

Chokwe

Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia

Chokwe and Lwena "Mwana Pwo/Pwevo" masks

One of the most important makishi characters in mukanda initiations represents the ideal woman. She is either conceived as a "fulfilled" woman, called Pwevo (or, in some Chokwe-related areas, Pwo), or a younger, "potential" woman called Mwana Pwevo (or, in other areas, Mwana Pwo). In a mukanda-related public performance, women escort the female ancestor Pwevo to the center of the village, where she is received ceremonially by the head of the village. Pwevo, a female role model, is a beautiful woman who speaks gracefully and displays gentle manners; she also demonstrates considerable assertiveness by orchestrating specific songs and instructing the drummers to accompany her dances on cue. Pwevo also directs and engages the public through hand gestures and with implements that may include a whistle, an adze, or a flywhisk.

Pwevo dances are characterized by short steps and sensuous hip movements, which are emphasized by a bustle, tied around the hips, consisting of a bundle of cloth, strings, and rattling objects. Pwevo may enact sexual behaviors by pretending to have intercourse with a mortar or with a figure that she may quickly form from earth in the performance space. These dances are a type of sexual education, presented openly to stress the fertility of this female ancestor. Pwevo may also honor women as providers by dancing with a fishing basket or pretending to pound corn inside a mortar. To highlight her supernatural attributes as an ancestral spirit, Pwevo sometimes dances on stilts or performs acrobatic stunts.

Although Pwevo represents a woman and a female role model, she is created by men and performs in events related to mukanda male initiation. Women accept this male concept of the ideal female if they feel the performance honors them, but they may "chase away" a performer whom they feel is not up to their standards. In fact, the best female dancers in the community often dance alongside Pwevo to test the skills of the impersonator.

An adept Pwevo performer is appreciated and enjoyed by all, and new songs are sometimes created to celebrate a particularly talented dancer. Women also might give the performer an alternative name, which women can use strategically to request his reappearance. Although women usually know who is performing a particular mask, this knowledge is a secret regulated by men and their mukanda camp, because all performers are seen as spiritual entities. To avoid infringing the rules of mukanda secrecy, women can request a favored performer by calling out his alternative name.

Through Pwevo, men celebrate the vital social role of the fulfilled woman and the special importance of mothers for the well-being of the mukanda initiation camp. Mukanda also underscores gender tensions, however, because it signals the separation of the boys from their mothers. The Pwevo likishi helps mediate this tension by serving as a neutral emissary between the mothers and the mukanda camp. Whereas other masks may chase and harass women, Pwevo remains their closest ally in mukanda-related matters.

Towards the end of the mukanda initiation, a male likishi called Chisaluke (also spelled Chisaluki) accompanies Pwevo on a trip to a chief's village to request permission to conclude the initiation process. During that visit, it is Pwevo who takes the leading role in presenting gifts to the chief's family and stating that the initiates in her village have acquired the prerequisite knowledge to enter adult life. Pwevo speaks on behalf of all women in the community, and particularly for the mothers of the initiates, who are as interested in the accomplishments of their sons as the men in charge of mukanda. As a couple, Pwevo and Chisaluke signify the complementarity of the sexes, which should act in consort at the end of initiation, dispelling gender-related tensions to ensure the success of the initiates in achieving the goals set forth by mukanda and society in general.

Source: "CHOKWE! - Art and Initiation Among Chokwe and Related Peoples"



This mask is no longer in my collection

Chokwe Mwana Pwo mask

You often see these masks referred to as "Mwana" Pwo or "Mwana" Pwevo.

Mwana Pwo or *Mwana Pwevo* means a younger, potential woman.

Pwo or *Pwevo* alone refers to a fulfilled woman.

Although both names appear to be used somewhat arbitrarily, masks with few scarification details are more often said to represent the younger character.

