Cameroon’s Grassfields: Arts and Crafts of the Chefferies

The Grassfields

of Cameroon came late into European focus. Whilst West African coastal zones were explored from the 15th century onward (Portuguese), the interior was much more difficult to access and remained terra incognita.

Zintgraff (1889) was the first to explore this region after the Congress of Berlin (1884-85) had partitioned Africa under European powers.

He was the one who gave name “Bamileke” to peoples living there. The general reading says that he came down from the mountains of the north, and when he asked his guide how these people were called, the answer was: “people-from-below”. For Zintgraff it sounded like “Bamileke”.

Jean-Marie Tanefo, 16th fon (king) of Bamendjinda (Figure 12) derives the word from “pa nehg kah” or “pe me lekeu” – what means, he says, “habitants-of-the-hills”.

Both are true. The some 106 chefferies supérieures (kingdoms) and many more of their sous-chefferies are situated on the plateau about 1000 m altitude. A landscape strongly embossed by former volcanic activities. (Figure 20)

Coming from the coast where Mt. Cameroon is still an active volcano (last eruption in 2000), one has to wind up the cliffs, as it was called “the route of the elephants”, where cascades are abundant in the rainy season. (Figure 10) Within few weeks the scenery changes; green changes to brown, red dust becomes ubiquitous (Figure 1), bushfires glow in the Grassfields. (Figure 16)

Contradictory explanations are common in this region: One meaning or the other, or both or none of them. Perhaps this is the reason why so many divination techniques are used. The search for truth has many faces.

In the morning the fon of Bamendjinda looks for the answers of the spider. Earth spiders are in contact with the ancestors, the world of spirits, so they know what will come. Because nothing can happen in this world, what has not happened before in the world of spirits, the otherworld.

When the specialist, the expert of the spider oracle arrives, he discusses with the king positions of twigs, blossoms and leaves as the spider has left and what this means (Figure 15)

A sick person will die. A journey will come to a good end. A business will be successful. Ten people have asked questions.

Do you want to know something? He asks me.

There are also other divination methods in use. Revelations are taken seriously. They play an important role in traditional lawsuits. In former times the “teuh” (Bamendjinda version) was applied to defendants. Today it is (mostly) applied to chickens. This “potion of truth” exists under many names in African cultures; the Bamum call it lè, it decides about innocence or guilt.

In case of adultery the culpable were put to death. In some chefferies they were burnt, in others hanged (Figure 83). If both fell they were guilty. If one fell, he/she was guilty but not with the accused person.

Another way to obtain truth: Leave the defendant with this statue. (Figure 2)
If he is guilty his wish to confess grows every minute. His situation becomes unsupportable. Confessing is his only hope to regain calm. Even at the price of his life.
The colonial powers forbade believing in magical powers and pursuing witches, because witches do not exist. They sheltered witches people said. This resulted in a tremendous proliferation of witches and their evil acts. Witchcraft is hereditary. Today the code of law of Cameroon strictly bars use of magical powers to harm someone. Severe punishment is foreseen for such crimes. But it always happens as everyone knows. Politicians use witchcraft, businesspeople, soccer players. There is also beneficial magic. Statues act as guardians to defend home, property, meetings of secret societies in the sacred groves. (Figure 14) And the kings and great dignitaries are thought to possess magical powers they use for the benefit of their people.
But times are changing, as Dylon sings. People grow suspicious of their fon. Are they really with them? Or do they use their magical power on the paylist of Paul Biya, the president of Cameroon?

Figure 3 Secret objects, Bafoussam, 2004

Figure 4 Perhaps because the understanding of guardian statues gets lost, Bafoussam, 2004

*With the Berlin conference*,

Bamileke and Bamum chefferies came under Deutsch-Kamerun administration. People living there did not know what had happened in Berlin; they knew nothing about the decisions which should determine their destiny for at least the next seventy years.
With occupation forces, rules of power changed. Some chiefs accepted to pay taxes to the new masters of the country, others made war. One of the unruly was fon Tala of Bamendjinda. The Germans executed him (1903). As consequence of this act his chief of the army (Ndé Sa’a Dion) Sahadio Tagoukem killed some Germans. A deed he was praised by the people of Bamendjinda. German authority ended in 1916, when English and French troops took over. The “African Queen” with Bogart and Hepurn tells a story of this time of German occupation and British missionaries.

