The Pottery-forming Techniques in Bamessing and Vicinity, West Cameroon

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In Africa several kinds of forming techniques are used for making pottery. In general, the coil method is the commonest throughout the continent. Some techniques which exist in West Cameroon are not common elsewhere. For instance, one forming technique not commonly employed in other countries is that of kneading clay and working it gradually by pulling it upward and forming it upside down in the first step.
From October 2, 1978 until January 20, 1979, I conducted research in Mbegan, Bamessing, a chiefdom in West Cameroon, in order to study the pottery-making techniques of various localities. This paper is a brief introduction to the pottery-making techniques of the Bamessing chiefdom and its surrounding areas.

INTRODUCTION

1) Purpose of the study

This paper describes the pottery-making techniques used in the artisans' quarter of Bamessing, a chiefdom on the Bamenda highland in West Cameroon. A comparative study is also made of geographical distribution of these techniques in the surrounding areas.

As is common knowledge, the potters' wheel is not used in Africa south of the Sahara. Rather, the forming method of kneading clay and working it gradually upward is still employed. However, careful observation from the perspective of ceramic technology reveals differences among these simple techniques. Elsewhere I have demonstrated that the Ganda and Lango pottery of Uganda is made by the coiling method[1] which, technically speaking, is a broad category [MORI 1971, 1973a, 1973b]. Moreover, I realize that the coiling technique could also be classified as "wazumi" in the Japanese ceramic term. In one such method a flattened piece of clay is cut out, and the bottom of the pot is made first. Clay rings are then made and

1) From June to July 1969, I observed the pottery-making of the Ganda in three places around Kampala: Mukono, about 25 km to the east; Kabinbiri, about 80 km to the northeast; and Nkoko, about 165 km to the southwest. Also, in June and July 1970, I studied pottery-making of the Lango in Minakuru, about 350 km northeast of Kampala.

stacked up one-by-one from the bottom to form the pot. In the other method, the bottom is formed as described above. The pot is then formed by coiling a continuous rope of clay from the bottom up. There are clear technical differences involved. Japanese ceramists differentiate these two methods, calling the former "wazumi" and the latter "makiage."

Similarly, information on "mold-making" techniques [NICOLSON 1929; EGUCHI 1979; KAWADA 1979] reveals that two such African pottery-making methods exist: the "convex style" and the "concave style." In the former an old earthenware jar is inverted and its bottom used as a mold. In the concave style a piece of rounded, hollowed-out and baked clay is used as a mold. Also, a sandstone-like material may be hollowed-out and used for the same purpose. Clay is placed in the hollow and then pushed and pounded into shape, from the top. This exemplifies the "concave style". All these methods use a "mold," and thus should be correctly classified by this label when analyzed from the perspective of the technique employed.

In addition, a "pull-up" technique of forming pottery is also used in Africa. Few examples have been reported compared to the coiling method, and only scanty data exhibits its details. Yet one can presume that a variety of "pull-up" pottery-forming methods does exist.

