4P-Project (Patients, Practitioners, Practices, Plant Drugs)

4P-15: Protective and curative amulets in the Lake Chad basin
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1. Introduction [a]

Everywhere in the world, health is considered to be one of the most important aspects of life. African peoples are no exception, which is reflected in an almost endless variety of African objects to prevent, examine, or cure diseases (De Smet 1999) (Herreman 1999) (Grange, et al. 2001:124-165). An outstanding example are the metal rider-on-horse amulets that have been used against madness by the Kotoko and neighbouring peoples in the Lake Chad area. One of us [PP] [b] has collected hundreds of these amulets [PP collection] that have been largely documented in two catalogues (Peroni 2012) (Licina and Miskovic 2014). Our current contribution expands these publications with new information about the rider-on-horse amulets and expands them by reviewing other amulets of ethnomedical interest that were made of metal and roughly originated from the Lake Chad basin.

2. Methods

Study area. Our study area consisted of northern Cameroon, northeastern Nigeria, and the whole of Chad.

Study topic. We focused on amulets with a concrete ethnomedical purpose (such as the rider-on-horse amulets). We also included amulets, however, that specifically offered protection against supernatural causes of disease (evil spirits, angry ancestors, sorcery, witchcraft, evil eye). Sometimes, we added cross-references to similar types of contemporary and archaeological amulets in the study area. For the sake of convenience, we excluded Tuareg amulets, since the literature on these objects is already quite extensive.

Throughout, we used the term “amulet” instead of “charm” or “talisman”. According to some sources, an amulet is intended to protect its wearer against harm, while a talisman is a bringer of good luck, but other sources offer different definitions, and the only common ground seems to be that these terms have often been used in a careless and confusing way.

Data collection. We combined our experiences in the field [PP, HC, HT] with data from the literature and museum inventories [PS]. Museum records cited in the text are identified by their inventory number and can be easily retrieved through the online databases of the cited museum collections:

- BM-L: British Museum, London [https://www.britishmuseum.org/research.aspx]
- EM-B: Ethnologisches Museum Berlin [https://www.smb.museum/en/research/online-catalogues-database.html]
- MAA-C: Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge [http://collections.maa.cam.ac.uk/]
- MQB-P: Musée du quai Branly, Paris [http://www.quaibranly.fr/en/explore-collections/].

Data presentation. We arranged our findings as much as possible for one people at a time. This will allow readers to see for themselves which similarities and differences exist between different ethnic groups.

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[a] Since this review was not developed in the same way as the other contributions to the 4P-project, introductory objects are not presented separately at the start but have been incorporated in the figures throughout the text.

[b] The initials of the coauthors are used throughout the text to indicate personal communications to the first author.

There is a large variation between and even within African cultures and their interactions with each other (Herbert 1993) and it often remained unclear whether a specific practice was merely local or not. It could also be difficult to establish the extent to which a practice varied over time and whether it was still ongoing or not. This is reflected in our choice to present most of our data in the past tense or in the present perfect.

Names and locations of the discussed peoples were primarily based on *The peoples of Africa: an ethnohistorical dictionary* (Olson 1996) supplemented with the *Mandara Mountains* website maintained by Müller-Kosack [https://www.mandaras.info/].

3. Peoples in the Kotoko region

The rider-on-horse amulets from the Lake Chad area have been commonly attributed to the Kotoko people in northern Cameroon and adjacent parts of Chad and Nigeria (hereafter called the Kotoko region). However, such amulets were not used exclusively by the Kotoko but also by other peoples in the region (Fulbe[c], Guiziga, Kanuri, Mafa, Mandara, Massa, Shuwa Arabs) (Massa 2007) [HT]. For instance, the earliest publication mentioning these amulets states that they were worn by female Shuwa Arabs (Foureau 1905:968,Fig.338). A non-Kotoko origin may also apply to other amulets from the Kotoko region. For this reason, our heading emphasizes geographical origin (Kotoko region) instead of ethnic origin (Kotoko and neighbouring peoples).

3.1. Rider-on-horse amulets

The varied appearances of the rider-on-horse amulets have already been reviewed elsewhere. Here it is sufficient to note that they have mostly been cast in copper alloy or silver alloy (Figs.1a,1c); may or may not be covered with leather (Figs.1b,1d); and rarely decorate rings for elderly males (Fig.1c) (Massa 2007) (Peroni 2012) (Christoph 2013) (Licina and Miskovic 2014). There is general agreement that the rider-on-horse figurines were usually made to cure madness (Fr. *folie*) resulting from spirit possession and to prevent relapse after the madness had subsided (Peroni 2012) (Christoph 2013) (Licina and Miskovic 2014). We were told by an informant that covering with leather was particularly applied in serious cases [HC]. Older references imply that the amulets were only worn by possessed females (Lebeuf 1962:88) but this is no longer the case (Peroni 2012) and the amulets may also be given to children (Christoph 2013).

In the existing literature, the rider-on-horse figurines are commonly called *putchu guinadji* (Massa 2007) (Christoph 2013) (Licina and Miskovic 2014), which is a French transcription of the Fulbe expression *puccu ginnaaji* (horse [of] geniuses) (Seignobos 2017:126) [HT]. The symbolism underlying this theme remains to be firmly established. It has previously been suggested that the figurine represents a mounted warrior who has to defeat the genius (which would explain why the rider is often armed) (Peroni 2012) (Christoph 2013). However, based on our experiences with Fulbe possession ceremonies, it seems more likely that the horseman represents the genius (who often happens to be armed) [HT]. One source proposes that the rider is the genius while the horse represents the spirit of the

[c] The Fulbe people Fulbe (Fulani; Fr. Peul) have a widespread distribution in West and Central Africa. However, the information presented in this article pertains to the Fulbe in northern Cameroon.

possessed person (Massa 2007). This brings to mind the metaphor of Arabic-speaking peoples in Africa that patients are mounted by spirits in possession ceremonies. This does not necessarily mean, however, that a rider-on-horse amulet portrays how a patient is being ridden by a genius. At the end of a Fulbe possession ceremony, the patient will drink water like a horse to become dissociated from her or his role as a horse. The genius will then require another mount to leave and it is quite conceivable that rider-on-horse amulets represent a genius on such a substitute horse (Tourneux 2011) [HT].

