

rules. The shapes are simple, with a great economy of means, while the hands and feet are heavy and just roughed out. Their different gestures indicate different functions. Three statuettes from Huaca Tacaynamo have their arms behind their back; this indicates that they are prisoners. One of them also has a rope around his neck and his ankles are fettered. There are also hunchbacked figures in balsá, decorated with shells or feathers. Standing or sitting cross-legged, they hold a bowl in their hands, perhaps to make an offering. A Chimú bowl at the Linden-Museum Stuttgart represents a hunchback holding a vase, in the middle of a circle of smaller figures; another, smaller hunchback, is at his side and also carries a container. This scene evokes the ritual distribution of chicha (maize beer). The Chimú seem to have been the only ones to sculpt monoxylic boxes with lids. These rectangular boxes, decorated with Chimú motifs, are covered with champlévé carved geometrical figures at the sides and the lid. Some are divided into two or three registers and recall the motifs incised in the clay walls at Huaca el-Dragon. They involved an animal with a crescent headdress, depicted in profile, sitting on its long tail. Its large mouth is open. This monster, probably mythical, seems to be the result of a long iconographic tradition. Indeed, the vases of Mochica III (300–400 AD) and the subsequent periods depict a sort of feline or dragon with a crest, sometimes sitting in a kind of boat or on a crescent moon; it is associated with stars or heavenly bodies. The same creature is found in Recuay art. In the absence of an exact archaeological context, we can not know what these boxes contained –



perhaps weaving material. Some of them were firmly closed with straps passed through the holes at the ends of the boxes and their lids. On the south coast, the Ica-Chincha have left many wood works. In private American collections there are sculptures from the south

coast which date from the Late Intermediate Period. They seem to be influenced by Tiwanaku stone statues: the shapes are finer, the volumes more geometrical. But they give the impression that the local artists sought to imitate the Chimú without ever quite equalling them. Particularly original are the “ceremonial oars” carved in chonta or acacia. Some are painted with resin in red, green, and yellow. One model really looks like an oar and its long shaft is decorated with stylised birds and fishes. Other decorations are figures wearing a little hat or a half-moon headdress, long-beaked birds, simplified fishes and geometrical motifs (mainly a stairway motif). The top of the blade is decorated in the same way. Some oars display figures in profile, wearing a strange hat. The second model is in the shape of a long, thirty-centimetre-wide plank, decorated on its end with openwork and relief motifs. A semi-circular opening has the same motifs. On the side are mostly birds and fish. These objects recall oars and rudders, or planks for controlling the water level in irrigation canals, or shovels. One can imagine that the finer pieces were used only for religious purposes. Finally, some were put in the ground to mark tombs. One could not complete such a study without mentioning the kero and the pajcha, two ritual containers used by the Incas. The widespread wooden kero continued the tradition of the kero in ceramics from the time of Tiwanaku beyond the sixteenth century. Many keros of the Inca period came from Cuzco, but other regions of the empire also supplied fine specimens. They are painted, or sculpted in champlévé style, or simply engraved with geometrical decorations. Some have animals carved on the sides or forming the handle. Some fine specimens imitate the head of a cat with its mouth open to display impressive fangs. The long pajchas consist of a vase with a hole in the bottom to let the beer pass into a tube with a channel ending in a mouthpiece. Pajchas and keros were carved in hardwood and hollowed out with bronze tools. Resins, mostly mixed with mineral pigments, were applied to protect the wood and make it waterproof. Both containers were used for ceremonial purposes, particularly for rites having to do with agriculture and the fertility of the fields. This collection of wood sculpture begins cataloguing of an art, which is, as yet, little known and therefore not widely appreciated. Unfortunately information about the artefacts in private and public collections is spread, and the context of discovery is often absent. This exhibition of

ceremonial objects and sculptures for daily use is taking us on a voyage through time from the Mochica to the Incas. It is a true testimony to the universality of the spirit.

#### 44 Olówè of Isè A Master Wood Carver of the Yoruba

Jean and Jane David



Anonymous wood carvers, who gained neither fame nor admiration for their work; artists, who work out the shapes and styles of their works only within rigid set forms and produce undateable pieces – these and other, in part romantically distorted, assumptions even today still shape a widely held image of the nature of African artistic creation. In actual fact, even in Africa, some artists, highly regarded because of their capabilities, produced commissioned pieces and their names were well-known. The aesthetics of works of art were discussed and stylistic innovations were not frowned on. A prime example of this dynamic within African art is the life and works of the significant Yoruba artist Olówè of Isè.

