



MWAASH MBOOY

A BUSHONG ROYAL DANCE

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DANCE IN AFRICA —

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- The following slides are designed to compliment readings in the book:

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The Kuba today

THE KUBA IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC)

- The Kuba is comprised of several ethnic groups with similar cultural, religious, economic and social systems.
- The Kuba became a united nation of people in the 17th century.
- The Kuba kingdom was located between the Kasai and the Sankuru Rivers in the DRC.
- The predominant group within the Kuba was the Bushong.





THE KUBA'S TERRAIN

- The Kuba generally, and the Bushong specifically, lived in a rich territory consisting of equatorial forest, rich savanna, a number of intersecting rivers, and a host of natural resources.
- History is very important to the Kuba.
- The king is the primary custodian of the dynasty's genealogy.
- After the king, those responsible for the lineage's history are the bulaam, the king's eldest son, and a handful of trusted unrelated historians that must learn the dynasty's history.

THE MWAASH MBOOY

- The Mwaash Mbooy is a Bushong masquerade dance performed for the royal court.
- Within the genre of royal dances, the Mwaash Mbooy has the most elaborate attire and mask.
- It is a full body mask dance where the dancer is covered from head to toe with large amounts of beads, cowrie shells, fabric, feathers, and raffia grass.





THE MWAASH MBOOY & THE KING

- The Mwash Mbooy mask is kept in the king's possession and lent to the dancer during the ceremonial inauguration of the masks.
- The inauguration of the masks is a long ceremony involving many royal mask dancers.
- Each mask worn has its own name.

MWAASH MBOOY PERFORMANCE

- The Mwaash Mbooy mask symbolizes and validates the spiritual nature of the king.
- It also represents Woot, the founder of Kuba.
- During the Mwaash Mbooy ceremony, the mask arrives from the forest and after the ceremony has already begun.
- Generally, the ceremonial inauguration of the masks is attended by everyone in the village.
- However, spectators are not permitted to witness all royal masks.
- Some are danced solely for the royal court and are sometimes not seen for decades at a time.



OTHER ASPECTS OF THE MASK INAUGURAL CEREMONY

- Unmasked dancers also dance in the ceremony.
- They dance around the masked dancers.
- Movement vocabulary for unmasked dancers include subtle foot and arm movements.
- Shoulders move up and down in sync with the arm movements.
- Dancers hold leaves, canes, feathers and other props.
- Torso is held in diverse positions depending on the step, and is upright to acute in the high position.
- Turns are employed and knees are lifted and placed back on the ground to the rhythm.