"In the wooden masks, the eyes are usually elliptical or almond-shaped and generally half-closed. The swollen eyelids are prolonged down to the center of the concave eye-sockets. Sometimes the eyes are globular and have horizontal slits. Occasionally the forehead has a carved head-band. The ears are nearly always curved or else semi-circular with the tragus shown. The traditional scarifications are usually engraved, cut away, incrustated or carved in relief." (Bastin 1982:90)

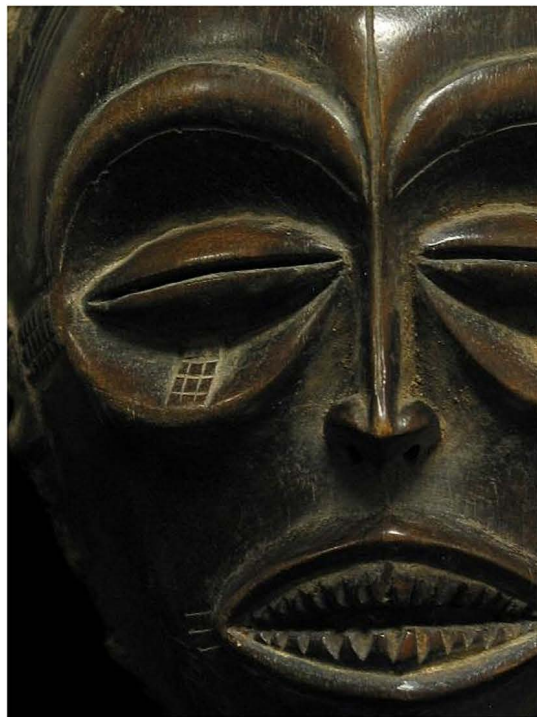
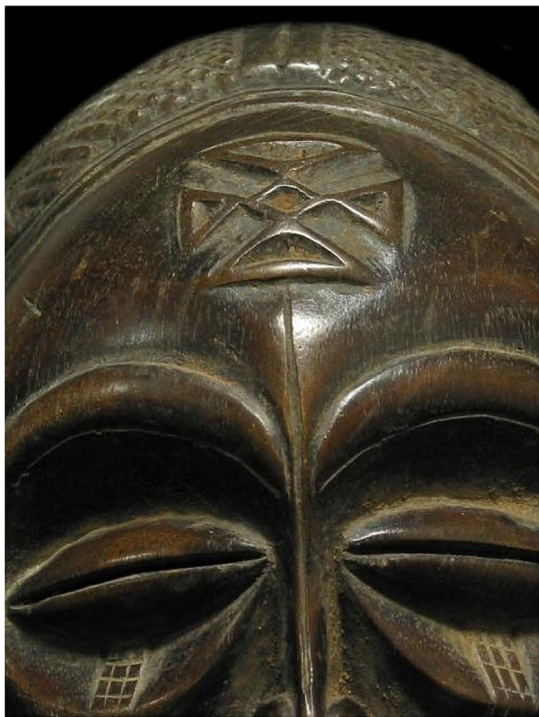
Mask measures 9.5 inches tall x 10" wide x 10" deep
Wood. traces of camwood powder, plant fiber for hair

As you will see on this page, Chokwe masks greatly vary in style because of the geographic separation of the Chokwe and related people but the masks have common stylistic characteristics.

My mask has well defined and expressive facial features as well as a wonderful worn patina to the wood. The facial scarifications below the eyes represent

tears, which may refer to the anguish mothers feel when they are ritually separated from their sons during the mukanda initiation. The forehead displays an the chinge-lyengelye cross motif, a scarification design commonly interpreted in the literature as a version of the imported Portuguese Cross of the Orce of Christ.

Click on any photo on the page to see larger version



Other examples and information below provided for reference purposes





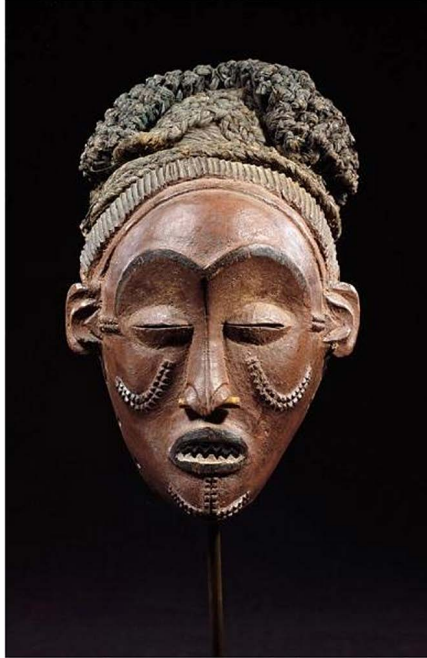
(This mask is probably my favorite Chokwe mask I have ever seen)