*Olówè and his Work under Rosalyn A. Walker*  
In 1988 Rosalyn A. Walker, as curator at that time for African art at the National Museum of African Art in Washington, organised an exhibition dedicated to Olówè and wrote a monograph as the catalogue to accompany the exhibition. Her most important sources about the artist from the federal Nigerian state of Ekiti were photographs of his works and reports written by travellers such as Charles Partridge, Philip A. Allison, Major C. T. Lawrence, E. Harlan Duckworth,

Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, Ulli Beier, William Fagg and John Picton, the Oriki praise song recorded in 1988 by John Pemberton III and the results of her own field research. According to the data collected by Walker, Olówè’s mother was living as a prisoner of war in Efon Alaye when she gave birth to him and a sister from around 1873 to 1877. After the father had managed to purchase his family’s freedom, Olówè spent most of his life in Ife and, according to Philip A. Allison, died in 1938 or 1939. Even today he is remembered every year with a festival. Olówè began carving when he first started to earn his living as a youth in Ife with all kinds of lowly jobs as one of the many hundred errand boys (elemoso) at the court of the king (Arinjale). The question as to whether he had any teacher(s) or whether he taught himself his profession alone by means of his talent remains unanswered for Walker. As a master carver, Olówè developed a distinctive style characterised, in particular, by figures carved with perspective, asymmetries, high reliefs and the depiction of movement. The artist worked in a geographic area of about a hundred square kilometres around the town of Ife. His works have been documented in the royal palaces of the towns of Isè, Ikéré, Owo and Akure, as well as Ikare, Igede, Ukiti, Ogbagi, Use and Ogotun. In Europe, people became aware of his artistic creations in 1924 at the British Empire Exhibition in Wembley. There a magnificent door on loan from the Ikéré palace was much admired in the exhibit at the Nigerian pavilion.

*The Latest Insights and Evaluation*  
As far as is currently known, Olówè lived between 61 and 68 years and began his artistic career presumably at about the age of 15 in about 1890. Contrary to Walker’s observations, it is not imaginable, however gifted, that he could have learned his craft without training or lessons – he must have had some kind of apprenticeship. What is certain is that, over the course of time, Olówè realised his own artistic vision within the Ekiti style. From a certain point onwards, after he had overtaken his teachers, he sought and found – now self-taught – new creative approaches on his own. If one assumes in the course of his development as an artist he had a ten year apprenticeship and then a coming to maturity as an artist, which took another ten years, then Olówè presumably found and consolidated his own style at around 35 years of age. Since, as an old man, he presumably left the

work to his pupils then the peak of his creative achievements was probably reached in the twenty years between 1910 and 1930. It is easier to answer Walker’s question regarding possible contacts of Olówè’s with other wood carvers and their work: during his lengthy career he is bound to have seen a good many works by his counterparts and may have also been inspired by them. Possible sources of such inspiration would be artists like Obembe of Efon-Alayè (c. 1869 - 1939), Bamgboye of Odo-Owa (c. 1883 - 1978) or Arèògùn of Osí-Ilorín (c. 1880 - 1954). Furthermore, it is completely possible that he, as Walker mentions, had knowledge of artworks outside Africa through illustrations in books and was influenced by them. On the other hand, it is possible that some of his motifs have their source in the early history of the region. Here we cite the artistic use of the relief in the bronze plaques of the Benin kingdom in which the motif of birds pecking at the eyes of decapitated heads clearly has its origin. The freely carved heads amongst Olówè’s bowls are also perhaps in the tradition of the Edo (Benin) ancestral rattle staffs. (ukhurhe).