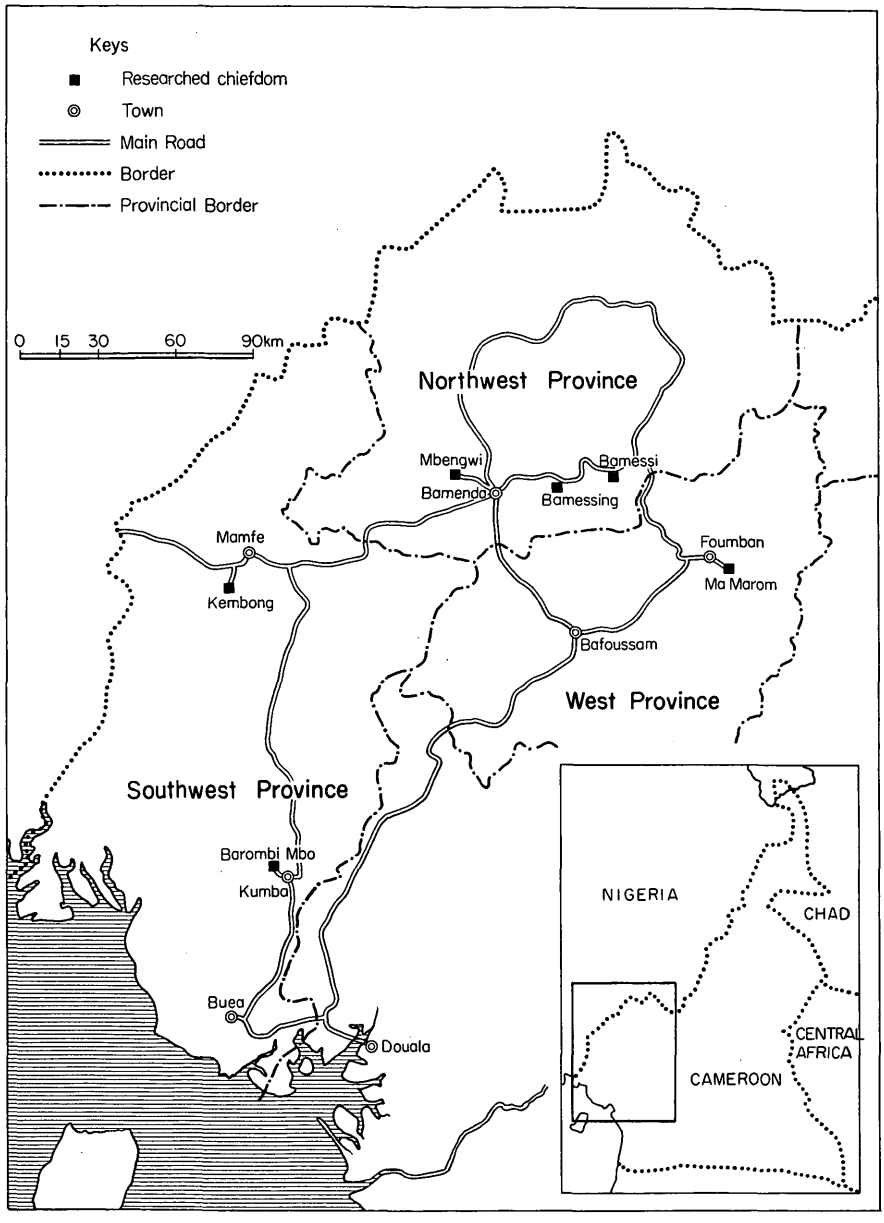
It can be said that pottery is formed by the "pull-up" technique in West Cameroon. I would like to record, the process of creating pottery by this technique and also comparatively research whether this technique is in general use in the area.

2) Field Research Area

Bamessing is the traditional Tikar chiefdom, located in the Northwest Province of West Cameroon. Although Tikar has not been granted administrative rights by the Government, it is at present a stable chiefship society that reveres the twenty-second generation Fon, Martin Lofung II and which is managed by traditional systems of organization. There exists a traditional council of four King Makers that is empowered to approve chiefly succession. The sixteen members of the council are chosen from each quarter of the chiefdom.

I conducted field research in Mbegan, one of the sixteen quarters in he Bamessing chiefdom. Mbegan is well-known in the Northwest Province for pottery-making and its many potters. Research was undertaken in Mbegan from October 2, 1978 to January 20, 1979.[2] This was followed by a 25-day study tour to make a comparison of pottery-making techniques in Bamessing. This journey was based on information from pottery merchants in the local market as to where I could most profitably study. Bamessing and Mbengwi in Northwest Province, Kembong and Barombi Mbo in Southwest Province, and Ma Marom in West Province were selected for comparative study, based on the merchants' information. Many other pottery-

2) The research was conducted under a 1978 Scientific Research Grant from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, for the "Comparative Ethnographic Survey of Material Culture of Tropical Africa." The research was headed by Professor Shohei Wada.



Research area

making centers were suggested but, for logistical reason, I had to limit my study to those near main roads.

3) Research Subjects and Methodology

Although there were some twenty specialized pottery-making families in Mbegan,

I selected as a subject for study Mr. Bamenda Ngwe, who, at fifty years-of-age is a renowned craftsman in order to study the processes involved of his pottery-making. In my opinion, Mr. Ngwe's work was superior and better designed that that of other potters, a judgement that appears to be locally substantiated by the fact that on market days people travel to Bamessing from the provincial town of Bamenda, about 40 km away, just to buy his pottery.