Mask, Chokwe; D.R.C. Congo/Angola

Wood, fiber, metal, beads, pigment; H. 8 1/4"

From: Remnants of Ritual - Selections from the Gelbard Collection of African Art

Pwo signifies womanhood and an elder ancestral female associated with fertility. Although performed by a male dancer, the costume includes wooden breasts and a female bustle behind. More recent adaptations transform her into mwana pwo, a young woman who has undergone initiation and is therefore ready for marriage. The cross form on the forehead, known as cingelyengelye, is an early Portuguese influence. M.L. Bastin attributed this lovely mask to the Expansion style of the Kwii-Kasai, on either side of the border between Angola and D.R.C. Congo.



SOTHEBY'S AFRICAN, OCEANIC AND PRE-COLUMBIAN ART
SALE N07996 AUCTION DATE 14 May 04

LOCATION - New York

LOT 74

PROPERTY OF VARIOUS OWNERS
A TSHOKWE MASK

Estimate 8,000—12,000 USD
Lot Sold. Hammer Price with Buyer's Premium: 8,400 USD

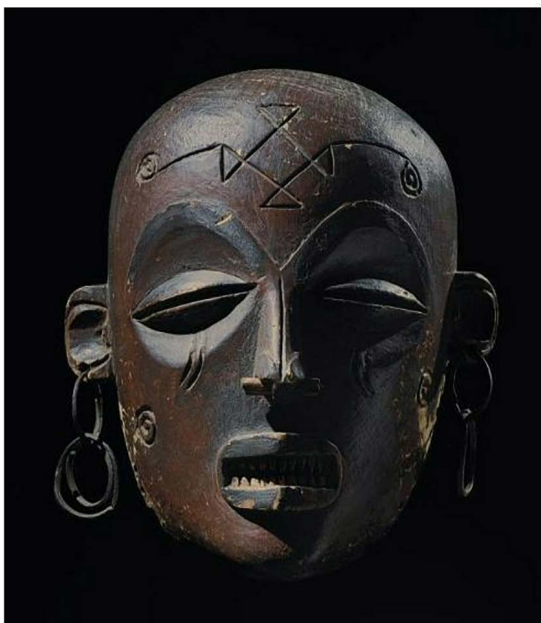
MEASUREMENTS
length 12in. 30.5cm

DESCRIPTION

pwo, of hollowed oval form and pierced around the rim for attachment, the oval mouth pierced and baring pointed teeth beneath the transversely pierced nose with insertion, a medial ridge leading to arching brows framing the almond-shaped slit eyes beneath the diadem framed by a woven fiber coiffure, the face decorated with raised scarification; deep red pigmented patina with areas of black pigment and kaolin.

PROVENANCE

Morton Dimondstein, Los Angeles



SOTHEBY'S AFRICAN & OCEANIC ART
SALE N08132 AUCTION DATE 11 Nov 05 10:15 AM.

LOCATION New York

LOT 143

A TSHOKWE/Chokwe MASK

Estimate 6,000—9,000 USD
Lot Sold. Hammer Price with Buyer's Premium: 12,000 USD

MEASUREMENTS
height 7in. 17.8cm

DESCRIPTION

mwana pwo, the delicate chin beneath the parted lips baring filed teeth, and the small transversely pierced nose bisecting slit eyes framed by C-shaped ears with earrings and incised scarification; deep red ochre surface.

PROVENANCE

Pierre Jernander, Brussels, February 1977

EXHIBITED

Notre Dame, Indiana, Traditional African Sculpture from the Britt Family Collection, The Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame, October 24 - December 19, 1982



SOTHEBY'S AFRICAN, OCEANIC AND PRE-COLUMBIAN ART
SALE N08095 AUCTION DATE 12 May 05 10:15 AM.

LOCATION New York

LOT 104

PROPERTY FROM AN AMERICAN PRIVATE COLLECTION
A FINE TSHOKWE MASK

ESTIMATE 15,000—20,000 USD
Lot Sold. Hammer Price with Buyer's Premium: 24,000 USD

MEASUREMENTS
height 7 1/2 in. 19cm

DESCRIPTION

of diminutive form, the finely carved chin beneath parted lips and small nose framed by slit eyes and arching brows, the cheeks decorated with delicately inset metal, and wearing a fiber headdress; brown patina with layers of camwood powder overall.