I am a successor of Sahadio Tagoukem and have been appointed to this function of second assistant to the king in 2011; in a ceremony as shown in Figure 47.

In 1919, after the defeat of the Germans, the region became League of Nations mandates, partitioned between the United Kingdom and France. Not until 1960 Cameroon gained independence. The north-western chefferies which had been under British administration joined the former French governed ones within the Republic of Cameroon.

First years of independence were a time of unrest: The chefferies burned. Many cult objects, masks and statues were destroyed. At that time objects of the Bamileke, Bamum and Tikar chefferies like Bandjoun, Bangwa and Laikom were already well known and famous in the West. In the last decades of colonialism huge quantities of masks and statues were transferred to Western collections. Prices of objects rose steadily. Some became famous as the “Bangwa Queen”, from the Harry A. Franklin Family Collection, sold 1990 at Sotheby’s auction house, for $ 3.4 Million. Meantime all auction houses have established special auctions for African art.

Stories of stolen cult objects, whose loss caused local disasters, till they could be restituted, caused even more publicity. The Afo-A-Kom (the “Kom-thing”), an image of a king, carved in wood, the torso covered with sackcloth stitched with reddish-brown beads, the face masked in copper, is sacred to the people of the Kom kingdom. Stolen, transferred to NY, finally restituted; when it was brought back, a jubilant state reception was organized. Widespread were stories that the Afo-A-Kom destroyed during night his display cases so that it was impossible to keep it under control, it had to be restituted. Memorial images of kings and of the throne spirit protectors are part of every chefferie’s treasury. (Figure 5)

The Grassfields lose more and more their savanna character at least along the main roads. Growth of population is the reason why more and more plantations are cultivated. Every day never ending columns of pupils, students are on their way to schools and the number of schools is outnumbering religious buildings, which are wide spread and numerous. (Figure 7) The need of schools cannot be only covered by state activities. Chefferies are investing directly by means of residents and the diaspora.
With the extension of cultivated land arises a new problem. Cattle breeders, Bororos, a subgroup of the Peul, on their sometimes long journeys to the cattle markets, as the one near Foumban (Figure 17) need feeding places along the way. This becomes more and more difficult with the cultivation of the country. Where to graze when Banana plantations have been established? (Figure 8)

In the last decade a strong cultural revival program was set up by the traditional chefferies. Some 30 fon founded the association “La route des chefferies” with the aim to preserve the cultural heritage, rituals, dances, establish palace museums, collect and make information available. http://routedeschefferies.com/fr/index.php

With the development of infrastructure touristic attraction will be enhanced.

The chefferies are in states of transition. They try to keeping traditions but modernizing; using technical developments, looking for independent electricity supply, satellite internet connection, communication centers, building museums, looking for added value for visitors, promoting arts and crafts; others transform the chefferies in agricultural enterprises. (Figure 9) Driving forces come from a generation of fon very often with university degrees as in biology, agriculture. Some understand their chefferies as business companies. One Chefferie produces 3000 to 4000 eggs daily, others develop fish farming, some invest in touristic leisure activities.

Though the fon live in traditional polygamy, many understand that this has to change. Schools are open for girls; they attend technical high schools, universities. Western life style can be seen on TV (when electricity has not broken down). Two of the queens I personally know, left their husbands since 2004, no longer bearing the situation.