At eighteen years of age, Mr. Ngwe learned the techniques of pottery-making from his real father, Naha, and today he is faithfully handing-down his father's techniques. However, there is no longer anybody in his family to inherit them.[3]

During the pottery-making season, when Mr. Ngwe set to work, I observed all phases of the process, from preparing the clay to forming, drying and firing the pots. The details of his work were recorded with a 8 mm movie camera. To complement this study, I interviewed Mr. Hansen Ngan, also fifty years old, a working potter in the same quarter. Mr. Ngan is Mr. Ngwe's half-brother and, as might be expected, had been inculcated with the techniques of his real father, Naha, at eighteen years of age. He is now fully devoted to pottery-making. By gradually expending my sphere of interviewing, I could obtain information from all craftsman in the quarter. Also, I could not observe the entire process of pottery-makingin each of the five locations in which I conducted comparative research. I collected data based on all my interviews with the artisans, as well as by study of examples of their work.[4]

1. POTTERY-MAKING IN THE MBEGAN QUARTER OF BAMESSING

The process of making pottery

(1) THE CLAY

Prior to the beginning pottery-making, clay (*cha*) is excavated from the deeply-eroded banks of a river that flows through the mountains, at a locality some 1800 m in elevation and 3 km west of Mbegan, near the Sabga Pass. This clay, one variety of which has a reddish tinge and the other a black one, contains a considerable amount

3) Here, both men and women take up pottery-making. Men almost always learn the techniques from a father or an uncle, and the women from their mother. Men begin learning in their late teens, usually with the bowlshaped *kubuto*, which is made by techniques common to each kind of pot. Because it is bowl-shaped with a round base and projecting decoration, knowing how to make a *kubuto* is extremely important when later forming a ceremonial pot (*kumoro*). Women, however, are restricted to each kind of everyday cooking pot, and they never make ceremonial pots.

4) It is not known when pottery was first made in the Mbegan Quarter. But in this respect the following folk legend is noteworthy.

During the reign of Fon Mbo Kanmangwe, the 10th Fon of Bamessing, an old man named Naha learned the technique of making pottery from the gods. He taught it to the people of Mbegan, Ntukue, and Mbesow Quarter near the Fon's palace, but it was in Bamessing that pottery first started to be made. During Naha's time a woman named Batafa Bimbong started to make pottery. She taught the women of Mbegan Quarter, and ever since they have made pottery.

of mica. Both varieties have accumulated in a thin layer along both banks of the river.

According to ancient custom, the people of Mbegan remove only just as much clay as they need for their pots. A special charm is applied to the transport of clay from the digging site to the potter's home. A piece of small cutlery and one elephant grass stem are tied into a ringed knot and stuck into heart of the clay. This charm is never over rolled, since if the clay is transported without the charm, it is believed to decrease in quantity during transport should they be seen by another person en route home. Further, should that person possess the "evil eye," the pottery will surely crack when fired.

A yellow ochre (*kuchya*), used as an engobe over the pot, is excavated in the vicinity of Mbegan. Its extraction is forbidden to people of other quarters.

For preparation the two types of clay are placed on a large, flat rock (*ngo-cha*) and blended with a wooden pestle (*ken-chu-cha*). River sand, corresponding to about 20 percent of the clay, is blended in at this time. The increase of rough particles in the clay reduces the proportion of shrinkage, thus the addition of sand prevents expansion and shrinkage damage during drying or firing.

(2) FORMING

After blending the clays and adding sand, the mixture is removed to a board and a sausage-like coil of clay, about 20 cm in diameter and about 40 cm long, is rolled out. This is then pressed to a belt an even 5 cm thick and 15 cm wide. The belt is curved into a ring and the two ends joined securely. This ring is then placed on a plastic sheet spread on the ground, and pressed down a second time.

The low, thick clay ring is then worked from the bottom up with the four fingers of the right hand, while the left hand counteracts the pressure against the wall of the pot, and smooths the clay to ensure a uniform thickness for the entire pot. During this process, the potter, working in a squatting position, moves backwards around the pot. When the bottom of the pot in inverted and being shaped int oa dome, the hands work inside and out to pull-up the clay into a dome. As an apex is reached and the clay runs out, a second coil is made, attached firmly on top and worked upward.

When a dome of even thickness is formed, the engobe is applied to its surface, in the form of a water solution, to produce a soft slip. This yellow ochre slip is scooped up by hand and applied to the entire surface of the not yet fully dry pot. After having been left briefly dried, the entire surface is carefully burnished with a small, smooth, feldspar stone (*fungongo-teku*). When completely burnished, the lower portion of the dome, that is, the open mouth of the pot in contact with ground, is covered with banana or coco yam leaves to prevent it from drying out. This is the only part of the pot that is not allowed to dry.

