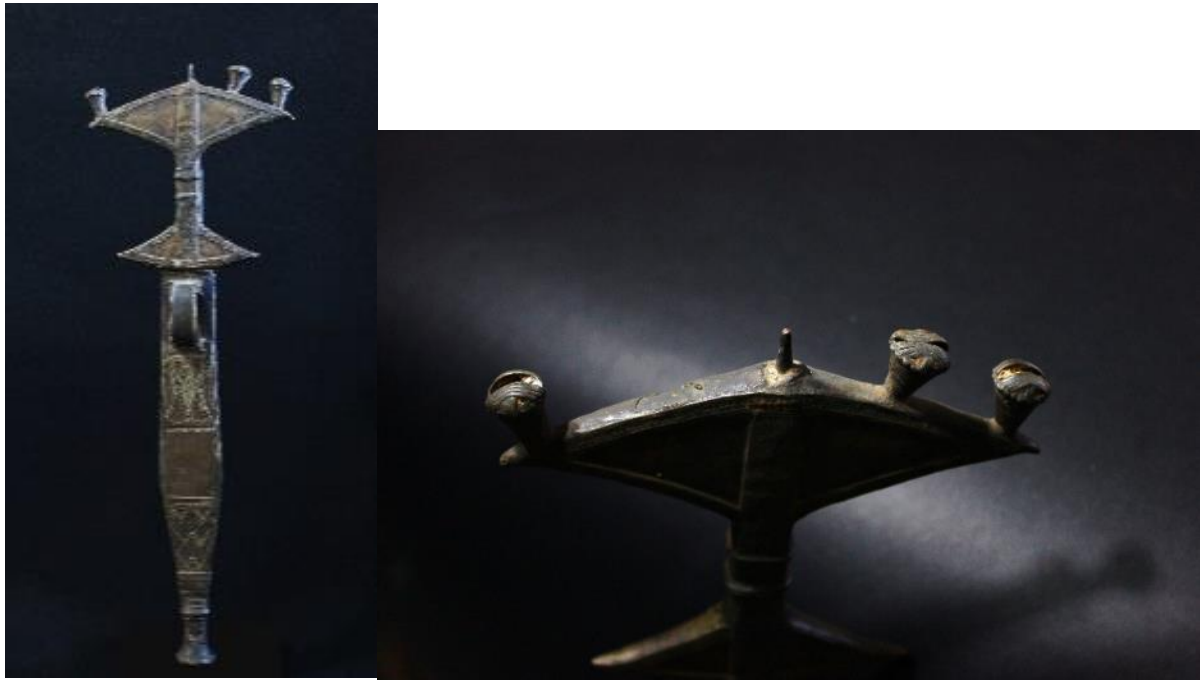
This second MQB-JC example is similar to the first in overall dimensions and weight but appears to be a finer brass casting. An anthropomorphic central boss on the pommel of the hilt is flanked by four crotal bells arranged symmetrically. As well as a threaded pattern of bands, the pommel and quillon have respectively semi-circular and triangular incisions. The scabbard has a local repair (in copper or a predominantly cuprous alloy) which accounts for the absence of a chape. The iron blade lacks the central ridge, or fuller, of the other two examples.



MQB-JC 73.1997.4.57.1-2; Dimensions and weight: 38x15.2x4.3cm, 673 g.
(Clicking on the image will open a higher quality version)

Without closer inspection, we cannot say whether this third MQB-JC example is a sub-type without pommel ornaments or whether, as seems at least equally likely, the ornaments have become detached and lost at some point. Maas's sketch of the reverse of the pommel of **619** has a similarly indented diamond decoration to this, which would also support the likelihood of original ornaments being lost. The missing scabbard chape of the previous example may well have resembled that seen here. Given that they are on occasions missing from other examples on the market, it is likely that chapes were cast separately from scabbard sheaths and welded to them subsequently. There is a prominent raised central fuller to the blade of this example, a feature we know from the similar blade of the Frobenius dagger not to be recent.

The greatest variation in quality of other daggers attributed to Verre in galleries, auctions and private collections seems to involve the hilts, their central boss and symmetrically arranged crotals. Our first example in a private collection has an angular pommel and quillon similar to one of those in Rubin's photographs of the Jos collection. Its interest lies particularly in the damage to the pommel which shows how the central boss would have been welded over the tang of the iron blade which protrudes a short way through the hilt.