The Bamum are in a further state of transition. Whilst conversion to Islam is widely accepted, beginning with Njoya, mosques are built all over the region and Islamic rules are more and more applied; there are the traditional feasts as the Nguon when they commemorate ancient history and the tradi-
tional rituals. During the Nguon they are wearing the pre-Islamic garments with “heathen” medicines loaded (Figure 84); during the feast of the sheep they wear Arabic robes. In the Nguon women are actively participating, in the Islamic feast, men and women are separated.
Figure 7  Students

Figure 8  Cattle herd coming the main route leading to the North-east, direction Tchad
Figure 9 egg production business

Figure 10 Cascade near Dschang, 2011
Figure 11 The fon of Batoufam, 2004

Figure 12 The fon of Bamendjinda, 2004
Figure 13  The fon of Bamendjinda, court of first instance, 2004

Figure 14  Guardian statues in the sacred grove of Bamendjinda, 2004
Figure 15 The spider has spoken, Bamendjinda palace, 2011

Figure 16 Bush fire
The development of a strange attraction

At the end of the 19th century Western interest in what was called tribal art, art primitive developed. To understand why just at this time Europe, the West was ready to deal with African art, Western spiritual situation must be considered.

The most important factor perhaps was the spiritual emancipation of Western world. Churches had lost their power which for centuries had defined rules of thinking, ways of perception. Separation of churches and states was obtained. Research was opened to mythologies of all peoples. Frazer in the “Golden Bough” was the first to compile information about cults; myths all over the world structured in what he thought are general themes. Natural sciences could develop without religious restraints. In the 19th century new forms of execution in fine arts were developed, and they found a clientele. Society was conditioned for new views; interested in experiments in arts as in science. Sub-Saharan Africa could be seen with new tools of interpretation, once the classic axiomatic of beauty, aesthetics was abandoned.

Due to the then developing strong connections with Africa (colonialism), masks and statues were imported and found their way into the ateliers of artists.

A special input was given in 1897 by the British, after they had sacked, destroyed and looted Benin. They then sold the stolen objects, mostly bronzes and ivory works to different western collections. Western museums founded collections, exhibitions were made.

Another issue came up: In the early 20th century interest for the subconscious became an obsession of the bourgeois society. Not only led by Freud, who could establish his quasi-scientific Religionsersatz; but also by groups of artists as Dadaist’s, Surrealists’, les Fauves and “die Brücke” in Germany.
Some artists saw in the styles of African objects freedom of art, freedom from social constraints, freedom they were lingering for.

Interpretation always is a matter of the tools applied. Tools in humanities are axiomatic. Cultures are defined by axioms. In former times these axioms, laws were given by gods, in our days they are decided on party conventions and parliaments.

When early European observers with their background of figurative representations of devils and demons were confronted with sub-Saharan cult objects, they concluded that these people adored devils. These objects were demons as expressed by the canvas of Bosch and other artists. (Figure 18, Figure 19)

Europe’s new spiritual visions were based on axiomatic changes (similar but not identical with the paradigm shift Kuhn stated ¹).

The new approach was not based on experiences but again axiomatic, as there had been the “ideal-ist” idea of the noble savage; or as illustrated by the works of Margaret Mead. ²

It took much time and in-depth study of the underlying culture to understand that traditional African artists follow strict rules.

There are types of masks and statues where individual freedom of design (intentio auctoris) is strictly limited; there are others where even within a typical and unchangeable structure is enough freedom for the artist to live and form his inspirations – or follow the demand of the client.

Interpretation depends on the knowledge of the observer. Using the terms of literary interpretations, we distinguish between intentio objectis, intentio auctoris and intentio lectoris.

If the axioms of a culture are not known, interpretation is determined alone by the cultural background of the observer.

This is the principal problem understanding artifacts of lost cultures. Le Quellec ³ tries to find interpretations of African rock art out of mythologies, legends. Essentially this would cover intentio objectis. But do we have the basis of legends of dozens of thousands of decades? We can also assume that the legends were built much later, as reaction of the confrontation with such remains, to explain them.

Leroi-Gourhan was one to show that interpretations of the positions of the bones of cave bears should not be used to derive prehistoric rites and religious beliefs. They are rather connected by probability theory, when gnawed spare ribs were thrown behind the feasting group.

In the case of African art at least we recognize similarity and continuity of masks over thousands of years. As it seems there are human beings with antelope and buffalo masks on petroglyphs, Egyptian gods wearing masks of animals or being composed half human half animal, a presentation we know as late as the 18th century of a mythological oba (king) of Benin and in the 19th century from representations of the kings of Dahomey. Masks, masquerades and mask dances of the peoples of Africa consist in this tradition.