In this condition the pot is set aside to dry for one night. On the next day it is turned right side up and placed on a ring shaped mat of twisted banana leaves (*kiekew*). Finishing touches are applied to the open mouth by beating it with a small wooden paddle (*kungute*). To form the upper portion, clay is secured firmly to the

Photo. 1. A ring of clay is pulled up.

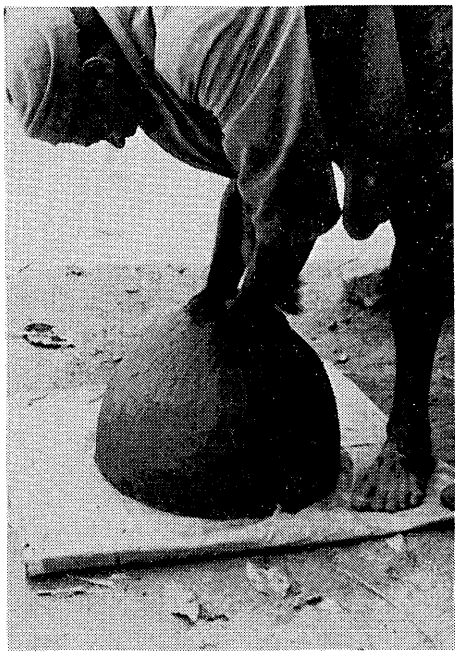


Photo. 2. Gradually pulled up into a dome shape.

Photo. 3. Made into a perfect dome.

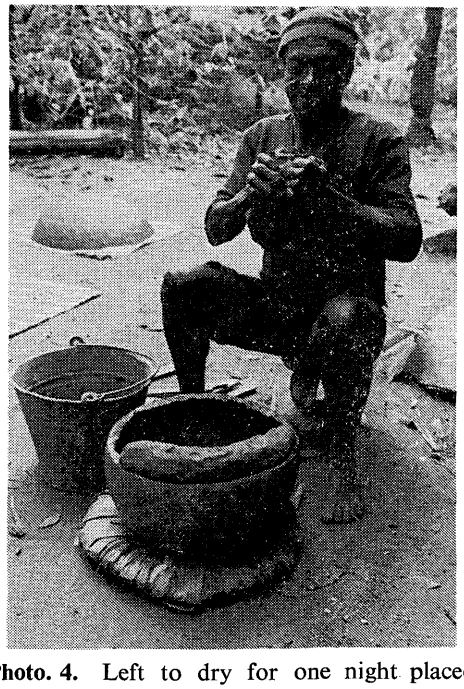


Photo. 4. Left to dry for one night placed upright on a round mat, and more clay is applied to the mouth.

Photo. 5. Clay pulled-up a second time to form pot.

Photo. 6. Making the mouth.

top of the pot and worked up from inside. Great care is taken to achieve the same thickness up from inside and to achieve the same thickness as that of the already formed portion.

As the pot gradually takes shape, the entire piece is touched up. The potter uses a burnishing tool to smooth out humps or identations from the surface.

Next, the section from the neck to the rim is formed. Little by little, all the fingers of the right hand press in the upper cylindrical portion of the pot. The potter keeps in mind the balance of the shoulder to the neck, and that of the rim to the entire pot, as the piece takes shape.

The rim is finished with the fingertips and the paddle. The shape of a rim will have special features according to a potter's individual preferences.

As soon as the rim is finished, a larger water pot (*kew*) will be completed by applying continuous dot patterns to its leather hard shoulder, using a small, engraved, wooden roulette (*kunyate-ku*). Human figures, faces or mask decorations will be applied to the surface of the completed ceremonial jar-shaped pots, such as containers used to store palm wine (*kumoro*).

When the rim of a pot for everyday use is finished and tentatively formed, the potter uses a scraper (*nton baku*), made from a ring of banding iron bent to match the curve of the pot, to skim the inner walls of the pot and humps or indentations as well as to touch up the thickness of the walls.

The above processes complete, the yellow ocher engobe is applied by hand to the

entire surface inside and outside the pot. When the clay is not yet fully dry, the entire surface is burnished with a small, feldspar pebble (*fungongo-teku*). Normally, the engobe is applied and burnished two or three times. The higher the quality of a pot, the thicker the layers of engobe.