Fig.1. Rider-on-horse figurines (all examples from the Lake Chad area and made of copper alloy with or without leather)

Fig.1a

Fig.1b

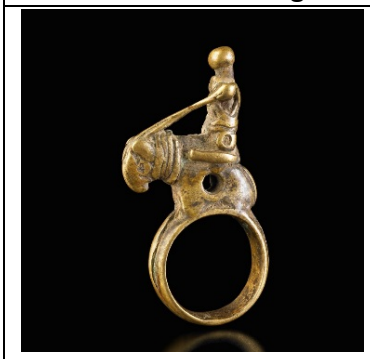

Fig.1c

Fig.1d

Fig.1e

Fig.1a Rider-on-horse figurines. H. 5.8 cm (left) and 3 cm (right)

Fig.1b Rider-on-horse figurines covered with leather. H. 5.4 cm (left) and 6.6 cm (right)

Fig.1c Rider-on-horse figurine on top of ring. H. 6.2 cm

Fig.1d Rider-on-horse figurine. H. 4.7 cm.

Fig.1e Rider-on-horse figurine covered with leather. H. 5.8 cm.

Fig.2 Activation of a rider-on-horse figurine by a Kotoko marabout named Bakoura located in a village rather near to Maroua in North Cameroon

Fig.2a

Fig.2b

Fig.2a
The rider-on-horse is placed upright in a magical herbal brew and is left in the boiling brew for 30 min to activate it
© *Henning Christoph (Soul of Africa Museum, Essen)*

Fig.2b
The amulet is additionally heated and smoked thereafter
© *Henning Christoph (Soul of Africa Museum, Essen)*

According to Kotoko informants, the prescribing of a rider-on-horse amulet and its preparation for use may involve the following steps (Christoph 2013):

1. A marabout (Muslim teacher/healer) establishes that the patient is afflicted by madness
2. He sends the patient to a caster who makes a rider-on-horse amulet of copper alloy by means of the *cire perdue* (lost wax) technique. The casting process is a sacred act that requires spiritual power from the caster.
3. The marabout activates the casted figurine by boiling herbal medicine in a pot of water, lacing the figurine in the boiling brew for half an hour, and dousing it afterwards with the blood of a chicken.
4. The marabout decides, whether the figurine needs to be covered with leather or not. The specific details of the activation process may be individualised.

One of us [HC] was recently able to observe and photograph the actual activation of a rider-on-horse by a Kotoko marabout in rural North Cameroon (Fig.2). The patient has to wear the amulet until a full recovery is reached or, if the affliction is incurable, until the patient dies (Massa 2007) (Peroni 2012) (Christoph 2013). If the figurine starts to lose its potency, it may be reactivated by boiling it once more in the herbal brew or by sacrificing another chicken (Christoph 2013).

The Kotoko believe that the social organisation of their spirits is modelled after the human world. There are non-Muslim spirits (*bədəri* and *kuruguma*) that are a priori considered to be hostile and dangerous to man. There are also Muslim spirits (*fakiye*) that are believed to be more benevolent. These latter spirits can also cause harm, but they are not harmful in essence (Adam 2017). *Sùrè* (roughly translatable as madness) is usually attributed to possession by a spirit or to bewitchment (*envoûtement*) by a malevolent

sorcerer (*sorcier*) [d] who attacks the target through a spirit (Adam 2012). This may cause headaches (Massa 2007), convulsions (Peroni 2012), and hallucinations (Arditi 1999) (Adam 2017). The victim may also show stupefaction, amnesia, a lost gaze, and erratic behaviour (e.g., incoherent talking, negligent dressing, wandering around or sleeping in unusual places) (Adam 2012). The Kotoko also distinguish the following types of madness:

1. Being madly in love (which can happen to males as well as females).
2. Being overcome by maddening grief.
3. Being overstrained (which may particularly happen to pupils who have to memorise the Quran) (Adam 2012:8-18).

The Fulbe people in northern Cameroon likewise associate madness with spirits (*ginnaaji*) and excessive feelings (e.g., pain, grief, or anger) (Regis 2002).

The Kotoko do not only combat spirit possession with rider-on-horse amulets but also with musical ceremonies that involve dancing and are led by a medium and are performed in the context of a possession cult. Just like the rider-on-horse amulets, such ceremonies have not only been documented for the Kotoko, but also for other peoples in the Kotoko region (Rouget 1985:77,151-153) (Tourneux 2011). Although the participants in these ceremonies are predominantly women, the rituals are not strictly a female affair. They may also be performed for a possessed male and men may be also present as a musician or as the master leading the ceremony (Brandily 1967) (Adam 2017) [MA][e]. Some suggest that the ceremonies are meant to domesticate the spirit (Rouget 1985:77,151-153) and that the bond between spirit and patient remains until the latter dies (Adam 2012). According to others, the ceremonies are aimed at the actual casting out of the spirit (exorcism) (Brandily 1967) [HT]. Whatever may be more common, the ceremonies and rider-on-horse amulets are by no means mutually exclusive. It is possible, for instance, that the medium (who has power over the spirits) orders the patient to perform dances for the spirits and to wear a rider-on-horse amulet as well (Adam 2017) [HT].

The spiral pattern on some riders-on-horse may symbolise the basket tray (*plateau de vannerie*) that plays a role in the possession ceremony. The tray is a symbol of the cure that is brought about by the ceremony. At the end of the ceremony, the possessed will throw the tray in question into the water (river or pond) (Adam 2012).

