

Royal Pipe with Ceramic Bowl



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- Cameroon, Grassfields
- Bamum Kingdom
- Late 19th century
- Terra cotta, bronze, wood
- H. : 170 cm
- Presented by King Ibrahim Njoya to Captain Hans Glauning in 1905 or 1906.
- INV. 1018-8

This royal pipe has an interesting history, for it is a testimony of the relationship between King Ibrahim Njoya of Bamum and the German colonial administration. Njoya, who was seen as a German ally and who was able to maintain a certain degree of independence in the colonial situation, engaged in gift exchanges with the Germans, among them, Captain Hans Glauning, the head of the military station in

Bamenda in charge of Bamum. Glauning supported the king against transgressions by German merchants and with the help of Bamum troops he defeated the kingdom of Nso, in 1906. In 1885-1887, in another war, the Nso had devastated the Bamum armies, killed Njoya's father, Nsangu, and kept the ruler's head, which could now be returned to Bamum. Njoya presented the pipe and a beaded stool to the officer in 1905 or 1906. The pipe is the work of artists from the small kingdom of Marom, who specialized in pottery, and artists of the kingdom of Nguot. A famous for their objects in wood and bronze. Both kingdoms had been defeated by the Bamum, integrated into the Bamum state were their artists appropriated. The pipe bowl is in the shape of a male head with the round eyes, incised eye brows, and a nose with flaring nostrils. The pronounced cheeks, a signature stylistic element of Bamum works, may allude to King Mbuembue, who ruled in the first half of the nineteenth century and was said to have been a "giant" with large cheeks. Another explanation is a technical one—the pronounced cheeks allowed to be the pipe balanced when on display. The openwork headdress shows a central lizard or crocodile icon and three similar configurations on each side. The lizard motif has been associated with princes and crocodile alludes to the king. A fine meandering motif, which can be interpreted as chicken entrails or a stylized serpent, adorns the rim of the bowl. Bronze, male, human figures with high status headdresses form the pipe stem. This configuration—one figure on top another—is reminiscent of the wooden figurative pillars, which adorned the Bamum palace before it burned down in 1913. Called "tree of persons" in the Bamum language, they visualized wealth in people and the riches of the Bamum monarchy. Pipes of this size and elaboration served mainly for display purposes.

Christraud M. Geary, *African Terra Cottas. A Millenary Heritage, musée Barbier-Mueller and Somogy (eds), 2008: cat. 114 p. 262.*