

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, SONGS AND DANCES OF THE CHOKWE

(Dundo region, Lunda district, Angola)

by

MARIE-LOUISE BASTIN¹

Summary

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During my stay with the Chokwe in 1956 I swam in an atmosphere of music and dance, in the most varied circumstances, and always in an ambience permeated by sensitivity, earnestness and excitement.² This matrilineal bantu people, originating from central Angola, live for the most part today in the northeast of Angola, spilling into Zaïre and Zambia since the end of last century. Despite this expansion, Chokwe culture remains fundamentally homogeneous, with local variations, however, due to the extent of the

territory which the more than 600,000 of them occupy.

I shall speak only of traditional music and choreography because for a good forty years new styles have been spread among young Chokwe through the radio.

The Chokwe like to hear birds sing. So they keep the *kasakala* canary (*Serinus mozambicus*), a delicious singer, as a cagebird. The little cage, called *cisakala* (pl. *yisakala*) is rectangular, of vegetable matter, consisting of a frame and a fine interlocking lattice. They hang the cage with the little Mozambique canary in the shade among the trees, near houses, and feed it with its favourite seeds; on journeys they take it with them as a cheerful companion. All this was related by explorers during the last century, starting with Livingstone in 1873. It is thus that the most widespread Chokwe decorative motif is called *maswi a yisakala*, "net of cages": a drawing with symmetrically crossing parallel lines, usually forming a diamond shape or adjacent diamonds. *Maswi a yisakala* is also the name given to a seed-like keloid tattoo which decorates men's and women's skins, in the form of a fine checkered embroidery (Bastin 1961, IV.c.d.7).

1. Most commonly used musical instruments

1.a. *Kasengosengo* whistle

This is not, properly speaking, a musical instrument, even if the sound of this aerophone can be varied by fingering the two tubular lateral holes situated on the neck of the pot-bellied whistle, typical of the Chokwe. The *kasengosengo* is used to call people: to summon them to the village when they are in the bush; while hunting it is used to call help from one's companions; formerly in war they used to encourage the men to march to battle, raising enthusiasm and shouts among the warriors.

1.b. The *cisanji* idiophone

The Chokwe who, as we have said, love to hear birdsong, show the same pleasure in the intimate melody of the *sanza* which they call *cisanji*. They have several types:

Kakolondondo (Fig. 1)³ *lungandu*,⁴ *muyemba*,⁵ *mucapata*,⁶ *lipungu*.⁷ These idiophones with metal keys⁸ are played around the fire during social evenings. The Chokwe also carry a *cisanji* when they are walking from one village to the next, and the solo played on the instrument encourages and gives rhythm to their walking, comforts them in solitude and banishes evil spirits. This is why, for the sake of exorcism, some white clay is spat between the reeds (*ngeya*) on the bridge (*mukambu wa ngeya*), not only to make the instrument "sing well" but also because the colour white, symbol of life, is also a sign of innocence. Sometimes there are also red and black *kenyenge* fruits from the creeper *abrus precatorius* L. and dark red feathers from the *nduwa* (Rooss's violet loerie, *musophaga rossae*) because of their magical properties. If at times anybody may play the keyboard (*mulongo*) of the *cisanji*, only artists perform pieces for the pleasure of a group, with the instrument held over a *muwungu* calabash resonator, which a helper taps with a stick (*mukakala*) to punctuate the melody.

Nearly all types of Chokwe lamellophones are fitted with a rod at the bottom end of the resonator, bearing rings of tin (*mayuku*). The resonator body, also called *cisanji*, is normally pierced by a hole, *citwawa*, in the centre, for sound communication with the calabash; sometimes this hole is covered on the back by a membrane, *lundandji*, for sympathetic vibration, which is taken from the tightly woven web with which the flat spider *candawuli* (Selenopidae) lays over its eggs, laid on the bark of a tree or a hut wall,

in order to protect them.⁹ The *lungandu* and *muyemba* types have respectively two and three manuals, and for tuning the reeds *ulongo* resinous gum is stuck beneath their tips in order to distinguish the low, *shina*, the high, *songo*, and the middle, *cikaci*, registers. The bell type, *mucapata*, is provided with a flat fruit, *cifuci*, strung on a lace, which punctuates the rhythm by striking against the back of the instrument as it is being played. The *lipungu* type has a box resonator in which three round holes are made in the base and another, called *cituwa ca kukwata munwe*, in the back wall. This is off-centred to the left, about half way up the instrument, and is stopped at will by the musician with the 4th finger of the corresponding hand.

With these few facts, one becomes aware of the subtlety of conception of these different types of *sanza* among the Chokwe, sensitive as they are to a wide fan of sounds. The music of these lamellophones is only rarely accompanied by song.¹⁰

1.c. The xylophone *citanda ca ndjimba* or simply *ndjimba*.

The Chokwe xylophone consists of about seventeen rectangular keys of decreasing size, hung with a vegetable binding over an arch-shaped frame, *citanda*. Each key, *ndjimba*, has its corresponding cut-down calabash, *muwungu*, which serves as resonator. These calabash resonators, each impaled by a thin stick fixed to the frame, have an orifice pierced on the side and covered with a membrane, *lundandji*, which vibrates in sympathy when the keys are played.¹¹

The *ndjimba* is an extremely melodious instrument, played at dances (Fig. 2) but also for the pure pleasure of the art of music.¹² The musician, squatting in front of the instrument which is inclined towards him as it rests on its arched frame, *uta wa ndjimba*, strikes the centre of the keys with beaters, *mishipo*, with an oval rubber head: the large, deep keys, on the *shina* side, with the left hand, and the high *songo* keys with the right hand. The Mwata Tshitembwe, a virtuoso on this noble instrument, succeeded sometimes in playing with crossed beaters, and in the heat of performance standing up and striking certain keys with the back of his wrist or even his knee.