I also observed differences in engobe and burnishing of pots that are normally blackened after firing (such as *kubuto*, the round-based bowl-shaped saucer used for meals and *kubuko*, the high-foot, rimmed sauce bowl among other), as well as on pots such as water jugs, which are not blackened. Blackened pits such as the *kubuto* and *kubuko*, in particular, are burnished until their surfaces are smooth and lustrous.

(3) DECORATION

As I have mentioned above, the decoration of pottery for everyday use, such as water jars and cooking pots, is, for the most part, quite simple. For example, there are dot patterns applied by an engraved, wooden roulette (*kunyate-ku*), cuts made by a metal modeling tool (*funnybaku*), a rope pattern applied by turning a rope (*kunguise-teku*) around the pot (although this is not done frequently nowadays), or a dot pattern pressed into the clay with a engraved wooden modeling tool (*kunyafuka*).

Ceremonial pots (*kumoro*) are distinguished by being decorated with human figures, faces or masks, as well as a pattern of cuts applied with a metal modeling tool. In this case, also the human figures, faces or masks chosen will differ according to the craftsman. Mr. Bamenda Ngwe decorates the shoulder of his pots with decorations

Photo. 7. Decorating a ceremonial pot.

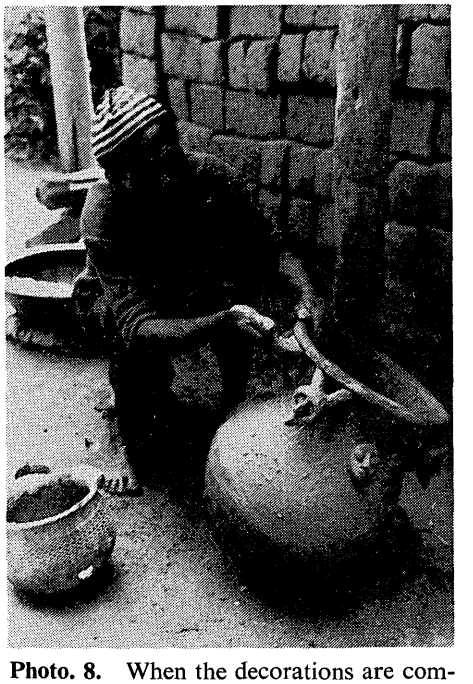


Photo. 8. When the decorations are completed, the engobe is applied.

patterned on two masks called *Ndondyun* and *Mabah*, which he selected from among the masks used in the ceremony for the dead held during the November dry season. He also simultaneously applies a pattern of cuts, using a metal modeling tool.

While the clay of the jar-shaped pot is still leather hard, Mr. Ngwe decides where to place the decorations on the neck or shoulder. With his fingertip he makes holes at these positions and inserts the ends of short coils of clay in them, forming X-shaped handles at four intervals around the pot. He attaches a *Ndondyun* mask decoration on each handle and a *Mabah* mask decoration between each of them. Then an engobe is applied to the surface of the pot and to the decorations. While the engobe is not yet fully dry, the decorations are thoroughly burnished with a metal modeling tool. A line pattern is incised in the smoothly burnished surface of the pot with the same tool, and a point pattern is applied with a flat wooden modeling tool, engraved at the tip (*kunyafuka*).

Mr. Ngwe draws three parallel lines, and in the lower part of the two wide bands part created by them he draws a pattern of twin bells (*fungang*) joined at the top. The decorations patterns on the masks and the bell pattern make it clear that this pot is for ceremonial use.

After the application of the patterns, the mask decorations are finished. A small amount of palm oil is applied and they are thoroughly burnished with a slightly tapered metal modeling tool (*funnybaku*). Superfluous pieces are skimmed off, and last of all eyes are given to the masks.

Ceremonial pots require about three days from formation to completion. Everyday pots with little ornamentation are finished in one or two days.

Ceremonial pots are only made and used by men. These pots are connected with the mask dance performed in each chiefdom of Bamenda highland. Women are forbidden from handling the masks. It is taboo for women to look at a man wearing the mask, especially during ceremonial periods.