*Olówè’s Work on the Art Market*  
Olówè’s talent was so appreciated that he was entrusted with the complete furnishing of the palaces of the wealthy. The artist often worked on his own or else with up to 15 employees for years on such commissions, which could be compared with those from the wealthy patrons of the arts in the Renaissance. In Rosalyn A. Walker’s catalogue about 50 works of Olówè’s are listed. Their exact number varies according to whether pairs are classified as one or two sculptures in the list and how many of the works can really be attributed to Olówè as some pieces differ stylistically from the rest of his body of work. In 2004, Rosalyn A. Walker went to work for the Museum of Art in Dallas, which, in the same year at Sotheby’s May auction in New York, purchased a female bowl-carrier by Olówè for a record price of 534,000 US dollars. Since then, the same auction house has offered three further pieces by Olówè: a bowl and two doors. In situ, in the trade and in collections, thanks to the increased interest, further new works by the artist have surfaced again and again. This proves that, contrary to the commonly held belief, there still exist top class pieces either waiting to be discovered in Africa and hidden in private collections. The only nagging question is, which

of these new discoveries can we confidently attribute to Olówè? Anyone who deals with this difficult subject has to differentiate between works carried out by Olówè’s own hand as well as works by his pupils which they produced either under his supervision or not. In addition to this, there are pieces by his imitators which were produced for their own use and imitations which are intended for sale to collectors. Occasionally it is extremely difficult to differentiate Olówè’s own works from those of his pupils or imitators. It is certain that in this case too, as so often, that the copy is worse than a first class original, the work of the pupil is not of equal worth to that of the master. In what does a second or third class original differ from a good copy? And: who can attribute a piece in front of them without inventory records and without a faultless and verifiable provenance? Olówè’s students were bound to have set up on their own in his lifetime for various reasons and at least in part have alluded to the style and forms of their master. There is after all no copyright for African art (yet). One can also assume that canny craftsmen will have been copying the master carver’s successful style whilst he was still alive and that others will have carried on with this after his demise. This break-down brings fresh aspects to the word “forgery”. After all, the producers of the pieces in the different categories depicted are at any rate good craftsmen – even if possessed of varying degrees of artistic talent if not at all less talented or simply without a clue. Forgery in the usual sense of the word only arises through the intention to deceive. Should the carver at the production stage already have the intention to deceive future beholders over the attribution of the work in order to achieve an increase in value then he is a forger and, if the work sells successfully, then he is a fraudster. For the most part though, it is not the craftsman but a commissioning agent, who initiates the fraud and it is always a dealer that carries it through to the end. It is only at this stage that the piece becomes a forgery: when a seller declares the goods knowingly as something that is authentic. Olówè is however without doubt an exception in African art and the development in the prices can, as far as one can predict, only carry on in the direction they have taken – assuming we are speaking of a genuine, legally acquired, Olówè. Manuscript extract from a book about the art of the Yoruba by Jean und Jane David, which is currently in preparation.

#### 52 Palat Khik, the phallus that can work wonders Prof. Gert Chesì

It is a well-known fact that phallus cults and fertility ceremonies belong to the repertoire of animist religions. The fact that most of them have their roots in a dark, distant past is vouched for by archaeological discoveries worldwide. But the fact that there are younger cults that are in no way limited to sectarian minorities is known even by tourists who get their hair cut in Thailand. Whoever opens the door of a Thai hairdresser will discover a wooden phallus in a prominent position, generally amongst other paraphernalia next to the till. It is often so true to life that the Muslim women who frequently turn up there as customers, veiled in black, look away in shame. At the same time there is hardly a more prudish society than that of the Thai middle class. An exception is made, however, for the phallus, which belongs to the metaphysical world view, as does the meditating Siddharta. The fact that it is precisely amongst small-business owners that the penchant for the phallus that affords protection is so prominent may well be due to their social status, which is in no way so secure that they do not need protecting by spirits and gods. Eed Yingying Opakul und Cathy Vandewalle – she is Belgian, he was born in Thailand – have, as collectors, devoted themselves to this subject. They were fascinated by the phallus and its many manifestations. Whilst searching for the origin of this cult, Eed made an extraordinary discovery. The phallus – whether made of wood, ivory or bronze – had a protective function and a power that was said to enable it to repel evil. At the same time it did not matter whether this evil appeared as a spiritual being or as a physical enemy. It is said to have been in the 15th century when Thai monks began to hang phallic symbols on the belts of the smallest and weakest amongst them. In doing so a thoroughly logical conclusion was drawn. The boy, whose childish penis is still entirely covered by the foreskin, represents the unprotected one. The grown man, on the other hand, whose bell-end constitutes the tip of the erect member, symbolises fortification and strength. It was therefore in monasteries that they began to give boys phallic amulets in order to offer them some protection. The idea seemed to appeal to other social classes, and the practice soon became established. What once discreetly acted as a protective tool in the isolation of monasteries appeals to wide sections of the