The xylophone is sometimes played in duet, where the musicians sit facing each other, each behind their instrument: a large xylophone, *citanda cinene*, also called *ndjimba ja kuvunga*, is the one which starts and leads; another of slightly smaller size, *citanda cikepe* or *ndjimba ja kusalwiya*, accompanies.¹³

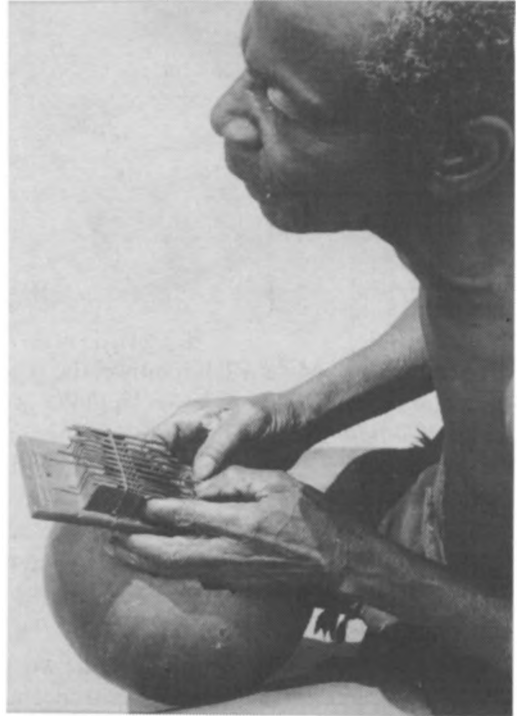


Fig. 1 Player of the *cisanji ca kakolondondo*.



Fig. 2 Player of the *ndjimba* xylophone

According to Mwata Tshitembwe, the seventeen keys, starting from the deep end are called: *shina*, *cihata*, *kanuke ko*, *muluwa* (1-2-3-4); then in the middle part (*hakaci ha kutulishila ndjimba*) the five keys *ana malunga* or young men (5-6-7-8-9), *muluwa* (10), the five keys *ana mapwo* or young women (11-12-13-14-15) and finally the two *tuvungili* (sing. *kavungili*) (16-17).

The xylophone keys may sometimes be decorated with carefully incised motifs taken from the classical repertoire of Chokwe decorative art (Bastin 1961, pl. 225-9). Sometimes a copper nail with convex head marks the two *muluwa* keys (4 and 10).

1.d. The *kakosha* chordophone

The *kakosha* is little used, but while we are on intimate music, before talking about drums, we should take note of its existence among the Chokwe. This kind of fiddle, with two or three strings stretched from the pegs on the neck over a bridge made of a piece of calabash, is played with a small arched bow and sometimes has crescent-shaped sound holes. European influence seems to us undeniable, but there is nothing surprising about that with this African people who copied the 17th century upright chair, and added original scenes on the cross-bars.

This fiddle is however more widespread among the Imbangala, under the name of *kalyalya*. These western neighbours of the Chokwe were before them in contact with the Portuguese who landed on the coast of Angola at the end of the 15th century. The Imbangala became famous as long distance commercial intermediaries between the coast and the interior, which only opened to Europeans during the 19th century. And it was doubtless via the Imbangala that the *kakosha* bowed chordophone was introduced to the Chokwe. The neck of this fiddle is sometimes decorated with a human head.

1.e. *Ngoma* drums or membranophones and the idiophone *cinguvu*.

These instruments make up the orchestra which plays at rituals and various dances. The music, powerful, lively and rhythmic, can be heard from far.

i. The upright drums *shina*, *mukhundu* and *kasumbi*

The orchestra (Fig. 3) includes the large deep drum *shina*; the middle drum *mukhundu* (sometimes one finds two); the *mukhundu wa kuvunga* and the *mukhundu*



Fig. 3 Orchestra of three upright drums, *shina*, *mukundu* and *kasumbi* and two *mikipela* hourglass drums, directed by the *tangishi* (centre, with sheep hair headdress), during the return ceremony from *mukanda* initiation.

wa kusalwiya, or the one which follows close behind the first;¹⁴ the small high drum *kasumbi*. These drums are upright, with a cylindrical body on a foot, *cikelekeko*, and provided with handles, *makana*, in the upper part and at the narrow part of the base. The base opens to the inside, *mucima*. At the top the skin is fitted with the help of pegs, *mbambo*. A gummy patch of *ulezo*, made of a mixture of rubber and castor oil, is stuck on top of the membrane to give greater resonance to the instrument or to make it 'speak'. Before starting to play the drums the musicians hold the skins to the heat of a fire to tighten them, and often during a pause in playing they repeat this action to improve the tone of their drums. These upright drums are beaten with the palms of the two hands. The drummer stands astride the instrument while it held obliquely in front of him by a string around his waist (Fig. 3).

ii. The hourglass drum *mukupela*

In addition to the upright drums, the Chokwe orchestra normally includes two hourglass drums called *mikupela* (sing. *mukupela*). In former times the *mikupela*, always



Fig. 4 Buzzing drum of the Luba or Luluwa, showing the membrane buzzer, *mukapa wambambo* reinforcing strip and *ulezo* rubber weighting.

were the insignia of great chiefs, and were sounded in various circumstances, for example for announcing war. Nowadays it is a dance drum which is played sitting down. The left hand strikes the deep end, *shina*, which is slightly larger in diameter than the high end, *songo*, on the right. It is the patch of *ulezo* rubber stuck to the centre of each head which accentuates the difference between the two pitches. The skins, which are held with pegs, *mbambo*, have a strip of skin around their edges which reinforces the tensioning system. This strip, which is pierced by the pegs, is called *mukapa wambambo*. The drum has four handles and a hole in the neck. The *cihondo*, cut from a calabash neck, is pushed into this hole. Slightly conical in shape, it goes in narrow end first, taking with it into the interior a *lundandji*¹⁵ membrane which closes the airway and vibrates in sympathy when the skins are beaten. (Fig. 4)

The skin drums are made mainly of *cikamba* wood (*vitex* cfr *mombassae* Vatke) because of its good resonance. The skins used are from

antelopes *kai* (*sylvicapra grimmia*), (*cephalophus nigrifons*), *ngulungu* (*tragelaphus scriptus*), *kasheshi* (*guevei coeruleus*) or *vuli* (*limnotragus spekei*); from domestic goat, *pembe*, or sheep, *panga*.

iii. The slit drum *cinguvu*

The orchestra which accompanies Chokwe dances includes, as well as the membranophones, the idiophone *cinguvu* or large trapezoid shaped wooden drum with longitudinal slit with close-set lips, through which the inside is hollowed out. The vernacular name for this wooden drum comes from the hippo, *nguvu*, whose cavernous voice it resembles. The *cinguvu* is always part of the orchestra which accompanies the appearance of masks and the various social dances,¹⁶ but is not used when the initiates dance on their return from their *mukanda* initiation.¹⁷ For playing, the *cinguvu* is hung slightly obliquely from two posts which remain permanently in the village square; it is struck with two beaters, *mishipo*, with round rubber heads, by the musician, who stands bent over it, striking both its flanks, one deep and the other high.¹⁸ (Fig. 14)

Let us observe now what is the normal order of entry of the instruments in a dance orchestra. The playing starts when the middle drum *mukhundu* moves into action. Then the small high drum *kasumbi* sounds, followed by the big deep *shina*. The one or two

mukupela hourglass drums join in. Finally the slit drum *cinguvu* sounds out. The deep drum *shina* and the idiophone *cinguvu* are often accompanied by the rhythmic tapping of two sticks, *mikalala* (sing. *mukalala*)¹⁹ played on their wooden bodies by a helper: sharp sounds which contrast with the powerful voices of these two large instruments.

