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CHOKWE

VISIONS OF AFRICA

BORIS WASTIAU

This introduction to the sculpture of one of the best-known peoples in Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo focuses exclusively on sculpture in the round. After situating the Chokwe in a temporal and spatial context, successive chapters look at figurines used in the divination ritual, statues related to the hamba possession cults, ancient traditional statuary (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) known as the "homeland style", court objects reserved for the warrior aristocracy and the wooden masks associated with the chieftaincies and the initiation rites surrounding circumcision. Particular attention is paid to the precious figures of Chibinda Ilunga, the civilising hero of the origin myths, almost all of which came to Europe in the nineteenth century, as well as to stools, whose symbolism and function give insights into the Chokwe's religious beliefs and the hierarchical structure of the chieftaincies. Some fifteen field photographs, many previously unpublished prints from the archives of the ethnographic section of the Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale (Tervuren), illustrate the text.

Boris Wastiau, since 1996, is one of the conservators of the Ethnography Department of the Royal Museum of Central Africa at Tervuren. He specialises in the rituals of arts of the Upper Zambezi and the Upper Kasai, as well as in the history of the collections.