population to the present day. It acquired new functions; being a western-oriented society, money of course plays a significant role. When Li opens her hair salon every morning, she gently touches the phallus lying on the counter with her finger tips. It is meant to bring customers, the type who also pay properly. In times like these every chance has to be seized. The wonders expected of the wooden penises are complex and vary from household to household. Eed reports that it was also the case in the past, when different monasteries demanded a variety of things from their phalluses. But the roots of this cult lie deeper. Buddhism, which evolved against the backdrop of Hinduism, had always been permeated with sexual symbols which spread out from ancient India over the entire region. The Lingam, the phallic symbol of Shiva, and the Yoni, a counterpart to the divine vagina of Khalis, are, to this day, influential in the iconography of Thai Buddhism. It is no surprise,



then, that there is a large Lingam in the royal palace in Bangkok, always decorated with colourful cloths and heaped with flowers. The cult of the phallus is alive and however prudish the Thai middle class may be, no-one would want to be without it. In the heart of Bangkok the construction of a large hotel threatens a small place of worship that was held in high regard by the local people. Dozens of Palat Khiks – some very large – line a small sanctuary. Hidden under an enormous treetop, it almost has the effect of a secret place only for people who have been sworn into it. The hotel builders had to respect this place; they spared it grudgingly – they were Americans, who could find no way around this logic. Religions and their moral concepts are the material that create conflicts. And yet the cults around the Palat Khik are only apparently Buddhist. Their roots lie in Tantrism, which goes along with Thai Buddhism in an almost folkloristic way. However dubious moral concepts are in general, this is also exemplified by the comparison with Europe’s history of cultural mores. If the

Christian church was still permissive five hundred years ago as far as the display of sexual attributes was concerned, it later increasingly began to cover the Madonna's breasts or to conceal the nakedness of the angels. That was when Buddhism opened out to a new worship based on sexuality. The pendulum that allows one type of worship and then other ones to appear as the guardians of morality is nevertheless not a pendulum that swings back and forth. It appears to care little for physical laws and in this way it occasionally improvises so that the desire of one can become the suffering of another. Even in Thailand the greatest permissiveness often exists alongside bigotry; for the most part, perversion follows hard on the heels of the highest moral demand. But what is perversion in such a context? It is the downside of a morality conceived by people; the negative part of a value system that a society deemed to be valid and good at a particular time. All that can change very quickly – those who are old enough to look back at their youth know that. In Thailand this phallus is referred to as Palat Khik, for which Palat is a vulgar expression for penis. With the small amulets that are mainly worn by boys, there is the belief that they will protect them from stab wounds or spears; they are also seen as effective against snakes and dog bites. The Palat Khik of the adults is larger and often inscribed – the most frequently used phrase is Kan ha neha. That means “the heart of the killer” and is effective against all dangers as well as illnesses. Popular belief ascribes even more to it: if it is worn on the left-hand side of the belt, it protects the warrior against enemy attacks and makes women compliant. Worn on the right of the stomach it facilitates contact with influential people. One can also prepare medicines with a Palat Khik; it is placed in alcohol which is then administered to the patient. Palat Khiks are made out of a variety of materials, the most valuable of which are tiger's teeth because the tiger, as a symbol of strength, has extraordinary value. One frequently comes across Ling Lom, the monkey's phallus. It represents the Hindu monkey god Hanomann, who is prized for his intelligence and good deeds. In the Ramayana epic he saved a princess who had been kidnapped and by doing so became one of the most popular figures in the Hindu gods' heaven. His intelligence helps to perfect language and literature. But the Palat Khik that represents a woman embracing a penis holds a very special position. As

a symbol of fertility and virility it is extremely important.