At the ceremony for the return of the initiates from *mukanda*,²⁰ the orchestra, composed entirely of drums, is lead by the *tan-gishi*, who plays the *shina* drum. On this occasion he wears a headdress, *kuyembe wa panga*, made of the stiff hair of the *panga* sheep, and on his wrists rattles, *sangu* (sing. *lusangu*).²¹ (Fig. 5)

1.f. Rattles *musambu* and *lusangu*

i. *Musambu* (pl. *misambu*) rattle

This is a basketwork rattle shaped like a dumb-bell which the diviner, *tahi*, uses in pairs (Fig. 6), at the beginning of the divination session to dispel bad spirits. He then uses them to accompany the introductory dialogue song, with an invocation to



Fig. 6 Namayanga, *tahi* diviner, shakes the *lusangu* rattle, singing a song to propitiate the ancestors, before divining.



Fig. 5 *Sangu* rattles as worn by a drummer.

the ancestors.²²

ii. *Lusangu* rattle

We have just mentioned the *lusangu* rattle which the player of the deep drum fastens to his wrists to accompany himself. *Sangu* are also worn on the ankles by masked dancers. They are made of round, hard-shelled fruit, pierced with a number of little holes, which come from the *munzenze* tree (*Rubiaceae*). The perforated shells are filled with seeds and small stones which sound at the least movement. The *lusangu* rattle, with a stick for a handle, is also used by the diviner instead of the *misambu* basketwork rattles for the same purpose of warding off evil forces and begging for the intercession of the ancestors (Fig. 7). With the same aim of protection, just as much as to mark the rhythm, numerous masks dance with a one-shell *lusangu* in each hand (Fig. 14).



Fig. 7 Mwafima, *tahi* diviner, shakes the *lusangu* rattle, singing a song to propitiate the ancestors, before divining.

1.g. *Lubembe* bell and *ngezo* small bell

i. *Lubembe* bell or metal bell with external beater

The idiophone *lubembe*, a metal bell, often double, struck with a beater, was formerly used when preparing medicines to bring victory in war. It is also used by the diviner's helpers, at the point when he names the sorcerer, *nganga*, who is supposed to be the cause of the illness or the death of a member of the community.

ii. *Ngezo* small bell

The Chokwe have adopted the European brass bell which they call *ngezo* or *ngenzo* (after the Portuguese 'guizo' or small spherical bell). The diviner Sakariela had one hung on his belt and announced his arrival with the tinkling of its clapper inside the small metal bell. Doubtless he carried the bell just as much for chasing away evil spirits along his way. *Ngezo* has replaced the ancient small iron bell *mukelenge* which the Chokwe used to make before contact with Europeans. The *cihongo* mask, representing

the spirit of power and riches,²³ also often dances with an imported *ngezo* bell, made of brass, held in one hand, or sometimes in two, instead of the *lusangu* rattle common to other dance masks.

1.h. *Lundandji* small mirliton

I have already mentioned the various uses of the membrane which protects the eggs of the *candawuli* spider, which has the job, in the musical sphere, of sympathetic vibration.²⁴ It is also used to make a miniature mirliton which is placed behind the mouth of certain masks. (The Chokwe call both the mask and the masked man *mukishi*, pl. *akishi*). This very small mirliton is the *lundandji wa mukishi*. It is made of a calabash neck, *cihondo ca swaha*, in which a rectangular hole is made, and the two ends of which are closed by the membrane in question. This mirliton distorts the voice, remembering that masks represent spirits who thus do not have a human voice but utter long, deep sounds, like the wind whistling (for the *cikungu* mask of the ancestors of the chief), or a hooting sound (for the *akishi a kukumbuka* or masks which appear shouting during the *mukanda* initiation school to chase away women and the uncircumcised), or a sort of tremulous sound (for the *ngulu* dance mask which represents the domestic pig).

1. i. *Mishipo* sticks

We have already mentioned the use of the long thin stick *mukakala* which keeps time on the *muwungu* calabash resonator when it is being used as a resonator for the *sanza*,²⁵ also the accompaniment of one or two *mikakala* on the flank of the deep drum *shina*.²⁶

The Chokwe also use *mishipo* (sing. *mushipo*), short round hardwood sticks, of equal length, which are struck against each other by the mask *Katwa*²⁷ when he appears during

the *mukanda* initiation; also by the young initiates, *tundandji*, as they learn songs at their camp in the bush and at the ceremony when they return from initiation before they have appeared one by one in public, singing to their parents and asking them to be generous to their dancing and singing teacher, the *tangishi*.

2. Songs and dances

I believe it is difficult, if not impossible, to dissociate song from dance among the Chokwe, where these two are intimately linked, so I shall discuss them together.

We have seen that the *sanza* and the xylophone are not normally accompanied by words. In the same way the musicians of the drum and slit drum orchestra do not sing themselves: they inspire or accompany the dancers' singing. However, on the return of the initiates from *mukanda*, the *tangishi*, who plays the deep *shina* drum in the drum orchestra, not only leads the music but also converses, on his instrument, with the initiates, *tundandji* (sing. *kandandji*), when they are demonstrating to the assembled parents the talents they have acquired during their seclusion in the bush.

2. a. Songs and dances connected with the *mukanda* male initiation rites

The *mukanda* rite of passage includes circumcision and a period of isolation of several months (formerly two or three years) outside the village, during which the initiates are taught the history and the moral code of the tribe, in order to qualify for adult status, to be able to marry, start a home and accept the full responsibilities of a member of the community. During seclusion they are taught songs and dances by the *tangishi*, the player of the deep drum.²⁸ On his pupils' return to normal village life he is the one who is paid with gifts and money.

Let us follow the course of *mukanda* from the start. *Mukanda* is expensive for parents; also, in order to spread the cost among the families, they wait until several young people reach puberty before organising the initiation. It is the chief and the elders who decide the date. As soon as the arrangements are made, the parents meet for a big *cisela* dance, lasting the whole night, accompanied by singing.²⁹ It is a night open to all sexual licence, for on the next day, that of the circumcision operation, all marital relations are forbidden. On the 'illustrated' Chokwe chairs one scene which appears frequently on the cross-bars alludes to the *cisela* dance, where men and women are shown touching each others' genitals (Bastin 1982, ill. 189, 190, 191, 193).

Sunrise is the harbinger of the great day of the departure of the future initiates and their circumcision. Everything is done in silence, seriously and calmly. The appearance of a mask, *Cikunza* and/or *Kalelwa*, who is the patron of *mukanda* and a propitious for fertility, is the sign to start the proceedings when the boys are shouldered and carried off to the operating place by the *yikolokolo*, as it were godfathers, who will help them throughout initiation. Numerous masks intervene in the course of *mukanda*³⁰ but do not dance: they walk, or run sometimes like *Kalelwa* who represents a 'cloud', or hoot. Their function, armed with branches, *yitete*, is to chase away women and the uncircumcised from the path to the initiation camp. During the stay in the bush, when the food that the initiates themselves have to find is running low, some of the masks go to fetch food in the village. Their tremulous cries warn the mothers, who place the food outside the houses and go and hide inside while the masks take it away: for women may not go near these *mukanda* masks, nor even see them in principle, believing that they are spirits from

beyond the grave. Although the *mukanda* masks do not dance, the young people's initiation is a school of song and dance.

Moreover anything can be the occasion for dance among the Chokwe, who express through it their beliefs, their feelings and emotions. For example, the circumciser, having cut the initiates foreskins, dances the *kusembela*, to the sound of the upright drums, to show his satisfaction with the good result of the whole operation: the dancer kneels from time to time on his right knee, bends forward and kisses the end of his left foot.

During the long months of retreat, the circumcised boys, under the direction of the *tangishi*, learn to sing and dance (Fig. 8), accompanying themselves with the *mishipo* sticks. They are taught the steps of the dancing masks,³¹ so that they may also eventually become masked dancers. They are also taught the different movements of the current



Fig. 8 Circumcised *tundandji* learning to dance

Chokwe dances³² and the dance actions appropriate to them, like *wino wa cipaya*, with the shoulders; *wino wa kaliteta*, with the hips; *wino wa macakata*, with the legs, which comes before the *Cihongo* hip-dance.³³

At the close of the bush school the return of the initiates is the occasion of a big festivity. The initiates wear fibre costumes and body paint so that they may not be recognised by evil spirits. The costumes consist of a skirt, *nzombo*, made of beaten fibres from the *munzombo* and *mujiji* bushes (the former supple and reddish-coloured, the latter stiffer and whitish); also a *mukuku* headdress with a peak which partly covers the face. The body paintings, done with white and red clay, symbolic of good and evil, reproduce the classical motifs of the Chokwe repertoire of decoration. Thus adorned and protected against all evil influences, the initiates proceed into a rectangular enclosure where their families are waiting for them. They sit inside the small *luputa* shelter, which is raised up on one of the small sides of the enclosure, at the opposite end from the drum orchestra. They sing against the rhythm of the *mishipo* sticks and beg their parents to be generous to their dance teacher, the *tangishi*. The latter, who is playing the deep drum, calls the initiates out from the shelter one by one to show off their new talent as dancers. There are salvos of gunfire. The families surround them and throw money

for the *tangishi* onto their headdresses; his wife goes round collecting it (Fig. 9).

The initiates' return is celebrated amid general merry-making in the *ciyanda* dance,³⁴ which is increasingly replacing the old *cisela*.

2. b. Songs and dances connected with the *ukule* female initiation rites

The girls' puberty rite is also called *mwana pwo ha kula*,³⁵ a rite of passage equivalent to the boys' *mukanda*. It only lasts as long as the first menstruations and can be held individually if there is no other adolescent ready. The young marriageable girl is called *kafundeji*, the same name as given to the black-fronted duiker, an antelope with black



Fig. 9 A *kandandji* initiate comes out of the *luputa* shelter (made of blankets) and dances *wino wa Cihongo* surrounded by his family.

forehead, better known as *khongo* (*cephalophus nigrifons*), whose reddish skin colour is reminiscent of that of the young girl smeared with ritual red earth, *mukundu* (Fig. 10).

The *kafundeji* spends the period of her retreat in the menstruation hut, *nzuwa lya muyanga*. An old woman cuts *mikonda* tattoos on her pubis: six to eight long horizontal, parallel cuts, which are rubbed with charcoal to bring up the relief of a keloid scar. All women must have these tattoos before they can marry, because they are made for erotic purposes. During seclusion, women called *yikolokolo*, like the men who act as 'godfather' to the boys, perform the operations which marriageable Chokwe girls have to undergo to initiate them into their sexual life: defloration and stretching the labia minora. The *yikolokolo* also teach the young woman how to sleep with her future husband in order to give him the greatest satisfaction.

The *ukule* rite ends with a ceremony involving only women where the marriageable girl sings songs accompanied by hand-clapping (on this occasion there is no orchestra) as well as the dances which she has been taught. The most popular song for this ceremony is:

Lya wanda mbaci yami Who has taken my tortoise?
Swangongo mu cana Swangongo in the river-valley³⁶

Ukule is a preparation for marriage which is normally performed at the end of this female rite of passage. In this matrilineal society the ideal Chokwe marriage is between cross-cousins and 'avunculocal': the man marrying the daughter of his maternal uncle, *matu*, and the couple going to live in *matu*'s village.

2.c. Diviners' songs

The diviner, *tahi*, is an important person in Chokwe society. Among these people who believe that the world to come is peopled with both beneficent spirits, *mahamba* and *akishi*, and maleficent, *wanga*, the diviner acts as intercessor or intermediary. All ills and misfortunes are caused by these supernatural powers, angered if their cult has been neglected (*mahamba*) or masks not worn (*akishi*), or else they are provoked by the *wanga*, activated by the malevolence of enemies. In various circumstances (sickness, accident, death, sterility, impotence, unlucky hunting, bad omens, possession, theft, public disaster etc) it is the *tahi* that one goes to or whom one consults to divulge the cause, to clear up the facts of the past, remote or recent, rarely those of the future, and in this case, for example a journey that has to be undertaken, advice rather than prediction is sought.

Several divining items, *ngombo*, are traditionally used³⁷ and each diviner specialises in the use of one or other. It is as '*kabuma*', 'witch-finder', that the *tahi*, often combining these two functions, officiates in the case of a death that is believed to have an evil cause.

At the beginning of a divination session the diviner starts up an introductory song, in call and response with the patient, in which the ancestral spirits are invoked,³⁸ by shaking *misambu* (Fig. 4) or *lusangu* (Fig. 5)³⁹ rattles, to chase away evil forces with their noise.

The diviner often has helpers called *ana* or children. During the consultation, the *ana* play a small flat xylophone or the *lubembe* single/double bell.⁴⁰ The bell is played, as we said, at the moment when the witch, *nganga*, is named.

2.d. Songs and dances linked to the *mahamba* cult

The *mahamba* (sing. *hamba*) are ancestral and natural spirits who fill an intermediary role between *Nzambi*, the Creator, and men. Regular honour is paid to these spirits. The *mahamba* are represented by trees, by symbols or figurines of clay or wood which can be seen in enclosures near houses or in the houses themselves. As protectors of the community or of individuals, sacrifices and gifts of food are regularly offered to the *mahamba* by the heirs to their cults. Prayers, songs⁴¹ and dances⁴² are part of these ceremonies. Although I have seen and photographed numerous *mahamba* performances, I have unfortunately never been able to attend propitiation ceremonies. Victor Turner (1962 and 1957: pp. 37/203) describes in detail this kind of rite among the Ndembu, eastern neighbours of the Chokwe, whom he studied in Zambia. He also notes the existence of songs and dances performed on this occasion.

2.e. Dance of the *akishi* masks

In addition to the sacred, sacrificial mask *Cikungu*, symbol of the chief's ancestors, the Chokwe distinguish two other kinds of mask: 1) the *akishi a ku mukanda*, those who take part in *mukanda*, and who never dance, as we discussed;⁴³ 2) the *akishi a kuhangana*, itinerant dance masks who are presently acquiring more and more of a

secular character. For in the eyes of the ancient Chokwe, the *akishi* are spirits who have a social role and are embodied in the masks designated by the same name, *akishi*. The maskers are dedicated to them and merge themselves personally with the spirits whenever they put on these symbolic masks. Every Chokwe man can handle a mask without fear, but no one would want to put it on unless he were a professional dancer, because wearing a mask, for the dancer, does not run the sacriligious risk of releasing the spirit's anger.

The principal dance masks are *Cihongo*, *Pwo*, *Mungenda*, *Katoyo* and *Ngulu*.⁴⁴

i. *Wino*⁴⁵ *wa Cihongo*

Mukishi wa Cihongo is a noble dance mask. He represents the spirit of power and riches and was sometimes worn, in ancient times, by the chief himself, but more often by his son. These days any good dancer can present it.

The masked man goes on a tour, sometimes for two or three months, gathering gifts from village to village. It was formerly a means of collecting the tribute due to a ruler. Lima (1967: p. 160) notes further that *Cihongo* was sometimes a means of justice: he would point out a spectator who was guilty of certain misdemeanours for which he could frequently be punished by death.

The first *Cihongo* masks were modelled in resin (from the *mupafu* tree, *Canarium schweinfurthii* Engl), like the *mukanda* masks, on a framework of branches and covered with *mwanji* bark-cloth. At present *Cihongo*'s face is often made of wood. The hair is shaped like a fan with feathers stuck in, often covered, as a sign of riches, with western woven material (Fig. 11). Over the classic *civuvu* mask costume made of plaited fibre *Cihongo* wears a belt which is peculiar to him, the *cikapa*, consisting of an oblong frame which sticks out on each side of his hips, somewhat evocative of the panniers of women's dress of the 18th century, onto which stiff *makintu* grass is sewn in a long bushy fringe which swishes as the dancer spins.

In each hand *Cihongo* holds a small copper bell, *ngezo*.⁴⁶ On his legs he wears several round *sangu* fruits tied together as a leg rattle.⁴⁷ *Cihongo*'s dancing consists of hip movements which make the grass on his belt whirl around, accompanied by arm movements which make the bells sound: *wino wa mukishi wa Cihongo: wino wa ha yikumwa ya molu nyi moko*. It is the favourite, the most difficult and the most spectacular dance of the *tundandji* initiates which they learn in their bush school and are proud to show off to their parents when they return.

Some texts sung by the singer/spectators who sometimes accompany *Cihongo*'s dance are published in "Folclore musical de Angola": Vol. I, 1961: No. 291, II (1967): No. 359, collected respectively in the Lovua and Camissombo regions.

ii. *Wino wa Pwo*

The female mask *Pwo*, symbolising 'woman' or female ancestor, is a dance mask that is the ritual counterpart of *Cihongo*.

Pwo is the ancient name of this *mukishi* which is called, more recently, *Mwana Pwo*, young girl or young woman: a shift in values, underlined by J. Redinha (1955: p. 25), from the ancient African conception of the recognised appeal of a mature woman, to the more modern one aimed at the charms of youth.

The *Pwo* mask appears as a woman dressed for dancing. Above the wooden face is a

fibre wig, an exact replica in fibre of the woman's traditional hairstyle, plaited and dressed with red clay. This female mask, like all Chokwe masks, is worn by a man. The netting body costume has false breasts and a long cotton loincloth worn around the hips. The dancer wears the *muya wa ciyanda* belt,⁴⁸ which shakes at the small of the back with every back movement. He holds a *lusangu* rattle in each hand and often a *mufuka* fly-whisk. He wears the *sangu* leg rattles worn by all dance masks (Redinha 1956, figs. 3 & 4).



Fig. 10 A young *kafundeji*.

there are also several different ornaments and amulets. For we are dealing with a spirit reincarnated in this mask, as with all the Chokwe masks. The traditional rules of mask manufacture, always secret, and their ritual usage are described by J. Redinha (1956) in the introduction to his book on wooden masks, where he shows that the *mukishi wa Pwo*, reincarnation of an ancestral spirit, is treated in most circumstances like a real person: on buying the mask, the dancer gives the carver a copper ring, symbolic payment for a fiancée; after the death of the dancer, whose profession is generally inherited from uncle to nephew, the mask is often buried, out of superstitious fear. The *mukishi* has a beneficial spiritual potential which it transmits to the spectators at its performan-

Pwo, as I said, is the incarnation of the female ancestor. The mask is worn by itinerant dancers who transport the costume and accessories for safety in a *cipawa* basket, oblong and closed with a lid. At present *Pwo* is always made of wood, but formerly it was made of resin.⁴⁹ *Pwo* is adorned like a pretty coquette (Fig. 12). Tattoos are carved on the face of the mask. An ornamental piece of reed, *luteya wa zulu*, pierces the nasal septum. Her teeth, often visible, are made pointed like those of Chokwe women as a tribal mark, and are normally accentuated in white. She has rings in her ears and in the wig



Fig. 11 The masks *Cihongo* and *Mugenda* dancing

ces. Thus *Pwo* brings fertility. But its supernatural power is also to be feared (Fig. 13).

The dancing of this female mask consists of back movements: *wino wa mukishi wa Pwo*; *wino wa ku nyima*, punctuated by the swinging of the beaded belt, *muya wa ciyanda*, which weighs heavily on and is activated by the lower back of the dancer. According to Redinha, by studying *Pwo*'s serious bearing and elegant gestures, women learn graceful manners.



Fig. 12 *Pwo* female mask, with fly-whisk and *lusangu* rattles.

the majority of them live. *Cihongo* and *Pwo*, as one often sees them illustrated on decorated chair legs, dance alone, seriously and nobly. Other masks like *Katoyo* (see below) can raise a smile or a laugh, but *Cihongo* and *Pwo* are honoured and feared.

iii. *Wino wa Mungenda*

Another mask which is equally popular among the Chokwe, and whose dancing is learned by the young *tundandji* initiates, is *Mungenda*. His face is always made of resin and he can be identified by his fan-shaped hairstyle, from whose cap grow three cone shapes, *matumwa*: the largest, in the middle, projects to the rear and ends in a tuft of hair or feathers.

Although it may be true in Zaïre where the Chokwe settled at a fairly recent date and are not numerous, it is completely incorrect for Angola to say, as A. Maesen does (Umbangu, n.d. [1960] pl. 31), that *Cihongo* and *Pwo* dance together and "relentlessly stress the difficulties between men and women, the failings of each of the married couple, etc."

This anecdotal, theatrical side is, I insist, unknown in Angola, the cradle of Chokwe culture,⁵⁰ and where

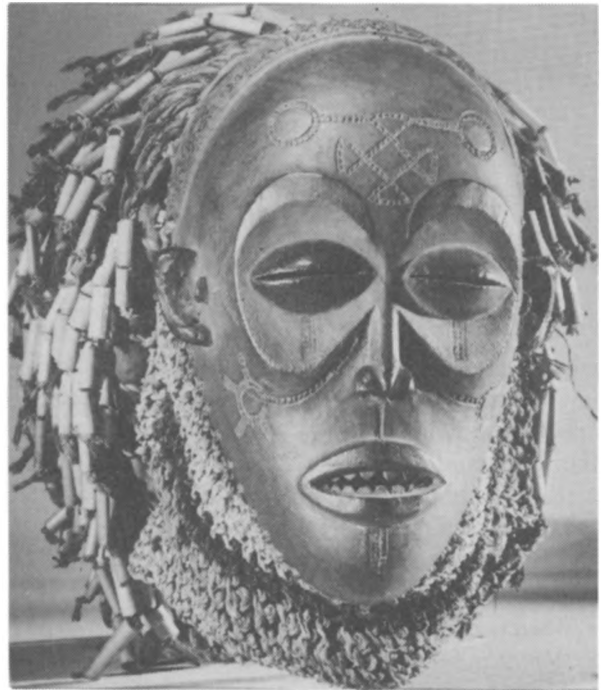


Fig. 13 *Pwo* female mask in the 'Kwilu-Kasai' substyle, showing the cross-shaped *cingelengelye* tattoo on the forehead and above it a design evoking the course of the sun from east to west.

Like the other dance masks, *Mungenda* holds a *lusangu* rattle in each hand and wears *sangu* leg rattles on the calves. The dancer has an S-shaped stick between his legs, peculiar to this mask, which simulates a penis. This phallic part of the mask, called *muwango wa Mungenda*, attached to a waist-belt and normally covered with a fibre or cotton net, ends at the top in a large bunch of leather strips (Fig.9).

Mungenda's dance action is pelvic: *wino wa mukishi wa Mungenda: wino wa ku jimo*.

iv. *Wino wa Katoyo*

Katoyo is a mask with quite a large audience among the Chokwe but is relatively



Fig. 14 Two *katoyo* masks dancing, wearing the *muya wa ciyanda* belt.

recent. It represents the White person, *cimbali*. The slight projection of the forehead above the nose represents the peak, *katemo*, of a cap, *kashikici*. The nose, *zulu*, supposedly straighter than on the other masks, is similar to that of a European. The face is made of resin or carved in wood. Pig or bush-pig (*potamochoerus porcus L*) teeth are inlaid at the corners of the mouth. The cap of the head-dress is covered with a colubus monkey skin, *pulumba (colobus polykomos angolensis)*. His costume has a false wooden penis attached to it, covered as far as the head with the same netting of

which the costume is made. Concealed behind a strip of cloth around his waist, *Katoyo* uncovers it furtively while dancing to make the audience laugh. This mask carries a *lusangu* rattle in each hand and sometimes also a *mufuka* fly-whisk, *sangu* leg rattles on the calves and a *muya wa ciyanda* belt⁵¹ around the waist (Fig.14).

Katoyo's dance is complex and can be acrobatic: the yoga 'pear-tree' position (Fig. 15), somersaults, etc.

The *Katoyo* costume and parts, as with *Pwo*, is kept in the long *cipawa* basket, which is carried on the shoulder during the long dance excursions.

v. *Wino wa Ngulu*

Ngulu means the domestic pig in Chokwe. This mask, *mukishi wa Ngulu*, is ancient and can be made in resin or in wood. It is also itinerant, and like *Katoyo* but unlike *Cihongo* or *Pwo*, aims to amuse. Yet it is not purely for entertainment, as shown by an example in the Dundo Museum (I.147) made of leather and beaten bark cloth covered in resin, which has small bags full of magical ingredients, *yitumbo*, attached to its mane. This mask also has a voice modifier, *lundandji wa mukishi*.⁵²

Over his body costume, like *Pwo* and *Katoyo*, *Ngulu* wears the *muya wa ciyanda* belt⁵³ with *sangu* rattles in the hands and on the legs. If he dances standing up, he parodies the *mukishi wa Pwo*,⁵⁴ but *Ngulu* is more often seen on four legs, scraping, grubbing in the

ground (Fig. 16) and making a grunting noise.



Fig. 15 A Chokwe dancer in the yoga 'peartree' position, photographed by Burr in central Angola in the thirties. A musician plays a sanza over a calabash resonator.

2.f. *Wino wa Tucokwe*

i. The circle dances: *kapaka*, *kashinga*, *kateko*, *cisela* and *ciyanda*

Kapindjisa was probably the first Chokwe word for dance, now called '*wino*', meaning literally 'skill in dance'.

Chokwe dances, *wino wa Tuchokwe*, are danced by men, women and adolescents in a circle around the orchestra.⁵⁵ They express cheerfulness but also have a much deeper meaning. J. Redinha (1958, p.185) states that the dance circle always moves from left to right, like the stars, to accord with their movement in the sky, and thus participate in the harmony of the universe. It is indeed from left to



Fig. 16 Ngulu 'pig' mask grubbing in the ground, wearing *muya wa ciyanda* belt, *lusango* rattle in the right hand.

right, i.e. anti-clockwise. The Chokwe explain this by the fact that the dancer first moves his right foot out of the circle, then puts weight on it to allow his left foot to move in turn. Circle dances unite the village community and are usually held in the evening after supper. They are a way of communicating with the supernatural. Women make up part of the circle, the rest being filled by men.



Fig. 17 Relatives dancing *wino wa ciyanda* for welcome and happiness on initiates' return from bush school.

The real Chokwe dances are called *kapaka*, *kashinga*, *kateko* and *cisela*. My informant Muacefo told me in 1956 that they seemed nearly lost; only *kashinga* and *kateko* were seen by him when he was young. *Cisela*, as we said, is related to the boys' rite of passage.⁵⁶ At present *ciyanda* is the one most danced on all occasions. It has been revived recently from the Shinji, western neighbours and relatives of the Chokwe:

"*wino wa Shinji nyi Tucokwe ha wuhasa*".

Ciyanda is sometimes chosen by the *kandandji* initiate as a demonstration on the day of his return from the bush. It is also danced on this occasion, just for joy, by the mother or a female relative. The dance consists of movements of the hips and pubis, with corresponding harmonious arm movements (Fig. 17). One dancer wears the *muya wa ciyanda* belt around the hips, which looks like a padded crescent, weighted with stones and decorated with multi-coloured beads. The belt skips and swings on the small of the back with the up-and-down movements the dancer makes. To accentuate the effect, a fibre fringe, *cipokolo*, is attached at the back, like a little 'pouf', which emphasises the least movement all the more.

Ciyanda is sometimes performed by professional dancers, who dress like women for the occasion, with the *uyembe* wig and the beaded crescent belt.

Songs are sung during the *ciyanda* dance.⁵⁷ In fact, apart from the masked dances, Chokwe choreography is always accompanied by song.

There remain only the songs and dances which appear on particular occasions, hunting, war and funerals.

ii. Hunting dance

The Chokwe are excellent hunters, and recognised as such by their neighbours. They have a hunters' society with entry by initiation, whose members are called *mayanga* (sing. *yanga*). An experienced hunter is the head, the *tata wa uyanga*, father of hunting, and he supplies his members with medicines for successful hunting. The particular hunters' dance consists of shoulder movements performed with a gun, *uta*, in the hand: *wino wa uyanga wa ku yipaya wa ku hangana nyi uta wenyi* (Fig. 18).⁵⁸



Fig. 18 Hunters' dance.

iii. War dance

The warriors used to wear a headdress decorated with cock feathers, a symbol of virility. War, *jita*, was announced by beating the *mukupela* drum. The warriors dance consisted of leg and foot movements while holding a gun: *wino wa jita wa ku molu ku yiliato muze masa yitumbo mahangana kana kwata mata jo*.

iv. Funeral dance

Funerals have their own dances and songs. The significance of the rites corresponds with the social status of the deceased, the level of initiation into the men's *mungonge* society or the women's *ciwila* society. Entry into these secret societies, whose cultural importance is still hardly understood,⁵⁹ is voluntary, thus optional, once candidates have gone through the puberty rites *mukanda* or *ukule*. Membership in *mungonge* and *ciwila* brings instruction towards a better knowledge of the forces of the other world, in order to communicate better with them and that they may become more favourable.

Unfortunately I have not been able to attend Chokwe funeral ceremonies, so I can only note that they do feature music, song and the *munema* dance (performed to honour the dead),⁶⁰ but four items of this nature have been published in "Folclore musical de Angola".⁶¹

Conclusion

This description of several musical instruments, songs and dances of the Chokwe, otherwise better known for their plastic arts, proves for us the great diversity and richness of their musical and choreographic expression which is just as important, tangible and varied.

Several authors, including Himmelheber (1939), have in fact stressed the grace of Chokwe dances where the studied, precise, deeply rhythmic movements evoke the ordered nature of a ballet, performed naturally and in deep communication with the cosmos.

Notes

1. This article is a new expanded version translated from the original by Andrew Tracey, of an article originally appeared in *African Musicology*, Nairobi 1983.

2. In 1961 and 1967 the *Companhia de Diamantes de Angola* (Diamang) published recordings on tape and disc of the Angolan Chokwe of the Lovua and Camissombo regions, with the transcriptions of the songswords, in its series "Folclore musical de Angola".

Dr Barbara Schmidt-Wrenger carried out musicological research in 1973 among the Chokwe of Sandoa and Dililo (Shaba) in Zaïre, and in 1976 she continued this study in the same country among the Chokwe of the Tshikapa region (Kasai)

3. *Cisanji ca kakolondo*, board resonator, single row of keys, generally consisting of eight reeds arranged in V-shape (Bastin 1961, pl. 205).

4. *Cisanji ca lungandu*, larger board resonator, with twelve to fifteen reeds, always weighted with *ulongo* beeswax, in two superimposed manuals: this idiophone has been adopted by the Lwena, southern neighbours and relatives of the Chokwe (Bastin 1961, pl. 206-211).

5. *Cisanji ca muyemba*, large board resonator, eighteen reeds with *ulongo* gum, in three superimposed manuals: this idiophone is proper to the Chokwe and the Lwena use it as well (Bastin 1961, pl. 212).

6. *Cisanji ca mucapata*, box resonator made of one piece of wood, hollowed out in 'bell' fashion from the bottom to about two thirds of its length, large keyboard of 22 to 24 reeds in saw-tooth arrangement: this idiophone comes from the Imbangala, western neighbours of the Chokwe, and has also been adopted by the Lunda (Bastin 1961, pl. 213).

