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KUYU

VISIONS D'AFRIQUE

The Kuyu are an ethnic group who live in northern Congo-Brazzaville, on the banks of the River Congo, in a part of Equatorial Africa that has remained only marginally influenced by Moslem encroachment and Western colonialism. Although at first the predominant group in the area, they later became a minority within the broader Mbochi population.

The objects making up their material culture have long remained unknown as they did not suit Western aesthetic tastes.

Kuyu art can be broadly broken down into three styles, the first two—of which there are the fewest examples—are strictly associated with the Kuyu ethnic group, while the third style, which has the largest sculptural component, includes both Kuyu and Mbochi pieces. Among these are a number of statuettes and especially wooden clubs topped with a human head (the most recent being polychrome), known as **Kebe-Kebe**, which were used in the dance by the same name. This ritual performance has remained faithful to its original function of giving physical expression to the Kuyu cosmogony.

The distinctive feature of these clubs is their attention to detail in their portrayal of particular faces, depicting a large variety of hairstyles, carefully rendering the teeth and accurately delineating scarifications, where present. The polychromy that distinguishes the third style of objects is also associated with a specific symbolic meaning.

In this volume in the **Visions of Africa** series the reader will find a wide range of authentic objects belonging to a traditional Equatorial African culture, as well as a reconstruction of the migration routes that would explain such a seemingly motley collection of objects.

Anne-Marie Bénèzech is an art historian and graduate of EHESS. She also has a PhD in Cultural Anthropology from the Sorbonne, Paris I. She has spent several months in Congo-Brazzaville, but



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has been unable to return to continue her field research on account of the political upheavals in both Congos. She has held the position of Professor of African Art at the universities of Bordeaux and Pessac. Her scientific publications include: **So-called Kuyu carvings** (1988); **L'anthropologie de l'art pourquoi faire?** (1993); **A propos des marottes kuyu et Mbochi de La Rochelle** (2005); **L'humainimal Kuyu** (2009); **La découverte différée des objets kuyu** (2017). Her forthcoming publications are: **La cérémonie du Djo, essai de reconstitution d'une cosmogonie des Kouyou**, with text by Alfred A. Poupon, and **Les origines du kébé-kébé**.