PROVENANCE

Acquired from Pace Gallery, New York, 1984

CATALOGUE NOTE

According to Bastin (in a 1983 letter to the current owner about this mask), the beautiful and unusual scarification patterns on the front of the mask are called cingelyengelye (portable amulets evocative of the Cross of the Order of Christ in Portugal). On the cheeks are patterns called masoji a mitelumuna nyi cijingo (the outline of tears terminating in the sun).

Bastin goes on to note that the quality of expression in this mask suggests it is a portrait, not surprising as old Tshokwe sculptors took inspiration for their carving from a woman they admired for her beauty. The frontal transverse section of the coiffure is a type called tota (short tresses covered in red clay). Under the headband is a double diamdem called kaponde. A fringe, cisukusuku, ornaments the back of the cap.





SOTHEBY'S AUCTION DATE 16 Apr 03 5:00 PM.

LOCATION Paris

LOT 125

Beau masque phwo, Tshokwe, Angola

ESTIMATE 15,000—25,000 EUR
 Lot Sold. Hammer Price with Buyer's Premium: 35,625 EUR

MEASUREMENTS

Hauteur : 34 cm avec la coiffe et 19 cm sans

DESCRIPTION

Creusé de forme ovale, avec une coiffe et une barbe élaborées composées d'une toile de fibres tressées, le visage aux traits finement sculptés a un menton de section carrée et une bouche ouverte montrant des dents filées à un point, le nez aquilin percé de deux narines est encadré de deux grands yeux en forme de grains de café sous des sourcils arqués, les oreilles en haut-relief portent des boucles d'oreilles en perles de verre turquoises, tandis que le menton, les tempes et le front sont décorés de scarifications; il porte une coiffure sculptée de six sections rectangulaires; très belle patine marron brillante, restes de pigments noir et blanc

Rough translation:

Made of oval form, with an elaborate cap and a beard made up of a braided fibre fabric, the face with the finely carved features has a chin of square section and an open mouth showing of the teeth filed at a peak, the bored aquiline nose of two nostrils is framed of two large eyes in form of coffee beans under arched eyebrows, the ears in high relief carry earrings in glass shots turquoises, while the chin, the temples and the face are decorated with scarifications; it carries a carved hairstyle of six rectangular sections; very beautiful brilliant patina chestnut, remainders of pigments black and white

Bibliographie :

Bruxelles, Utotomb : L'Art d'Afrique Noire dans les collections privées belges, 1988 : figure 187

Exposition :

Bruxelles, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 25 mars-5 juin 1988



SOTHEBY'S ARTS OF AFRICA, OCEANIA AND THE AMERICAS
 SALE N07902 AUCTION DATE 15 May 03 10:15 AM.

LOCATION New York

LOT 91

A FINE TSHOKWE MASK

ESTIMATE 20,000—30,000 USD
 Lot Sold. Hammer Price with Buyer's Premium: 42,000 USD

MEASUREMENTS

height 8in. 20.3cm

DESCRIPTION

pwo, of deeply hollowed form, the rounded chin beneath an oval mouth with pointed teeth framed by large, pierced coffee-bean eyes inset into circular sockets with small, pierced ears on either side, and decorated with incised scarification at the chin, cheeks and forehead, the headdress of woven fiber with strands of twisted cord and glass beads attached at the perimeter; fine reddish patina with areas of black pigment.