(4) DRYING

Completed pots are dried for several days indoors, away from direct sunlight. They are then taken outdoors and left to dry under the sun. At this time they are turned frequently to ensure even drying. A pot left to dry indoors will be taken outside to ensure complete drying, especially before firing. The drying period lasts until a pot can be fired, depending on relative humidity. During the dry season 7–10 days are required, but during the rainy season from 20 days to more than a month may be necessary.

If a crack appears on the base of the pot during drying, the potter scrapes the crack with a metal modeling tool to widen it slightly. He then fills it with a clay identical to that used for the pot, and burnishes the surface again with a small stone.

(5) FIRING

All pottery made in Bamessing is fired (*tunteku*) by the open fire in the pit The depth and size of the pit differs according to the preference of each craftsman, but averages 2 m long, 1.5 m wide and 50 cm deep.

Photo. 9. Finished ceremonial pot.

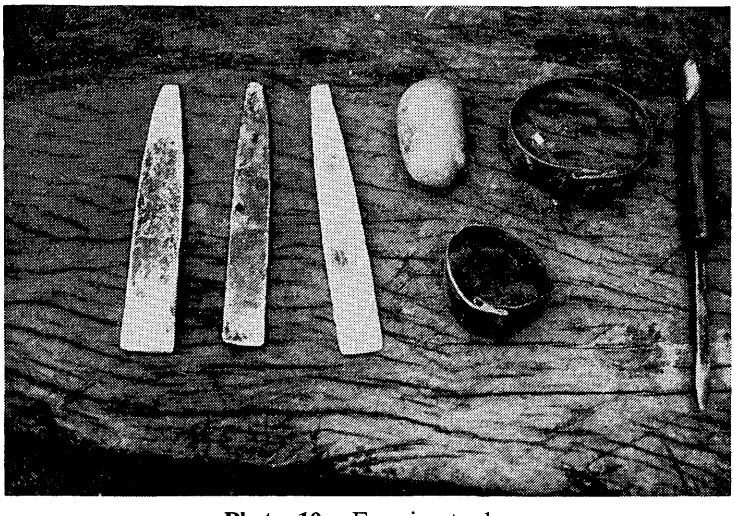


Photo. 10. Forming tools.

The first step is to spread dry leaves over in the bottom of the pit. Raffia palm leafstalks, cut to about 1.5 m long, are put in the pit to a thickness of 15 cm. They are spread in a grid pattern to ensure proper airflow during firing.

The pots are lined up on their sides about the leafstalks, and more stalk are stuffed between the pots so that they will not move. When lined up, the pots are covered with well-dried elephant grass pressed down by long Raffia palm leafstalks. Many layers of dried leaves and grass are placed on top. Finally, the entire pit is covered with freshly cut elephant grass.

The fire is ignited in one spot, and within 15 minutes the dried leaves and grass

within the pit start to burn. White smoke billows up but the flames are contained by the fresh green elephant grass.

About an hour later, the fuel has been entirely consumed, and embers envelop the pots. The embers gradually turn to ash, and when the pots emerge from the ashes firing is complete.

This "open fire' method does not result in high firing temperatures, which are estimated to be around 700°C. (Estimated by observing the color of the flames during firing and comparing them to the color of tabacco fire, known to be 800°C.) Firing takes about 2–3 hours, although frequency also depends on the quantity of pots to be baked.

(6) BLACKENING AFTER FIRING

Among the pottery made in Bamessing, the aforementioned *kubuto* and *kubuko*, used by men, are blackened. This blackening technique is in general use throughout Africa. It does not utilize the method whereby the surface of the heated clay base is brought into contact with a gas containing carburetted hydrogen, thus applying a carbon coating. Rather, in this method, Raffia palm leafstalks are first cut to a length of 30 cm, placed on rock and beaten with a club (*kumbo*) until they are fibrous. These fibers are then untangled in water. The sap from the leafstalks dissolves to form reddish decoction (*kusuw*). The liquid, which includes the sap, becomes the ingredient for the black pots. Already fired pots are reheated under buring dried brush in a firing place prepared on level ground. When red-hot, the pots are plucked from the fire with wooden fire-tongs (*wene*) and quickly and thoroughly doused with the red liquid (*kusuw*), before they have a chance to cool. The *kusuw* boils on the surface of the hot pottery. The sap in the water is carbonized and baked onto the surface, as well as seeping into the porous wall of the pot. Thus a black carbonized pot is formed.