¹ The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 1962
² Coming of Age in Samoa, 1928
³ Jean-Loic Le Quellec, Rock Art in Africa Mythology and Legend, Flammarion, 2004
In the Grassfields the meaning of masks and masquerades not only is the representation of spirits of ancestors but also of the strong belief (even today) that kings and high ranking notables are able to morph into animals such as elephants, panthers, lions. Another significance is the special connection between a man and an animal, which is his pi. What happens to the one happens to the other.

In a broader context we find these connections men–animals also in other cultures; so in Greek mythology as in form of Centaurs; werewolves in Germanic mythology. All of them connected to brotherhoods, rituals. This leads back to the brotherhoods (secret societies) in Africa and their connections to certain animals expressed by the masks. Figure 21, Figure 22, Figure 34
Figure 19 Janus mask, as above
What the observer sees and interprets without knowledge of the cultural background of the objects has nothing to do with them and their purpose (Intentio objectis). The object becomes a releaser for associations, kind of a Rorschach test. This leads back to the understanding of Surrealists. It does not mean that interpretations made on the basis of individual understandings are without significance, of general importance.

On the contrary, they understand objects as primary codes, such as a landscape, a person, and primordial therefore. The transformation of these objects in another kind of art objects. Plenty examples show this process. Artists assemble African art objects to build new ones as by Arman. Photos by Windholz show another access (Figure 88); digital image constructions by Katterbauer (Figure 89)

Numerous modern Black-African artists use forms and symbols of traditional arts in their works. We may understand them as interpretations, citations, paraphrases.

**Origins of forms**

Abundant decoration is the impression when confronted with African objects. Even objects which are used for daily purposes such as kitchen tools, tools for working in the fields or bellows (Figure 25), show heads, bodies, ornaments.

The origin of what we see as decorative elements lies in animism. All objects have souls, contain spirits. Displayed figures are embodiments of spirits. Frobenius developed this morphogenetic concept as a theory of the origin of the form of most statues and anthropogenic objects which can be found in Africa; the theory of “Geistbäume”, spirit-trees. The souls of deceased emerging from their graves are taken up in trees. Trees develop sometimes forms resembling heads and this was a beginning of ancestor statues. For this very strong connection...
significance lies on the head, which according to most Black-African cultures is the seat of the soul, the body remains mainly the trunk, legs and arms often are only indicated. This is an understanding. It is remarkable that we find this imagination of the connection body-tree all over the world. Greek mythology has its examples as well as South-Sea cultures. A modern example is a painting by Kahlo, representing Burbanks. There are many examples with trunk bodies as in Figure 23, Figure 26 but also faces developed in parts of trees. (Figure 27)
Peter Krejsa
Ndé Saha Dion of Bamendjinda

Photos: Gerhard Katterbauer, Carin Windholz

Figure 22  KS 6373, Bamum

Figure 23  KS 4344, Tikar (?)

Figure 24  KS 4869, Kota, relic guard
A more recent explication for the overemphasis of heads in African art is based on psychoanalysis. Dominating heads of reliquary guardians (Figure 24) are equivalent to the rebirth condition of ancestors. This interpretation has the problem that many statues, which are not manifestations of the soul of ancestors, show the same disproportion; as we can see in Figure 61.

Regional provenance of objects

The only information that can be obtained precisely is the place where objects were collected; at least nowadays. The provenance, with the meaning where the object has been produced usually cannot be answered easily, often not. The reason is a vivid exchange of objects between chefs, and the open art market; even objects for ritual activities are bought in the market or at specialized craftsmen. Skilled sculptors emerge from chefferies, craftsmen, and traditional workshops. Many notables and chefs themselves are artisans. “Les rois sculpteurs”, one has named the widespread woodcraft qualities of the “fon”. (Figure 32)

They produce for the needs of the chefferie, for the palace and secret societies. When they produce beyond their own needs objects are exported. Objects are also produced for touristic markets. Even thrones are bought from merchants, so they might be produced in other chefferies. If an object will be used in ritual or as a decorative element cannot be predicted and is independent of its origin.