3.2. Appendages to rider-on-horse amulets

Various rider-on-horse amulets carry one or more miniature appendages that may or may not be hidden in leather (just like the riders themselves) (Fig.3). Examples discussed below are lizard-like figurines (3.4), crocodiles (3.5), miniature writing boards (3.6) and cups (3.7). Other examples include miniature footwear, leather amulets (probably containing a Quranic

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[d] Many sources distinguish sorcery and witchcraft as two different concepts of supernatural disease causation by human beings. However, a sharp contrast between both concepts does not apply well to all societies and is not always strictly adhered to in the anthropological literature. For instance, the French translations of sorcerer (*sorcier*) and witch (*sorcière*) merely seem to indicate a difference in gender. To deal with this problem of inconsistent definitions, we have systematically reproduced the labels that were used in the consulted references.

[e] Personal communications to the first author by Adam, M. (Maroua: ENS-Université de Maroua) 2019

text on paper in many cases), a bell or spiral, unidentified animal-like creatures, a throwing knife, and cowrie shells (Massa 2007) (Licina and Miskovic 2014) (Seignobos 2017:126). In one exceptional case, a vial filled with water from the Logone River was attached for a woman who had become mad while fetching water from the Logone River at night (Christoph 2013).

Fig.3. Appendages to riders-on-horse figurines from the Lake Chad area

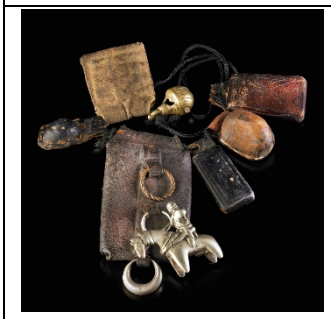

Fig.3a

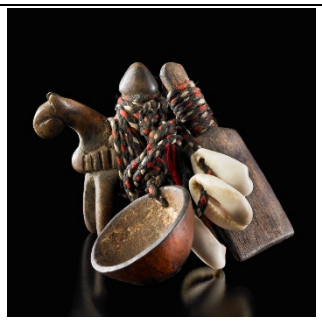

Fig.3b

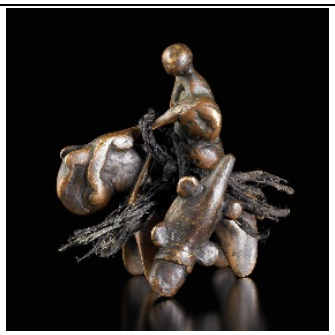

Fig.3c

Fig.3a
Leather amulets and metal bell. H. (rider-on horse) 4.4 cm
© *Pierluigi Peroni collection, Italy*

Fig.3b
Cowrie shells, calabash cup, wooden Quranic writing board. H. (rider-on horse) 5.2 cm
© *Pierluigi Peroni collection, Italy*

Fig.3c
Four-footed animal covered with leather (cf. Fig.6) H. (rider-on horse) 4.9 cm
© *Pierluigi Peroni collection, Italy*

The literature offers two reasons for the attachments. The first is that the wearer of the amulet could bestow gifts upon the spirit in the form of everyday objects (Massa 2007) (Seignobos 2017:126). The second is that the appendage was meant to potentiate the supernatural power of the rider-on-horse (Christoph 2013). The attachment of metal bells may well be an example of the latter. Such bells had a prophylactic function in eastern Chad (see 6.1) and served as portable noise-makers (that proclaimed a sacred presence and neutralised inimical forces) in western Africa (Neaher 1979). Other examples are discussed in the sections below.

The attachments in the form of a Quranic writing board or leather amulets betray the profound influence of the Islam on the region. Leather Quranic amulets were called *laya* by the Kotoko and *layaru*, *layaaru* or *layāru* by the Fulbe (Baldi 2008:59) [HT]. It remains to be established whether they enhanced the effect of the rider-on-horse or had their own different purposes (Regis 2002) (Al Safi 2006). The entwining of Islamic concepts and old animistic beliefs is also apparent from sources that identify part of the healers as Muslim marabouts (Massa 2007) (Christoph 2013) and that use Muslim terms (djinns, sitan) for the spirits in possession cults (Adam 2017). However, the latter should not be mistaken for proof that these cults had an Islamic origin without animistic roots (Henley 2006).

3.3. Water spirits

PP has collected more than hundred amulets from Kotoko and non-Kotoko villages in northern Cameroon and adjacent Nigeria that were locally designated as water spirits (*génies de l'eau*). They were used, above all, as protective amulets against evils spirits and health problems. The water spirits usually have some animal-like features but it is often difficult to pinpoint which specific kind of animal they represent. According to some informants, certain amulets may portray a lizard, crocodile, turtle, snake, or even a strange fish. However, some other informants (including the eldest ones) told him that water spirits are magical beings and that the amulets do not represent really existing animals. For instance, a single water spirit could be composed of different animals to create a magical creature with the power of these different animals [PP].

It is possible to support both of these opposite views with examples from the PP collection (Fig.4). On the one hand, various water spirits in this collection resemble a reptile: they most often look like a lizard (Fig.4a; cf. Figs.5-6), but sometimes like a crocodile (Fig.4b) or a turtle (Fig.4c). On the other hand, there are also water spirits with remarkable surreal features, such as pointed protrusions (Fig.4d). In rare cases, two lizard-like figurines have been cast or tied together (Fig.4e) or the figurine seems to represent a parent reptile with its offspring (Fig.4f).