**Gianni Mantovani Collection**

An undamaged example of a similar dagger is in the collection of the Sudan United Mission which, as we have seen, consists of items acquired in Nigeria more or less contemporaneously with Chappel's field collection. The central hilt boss is of a bearded man. The heavily rusted blade is flat, apparently without a central fuller.



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



SUM - Holtegaard

A third example contributes a variation in hit decoration. The pommel and quillon are relatively angular and both have border decoration, but the ornaments take the form of theriomorphic bosses of which there would originally have been five. These appear identical other than in size. The creature portrayed has the elongated beak of a bird, or perhaps jaws of a crocodile (and may resemble the SUM dagger in this regard).



James Wade Collection

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

A striking example of a pommel with four, widely spaced, crocodile bosses, but lacking its scabbard, demonstrates that the width of the pommel does not necessarily determine the number of crocodiles. Although differing in other respects, the central anthropomorphic boss resembles the two sketched by Maas. The circular decoration is also found on the scabbard of **593** (above).



Pierre Loos, Ambre Congo Gallery, Brussels

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

The more crowded pommels of the next three examples illustrate hilts with respectively seven and nine ornaments. The reverse faces of daggers are not invariably decorated.



Mark Clayton Collection (note the comparatively plain reverse) 44 x 15.8 x 3.6cm
(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

The quillons have been handled different in these two examples of knives with eight crotals; and the central bosses are respectively anthropo- and therio-morphic.



Charles Jones Gallery, Wilmington USA
(the scabbard chape may have been repaired locally; or the entire scabbard replaced)

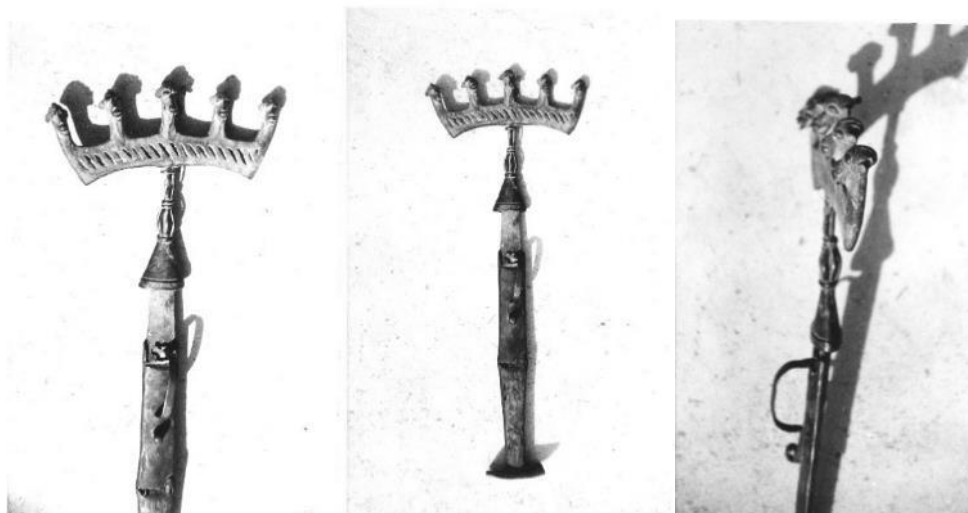


Barry Hecht Collection
(Clicking on the images will open a higher quality version)

In discussion of Verre brass bells, we tentatively suggested a relationship between ornamentation with crotals and age. The evidence was slender since it was based on a single

bell known to be an early acquisition, the presence of crotals on other early pieces such as arm cuffs, and the aged appearance of the bells collected with crotals in the mid-1960s compared to those with bulbous decoration. Given crotal ornaments were added to an initial casting, we also noted the possibility that these pieces might have been sourced by Verre casters rather than made by them. We did not have the evidence to say one way or the other. With all these reservations, we would nonetheless point to the crotal ornamentation of almost all daggers in our Type 1 as a characteristic worth taking into consideration when assessing their age. We would also note, although we do not have the evidence to pursue the idea, that there seems to be a stylistic difference between more curvilinear and more geometrical forms of pommel and quillon. The curvilinear forms seem also to have been more finely cast and finished.