Provenance:

Collected by Hans Himmelheber, Heidelberg, Germany, before World War II
 Kegel-Konietzko Family, Hamburg
 Acquired from Pace Gallery, New York, 1991

Bastin (personal communication) has written the following about this mask: it is the 'evocation of the feminine ancestor, protector of the lineage, this spirit propitious to fecundity that is personified by a dance mask [and] is the female counterpart of Cihongo. Like the male mask, the feminine one, would, in old

...dances, go on a tour of exhibitions in the villages, dispensing to the public their spiritual qualities favorable to fecundity; and teaching women grace [and] manners. The face of this pwo or mwana pwo, is composed of a beautiful oval-convex form, with a beautiful outline--eyes half-closed, drawn, are inscribed in the interior of concave parallel orbits. The tip of the nose, long and narrow, that occupies with elegance the central part of the face....The stylization of the ears is remarkable: recreating anatomic details with originality worthy of a 'master' sculptor.The thick eyebrows as well as the lips--of a very dark black--have been accentuated by a red-hot iron blade, also used in a light touch of the scarifications and on the narrow diadem, or kaponde, carved over the forehead. A second kaponde, in woven fiber, situated just at the back, forms the point of departure of the wig, composed by wicks of woven fibers, impregnated with red clay, mukundu, mixed with castor oil, mono.'

According to Bastin (in Herreman and Petridis 1993: 90 and 95), 'the Tshokwe have a marked taste for creating well-made work which also has aesthetic qualities, which they themselves call utotombo, and this is found in an even more fully developed form in the creation of wooden masks by professional sculptors (songi) who have learnt their skills in a master's workshop. ...The dancer himself commissions the mask and, in the case of the pwo, at that point gives the artist a brass bracelet; the symbolic bride-price. From then on there will be a sort of mystic marriage between the dancer and his feminine mask... the artist begins [the mask] by carefully observing a woman in the area whose beauty he admires.' He then executes the mask with similar scarification, coiffure and expression.



32 masks on display at the Museu do Dundo. From Fontinha 1997:29, fig. 49. Dundo is a town in northeastern Angola near the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Chokwe and other related peoples share similar mask-making traditions on both sides of the border.



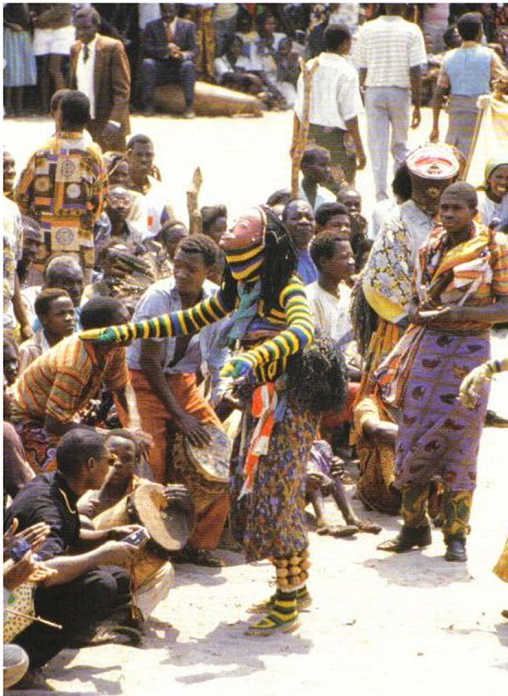
This illustration of an Angolan Pwo performer was published by Portuguese explorer Henrique Carvalho (1890:245). The mask is similar to examples found among Lwena and Luchazi in Angola south and east of the town of Mexico in Angola and in areas of western and northwestern Zambia.





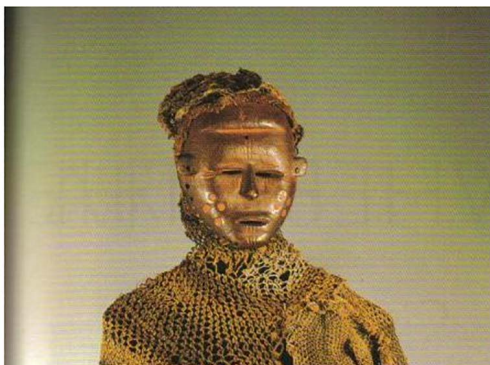
Field photo from a 1920's post card featuring a Lwena Pwevo/Pwo performer holding a flywhisk and hand rattle made from a tin can. The mask dances with the women who clap and sing to musically accompany the performer.

Photo from Baltimore Museum of Art
From the FANTASTIC book "CHOKWE! - Art and Initiation Among Chokwe and Related Peoples"



A Luvale Mwana Pwevo ("young woman") mask performing during con-irmatory ceremonies honoring Luvale Paramount Chief Ndungu. Zambia, 1997. Photo Manuel Jordan.