Fig.4 Reptile-like and imaginary water spirit figurines (all examples from the Lake Chad area and made of copper alloy)

Fig.4a

Fig.4b

Fig.4c

Fig.4d

Fig.4e

Fig.4f

Fig.4a
Lizard-like water spirit
© *Pierluigi Peroni collection, Italy*

Fig.4b
Crocodile-like water spirit
© *Pierluigi Peroni collection, Italy*

Fig.4c
Turtle-like water spirit
© *Pierluigi Peroni collection, Italy*

Fig.4d
Imaginary water spirit which combines lizard-like features with pointed protrusions
© *Pierluigi Peroni collection, Italy*

Fig.4e
Two lizard-like water spirits tied together
© *Pierluigi Peroni collection, Italy*

Fig.4f
Reptile-like water spirit apparently with offspring
© *Pierluigi Peroni collection, Italy*

3.4. Lizard-like figurines

Our view that a fair number of water spirit figurines resemble lizards is supported by a small copper alloy figurine of the archaeological Sao culture [f] that has been identified as a lizard (compare Figs. 5a and 5b). This identification was probably made by Jean-Paul Lebeuf who did archaeological and ethnographic field work among the Kotoko people for several decades. Further support comes from the presentation of six different appendages to six rider-on-horses as lizards (Licina and Miskovic 2014:Fig.26). Although we have our doubts in three cases, we are inclined to agree on the other three. One example (Fig.6a) has the same shape as the lizard-like figurines in Fig.5. The two other examples are shown in Figs.6b-c. The lizard-like animal in Fig.6c has been moulded against the side of the rider-on-horse figurine before casting. This also the case with the previously unpublished figurine in Fig.6d. In the latter two cases, circles on the back on the attached animal correspond, to some degree, with the skin pattern of a large monitor (*Varanus niloticus*) that was worshipped by the Kotoko (Lebeuf 1969). Yet it may be sensible to exercise some caution here. Two copper alloy figurines from Burkina Faso in the Wheelock collection represent a monitor lizard (no.328) and an undetermined riverine animal (no.331). The attached animals in Figs.6c-d resemble no.331 at least as much as they do no.328 (Roy and Wheelock 2007).

Kotoko cults attributed primordial roles to the monitor lizard and to a serpent (python). They paid homage to these animals in exchange for protection. The monitor was associated with the land, the night, the hunter, the fertility of the soil, the femininity, and the south; in contrast, the serpent was related to water, light, fisherman, movement, masculinity, and the northern region. The citizens of Goulfey did not worship a single monitor but three monitors

[f] If the legendary Sao civilisation existed in former times, it was probably composed of several cultures in the Lake Chad basin that are no longer there today. Modern Kotoko believe that they belong to the most direct descendants of the ancient Sao population. It cannot be excluded that some of their bronze amulets might in reality be reused Sao amulets.

that each represented one aspect of the same entity. All three had their own priest and their own specialisation (Lebeuf 1969).

The lizard-like figurines in Fig.7 probably represent agama lizards (Fr. *margouillat*) to portray the zoomorphic Fulbe djinn *Mayna Liga*. Such Fulbe amulets have an oblong shape and usually reach a length up to 8 cm [g]. Sometimes they show, on their ventral side, a male sexual apparatus (penis and testicles) in addition to their embryonic legs, but this is not the case here. The amulets may be more reminiscent of a crocodile than of a lizard (Tourneux 1999). The implication is that reptile figurines from the Kotoko region cannot always be taken at face value.

The Fulbe believe that humans can be attacked by *Mayna Liga* and that such attacks result in nausea, gas in the stomach, nasal discharge, and an urgent need to eat natron. To recover, the victim must wear the agama lizard amulet at a sling on his left flank (Tourneux 1999:23).

Fig.5 Lizard-like figurines from the Lake Chad basin (all made of copper alloy)

Fig.5a

Fig.5b

Fig. 5c

Fig.5a
Archaeological lizard-like figurine of the Sao culture. L. 7.2 cm. Collected by Jean-Paul Lebeuf in Cameroon
© *Musée quai Branly inv.no.71.1938.53.11*

Fig.5b
Modern lizard-like figurine
© *Pierluigi Peroni collection, Italy*

Fig.5c
Modern lizard-like figurine. L. 8.3 cm
Credit: Credit: Peter AGM De Smet. Provenance: Henry Tourneux

[g] Fig.7b shows an exceptionally long specimen of 14 cm

Fig.6 Lizard-like figurines attached to the side of a rider-on-horse (all from the Lake Chad area and made of copper alloy)

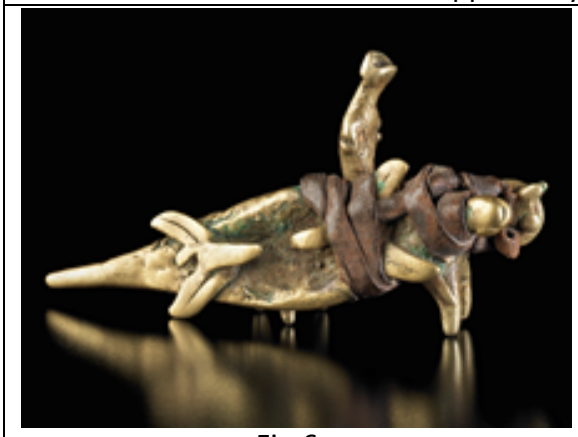

Fig.6a

Fig.6b

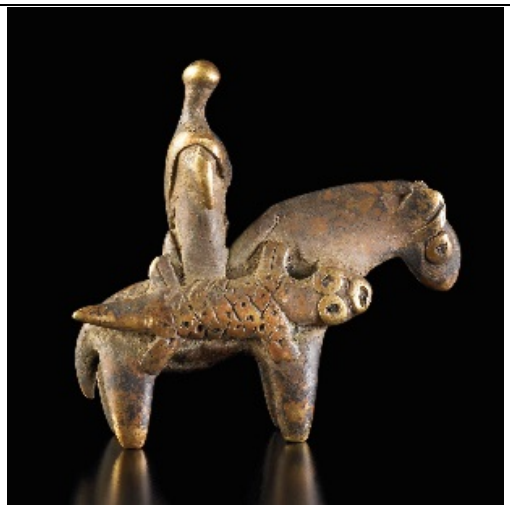

Fig.6c

Fig.6d

Fig.6a
Lizard-like figurine tied to side of rider-on-horse after casting. H. 4.5 cm

Fig.6b
Lizard-like figurine tied to side of rider-on-horse after casting. H. 5.2 cm