The ground attributing objects to artists or even to chefferies is rather shaky. Written documentation is rare; attribution of objects to names of sculptors depends mostly on oral witnesses. The easiness to use cult objects as one might say gathered by shopping has two reasons: The cultural similarities of the chefferies and the rituals to “initiate” objects for their special use. The first reason allows objects representing general types to be used in every chefferie.

A typical example is the “Batcham” mask type. (Figure 33) It received its name by a German officer who in 1904 collected the first mask of this type in the chefferie Batcham. This mask type belongs to widespread Bamileke rituals. It is a mask of a secret society, njikatso, and is called katso (Bamendjinda version); interpretations of its meaning vary widely. Every Chefferie possesses some. One source of these masks, a workshop in Bandjoun has been identified. They were exported to other chefferies.
and also to western collections. But Bandjoun as production center was not the only one, therefore mapping is difficult.

Form of the masks is always the same, what we can consider as intenio objectis, even if we do not know the underlying history, legends, religious meaning. (Comparable if someone with no background knowledge would find paintings showing a woman, an elder man and a child in a rather rotten building, differently arranged but with a clear compliance.) We have no clue. Perhaps one day one of the guardians of traditions will reveal his knowledge. “A hippo emerging from water” as rational for the form does not explain anything.

We can assume that the way how symbols are executed lies in the intentio auctoris. But it cannot be decided if the hunting scene on the backside of Figure 33 is connected with a ritual meaning or if it originates in an idea of the carver. To my knowledge this is up to now the only known Batcham mask with the backside carving.

Figure 28 shows a modern sculpture, not used in ritual. It emphasizes the citation qualities of modern “traditional” artists. Head of the statue is of Batcham mask type. Strong accent is given to the eye sockets which in some masks can also be understood representing flasks to receive the tears of a king. The king does not weep therefore his tears cannot drop on the soil. A good story; but we don’t know the background of the masks. Therefore it is also possible that the story was constructed to explain the eye sockets. And it seems that the flask form appears more in recent objects as a consequence of spreading of this interpretation.

The nose has its origin in a head between the eyes and forming the trunk of an elephant. This is a citation of another mask type of the Grassfields. (Figure 30, Figure 31)
Other types of masks which are used in all chefferies are anthropomorphic (Figure 29), as for commemoration of historical events; zoomorphic: elephant, buffalo masks. These masks can express different meanings: The totem function as for families and secret societies.

Basic concepts are the same over the Grassfields. Therefore there is widespread use of same mask types in the chefferies. The mask type defined, that is intentio objectis, singularities, geographical provenience of masks is not relevant. This allows easy translocation of masks and incorporation in rituals of the chefferies.

The second reason that objects used for ritual acts can be bought from workshops of other chefferies or on the market consists in the necessary transformation of an object for spiritual purposes. The object has to undergo a ritual process to be transformed into a power figure. This process changes the spiritual nature of the objects. Objects can only be used for specific purposes when they have been incorporated ritually for this function. This is a tradition to be seen in all religions. The objects gain their spiritual power through rituals. Purpose of rituals is mostly to invite spirits to dwell in objects. There are long procedures before the object throne becomes the seat of power of the chefferie.

But after this procedure has been performed the throne has a special quality. Taking seat on a throne means to destitute the king. King Njowa of the Bamum had to calm down his people when an Austrian trader just for fun took place on his throne.
Figure 29  Anthropomorphic masks, Menjang, 2011

Figure 30 Mural painting Bangangté, 2002

Figure 31  Elephant masks, mural paintings, 2000
Figure 32  The fon of Babungo with the bed he carved, 2004

Figure 33  KS 5794, Katso (Batcham) mask, with hunting scene on the back
Authenticity or genuineness of objects for western collectors has been defined when they have been used in ritual. Objects which are produced primarily for export are not appreciated by experts; a demand which is useful but is also difficult to maintain. It goes for what is called airport-art, but there are examples where the criterion cannot be applied; as for the ivory carvings commissioned by the Portuguese. They were never in any ritual, exclusively destined for export to Europe. But despite of this manqué, every museum, every collection would be happy to house one of them.