TYPE 2 Solid hilts. Our second type of dagger owes less to its everyday counterpart, and so cannot be designated a skeuomorph in as close a sense as Type 1. The hilt and pommel consist of narrow solid bars of brass in a T-shape which may have deeply scored patterning. The pommel is either straight or very slightly curved, while the cone-shaped quillon is much like that of an everyday knife. The pommel is ornamented with identical bosses that may take the form of heads or else of protuberances that, in one instance, were interpreted as medicine containers by an informant of Chappel's. As Rubin demonstrated in his 1973 survey, the overall form is distributed widely along the middle and upper Benue. The field photograph below from Chappel's records below lacks any accession number, although he feels it might be an example in this style he did not buy. Attribution to Verre is far from clearcut, since Maas reproduces a photograph taken by Arnold Rubin in 1970 in Gabun Town, Ga'anda District, of a hilt either very similar or identical to this one (Maas 2011: 196, fig. 6.17).



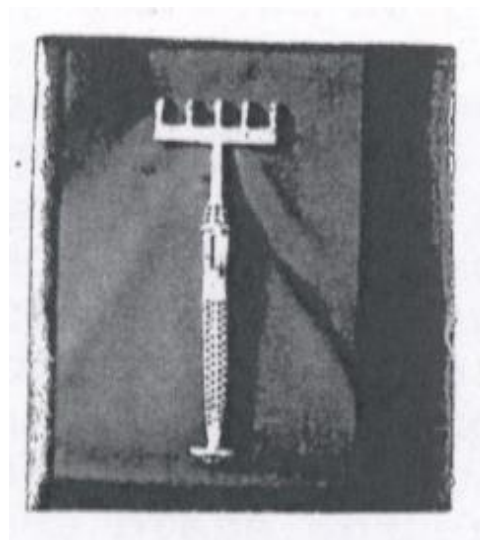
16.3A.24-6

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

A photograph of daggers in Jos Museum in Arnold Rubin's archive provides an example which we can identify in Chappel's field collection as **66.J11.669** (see also Rubin 1973, Plate XVa). Its accession note describes it as *wék ja Tibaai*: a dagger for the use of smiths with a cut-out pattern, *ja*, likened to that of plaited *zana* matting. At £1/10/-, it cost Chappel around half as much as a good example of our Type 1 dagger.



Arnold Rubin Papers Box 11



16.7B.36

<http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/kt5z09p0rn>

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

Following Rubin, Maas demonstrates how daggers similar in overall form turn up both west of the Verre, in the Middle Benue, and north of the Verre in the Highlands among Longuda, as well as Ga'anda (2011: 191, 195-97). The Sudan United Mission collection also contains an example in this style, though whether of Verre or Koma casting is undecidable since Olga Grening was based at the Tantile Mission in the Alantika Mountains in Koma country.



Sudan United Mission – Olga Grening

A fourth dagger attributed to Verre that found its way via the Barbier Mueller Collection to Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac is another example of the same style (see also Maas 2011: 194: fig. 6.15).



MQB-JC 73.1997.4.57.1-2; Dimensions and weight: 40.5x12.6x4.8cm, 437g.

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

The pommel has seven identical protuberances which may represent medicine containers (*porg*), while the narrow scabbard is patterned with two rows of triangular excisions. In the absence of other illustrations of the daggers collected by Chappel for the Jos Museum, quite

how many might have been of this type relies on some guesswork. Both **577** and **618** are described to have a *ja* (matting) decoration and *porg* (medicine container) ornaments: the purchase prices were identical, £2/10/-, despite the vendors differing.

Daggers of our Type 1 style seem to be distinctive of Verre (or perhaps Verre and Bata) casting, however, deriving attribution from style for Type 2 daggers is complicated by the form being widespread and our knowledge of variation within it slight.

TYPE 3 Double spiral Identifying other dagger or knife types is complicated by our lack of illustrations. A recurrent term might be a clue, and we find four instances of *wék ga-ga* (**411**, **464**, **710** without scabbard, **716**). This is generally a less expensive dagger than those we have looked at previously: **410** and **464** cost 13/- and 15/-, while **710** lacking its scabbard was only 5/-; **710** is the most expensive at £1/10/-, and it is specified as being for the use of *Tibaai*. The repeated syllables, *ga-ga*, point us towards a double spiral, which might refer either to decorative patterning or ornamentation. An illustration of a knife in the SUM collection meets both criteria.