Fig.6c
Lizard-like figurine moulded against side of rider-on-horse before casting. H. 5.3 cm

Fig.6d
Lizard-like figurine moulded against side of rider-on-horse before casting. H. 5.1 cm

Fig.7. Lizard-like figurines that probably represents the Fulbe djinn *Mayna Liga*

Fig.7a

Fig.7b

Fig.7a
Lizard-like figurine. Copper or brass alloy. L. 6.5 cm
Dorsal side (top) and ventral side (bottom)
© *Collection Henry Tourneux, Paris*

Fig.7b
Exceptionally large lizard-like figurine. Copper or brass alloy. L. 14 cm
© *Collection Henry Tourneux, Paris*

3.5. Crocodiles

Besides crocodile-like amulets that were collected as water spirits (Fig.4b), we have also collected small bronze crocodiles with a suspension hole that were not locally identified as water spirits (Figs.8b-c). We heard that these figurines are probably only worn by men to transmit power and courage to their owners [PP], but were also told that these figurines may portray an evil spirit [HC]. When someone has fallen ill, the small crocodile figurine is tied to a string and immersed in the river. This would explain why bronze crocodiles have sometimes become green. After the patient has recovered, the figurine is pulled out of the water again and destroyed. A small crocodile could also be tied to a rider-on-horse amulet for extra power (Christoph 2013) [HC]. Could it be that the lizard-like appendages (see 3.4) had the same function? In some places, the Kotoko people do not only worship the monitor lizard (see 3.4) but also a particular crocodile called *magaga* (Lebeuf 1969).

A search for archaeological bronze crocodiles yielded three one-headed Sao examples (including Fig.8a) and one two-headed Sao specimen (Delange 1962) (Jansen and Gauthier 1973) (Pemberton III 2008:40-41).

Fig.8. Crocodile figurines from the Lake Chad basin (made of copper alloy)

Fig.8a

Fig.8b

Fig.8c

Fig.8a
Archaeological crocodile figurine of the Sao culture, Chad. L. 5 cm
© *Musée quai Branly inv.no. 71.1938.53.16*

Fig.8b
Modern crocodile figurine. L. 6 cm.
© *Henning Christoph (Soul of Africa Museum, Essen)*

Fig.8c
Modern crocodile figurines. L. 8 and 10 cm
Credit: Peter AGM De Smet. Provenance: Henning Christoph

3.6. Miniature Quranic writing boards

The Peroni collection includes a handful of rider-on-horse figurines with a miniature metal or wooden Quranic writing board as an appendage (Fig.3b) that is sometimes decorated with magic symbols (Figs.9a-b). PP and HT have also collected a few loose miniature Quranic writing boards from the Kotoko region (Fig.10). The Fulbe make such miniature boards of iron or copper and hence call them *alluha njamndi* (Quranic tablet of iron/metal). The Fulbe use these for the treatment of people possessed by *ginnaaji* (geniuses) (Tourneux 2007) [HT].

The boards belong to the miniature presents that can be given to Muslim djinns to please them, since this recognizes them as devout Muslims who read and write the Quran on their tablets (Massa 2007) [HT]. The boards are also reminiscent of a widespread Islamic ethnomedical practice that involves giving the patient a holy fluid (*mahw* in Arabic) to drink. This fluid is obtained by writing Quranic verses with ink on a wooden board and washing the writing off with water or, alternatively, by steeping a Quranic text on paper in water. The fluid may not only cure diseases, but also protects against malevolent forces and epidemics (Sanneh 1979) (El-Tom 1985) (Al Safi 2006).

Fig.9. Appendages to rider-on-horse figurines from the Lake Chad area in the shape of miniature Quranic writing boards and cups

Fig.9a

Fig.9b

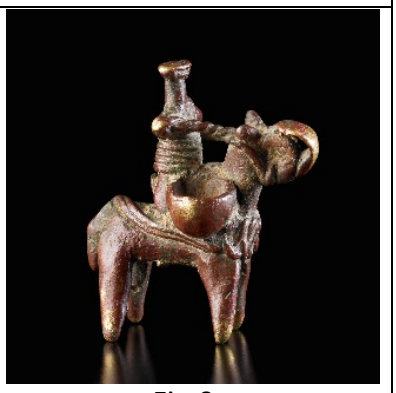

Fig.9c

Fig.9a
Appendage in the form of a writing board with magical symbols. H. 7 cm
© *Pierluigi Peroni collection, Italy*

Fig.9b
Appendages in form of leather amulets and writing board with magic symbols.
© *Pierluigi Peroni collection, Italy*

Fig.9c
Rider-on-horse figurine with calabash cup that was already moulded against side before casting. H. 5.3 cm
© *Pierluigi Peroni collection, Italy*

Fig.10. Miniature Quranic writing boards from the Lake Chad area

Fig. 10a

Fig.10b

Fig.10a
Board of iron
© *Pierluigi Peroni collection, Italy*

Fig.10b
Boards of Copper alloy. H. 8.0 and 7.5 cm
© *Collection Henry Tourneux, Paris*

3.7. Cups

A few rider-on-horse figurines have a wooden cup or the bottom part of a calabash tied to them (Fig.3b). There are also examples where a metal cup has been moulded to the figurine before casting (Fig.9c). It has been pointed out that the calabash has a symbolic role in African cultures and that the ancient Sao-Kotoko used calabash vessels for bringing offerings to the water people (*hommes de l'eau* or *me gbula*) (Licina and Miskovic 2014). However, we feel that the cup is more likely associated with the Fulbe practice of giving a patient water to drink at the end of a possession ceremony (see the description in 3.1) (Tourneux 2011) [HT].

4. Other peoples in northern Cameroon

4.1. Montagnards

Montagnards (lit. mountain dwellers) is the best aggregate term for the non-Islamised peoples living in the Mandara Mountains of northern Cameroon and adjacent Nigeria [h]. These peoples were renowned for their metal jewellery (Wente-Lukas 1977:280-281) (Fisher 1984:136-139) (Kandert 1990:56,64). They used metal lip and nose ornaments, earrings, and pubic covers not only as signs of tribal identity, but also to prevent evil forces from entering the body through an orifice (mouth, nose, ears, vagina) (Fisher 1984:136-139) (Herbert 1984) (Van Beek 1991).

