

## The Analysis of Power and Authority: The Headwear Decoration of African and Indonesian Art Grace Hann

The power and authority within a culture is often represented through headwear. This motif is evident in chief headwear in the Congolese *Tiered hat with brass discs (botolo)* and the Indonesian *Warrior's headdress ornament*. Both use valuable, culturally significant materials to symbolize and project an aura of importance.

The *Tiered hat with brass discs (botolo)* was produced by the Ekonda peoples in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the 20th century. They believe that the projection of one's body in everyday life, as well as in ritual context, can profoundly shape their relations with the community around them.<sup>1</sup> Because of this, the Ekonda peoples put a heavy importance on rituals, and the tiered hat would have been worn by the village chiefs, or *nkumu*. Their headdresses would also be preserved and passed down to their successors.<sup>2</sup> Generally, kings and chiefs are often depicted larger than an average person to seem more important; similarly, the *botolo* is comprised of coiled, brimmed basket fibers in order to create a towering 2-foot visual through its repetition of many coils, tiers, and brass discs (*losanja*). Brass was a valuable resource because it was the medium for trade in Central Africa.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of the *botolo* was to enhance the sense of acknowledgement and power one would receive when interacting with these individuals.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, the *Warrior's headdress ornament* from 19th-century Indonesia would have been worn by a high-ranking warrior.<sup>5</sup> A warrior's status and individuality depended upon his adornment, and the more decorated a warrior was, the higher his rank and prestige.<sup>6</sup> The headdress ornament was designed to adorn a grass-like helmet to physically and spiritually protect the warrior in battle, suggested by the stylized frontal figures (*tap lavong kayo*) on the top and bottom of the ornament. The protection of the warrior during battle would have been a major reason to include such protective charms. The heart-shaped *tap lavong kayo* depicts a powerful underworld spirit with writhing limbs whose purpose is to protect the salient warrior. This ornament is reminiscent of the Bronze Age Dong Son Culture that developed in Vietnam because of the heart-shaped face with oval eyes that repeatedly appeared during that time.<sup>7</sup> What seems to be a mythical hero toward the top may also be the embodiment of the great warrior's own strength.<sup>8</sup> The brass ornament is ornately decorated with curvilinear shapes. This detail was added possibly due to the prestige of this warrior. The brass material is valuable in Indonesia as well – again hinting at the prestige of the warrior.

Both cultures incorporate brass as a distinguished material in headwear to convey an individual's power and authority within the community. The *Warrior's headdress ornament* is also much smaller than the *botolo*, yet it still indicates power by adorning a larger headpiece with decorative brass elements. Also, both the *botolo* and the headdress ornament individualized the village chief and the warrior to set them apart from the rest of society to depict them as powerful authorities. Moreover, the polished brass may have created a divine-like, reflective light that would coax the people to look toward the powerful men as divine leaders. In conclusion, power and authority is conveyed with the use of brass in both the *Tiered hat with brass discs (botolo)* and the *Warrior's headdress ornament* by alluding to the wealth and prestige the brass represents.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Jo Arnoldi and Christine Kreamer, "Crowning Achievements: African Arts of Dressing the Head." *African Arts* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 23.

<sup>2</sup> Arnoldi and Kreamer, 34.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Michael S. Bisson, "Copper Currency in Central Africa: The Archaeological Evidence," *World Archaeology* 6, no. 3 (February 1975): 279.

<sup>5</sup> Roslyn Adele Walker, *African Headwear: Beyond Fashion: August 14, 2011 – January 1, 2012* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 2011), n.p.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth DeMarrais, Luis Jaime Castillo, and Timothy Earle, "Ideology, Materialization, and Power Strategies." *Current Anthropology* 37, no. 1 (1996): 23.

<sup>7</sup> Reimar Schefold. *Eyes of the Ancestors: The Arts of Island Southeast Asia*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013): 20.

<sup>8</sup> Walker, n.p.