Another more sophisticated example is the Bamum throne of Nsangou. It was sent as gift from king Njoya to Emperor Wilhelm. Doubts have been expressed if Njoya has really sent the original throne of his father (why should he) and kept a copy for himself. (Figure 57) Suspicion arose because there had been a rather long negotiation between the German Governor and the king about this subject, who rejected to sell the throne for 1000 Mark. The two objects differ so they can be distinguished but it is not clear which one is the original. Photos showing Njoya on thrones are not precisely enough dateable so that exclusion can be made. On the other hand, according to the traditions of the Grassfields each king has its own throne. Thrones of ancestors are stored under les-choses-du–palais. Njoya therefore could have sent the throne to the emperor without losing his prestige. According to the (Western) criterion of use in ritual: would the copy have been sent to Berlin and would it therefore be worthless? If Njoya had kept the copy and used it as it is till today – the copy would be another original.

Authenticity and genuineness don’t have the significance in the places of origin of the objects as they are considered by western experts. Important is the ritual, the spiritual value.
Objects, materials, craftsmen centers

The main interest of Western collectors is oriented toward statues and masks used in cult and as memorial objects. Masks collected in museums and collections are not what the original concept meant. The mask represents only a part of the masquerade which is involved in the ritual. The masquerade covers the whole body of the bearer. Music, dance movements and songs are further parts of the ritual; so masks must be seen in the context.

Materials mainly used for ritual objects are metals (bronze, iron), wood (different kinds), terracotta and glass beads. Often very powerful masks consist of perishable materials, thus are not thought to remain intact for a long time.

Africa has a long tradition in cave painting and petroglyphs. Findings of last year indicate that some date back even about 100 000 years. A tradition which lives on in mural paintings frequently found in chefferies but also on walls of shops. (Figure 40, Figure 41, Figure 42, Figure 43, Figure 44)

An interesting example shows the chefferie Batoufam. In 2004 there were wall paintings of a very special kind. One might say very progressive. (Figure 35, Figure 36) In 2011 these paintings had been substituted for paintings, style and themes far more traditional. (Figure 37, Figure 38) With a certain background of knowledge concerning tensions between the fon and traditional notables, one can also think of a cultural dispute with sometimes one, sometimes the other side prevailing.

Mural painting examples in Foumban show scenes of the history of the Bamum kingdom. (Figure 39)

The house-of-the-state of the chefferies traditionally is surrounded by carved pillars. (Figure 45) Mostly they show the succession of ancestors. Modern replacements make use of sculpted concrete. (Figure 46)

A material which is more and more used not only in the chefferies but also in arts and crafts workshops, where objects for the decoration of houses and gardens are produced. Monuments of concrete are now widespread as in the chefferies Dschang, Bamendjinda, Bansoa. It is probable that the development of this kind of monuments finds its origin in cement sculptures of Nigeria. (Figure 47, Figure 48, Figure 49)

Traditional bronze monuments can be seen in Foumban. They are also indicators of the time frame of these works. Sultan Njoya’s statue who endorsed craftsmanship, the bust of his son Sultan Seidou and the big bronze monument placed in front of the palace showing a rider in Peul costume; a memorial for the civil war which took place during the early time of Njoya’s reign. (Figure 61)

Ancestor statues have their origin in what Frobenius named spirit trees. (Figure 26, Figure 27) In the Grassfields these statues are always connected to chiefs, leaders, founders or mothers of the nation, of queens. It is rare that wood alone will be used. Mostly statues, throne spirits, and queens covered with cauris, glass beads. (Figure 53, Figure 54)

Many of the palace museums of the Grassfields chefferies are rich with such statues and objects. They show a variety of patterns.

