

Ndop (portrait figure) of King Mishe miShyaang maMbul. Kuba peoples (Democratic Republic of the Congo). C. 1760-1780 C.E. Wood.

About other ndops: Most ndops are made with a few common characteristics: a shody (projecting headdress), a ceremonial knife, and rounded features.

About the ndop: The ndop literally means statue in the language of the Kuba peoples. It is the highest form of veneration for them, as most of their history is told orally.

The artist created this piece with the ideal king in mind, but not the individual king. The expression of the face and the rigid posture were made this way to represent the king's credibility and near-perfection.

Context: The histories of Africa were widely told orally, the ndop being an exception. This piece was made prior to the European Age of Imperialism by the Kuba people of internal Africa (Democratic Republic of the Congo).

Purpose: King Mishe miShyaang maMbul commissioned this so that his people would remember his reign as they had done with the kings before him with their ndops.

About the Kuba artist: The Kuba are actually nineteen related but distinct ethnic groups that all submit to the same leader, called a nyim. The artists studied in an apprenticeship until they could carve professionally on their own. Individual artists were not made known but had an elevated status in society.



Form: The enlarged head was made to be one-third the entire body in order to stress the head as important. The remaining form is relatively naturalistic. The features are rounded, and the reliefs are full of geometric detail.

Content: The ndop is a wood sculpture commemorating King Mishe miShyaang maMbul.

About the King (Subject): King Mishe miShyaang maMbul was the nyim (leader) or king of the Kuba peoples. He was known as a wise and generous person, and was well liked and celebrated in his kingdom. This ndop was commissioned at the height of his reign in 1710.

Symbols: The king's body itself was not meant to represent King Mishe miShyaang maMbul. The geometric motif (ibol) seen on the drum would identify the specific king. In this case, a severed hand is used to signify the king's reign.

*Medium:* wood and camwood powder, 19-1/2 x 7-5/8 x 8-5/8

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