4.2. Mafa people

The Mafa are primarily situated to the North of Mokolo in the northern part of the Mandara Mountains. They attribute all misfortunes including serious illnesses to human witches, angry ancestors, or ill-making spirits (Gavua 1989) (Kosack 2002). One source states that children and women are more vulnerable to misfortunes than men and therefore wear protective pendants, anklets and armlets. Copper bracelets and other red items are particularly values in the belief that red may counteract misfortune better than other colours (Gavua 1989). Another source confirms that children are more at risk than adults, but disputes that women are more endangered than men [i].

If an illness is refractory or keeps returning, a diviner is invited to look for the specific cause by moving oracle stones or by means of a crab oracle (in which the diviner interprets the behaviour of a crab in a sand-filled bowl in which he has recreated the patient's social

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[h] In colonial times these peoples were often designated as Kirdi. Older references often apply this general term to objects or data from the Mandara Mountains area, but we have not followed this practice, because the term is nowadays considered to be pejorative.

[i] Personal communication to the first author by Kosack, G. (Marburg: Philipps-Universität) 2019

cosmos with little sticks). If someone learns through the oracle that he or one of his family members has been attacked by a witch, he obtains an amulet from the diviner and determines which medicine has to be placed inside that amulet. The amulet is then carried around the neck or on the hip (Kosack 2002). In Fig.11a, some banana-shaped Mafa amulets made of iron are seen lying next to a pile of oracle stones.

Witches can magically make people ill by taking away their vital strength of by envying them with an evil eye. They may also introduce a foreign object into the patient's body, which produces a stinging pain and gradually absorbs the vital strength of the victim. Treatment consists of natural means (e.g., massaging, herbal therapies) plus supernatural measures (such as sacrificial offerings and prayers). The latter may also involve the steeping of energy stones or amulets in water whereafter that water is given to the patient to be drunk (Kosack 2002).

Mafa treatments are given by the endogamous *Ngwozla* caste of blacksmiths and their wives. *Ngwozla* men are blacksmiths and undertakers and they particularly treat fractures and injuries. *Ngwozla* women are midwives and are more versed in the healing of internal diseases (Kosack 2002). They also manufacture magical pottery against different diseases or evil spirits (Podlewski 1966:3) According to a survey in the mid-20th century, 96% of the Mafa blacksmiths acted as undertakers, 74% were still forging, 79% practiced divination and 68% prepared "medicines" (Podlewski 1966:3).

The Mafa attribute magical powers not only to the *Ngwozla* but also to the *Tsakalay*, another special group consisting of twins, persons of abnormal birth and their parents. *Tsakalay* wear spiral metal bracelets that distinguish them from the rest of society and that prevent blindness, barrenness and loss of property (Gavua 1989).

4.3. Mura people

The Mura (Mora) are a small ethnic group in the Far North of Cameroon that is situated on the northeastern tip of the Mandara Mountains. Details about the nature and functions of their amulets were collected in the 1980s by Diane Lyons who participated in the Mandara Archaeological Project under supervision of Nicholas David. From birth to death, the Mura people wear protective magic materials that are produced by specialists from diverse ethnic backgrounds who sell them in local markets. Both the shape and content of the amulets are standardised and have a large regional distribution. Adult amulets must be given by their owner to another before death or should otherwise be disposed of in a place from which they can no longer be retrieved such as down a latrine or termite hole. The Mura distinguish three types of amulets that are prescribed as personal protection against witch-craft (Lyons 1989) [j] :

1. Banana-shaped amulets known as *tadia* that have one or two suspension loops and are made by blacksmiths from copper or iron. The cavity inside the amulets is filled with medicines that have been prepared by a healer. They are then wrapped in red goat skin or red plastic by a third specialist. The red colour protects the medicines from corruption. Iron amulets are empowered by a twisted form, which is not necessary for amulets made

[j] Personal communications to the first author by Lyons, D. (Calgary: University of Calgary) 2019

of copper (red iron) as copper is a strong medicine in itself (Fig.11b). Men wear copper amulets for protection from being shot with a gun or cut with a knife.

2. Twisted iron finger rings known as *jerd* (ring) *eeray* (iron). They are worn by men and women as protection against male *matsamay*. Every Mura has two spirits: a good one (*sheedugway*) and an evil one (*matsamay*).
3. Iron bracelets known as *eeray* (iron) *chay* (eyes) *ool hay* (twins) . They are worn by twins and their parents. They are made of two bands that represent the twins (a twisted band represents a male twin and a plain band represents a female twin). Twins have particularly strong *matsamay*, so their parents need to be protected and the twins themselves need to be protected from each other. Either twin can cause blindness or other problems (scorpion bites, snake bites.

Fig.11 Magical amulets from the Mafa and Mura peoples, Northern Cameroon

Fig.11a

Fig.11b

Fig.11a
Mafa oracle stones together with several iron amulets photographed *in situ*
© *Godula Kosack, Philipps-Universität Marburg*

Fig.11b
Small *tadia* amulets that were meant for boys and not for adult men. There is a pocket inside each amulet for medicine. Collected in Mora in 1986.
On top: copper amulet measuring 5.2 cm. Its full name is *tadia* (amulet/ medicine) *tar bwa* (two holes) *vorja ganay* (copper) *mugse* (female). This double looped copper amulet protected against a female sorcerer.
On bottom: copper amulet measuring 4.5 cm. It is covered with red goatskin. Its full name is *tadia* (amulet/ medicine) *tar palay* (one hole) *vorja ganay* (copper) *jillay* (male). This single looped copper amulet protected against a male sorcerer or adversary.
© *Diane Lyons, University of Calgary*

4.4. Kapsiki people

The Kapsiki form one ethnic entity with the Nigerian Higi people. They belong to the *Montagnards* and are situated south of Mokolo in northern Cameroon on the central plateau that connects the Northern and Southern Mandaras.

This people did not only attribute ills and evils to a displeased personal god, but also to different types of human beings, such as witches, persons with the evil eye, and practitioners of black magic (*beshèngu*). The threat of witchcraft emanated from within the

compound, whereas black magic (mainly practiced by blacksmiths) originated from outside the immediate compound (Van Beek 1994) (Van Beek 2015).

The Kapsiki protected and restored health by iron objects with one or more small pockets for medicines. Iron holders (*mblaza*) with medicines mainly protected against witchcraft, miscarriage and curses, whereas iron bracelets (*takase*) with medicines often indicated special abilities and powers. For instance, a midwife could carry a *takase* with medicine for propitious births (Van Beek 2012a).

Since twins and breech birth babies could endanger their parents, the latter wore a protective iron bracelet (*takase kwalerha*) that consisted of one plain layer between two spiralled ones in the case of twins and of one plain and one spiralled layer after a breech birth (Fig.12). Parents also wore an iron bracelet to avert danger, if the first teeth of their baby were upper ones instead of lower ones (Van Beek 2002) (Van Beek 2012a).

Fig.12 Iron bracelets (*takase kwalerha*) from the Kapsiki people, Northern Cameroon

Fig.12a

(Fig.12b

Fig.12a
Twins bracelet
© *Walter Van Beek, University of Leiden*

Fig.12b
Breech birth bracelet
© *Walter Van Beek, University of Leiden*

5. Other peoples in Nigeria

The Margi are situated in northeastern Nigeria. The Bura are living to their West, while the Higi and Fali are located to their South. The Higi form one ethnic group with the Kapsiki on the Cameroonian side of the border and the Fali are likewise found in Nigeria and Cameroon (South to the Higi and Kapsiki) (Wente-Lukas 1977:280-281).

5.1. Fali and Margi peoples

The object in Fig.13a may have come from the Nigerian Fali or Margi people. The Fali called such objects *ifa* and used them in the magical defense against witches (Wente-Lukas 1977:280-281) (Kandert 1990:56,64) (Borel 1994:80-81). However, similar Higi and Kapsiki objects have been described as ornamental plates [EM-B inv.nos. III C 26973-6 and V12b]. In Kapsiki initiations, such plates were worn as decorative hip plaque by young assistants to the

male initiates. The Kapsiki generally used iron for magical protection, because brass would be much less protective (Van Beek 2012a) (Van Beek 2012b).

Fig.13 Amulets from Northeast Nigeria

Fig.13a

Fig.13b

Fig.13a
Metal plate with tapered corners. Fali or Marghi people (?), Northeast Nigeria. Early to mid-20th century C.E. Copper or brass alloy. H. 21.5 cm
© *Zena Kruzick, San Francisco*

Fig.13b
Ceremonial object in shape of snake [k]. Bura people, Borno State of Nigeria. Iron. L. 25 cm.
© *Trustees of the British Museum, London BM-L inv.no. Af1926,0705.3*

5.2. Bura people

The Bura (Pabir) people are situated in the Borno State in northeastern Nigeria. In 1931, Charles Meek described that Bura families and individuals protected themselves with *habtu* (amulets) and that a striking example in the shape of an iron *pwapu* (snake) was called *habtu pwapu* (Fig.13b). It was commonly seen in houses but could also be attached to one's leg as an amulet. In houses it could appear as a male/female pair in the shell of a baobab nut. These amulets warded off evil influences and were significant fertility devices. At harvest every householder had to make offerings such as the blood of a chicken to his *habtu pwapu* to prevent that one of the household members would be bitten by a snake (Meek 1931:164-165, 172).

The Bura ascribed death to witchcraft and also used the *habtu pwapu* at the end of the mourning period for a deceased man. The amulet was placed on the head of each wife and child of the deceased with the statement: "say not that you are husbandless or fatherless

[k] Charles Meek (1931) states after describing the *habtu pwapu* amulets that he observed among the Bura people (see the text) that he was able to obtain a specimen. The object shown here is not labelled as *habtu pwapu* in the museum documentation and it seems rather large to be worn as an amulet. It would be quite coincidental, however, if Meek would have collected another iron ceremonial snake from the Bura people in addition to the *habtu pwapu* he describes.

and thereby live in fear of witchcraft, for this amulet will destroy all witchcraft and evil" (Meek 1931:164-165,172).

6. Other peoples in Chad

6.1. Beri people

The Beri people are situated on both sides of the border between Chad and Sudan. They have often been subdivided in Bideyat and Zaghawa but both groups identify themselves as Beri (Olson 1996) (Tubiana 2008).

(Fuchs 1961) has reported that the Bideyat (*Bäle* in German) protected themselves against the evil eye by amulets of blacksmiths and marabouts. The evil eye was believed to be particularly dangerous for new-borns. Mothers would wear two amulets on their head and attach a third to the wrist of their child. The Bideyat equated metal amulets of the blacksmith with leather Quranic amulets of the marabout, but women generally preferred the former to the latter. Yet the social status of Bideyat blacksmiths was inferior (on the same level or perhaps even lower than that of slaves). (Fuchs 1961) adds that they made a separate type of amulet for each affliction and every danger and gives two concrete examples:

- an amulet called *kauda* that was used against snakes and scorpions and consisted of a piece of copper wire that was twisted five times
- an amulet called *kau* that was used against the evil eye and battle wounds and consisted of bovine sinew wrapped seven times around a piece of iron wire.

Fig.14 offers a good impression of what such blacksmith amulets looked like by displaying two examples that were collected by Fuchs in the Chadian Ennedi region and that are now in the Weltmuseum in Vienna. Fuchs (Fuchs 1961) also reported a necklace from northern or eastern Chad which combined a brass clapper bell with cowrie shells and several leather Quranic amulets. This suggests that the bell may have had a similar evil deterring function as the leather amulets.

