



CONDITION AND TREATMENT REPORT

Date: April 15, 2016

Acc./Loan no: 2016-4-9

Object: Sculpture

People; Country: Kissi peoples, Sierra Leone/Liberia/Guinea

Materials: Wood, cotton textiles, metal, stone, pigment,
undetermined materials

Reason for conservation report:



DESCRIPTION

Divination figure ("dressed pomdo") wooden figure (may not be a complete figure) from neck-down wrapped in a plain white, coarse cloth that is pieced and stitched to secure around the figure forming a bundle. The outer textile is a drapping of cut red cotton cloth with no selvage edges – Therefore, an unknown manufacturer. The bundle feels like organic material and possibly stones. The undergarment is made of a type of homespun-and-woven cotton cloth, undyed and unbleached -- i.e pure--that people in Guinea wear under their own garments. The narrow strips are usually sewn into a garment that is somewhat the size of a tee-shirt, without the sleeves, and unhemmed. This is worn for spiritual protection; to protect the wearer against evil, and may be worn regularly or whenever one feels sick or endangered. It seems to be worn by Muslims, and is not unlike the orthodox Jewish undergarment that one sees here (usually only the strings hanging below the shirt).

A fairly rare divination figure made by a Kissi artist takes the form of a wooden top carved into a human head and a base wrapped in red cloth, which conceals a cavity filled with metal and stone objects. The cavity and its contents are enclosed in burlap cloth, which is wrapped and hand-sewn for closure; it forms the lower portion and base of the figure. Collected by Siegmann in 1968 or 1969 during research in a Loma village that is located near the neighboring Kissi, such figural oracles, called pom'kandya ("dressed pombo") or pom'wama ("divining pombo"), combine carved stone figures (pombo) and metal objects for divinatory purposes, a practice that was observed in the early twentieth century but may date back centuries. A 2012 CT scan of this oracle figure by Dr. Marc Ghysels reveals that the cavity, open at the base, holds six bent or broken Kissi pennies and three pieces of stone, in a process that Minneapolis Institute of Art curator Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers referred to as ritual recycling.

Per Chris Kreamer via a conversation on 2/15/2018: Man (smock with slit in front or back) or woman (wrapper)?; the color red seen on objects from this area/people references power, the power of *zoes*, the ritual specialists/healers for power; dirt/soiling could be from object use, oily offering(s), or recycled cloth (red cloth would not have been thrown away even if soiled) – the dirt should not be

removed; stabilizing tears/holes is important and should be done (do not restitch neck slits/tears as those could have been added while in use to mimic men's smock); cloth could have been synched around the neck via the yarn, which would explain why if oil offerings were added to the head/face, the under-wrappings remained stain free;

Per an email with Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers, curator of African Art and the Arts of Africa, and the Americas Department Head at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, he's not aware of any particular way the cloth around the figure should be draped. It's possible that the MIA museum photographer tried to make it "look better." He also added that MIA does not alter photos for publication and that what appears to be a brighter, less soiled, cloth in the publication *Visions from the Forest* (pg. 191) could simply have been draped in such a way as to hide the stains and tears. Also, MIA did not stitch the under-cloth (or perform any other alteration) since the piece belonged to the Siegmann Estate at the time. Therefore, he was not sure if the light colored (newer?) stitches are indigenous or were added by Bill Siegmann himself to secure/stabilize the cloth.

Dimensions: H x W x D: 52.1 × 13 × 16.9 cm (20 1/2 × 5 1/8 × 6 5/8 in.)

CONDITION

Exposed areas of the wood figure are in good condition though there is some old cracking along the grain line on the PL side of the neck and head. There is a relatively new scratch at the PL cheek. Within the carved designs of the hair/headdress, there is compacted dirt or applied material.

The bundle covering (beige textile) is dirty and stained though the securing stitches are very clean. The draped red cloth exhibits numerous holes and tears, and is wrinkled, stained and dirty. The object stands on its own, but with a slight wobble.

Examined by: DMoffett

Date: 3/15/2016

PROPOSED TREATMENT

X-ray to determine figure shape and possibly identify contents, consult curators on state of red cloth (localized humidification? stabilize cloth?), analyze cloth stains (oils? proteins?), locally humidify around areas of loss and tears (Gortex and wet blotters), stabilize cloth (adhesive? Stabiltex? stitches? nothing?)

TREATMENT

1. Took BT photos.
2. Removed the red cloth from the figure and laid it unfolded and flat on buffered tissue paper.
3. X-rayed the body to verify cavity contents.
4. Performed solubility tests on the red dye using distilled water, acetone, and ethanol (see Analysis, Table 1).
5. Performed a pH test of the cloth (see Analysis).

6. Heavy fabric creases and folds were gently unfolded and lightly weighed down using acrylic blocks and glass microscope slides.

Conservator: Janelle Batkin-Hall

Date: 15 December 2018

Photographic Documentation

2016-4-9-bt1 (through bt14)

2016-4-9dt-15 (through dt)

Where are the CT scans?

Analysis

Dye Fastness

Dry blotter was placed under the test area. One drop of distilled water was placed on an inconspicuous corner of the red cloth and immediately covered with dry blotter and light weight for five minutes. Any color(s) that appeared on the dry blotter was recorded. This test was repeated in the same area using acetone and then ethanol, allowing the textile to dry completely between each test.

Table 1: Solubility of the Red Dye

Solvent	Blotter Color	Notes
Distilled water	Yellow/brown	Red dye is not soluble in distilled H ₂ O. Yellow/brown stain is most likely from surface dirt.
Acetone	Pink	Red dye is soluble in acetone.
Ethanol	Yellow/brown	Red dye is not soluble in ethanol. Yellow/brown stain is most likely from surface dirt.

Test for Azo Dye

Concentrated bleach, color did not fade – not an azo dye (azo dye molecule)

pH Tests

Dry blotter was placed under the test area. Several drops of distilled water were placed on a corner of the red cloth. A 0-14 pH strip was then lightly pressed against the wet cloth for 30 seconds:

Distilled water: pH 5

Red cloth: pH 6

XRF

FTIR

Per Gwenaelle, a protein.

Exhibition Recommendations

Exhibition Record: