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40. Steatite Figures from Sierra Leone.

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Source: *Man*, Vol. 9 (1909), pp. 65-68

Published by: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2840822>

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FIG. 1.

FIG. 2.

FIG. 3.

FIG. 4.



FIG. 5.

FIG. 6.

FIG. 7.

STEATITE FIGURES FROM SIERRA LEONE.

## ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

Africa, West.

With Plate E.

Joyce.

**Steatite Figures from Sierra Leone.** By T. A. Joyce, M.A.

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In MAN, 1905, 57, I described a small series of these interesting sculptures, and gave such information concerning them as I had been able to collect through the kindness of various correspondents in West Africa. In that note reference was made to a paper by Professor Rüttimeyer, of Basel, who was the first to publish anything concerning these *nomori*. Shortly after the appearance of my note the British Museum was fortunate enough to acquire from Lieutenant Boddy a long series of some forty specimens, perfect and fragmentary, which he had collected on the spot and of which some exhibit new characteristics. Still later a few other specimens have been added to the National Collection, the most recent series being the gift of Major Anderson, District Commissioner, Makondo Central District, who also was able to furnish some new and interesting information. Fresh details concerning these figures also reached me in 1906 through the courtesy of the Rev. A. E. Greensmith, of Bo, Sierra Leone. Quite recently Professor Rüttimeyer has described and figured in the *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*, Bd. XVIII, p. 167, a second collection which he has obtained, and has incorporated in his article further information, much of which he obtained from Mr. Greensmith, and is therefore similar to that which the latter gentleman was kind enough to send me.

It may be worth while, since Professor Rüttimeyer has published his results to date, to place on record the more important specimens which have reached this country. Many of the latter are similar in type to some already figured (notably Figs. 4 and 5 in Rüttimeyer's first article, Fig. 7 in his second, and Fig. 1, *a* and *d*, in my note in MAN), and some appear to have been carved by unskilful hands in quite recent times, and the artist has not always been able to free himself from the conventions of the present-day art of wood-carving. A few of the most interesting are shown on Plate E.

Fig. 1 represents a man in a standing position, with hands on either side of a very finely-developed chest (though it may be that the figure is represented as carrying some rounded object pressed close to the body). A number of lines drawn horizontally from the ear to the mouth represent tatu similar to that of the figure illustrated in MAN, 1905, Pl. G. The top of the head is cut off flat and a wide conical hole is bored vertically in the "crown" to a depth of 2.3 cm. The carving, with the exception of the legs, is very good. Height of figure, 13.4 cm. (Boddy Collection.)

Fig. 2 is interesting, chiefly owing to the fact that, though considerably weathered, it exhibits in the features of the face and method of hair-dress, many of the characteristics of present-day wood-carving. It represents the head and bust of a woman, the arms lacking, the hair is dressed in a crest running from forehead to nape of neck, two plain vertical bands in relief from temple to angle of jaw in front of each ear represent tatu, and a large necklace of spherical beads is shown in relief encircling the neck. The whole surface, except the face, is ornamented with incised lines grouped to form triangles. Height of figure, 14.7 cm. (Boddy Collection.)

Fig. 3 is a fragment, representing the head and shoulders of a man; the arms, one of which is broken, are raised, and the hands laid flat upon the cheeks, as Fig. 6 of Rüttimeyer's second article; the hair is trimmed in a circular fringe of braids with a tonsure on the crown; and a short beard follows the line of the chin. Height of fragment, 8.8 cm. (Duke Collection.)

Fig. 4 is in some ways the most interesting of this series; it represents a bearded male figure with a kind of turban on his head, bearing in his right hand a spear, in his

left a circular shield, and surrounded by six diminutive figures of varying heights. A somewhat similar figure (not illustrated) forms part of the same collection; viz., a man with spear, and circular shield which he rests upon the head of a diminutive figure; the latter, which is very rudely carved, is cut free from the larger figure. Fig. 4 is perhaps the most weathered of the whole collection; the surface is quite black and very smooth. The circular form of the shield is very interesting as it is extremely rare amongst negro tribes. Height of figure, 17·8 cm. (Boddy Collection.)

Fig. 5 represents a woman with pendant breasts standing and holding a staff in her right hand. In her head, the hair on which is shaved in patterns, is a vertical hole 2·8 cm. deep. Vertically down her body, above and below the navel, is a band of *guilloche* pattern in relief, representing tatu somewhat similar to that on the body of the figure illustrated in MAN, 1905, Pl. G. Height, 22·6 cm. (Boddy Collection.)

Fig. 6, which is somewhat battered, represents a head only, with very coarse features and widely everted lips. There is a flat circular projection on the top of the head about the region of the bregma but inclined to the right, the ear lobes and the *ala* of the left nostril are represented as ornamented each with a ring. A string with two cowries encircles the neck. Height, 14·0 cm. (Duke Collection.)

Fig. 7 is quite unlike any other I have yet seen; it represents a man seated on a peculiarly shaped stool (*see* Fig. 1 below) and carrying a bowl. On his head is a

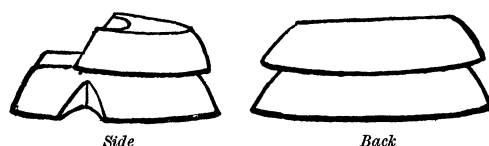



FIG. 1.

conical turban with a lobed border; the face is grotesque, the features sharply cut, the nose prominent and pointed, but with exceedingly broad *alæ*; the lips are parted in a wide and cat-like grin, showing a formidable array of teeth (obsured by the shadow in

the photograph); the ears are placed unnaturally high, immediately under the border of the headdress, the hair is shown in a fringe on the forehead, and a series of knobs on the neck may represent either curls or ornaments. On each temple is a band of tatu

thus:  Round the shoulders is cast a cloak, one end of which hangs down in a bunch behind the left shoulder (just visible in the photograph). Height, 21·5 cm. (Boddy Collection.)

As to the fresh points of information which I have received, I will first quote Mr. Greensmith's letter:—

“I have one or two observations to make which may be helpful to you:

“(1) In addition to being found in Sherbroland, Mendiland, and over the Liberian border, they are also found in those parts of Timniland that lie contiguous to Mendiland. It may be that you will possibly hear of them being found much more to the east than has yet been suspected.

“(2) I have not observed you make any mention in your note, nor have I indeed heard from any civilised person, black or white, of certain metallic rings that the natives say are discovered, *i.e.*, dug up, with these farm devils, and which are never separated or rather kept apart once they are found.

“Although I had heard of them more than two years ago, it was only a month ago that I saw, and actually came into possession of, one of these rings. It was very black with exposure to the weather apparently. On scratching it with a knife, it appeared to me to be either brass or bronze. The ordinary image is called, as you observe in your article, ‘nomoli’ or ‘nomorri,’ but when accompanied by one of these rings is then known as ‘mahai-yafei,’ king spirit or king devil—I suppose so called because they are employed in the courts of the chiefs for the witnesses to be sworn upon. These mahai-yafeisia or maha-yafanga, although but the ordinary

“ nomolisia with a ring accompanying them, are regarded with much more dread than the simple nomoli, and are regarded as of much greater value.

“ The metal rings are sometimes six, seven, and eight inches in diameter, and the nomoli is placed in the middle, but the one I secured was only about 2 inches, and fitted so close to the nomoli that it served to prop it up in an upright position.

“ (3) The word ‘nomoli’ appears to me to be derived from *nu* = person, and *muli* = soapstone. Soapstone, of course, is still to be found in the country.

“ Before the end of the year, possibly in a few weeks hence, I may find time to go off on a little expedition, to investigate the truth of the native reports about the ‘little hills’ I previously mentioned to you.”

Major G. d’A. Anderson, District Commissioner, Makondo, is the source of the following interesting information regarding the localities where these figures are found; he has not come across any rumour as to the, possibly mythical, *tumuli* concerning which other enquirers have received reports. His account runs as follows: “I cross-questioned many chiefs—Konnoh, Mendi, and Timni—and their answers were almost identical. In substance it was:—With the exception of a few figures handed down for generations as guardian ‘good fairies’ of a town and a few found in old farms, all the Nomoris were found in caves or recesses in worked-out veins of steatite. I warned all the Court messengers and officials that I wished to see one of these ‘pits,’ as they called them, and by chance I came across one and investigated it, and could see at once the manner of manufacture. I was crossing from the Konnoh country to the Kuniki chiefdom, and, as we were passing a newly-made farm, one of the boys ran back and said the man had found a Nomori pit. I found a gully or ravine in the side of a steep hill, which, on investigation proved to be a long tunnel or chamber with the roof fallen in; as far as I could judge it had been about 9 feet wide tapering to 3 feet, 15 feet long and 8 feet [high] at the entrance, tapering to about 4 feet. The sides were of steatite but badly veined with sand, mica and iron oxide. There were remains of several figures roughly blocked out but abandoned when a vein of sand or mica was encountered. Clearing away *débris* I found one small incomplete figure still adhering to the side; numbers of fragments were scattered about. The natives told me that when they found figures in the pits, these were always attached to the rock and had to be cut out. I came to the conclusion that the steatite was not first quarried and then sculptured, but that the figure was carved in the rock *in situ* and not removed until complete and perfect. If a vein or pocket of quartz or mica was encountered, which would spoil the sculpture owing to finer parts breaking or crumbling away, the figure was abandoned and another started. This is borne out by the fact that most of the figures now obtained are imperfect, the hair, fingers, or portion of ornament being unfinished, and always at the blemished spot mica or sand will be found.”

Unfortunately no information is forthcoming at present as to the makers of these figures; it is possible that a comparison of the tatu marks may shed a little light on the subject, but I have not yet had the opportunity of pursuing any enquiry in this direction. I feel convinced that some of them are quite modern, since they correspond so closely with present-day wood-carvings, and it seems likely that the natives may have taken once more to the carving of this easily worked material. Professor Rüttimeyer is inclined to attribute to the *nomori* an age of “many centuries”; this may be correct, but there is absolutely no evidence to show this. When it is remembered that tribal memory in savage Africa is extremely short, and that the whole of the west coast has been the scene of continual migrations from the interior, of tribes wishing to avoid the depredations of slave raiders, or pressing seawards in quest of salt, and when it is realised that these migrations usually resulted in the annihilation of either the immigrants or the people whose territory they tried to seize,

it will be readily understood that a very few years might suffice for a craft to fall into absolute oblivion. On the whole I cannot see that the facts as we yet know them warrant us in attributing any great age to these carvings. Nor can I see that these figures can be considered on the same footing with ordinary stone sculpture; some of them are so soft that they can be scratched with the nail, none that I have seen are so hard that they could not readily be shaped with an instrument of soft iron, and the fact that steatite possesses no grain renders it more easily worked with a blunt knife than wood, provided that the details are not to be very minute. They stand far below the very remarkable basalt sculptures discovered by Captain Partridge some twenty degrees of longitude distant in Southern Nigeria, and, indeed, have nothing whatever in common with them except the mystery which surrounds their origin.

T. A. JOYCE.

## Africa : Rhodesia.

Shrubsall.

**A Brief Note on Two Crania and some Long Bones from Ancient Ruins in Rhodesia.** *By F. C. Shrubsall, M.D.*

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The date to which the construction of the ruins in Rhodesia should be assigned has been a matter of controversy since their discovery. Some investigators regard them as having been built by the ancient cultured peoples of Southern Arabia, and would assign them to the early centuries of our era, if not indeed long prior to this. Others maintain that no objects have been demonstrated from any site which can be shown to be more ancient than the fourteenth or fifteenth century, that in the architecture there is no trace of Oriental or European style of any period soever, and that there are imported articles of contemporary date with the buildings

SKULL FROM OLD  
MINE.SKULL FROM CHUM  
RUINS.

which are mediæval or post-mediæval. Those who maintain the earlier dating conclude that the settlers who built the ruins were acquainted only with natives of the Bushman type; the others appear to maintain that the structures might have been constructed by negroes. Any evidence from human remains is therefore of some importance.

In the Natural History Department of the British Museum there are two skulls and some long bones which were found in these ruins and presented to the Museum by H. W. Moffat. One, catalogued as 97.2, 13.1, is described as having been found buried in an old ruin. With this were found some long bones. The other, 97.2, 13.2, is described as having been found in an old shaft 30 feet under the ground in a mine nearer Buluwayo.

SKULL FROM OLD  
MINE.SKULL FROM CHUM  
RUINS.

These records would scarcely serve to date the remains, but on tracing their history it appears that these are the specimens referred to by Hall (*Ancient Ruins of Rhodesia*).