Fig.14. Blacksmith amulets from the Ennedi region of Chad

Left: Iron and vegetal fibre (?). H. 3 cm. Collected by Peter Fuchs
Right: Metal alloy. H. 1.8 cm. Collected by Peter Fuchs

The Musée quai Branly has two Zaghawa bells with an amuletic function in its collections. One is a clapper bell [MQB-P 71.1957.82.180] that could be used in three different ways to ward off the devil (seytan) and evil spirits:

- it could be worn by the newly circumcised who hung it at their belt among their amulets. They would wear it for the duration of their retreat, then gave it to their mother who kept it in her home
- it could be clung to the door of the house of a woman who had just given birth and left there until the 7th day after birth
- it could be attached to the neck of a camel or horse, especially of a foal.

The other one is a pellet bell (MQB-P 71.1957.82.178) that was also used to ward off the devil and evil spirits. It was worn by little girls who would wear it together with other amulets and also by the newly circumcised. Among the nearby Tama people, this type of bell could be hung "for good luck" at the bottom of a beaded cache-sexe for a little girl [MQB-P inv.no. 71.1957.82.164].

6.2. Nar people

The Nar are a small ethnic group that belongs to the Sara peoples. They are located in the Koumra region in southern Chad. When a Nar man has killed a man or big game, he may be troubled by headaches and difficulty in seeing, because the blood of the dead person or animal is blinding him. He will then ask a smith to make a special pair of medicinal *nunga do* bracelets from copper for him (Fig.15). After the smith has made these bracelets he prepares medicinal water by boiling them together with the roots and leaves of *kuga* (which is his special medicine). The patient starts to wear the bracelets and each day washes his head with the medicinal water and drinks some of this water. This is continued for about a month or until the headache has been cured. A man wearing such these bracelets is much feared and respected in his society.

The collector of the *nunga do* bracelets (Ellen C. Patterson-Brown) also acquired another set of bracelets called *nunga ndo* that were made of aluminum and an unidentified metal alloy. The latter did not serve a medicinal purpose but played a role in initiation [MAA-C inv.no. 1975.50 A-H].

Fig.15 Pair of *nunga do* bracelets from the Nar people in southern Chad

Copper. D. 7.7 and 7.8 cm. Collected by Ellen C Patterson-Brown

inv.nos. 1975.51 A-B

7. Final comments

African art is an extraordinarily rich source of objects that are of ethnomedical interest. Such objects range from portrayals of sickness to insignia of diviners and healers and from instruments for supernatural protection, examination and healing to representations of and devices for natural prevention and treatment (De Smet 1999) (Herreman 1999) (Grange, et al. 2001). Natural protective measures include the well-known inoculation against smallpox (Herbert 1975) and certain methods of traditional malaria control: the West African use of protective blankets (Perani and Wolff 1999:159) and the application of the Himba cosmetic *otjize* as mosquito repellent (Molefe 2015). However, these examples are dwarfed by countless sacrificial offerings and an overwhelming myriad of amulets for supernatural prevention (Herreman 1999) (Grange, et al. 2001:124-165) (Al Safi 2006).

Our survey shows that the wearing of personal amulets has been as common in the Lake Chad basin as it has been in other parts of Africa. The distinction between amulets and jewellery was often as difficult in this region as it has been elsewhere (Herbert 1984). Yet two major sources about metal objects in our study area have treated amulets and decorative objects separately (Wente-Lukas 1977:280-281) (Kandert 1990:56,64).

A clear indigenous example of differentiation was reported for the Gula Iro in southern Chad: if someone died, ornamental jewellery was left on the corpse whereas ritual bracelets were removed and later thrown into the bush (Pairault 1964). Another reason why we limited our survey to amulets with a documented ethnomedical function was that many amulets can have various kinds of non-medical purposes (hunting, fishing, protection of property, weather control, and so on). An illustrative example is the difference between medicinal and initiatory bracelets among the Chadian Nar people (6.2).

Our contribution shows how important private collections and museum inventories are as material sources for research into the ethnomedical amuletic practices from the Lake Chad basin. The PP collection turned out to be particularly useful for this purpose, as it comprises many examples of different types of amulets. This gave a good impression what were the general characteristics of each type and what were local peculiarities.

The amulets we studied could be prescribed by a medium, marabout or non-Islamic healer, and they could be provided by a blacksmith, bronze caster or market vendor. Among the Mafa people, blacksmiths commonly also functioned as healers and their wives did not only act as midwives but also manufactured magical pots against diseases or evil spirits (Podlewski 1966). Despite their important societal roles, blacksmiths tended to have an inferior social status (6.1). A study of Mafa blacksmiths explained this low position by pointing out that their primary role as undertakers required the touching of corpses which made them unclean and shunned by the rest of the Mafa society (Podlewski 1966).

Many amulets were worn as magical protection against major supernatural causes of disease (evil spirits, angry ancestors, sorcery, witchcraft, evil eye). Contrary to popular belief, however, we also found several types of amulets that were used for therapeutic purposes (3.1, 3.5, 3.6, and 6.2). These latter amulets were sometimes used for or combined with the drinking of medicinal water (4.2 and 6.2).

Rider-on-horse amulets in the Kotoko region (3.1) and miniature writing boards among the Fulbe people (3.6) were specifically applied for the treatment of madness. This area of application was not only limited to psychoses but also covered indigenous concepts of mad-

ness (3.1). From a biomedical perspective, schizophrenia (characterised by hallucinations, delusions, and social withdrawal) may be as prevalent on the African continent as it is elsewhere in the world (Gureje, et al. 2010) (Read, et al. 2015). Psychoses can also be the acute result of another disease (e.g., sleeping sickness, cerebral malaria, epilepsia) or psychoactive drug use. Such secondary types have commonly occurred in Africa and are often transient (Read, et al. 2015) which may very well have fostered local beliefs in the therapeutic effectiveness of indigenous amulets.

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