The statues receive their individual meaning through rituals as in the funerary memorials which take place with the beginning of the dry season, commemorating the deceased. (Figure 81)
Figure 35  Wall painting, Batoufam, 2004

Figure 36  Batoufam, 2004
Figure 37  Batoufam 2011, same place as the paintings above shown

Figure 38  as fig.18
Figure 39  The founder of the Bamum dynasty with followers, Foumban 2004

Figure 40  Bangangte, 2002
Figure 41  Arts and crafts center, Foumban, 2011

Figure 42  Chefferie Bafoussam, 2004
Figure 43  Photo atelier, Foumban, 2004

Figure 44  Poster in the style of wall paintings, anti AIDS champagne, Foumban, 2004
Figure 45 „House-of-the-chefferie“, Bandjoun, 2004
Figure 46 Pillars, wood carving and concrete. Bandjoun and Bafoussam, 2004
Figure 47  Concrete monument, scene of ennoblement, with the fon of Bamendjinda, Bamendjinda, 2011

Figure 48  From the gallery of the fons, Dschang-Foreke, 2011
Craftsmanship is specialized and has a long tradition. There are workshops specialized. Even the kings go there, when they need objects for events. They bargain and buy. What might look strange is not. It follows the tradition. When the Bamum conquered land and subdued people, they used the enslaved craftsmen for their purposes. They were incorporated in Bamum society and worked for the palace. The chiefs of the craftsmen clans received high honors as servants of the palace. (Notables) And even today some of the traditional workshops have their basis in such lineages.

**Bronze casting** traditionally were rare; knowhow of processing was not wide spread. Origins, as we see them now, go back to Ife, Benin, 9th century perhaps, but in this time the technique was so developed that we must assume a history going beyond the time of the first known objects. Metals were the property of the king. Found objects had to be brought to the palace. It was king and later Sultan Njoya, advised by the Germans, who opened trade and commerce with metals, which gave a boom. Mosé Yeyap, a cousin of the king, his interpret and foe, being in the service of the French colonial administration, he too endorsed arts and crafts; he is the creator of an artisanal quartier in Foumban. The modern art and craft center is placed there. (Figure 41) Brass pipes were a sign of royal grace, award for notables. (Figure 63) An example of a very fine Bamum bronze is Figure 61. A statue which refers to the civil war when the Islamic Peul came to help Njoya.

The production of bronzes follows today the same rules and technique as 1000 years ago in Benin: The lost wax technique.

Over a clay body the objects is formed in wax. (Figure 68, Figure 69) More clay layers are posed over the wax form, dried in the sun. (Figure 59)

The kiln is prepared (Figure 58) Temperature raised by air feeding by bellows (Figure 70). The clay hardens, kiln is destroyed (Figure 71) and liquid metal is filled in the burned clay forms to substitute wax form (Figure 72, Figure 73)
Wax comes from the north of Cameroon; clay from the Foumban environment. With problems to obtain copper, they use other materials, such as nickel alloys. Themes are mostly traditional ones. This includes objects similar Benin and Ife bronzes, also of those from Igbo Oyu. But these are not copies. One can describe it as citations, paraphrases. Craftsmen with a very good knowledge of historical objects but with the quality to go beyond these themes use them, transform them.

The hunter (Figure 62) can be considered as a citation of the Tada bronze and the panther Figure 60 is a variation of the traditional Benin panther forms, with the head in a position which is never seen in the “originals” meaning also that there is not the intention to produce copies but to use traditional forms for new designs.

Generally, when we say “objects in the style of Benin bronzes” we compare with the classical Benin bronzes. But objects produced here are so different because of their sizes. So we should not speak of copies or fakes. It is a new quality of objects. Originals of them never existed. (Figure 65, Figure 66) Interestingly while traditional collectors discuss the originality of Benin bronzes, the big bronzes from the Grassfields gain international significance. Beside African collectors there are also Westerners investing in this developing part of art market. Recently there were exhibitions in the Kunstforum gallery Vienna and one in Berlin. In western countries the tendency prevails to attribute such objects to former ritual activities, while African collectors understand them as living expressions of traditional art. Again it seems that western understanding and concept of art objects does have a problem with African art. Just another one.

**Terracotta**

has a very long tradition in the region of the Niger and the Benue of today’s Nigeria. Objects have been found dating back as early as 500 BC; the Nok culture - named after the village in Nigeria where pottery figures of this kind were found first. There are many other regions with archeological findings and well distinct styles.

Terracotta heads and figures have been found in Ife, dating from the 12th to 15th century - the same period as the first cast-metal sculptures of this region.

A long tradition of Terracota objects exists also with the peoples now dwelling in the Benue region.