SUM Aase Kristiansen – Nigeria 1958-83

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

This example is likely to be Koma; the pair of opposed spirals forming a pommel is a precise skeuomorph of an iron, everyday Koma dagger; however, the spiral pommel is not unique to Koma and appears on single and double circumcision knives in use by eastern Chamba that were probably made for them by Verre. The Verre knife accessioned as **710**, specified to be with a brass hilt, is described as a sacrificial instrument used at an elder's funeral. We might provisionally treat this as a third type of Verre dagger.

TYPE 4 Circular pommel Evidence of a fourth type of dagger is even less conclusive since we entirely lack field evidence for it. Nonetheless, we ought to note that a Verre provenance has been given to brass daggers with circular pommels, like the fifth example that entered the collection of the Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac in the group acquired by Josef Mueller (Maas 2011: 195, fig. 6.16). The credibility of a Verre attribution receives some support from the similarity between both the quillons and scabbards of these daggers and those of our Type 1. While the triangles on one side of the pommel decoration is close to that of some Type 1 daggers, the edge ornamentation is unlike that not just of Verre daggers but of any other brass objects made recently by Verre. If Verre then, like a couple of bracelets to which we drew attention, then it would have to be in a discontinued style.



MQB-JC 73.1997.4.58.1-2; Dimensions and weight: 45.1x 1.4x3.2cm, 704g

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

Wente-Lukas includes a sketch of a dagger with a handle in the same form in the Berlin collection, which she attributes to the Margi (Wente-Lukas 1977: 226-27, figure 304, but see

our footnote 3 for problems interpreting the accompanying text). The accession record (26589) reveals this dagger have been donated in 1910 by Kurt Strümpell, who knew the area well, with attribution to the 'Margi, Falli', two different peoples, which presumably means no more than it came from that area of the Mandara Mountains (see Chapter 6). This does not preclude it, and others like it, having been made elsewhere. The apparently worn handle, and the local repair to the bottom third of the scabbard of the MQB-JC example indicate some age. The pattern of triangular indentations on one side of the pommel, differs from a threaded design on the other, a characteristic of some Verre knives of our TYPE 1. The blade is apparently flat, or almost flat, without a pronounced fuller. A very few similar daggers reaching the market show this is not a unique piece.



Galerie Walu



Koller Zurich – Type 4 example left; note also Type 3 dagger second from the right

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

Both these two further illustrations show the side of the pommel with threadlike decoration. If they resemble the example in the MQB-JC, then we would anticipate the other face of the pommel to have incised triangles. The illustrations show opposite faces of the scabbard, and these are indeed comparable to that in the MQB-JC. The Koller example retains a chape the other two examples appear to have lost, in a shape of which is similar to that we know from Verre. At least two more examples in similar style have been offered for sale by auction without their scabbards. Since a definitive attribution to Verre cannot be made on the basis of the evidence we have, we simply leave open this possibility.⁴

⁴ It is not possible to comment on iron knives attributed to the Verre since we lack illustrations of examples collected in the field. An elaborate iron dagger given to the the Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac (MQB-JC 70.2012.14.3) by the gallery owner Hervé Loevenbruck has a composite construction that might be related to other Verre ironworks (notably pot stands) and was presumably attributed to Verre by African intermediaries. Comparable examples, however, have been attributed to the Dadiya/Tula further north; and

Conclusion

The variety among Verre daggers, even between those belonging to the types we have sought to distinguish, suggests a longstanding tradition of invention. We learn only two names of brasscasters, Gabdewa of Tchamba (**454**) and Yawam of Lainde (**648**), of whom the latter, also credited with two other pieces of brassware collected by Chappel (**801** a figure, **802** a beer jar), may either still have been active, or, if not, had been active in the recent memory of those alive in the mid-1960s. However, the dagger attributed to Yawam is one of the least expensive of Chappel's acquisitions (**648** £1/10/-). While it is not possible to date Verre daggers precisely, the inclusion of crotal bells on many of those in TYPE 1, which are also the most distinctive, suggests a dating to the early twentieth century for the latest of them, and plausibly earlier than that for the finer castings.

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their spiral ornamentation is also reminiscent of Ga'anda works in iron (Berns and Hudson 1986: 61; MacEachern and Berns 2019).