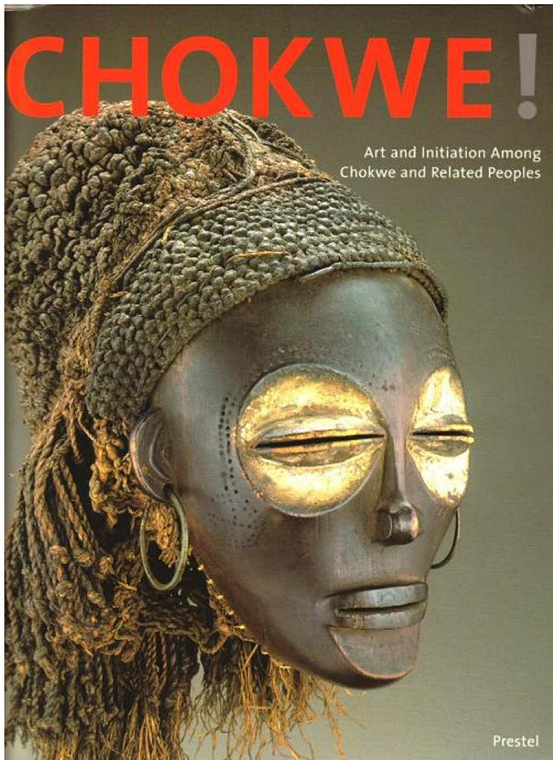
A fiber-and-resin mask representing a more immature young woman, Chiwigi, is visible at right. The masks share the positive influences of the ancestral spirits with the community and show contrasting or comparable social and moral values.





Pwo/Pwevo mask with partial costume, mid-20th century. Luchazi or Luvale. Wood, fibers, pigment.
Private European collection.

Masks representing "old women" are mentioned in the literature pertaining to Chokwe and related peoples, but none were identified and illustrated as such until recently. Zambian field consultants identified this Luvale or Luchazi mask (retaining part of its original body covering) as an old woman, called Kashinakaji.



"CHOKWE! - Art and Initiation Among Chokwe and Related Peoples"

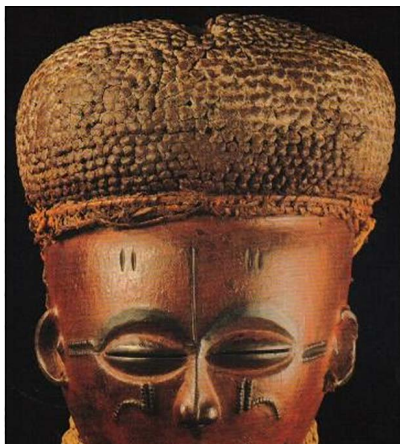
a FANTASTIC reference book!

The article below is a fantastic reference on the Mwana Pwo masks...

Click below to go to the article

[REVISITING THE PWO](#)

Chokwe masks
by Manuel Jordan





CHOKWE (BAJOKWE, BATSHIOKO, JOKWE, TCHOKWE, TSHOKWE)

Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia

One million Chokwe (at least 30 different spellings -- all based upon the name these people call themselves, Kocokwe, in plural Tucokwe) have spread out over a wide area in the eastern Angola, southern DRC and Zambia. Their history dated back to the 15th century, when a Lunda queen married a Luba prince Chibinda Ilunga. A significant member of the Lunda aristocracy so disapproved of the marriage that they migrated south to present-day Angola. Once settled, they founded several kingdoms, each headed by a god-king. Around 1860, following a major famine, the Chokwe people migrated back towards the south and settled in Angola, at the source of the Kwangi, Kasai and Lungwe rivers. The Chokwe are governed by a king called Mwana Ngana, who distributes hunting and cultivation areas. The male Mugonge and female Ukule societies regulate their social life. **They are vigorous and courageous hunters and agriculturists who used formerly to engage in the slave trade.** Their dynamic spirit is also reflected in their art.