**56**  
***Arunachal—Forgotten cultures in the eastern Himalayas***  
*Peter van Ham*



My stomach churns as the tail of the helicopter tilts skyward above the densely forested ridges. However, this downward glimpse of nature at its most awesome and overpowering, spreading out to the left and right of the River Dihang – as the Brahmaputra or Tsangpo is called in these parts – causes me to quickly forget that dull sensation. I recall the British explorers who, at the back end of the 19th century, starting out from Assam, pushed onwards with incredible effort into this difficult and wild area in order to gain a foothold – against all the embittered resistance of the indigenous peoples, in particular the Adi, who were at that time known as Abor, or “wild people”. We fly upstream, northwards, and I am reminded that it was just ten years ago that the Earth's last great geographical puzzle was solved, i.e. the question of whether Tibet's Tsangpo and India's Brahmaputra were one and the same river. Several expeditions, both from the Chinese and from the Indian side, were necessary in order to determine that the Tsangpo splits on its course to India into a number of steep cataracts via an inaccessible rift, which on the Tibetan side of the border then manifests itself between the giant mountains of Namcha Barwa and Gyala Peri in the form of the Earth's deepest gorge. Our plan is to get very close to that location. A glance at the dark bank of clouds above, however, causes me to be dubious in this respect. In 2003, Agloja Stirn (my partner of many a year) and I travel, for the third time, around Arunachal Pradesh – the state in north-east India, the “land of the mountains bathed in morning light”, the “land of the rising sun”: that part of India which the sun touches first of all. Our first expedition, in 1996, led us through the valleys north of the Brahmaputra

and into areas which Austrian ethnologist Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf had visited in 1944/45, but which had not been visited by any European in the intervening 51 years. In 1998, we had the rare opportunity to research the southern part of the horseshoe-shaped state, at its border with Nagaland, as well as to undertake field research in the regions bordering Tibet and Bhutan, this form of research having been last permitted in the 1950s. And this year we have returned thanks to a governmental invitation to travel to the most far-flung of regions – places where, in part, foreigners had never trodden – so that we might complete our work on the traditions and arts of the 100-plus ethnic groups which live there. The government of Arunachal is worried that in the course of the accelerated opening-up of the area, many of its unique customs, social structures and traditional costumes would be lost, and commissioned us to record them, at least in visual, textual and audio forms, so that future generations have some kind of reference material. 140 different ethnic groups! It is no wonder that Arunachal has also been called an ethnological paradise on Earth. None the less, so as not to end up in a complete mess as a result of the amount of different cultures



evident within the state, it may be divided up into three main cultural regions: the Tibeto-Buddhist north, the animistic-shamanistic central region and the southern part, where Burmese-Buddhist ethnic groups have settled, along with animist cultures belonging to the people of the Naga. Thanks to the state's long period of inaccessibility (India waged war with China – headed for Tibet – on this soil in the 1960s, and was forced to protect itself against the communist military dictatorship of neighbouring Myanmar (Burma); the peoples of this area have managed to keep many unique traditions alive, which is reflected in the

social structures as well as through craftwork, materials, jewellery and art. What is more, this has been achieved within a grandiose natural environment which remains intact over large parts of the state. Thus we are now trying to reach the Dibang-Dihang biosphere reserve, which extends over 5000 square kilometres, and whose jungles and high-mountain regions are home to rare animals such as the Takin (a kind of bovine chamois), the musk deer, tigers, clouded leopards, the red panda and the snow leopard. An hour's flight sees us land in Yingkiang, and the start of the adventure: in order to reach Tuting – the last dwelling before the Tibetan border reachable by road – we have to cross over to the opposite bank of the Dihang. However, this is only possible via the rickety, bamboo rope bridge near to Nubo. (Ethnic groups such as the Adi, Mishmi and the Monpa are masters of bridge-building!) We load the heavy equipment onto our shoulders and stumble the three kilometres along slippery downhill paths towards the bridge. It does not take long for me to start sweating profusely through effort. Thankfully, a couple of friendly, sympathetic people invite us into their house for a break. Here I come across the same primitive, artistic expressive forms that I have seen