This method differs from that of bringing a pot in contact with a hydrocarbon gas so that a carbon coating is applied to the surface of the base. Since the carbonization penetrates the very walls of the pot, it becomes all the more watertight and its base is strengthened.

However, the whole operation of re-heating with a second firing, removing the still red-hot pot quickly and bathing it in *kusuw*, is inevitably limited to small pots. It stands to reason that large-size pottery cannot be blackened.

2. A COMPARISON OF FORMING METHODS IN NEARBY AREAS

1) Bamessi

The chiefdom of Bamessi is located about 30 km east of Bamessing, with which it shares almost the same organization of structure. I first interviewed Bamessi potters at Kumbo market, where they bring their wares for sale. Kumbo is the second largest town next to Bamenda, it is also said to be a site of Bamoun culture.

There the general processes of pottery making in Bamessi were elucidated. As

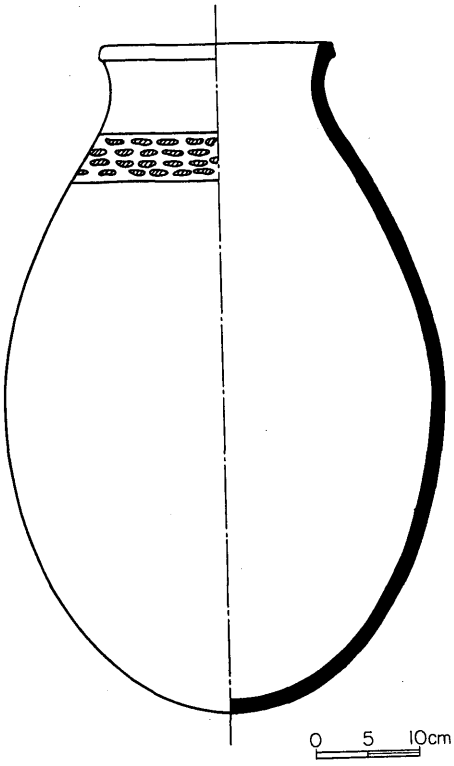


Fig. 1. Water pot (*Kew*).

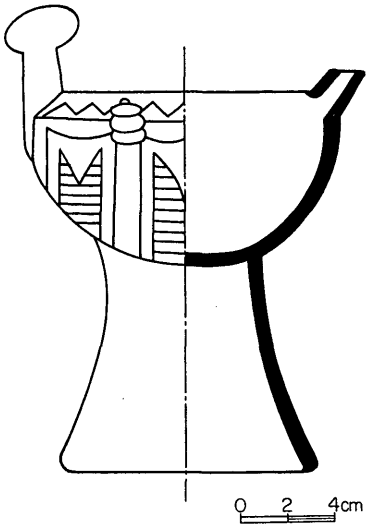


Fig. 3. Sauce bowl used by men (*Kubuko*).

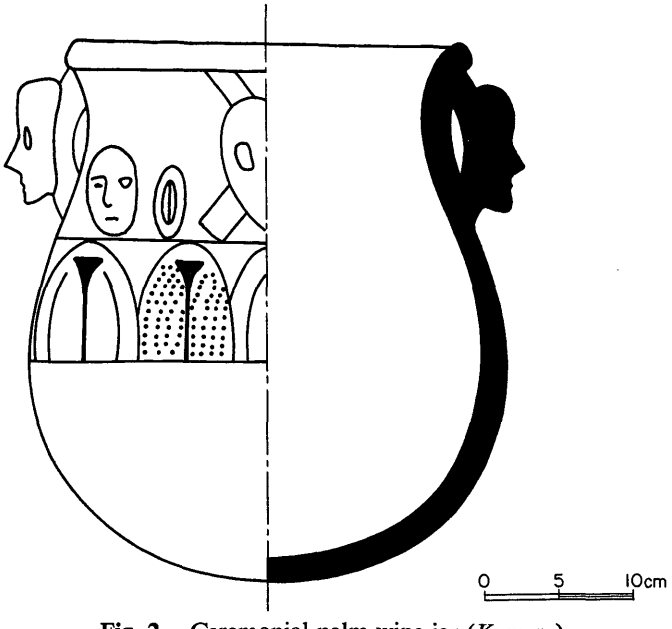


Fig. 2. Ceremonial palm wine jar (*Kumoro*).