Bamum and Bamileke peoples produced terracotta pipes, objects for ritual use, for magical purposes. Figure 50, Figure 76

The Bamum had no proper Terracotta production but received their objects from a village they formerly had conquered. This was the Chefferie Momaron. Even today objects from this village are sold on the market of Foumban.

Modern ateliers make citations of Nok and Sokoto objects. It can be seen that they usually are much more detailed and much bigger as original ones. (Figure 51, Figure 74, Figure 75, Figure 77) Another center of Terracotta production was Nsei (Bamenssing). In pre-colonial times Terracotta from this place was delivered all over the Grassfields.

**Glass beads, cauri**

They are used to cover masks, thrones, chairs, statues. (Figure 52, Figure 53) The body, which consists of wood, is covered with cloth. Glass beads on filaments are then stitched on the cloth to cover the object totally. Colors of the beads are used to produce different patterns. There also a specialization has taken place and there are regions where families have a long tradition in these crafts. Objects are bought to be used in different chefferies. (Figure 54, Figure 55, Figure 56, Figure 57) Glass bead production in Sub Saharan Africa is not well documented and not sure. Till 1940 important amounts were imported from Bohemia. This includes also the cylindrical forms dark blue and reddish-brown as substitutes for corrals. (Figure 54) Corrals were mostly used in Benin.
Figure 50  KS 4745, Terracotta, head of a pipe, Grassfields, 19th cent.

Figure 51  KS 4781, „Nok-style“, probably Bamum atelier
Figure 52  Statue, mask, Bamum, Foumban, 2000

Figure 53  Statues, museum Bafoussam, 2002
Figure 54  Ancestor statue, Babungo, 2004

Figure 55  Bracelet, on the road Bana to Bafoussam, 2011
Figure 56  On the road Banat to Bafoussam, 2011

Figure 57  Throne of the sultan of Bamum, Nguon, 2004
Figure 58  Kiln for cast-bronze

Figure 59  Clay forms for cast-bronze
Figure 60  KS 4050, panther "variation" of Benin style, Bamum

Figure 61  KS 5707, Bamum, Victory of the horse, civil war memorial statue, Foumban

Figure 62  KS 4072, hunter "variation" of Tada statue, Bamum
Figure 63  KS 3981, head of pipe, Grassfields

Figure 64  Bronzes Foumban, 2002, 2004
Figure 65  Arts and crafts center, Foumban, 2011

Figure 66  Arts and crafts center, Foumban, 2011
Figure 67  Bronze lion, chefferie Djam-Foreke, 2011

Figure 68  Modelling of the cast-bronze in wax on the clay matrix, Foumban, 2002
Figure 69  Finished wax forms, waiting for next process: clay coating, Foumban, 2002

Figure 70  Apprentice using the bellows to heat the kiln, Foumban 2002
Figure 71 The kiln destroyed, a burnt form is taken out to be filled with liquid metal, Foumban, 2002
Figure 72  Bronze casting, Foumban 2002
Figure 73  In the kiln, Foumban, 2002
Figure 74  Spirit of throne, cauris and glass beads; terracotta in the Nok style, but exceeding by far in size originals. Foumban, 2011
Figure 75  Nok style, Foumban, 2011
Figure 76  KS 4016, terracotta, head of pipe, buffalo and spider motifs, Foumban

Figure 77  KS 4774, terracotta, head Ife style

Figure 78  KS 4785, terracotta, Grassfields
Figure 79  Door, wood carving, Foumban, 2000
Figure 80  Door, wood, Foumban, 2000
Figure 81  Statues collection of the Babungo palace, 2004

Figure 82  Wood carver in Foumban, 2004
Figure 83  KS 3988, Hanging of adulterers

Figure 84  witch doctor, loaded with medicine, Bamum, 2004
Figure 85  In the art and craft center, Foumban, 2011
Figure 86  Art and craft center, Foumban, 2011

Figure 87  Art and craft center, Foumban, 2011
Figure 88  Masks and bodies, C. Windholz, objects KS with models, 1999
Figure 89 Fang head composition, Katterbauer 2011