throughout north-east India. The family, of the Adi-Shimong ethnic group, had hung roughly carved deer heads on the posts of their house, over which there was a fringe of the crude roofing made of palm leaves. After partaking of a strong tea, we hit the road once more, past large rice repositories on stilts, stilts with plate-shaped wooden discs affixed at their upper end, thus rendering them insurmountable to hungry rats. The final part of the journey is hellishly steep and perilously slippery. One wrong step would inevitably lead to a fatal fall into the thundering waters of the Siang. In view of the slippery surface underfoot, a glance

down into the gorge nearly causes my heart to stop. Slowly, I put one foot in front of the other, but even with the first step I notice that my tread is not steady. I ask our guide to help me with my heavy rucksack containing the camera equipment. How can this be? I think to myself. How can it be that a state can introduce a helicopter service, but not ensure decent access to the rest of the state? Whilst I continue my internal quarrel with the Indian authorities, I slide slowly, sometimes on all fours, down the slope towards the bridge. Finally I can stand on the swinging footbridge. An incredible wind swirls around the gorge. I carefully hold on to the rattan railing and balance, concentrated, over the slippery bamboo tubes. We have to go over and back twice in order to transport all the equipment. It is only now that I allow myself to breathe deeply. However, what meets us on the other side is an uphill rock face as steep as that we came down. Nonetheless, we feel more secure going uphill, and we are not forced to look constantly into the thundering abyss. Furthermore, we are aware of the fact that our guide's brother is waiting for us at the top in the jeep – that speeds us up. Mountain ridge after mountain ridge, we immerse ourselves deeper into the realm of the Adi, whose straw huts stick almost inaccessibly to the roadside overhangs and to the opposite river bank. I can see the shape of the stone blocks mounted by the Adi to combat the British, and hear the rumbling of boulders as they crash against the soldiers of the advance party and crush them. The left bank of the Siang is primarily inhabited by the Adi-Padam. Their largest village, Damro, has recently become the scene of a huge festival, where hundreds of bison are slaughtered in order to secure the relationship between the clan members who may live large distances from each other, and to please the gods of the harvest. On our bank of the river, on the other hand, the once-feared Adi Minyong are dominant. Between the two villages are strewn the smaller hamlets of less numerous groups. Today we are making our way to one of them – Karko. The village and its people seem miserable and squalid. At first I ascribe this to the increasingly deteriorating weather, but a short walkabout reveals otherwise. It appears that the Adi-Karko are in an inferior position within the traditional power relationships. Nevertheless, their Gam – the chief of Karko – creates a dignified impression and is committed to the village traditions remaining as

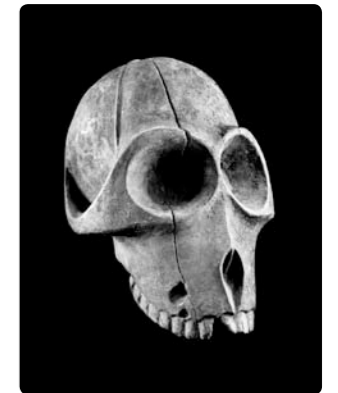
they are. He himself still carries all the external manifestations of his status: the helmet made of thick bamboo, yak hair and wide boar tusks; the backpack-cape covered with black plant fibres; the bag made of bearskin; the chains made of valuable glass pearls and the Adap, a piece of jewellery particular to the Adi made of blue and white glass pearls, on which the tooth of a musk deer dangles. Even his armour – consisting of bearskin and a long dao – is not complete. Many village women still display traditional chin and lower leg tattoos. However, given that the rain is getting heavier all the time, and that we cannot judge whether our jeep will get stuck in the mud of the un-tarmacked road, we say our farewells to the people of the village and return to the cold, equally miserable guesthouse in the town of Karko. The next day, we snake endlessly northwards. Settlements become scarcer, the landscape all the more imposing thanks to the ancient lichen and moss-covered trees. We are in deep jungle, and already by midday, I have had a taste of the untouched wilderness. I suddenly feel a biting pain in my lower leg. I instinctively roll up my trouser leg to see something black protruding its way into the flesh between my hiking boot and my sock: the dim-dam fly, about which I have read so much in Fürer-Haimendorf's work. Just in time, before the creature can lay its eggs under my skin, I manage to kill the insect. Immediately, the insect's acrid smell of death enters my nose which, given that I would continue to suffer as a result of the bite three months later, constitutes a lesser evil. We choose to finish our lunch in the car, as the damp parking spot would make the dim-dam's attacks unbearable. Agloja, chewing, clears the steamed-up window: “The weather is not getting any better; it's drizzling already. I hope it's not far to Tuting.” Tuting was originally a Mema settlement – a people emanating from the neighbouring Pemako region in Tibet. Today it is also home to the Adi-Ashing, from whom the Mema have borrowed many of their spiritual concepts. This is linked to their overpowering, dismissive nature, which does not sit easily with the clarity of Buddhism. Anyway, there is much other evidence of prayer in the village, and even a smaller monastery. As we reach the ramshackle building we see Tibetan women with colourful aprons and delicate silver belts turning the prayer drum. In our honour, they even sing a few songs before we enter the monastery, where we are met with a surprise: the