7. *Cisanji ca lipungu*, box resonator hollowed out from the side to about three quarters of its height and reclosed with a small slat, which is sealed around the edges with *ulongo* beeswax; the keyboard has about a dozen reeds: this idiophone corresponds with the "likembe" of Zaïre and was adopted via the Lunda (Bastin 1961, pl. 214).

8. The Chokwe also have sanzas made entirely of vegetable matter: the resonator consists of fragments shaped from *cingwalala* pith and from rib of the *phoenix reclinata* palm leaf, and the reeds are made of *kele*, the rib of the *raphia* palm leaf (*Raphia textilis* Welv.)

9. See below 1.c.: xylophone, *ndjimba*, and 1.e.ii, *mukupela* hourglass drum.

10. "Folclore musical de Angola": (1961) Nos. 155, 169, 183, 191, 195, 211, 213, 215, 221, 225, 227, 229, 231, 233, 235, 237, 251, 252, 253; (1967) 355, 357, 365, 377. Nos. 225, 227 include song.

11. See 1.b..

12. A little xylophone with two, four or five keys, mounted on a straight frame, with corresponding resonator calabashes, is used by diviners, *tahi*, during consultations.

13. "Folclore musical de Angola", Vol. II (1967), gives some *ndjimba* tunes collected in the Camissombo region: (solo) 382, 410, 424, 425; (duo) 389, 397. The last two are accompanied by a chorus.

14. See the two xylophones which play in duet: 1.c.

15. See *cisanji* lamellophone: 1.b. and *ndjimba* xylophone: 1.c.

16. See 2.e. and 2.f.

17. See 2.a.

18. Upright drums of the *shina* and *kasumbi* types, the *mukupela* double drum and the *cinguvu* slit drums are used in miniature by sorcerers, *nganga*, to call their fellows to secret meetings in the bush, in the course of which they make *wanga*, harmful ingredients kept in various receptacles: horns, leather bags, small baskets or small carved human black magic, thus it is not a profession. Formerly anyone accused of being a *nganga* was put to death. It is the opposite of the *nganga* among the Kongo who practises white magic.)

19. See 1.b.
20. See 2.a.
21. See 1.f.ii.
22. See 2.e.
23. See 2.e.i.
24. See 1.b. and 1.c.
25. See 1.b.
26. See 1.e.
27. The *mukishi Katwa* is the first mask invented by the Chokwe. He wears a costume and a simple hood of plaited fibre. He is mute, in contrast to the other *mukanda* masks (see 2.a.). His role is to go to the village and look for food for the initiates, when this is necessary. He announces himself by beating *mishipo* sticks.
28. "Folclore musical de Angola": (1961) No. 234, 236; (1967) 567. "Folclore musical de Angola", see 2.f.i
29. "Folclore musical de Angola", see 2.f.i.
30. The principal masks concerned with mukanda being *Cikunza*, *Kalelwa*, *Cinyanga*, *Citamba*, *Mbwesu*, *Cilomwena*, *Mbwembweto*, *Cietela* (Bastin 1961, pl. 233-241). The sacred mask of King *Cikungu* only appears in the initiation camp in case of calamity, to appease the angered ancestral spirits.
31. See 2.e.
32. See 2.f.
33. *Cihongo's* and *Mungenda's* dance styles are ones which are imitated most often.
34. See 2.f.i.
35. In "Folclore musical de Angola" it appears under the name 'ucule'.
36. *Mbaci* is the vernacular name for the carapace and also the tortoise itself, of any species. *Swangongo* is the name of the large terrestrial tortoise (*kinixis erosa*). For a great number of these women's songs see "Folclore musical de Angola": (1961) 159, 161, 167, 173, 180, 192/3, 199/201, 242/6, 263, 271, 273, 279, 285, 295, 297, 307, 313, 326, 342, 350, 352; (1967) 381, 383, 385, 443/4, 461, 482/3, 518, 526, 528, 530/1, 570, 575.
37. Bastin 1959, pp. 103/4, 1961, pp.40/6.
38. For texts see Bastin 1959, pp. 101, 103/4 and 1961, pp. 42/5.
39. See 1.f.
40. See 1.c. and 1.g.
41. "Folclore musical de Angola": (1961) No. 160, 181, 207, 224, 241, 254, 259, 260; (1967) 418, 430, 465, 557, 565.
42. Baumann (1935, pl. 40) shows an Angolan Chokwe woman's dance, done to free a woman possessed by a *hamba*.
43. See 2.a.
44. Some items of music and song appear in "Folclore musical de Angola", sung by the spectators during masked dances: (1961) No. 177/8, 291; (1967) 359.
45. *Wino* means dance in the Chokwe language.
46. See 1.g.
47. See 1.f.
48. See 2.f.i.
49. Baumann 1935, pl. 78, Musée d'Ethnographie de la Ville de Neuchâtel (Switzerland): III c 6147 and 3836, collected in the Cunene region, Angola.
50. In northwest Zambia, where since the twenties a mosaic of peoples have been living: Chokwe, Lwena (Luvale) as well as Ndembu, the female mask *Pwo* (or *Pwevo* among the Lwena) does an acrobatic dance unknown in Angola. The dancer revolves around a rope stretched between the tips of two long poles about 10 metres high. W. Fagg (1968, facing pl. 237) shows photos of this dance, which is more typical of the Lwena.
51. See 2.f.i. "Folclore musical de Angola" gives the singers' words which accompany *Katoyo's* dance: Vol. 1, 1961, No. 177/8.
52. See 1.h.
53. See 2.f.i.
54. See 2.e.ii
55. See 1.e.
56. See 2.a. and "Folclore musical de Angola": (1961) No. 166, 187, 190, 196, 203, 248, 255, 262, 267/8, 274, 276, 281, 289/90, 303, 315, 319, 332, 334/5, 351; (1967) 373, 379, 402, 414, 426, 431, 440, 448, 458, 463, 491, 495/6, 502, 507, 509, 550.
57. "Folclore musical de Angola": the list of *ciyanda* songs recorded in the Luvua and Camissombo regions

is so complete that I shall merely mention that Vol. 1 (1961) has 110 examples and Vol. 2 (1967) 108.

58. In "Folclore musical de Angola", Vol. I (1961), three war songs used as hunting songs were collected in the Lovua region: No. 238/40.

59. One *mungonge* song was collected in the Camissombo region: "Folclore musical de Angola" (1967), No. 487.

60. Struyf 1948, p. 387.

61. 1961, No. 176, 344; 1967, No. 375, 471.

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