Chokwe sculptors were the most famous of the region; there were two types. The songi made jinga charms, the small mahamba figures for the family shrines, and all objects used for hunting, love, magic, and fertility. In addition to the folk art, somewhat rigid and giving no illusion of depth, there existed also the ancient refined culture of the court, expressed with conviction by professional artists the fuli. They were hired by the great chieftainries and worked exclusively for the court. They sculpted scepters, thrones with figurines, fans, tobacco boxes, pipes, flyswats, cups, and figures of chiefs or ancestors -- all demonstrating a great deal of refinement. They were famous for their large statues of deified ancestors, exalting strength and dignity. The best-known representation of a chief is of Chibinda Ilunga. He was a wandering hunter, youngest son of the great Luba chief Kalala Ilunga. He got married a Lunda queen Lueji. Chibinda Ilunga was the start of the sacred dynasty of the Mwata Yamvo of the Lunda and became the model of the hunting and civilizing hero, sometimes represented seated on a throne, sometimes as standing naked or dressed as a hunter. As statues of him were sculpted after the introduction of firearms, generally the standing figure is holding a stone rifle in his left hand and a stick, called cisokolu, in his right. Chibinda Ilunga's body is stocky, with legs bent, shoulder blades clearly drawn, the neck wide and powerful, the navel protruding. He wears an enormous hairdo, the sign of princely rank. The social organization, founded upon matrilineal lineages, has an equally large number of female statues, whether these be identified as the queen mother or a chief's wife.

The most powerful and important Chokwe mask is known as chikunga. Highly charged with power and considered sacred, chikunga is **used during investiture ceremonies of a chief and sacrifices to the ancestors.** These masks are made of barkcloth stretched over an armature of wickerwork, covered over with black resin and painted with red and white designs. Chikunga is worn only by the current chief of a group. **The mukanda masks play a role in male initiation.** The mukanda is an initiatory institution through which religion, art, and social organization are transmitted from one generation to the next. **Mukanda training lasts from one to two years. Boys between the ages of about eight and twelve are secluded in a camp in the wilderness, away from the village. There they are circumcised and spend several months in a special lodge where they are instructed in their anticipated roles as men. As part of their instruction, the boys are taught the history and traditions of the group and the secrets associated with the wearing and making of masks.** Mukanda masks are also made of barkcloth over an armature of wicker. They are covered with a layer of black resin, which can be modeled before it is ornamented with pieces of colored cloth.

While in former times they probably played important roles in religious beliefs and institutional practices, many other Chokwe masks have come to be used primarily for entertainment. Itinerant actors wearing these masks travel from village to village, living on gifts received at performances. Most masks are carved of wood. The most popular and best-known entertainment masks are chihongo, spirit of wealth, and pwo, his consort. Gaunt features, sunken cheeks, and jutting beard of an elder characterize a chihongo mask. Chihongo was formerly worn only by a chief or by one of his sons as they traveled through their realm exacting tribute in exchange for the protection that the spirit masks gave. While chihongo brings prosperity, his female counterpart, pwo, is an archetype of womanhood, an ancestral female personage who encourages fertility. As an ancestor, she is envisioned as an elderly woman. **The eyes closed to narrow slits evoke those of a deceased person.** The facial decoration on the surface are considered female. Recently pwo has become known as mwana pwo, a young woman. It represents young women who undergone initiation and are ready for marriage.

During the 17th century many Chokwe chiefs were introduced to chairs imported by Portuguese officials and adopted the foreign style for their thrones. However, Chokwe style and decoration were saved. The figures on the back, stretchers, and legs were typical Chokwe carving.

The Chokwe have influenced the art of many neighboring peoples, including the Lunda, Mbunda, Luvale, and Mbangani.

LWENA (ALUENA, KALUENA, LOVALE, LUENA, LURALE, WENA)

Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia

This primarily Angolan tribe lives partially in DRC and in Zambia. The structure of Lwena art is largely based on that of the Chokwe, but includes a more refined use of full, round shapes, and differ also by the coiffures and scarifications on the cheeks and forehead. Artistically, the Lwena appear to have focused their skills on carving female figures, which are also found on decorative 'prestige' objects such as canes, combs and finger pianos, and on masks. These differ from those of the Chokwe as their statues usually display a spherical cross-hatched coiffure which is often divided by a vertical ridge, and angular linear scarifications on their cheeks. All in all, it is a very female art related to a tribal social structure in which women play important roles, including that of chief.

Source- www.zyama.com

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to see my Lwena Pwevo mask

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