monastery contains a large number of wonderful masks, manifestations of the Mema's highly developed carved art. The first masks of this type first appeared on the international art market just a few years ago, and are now sought after by a number of interested collectors. Those masks, however, come from a neighbouring people, the Monpa, who live on the border with Bhutan, around the great Tawang monastery. Mema masks, on the other hand, remain generally unknown. Later that evening, we would witness a pomung by the local Adi-Ashing. This is the name for the performance of traditional songs and dances which can last for days, whereby the Miri, the singer, and the female choir recite the early history of the clan back to (as the Adi say) “the first Man”. Thus it can take a long time. During our audio and photographic recordings I am always amazed by the indigenous way in which the people here adorn themselves: yellow, blue and white glass pearls, some of which are hundreds of years old, which have made their way here after being manufactured in Bohemia and Venice and which are still sometimes used as a means of payment. Locally made metal vessels, and those imported from Tibet, are still used as dowries, and are used to resolve disputes, whilst mussel shells, traded from the Gulf of Bengal all the way to here, are signs of status and affluence. A world which is, even today, nigh on unknown – but a world full of grace, dignity and beauty which I believe is worth keeping and encouraging!

The next few days in Tuting bring anticlimax with regards to our plans of crossing the border into Tibet: it was supposed to take us two to three days, on foot, to reach Geling, but porters and guides cannot be found due to the fact that work in the fields has begun. In addition, the weather is poor – it rains continually – which calls into question whether the climb to the Tibetan border is manageable for us at all. Under these conditions, we begin to doubt ourselves: six days of steep uphill and downhill slippery paths, without porters, with overly heavy equipment on our backs, in addition to the dim-dam flies and leeches – it is less than attractive. So, given that it is not our main concern to get somewhere so as to be able to say that we made it, but rather to experience cultures in a manner which is as authentic as possible and to document them, we decide to head back to the southern regions. The next morning proves that our decision was spot-on: the heavens open and finally the “real” eastern Himalayas

present themselves: sap-green jungle up to the snow level; above the mountain tops a deep blue sky; and in-between, collections of small brown huts above the raging Siang, with footbridges made of bamboo! The Nyishi, Tagin, Apa-Tani, Idu, Miju, Hrusso, Sherdukpen, Monpa, Khampti, Tangsa, Tutsa, Nocte, and Wancho are waiting for you!

**64**  
***Death in Africa***  
*Prof. Gert Chesl*



Death is not only a German master craftsman, he also comes from Africa. From time to time, whenever I browse through my books looking for something forgotten, I can see them in front of me: the old priests and magicians, the healers and all the young girls who, dedicated to cults, led traditional lives. When I met and photographed them, most were younger than me. Now they are dead and no one really knows why. Poisoned, it's called; cursed, a spell put upon them by a jealous neighbour and driven to ruin. I am constantly amazed and horrified at the lightness with which death reaps its harvest here; at how quietly the people surrender to their fate. Every trip back to Africa begins with questions about those who have since gone. It may be the living conditions that make them die so quickly, the lack of access to medicine; but it may also be an attitude that fatefully tolerates the fact that an often avoidable end takes the place of a struggle for survival. Poverty does not explain everything. The dead also include wealthy people – the kind of people who could have paid for their medicines and doctors. They did not do so – or only once it was too late. In this country the cautious approach to saving money that is glorified ad nauseam in Europe only seldomly exists, but one can nevertheless observe that a destructive form of stinginess still exists. Those who come into