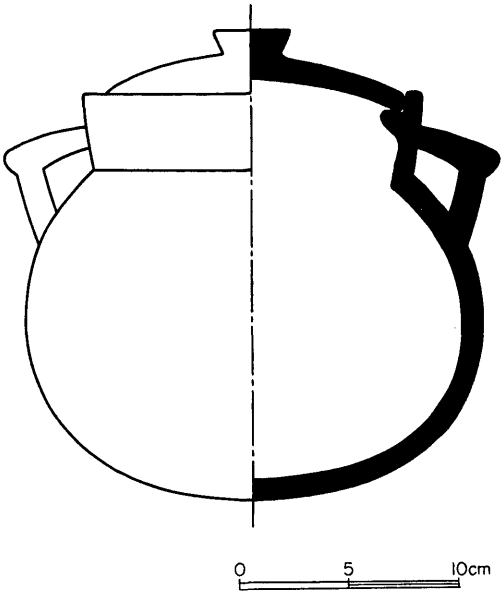


Fig. 4. Cooking pot (*Kenchi*).

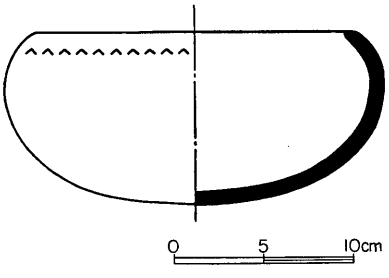


Fig. 7. Sauce dish (*Koyoga*).

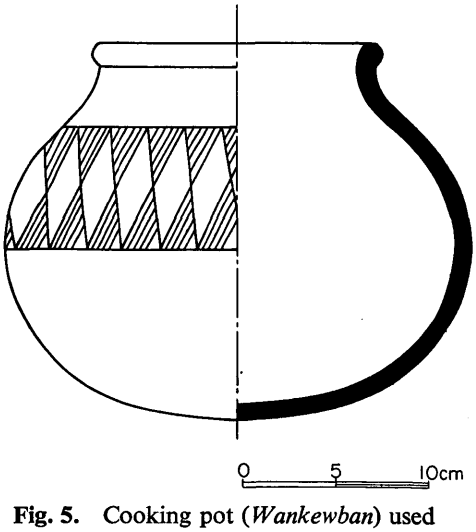


Fig. 5. Cooking pot (*Wankewban*) used for making porridge.

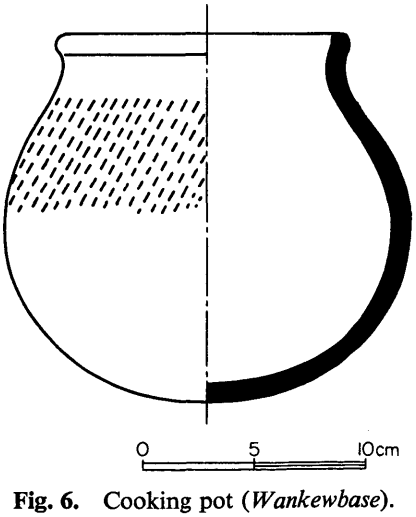


Fig. 6. Cooking pot (*Wankewbase*).

might be anticipated, the clay is dug from the nearby area and carried to private homes for preparation. Next, a lump of clay of the required size is placed on a wide banana leaf. The fingers work a hole in the center of the clay and shape the pot by pulling and working the inner clay upwards. In Bammessi, the upside-down Bamessing method of working a pot upwards from base to body and finally to the rim is not employed. Shaping is merely carried out by working the clay upwards. As the people of Bamessing say, although there is a cultural connection with Bamessi, their pottery-forming methods are different.

2) Ma Marom

Ma Marom is about 6 km east of Foumban in West Province. This area is well-known for pottery-making.

The pottery made in Ma Marom resembles that of Bamessi. In particular, the pottery from this area displayed in the Art Museum in Foumban, bears a strong resemblance to the Bamessi pottery, as well as to some from Bamessing.

The first step in the Ma Marom pottery-making process is to place a shallow-shaped old potsherd on the ground and then to place a lump of clay on it. The fingers make a hole in the middle of the clay, and work the clay upwards by stretching and pulling.

This differs from the forming methods of Bamessing because the fragment of pottery serves as a revolving stand, and the working of the pot is from the bottom up. However, the old style pots of this area on display in the Art, Museum reveal several similarities with the pottery made in Bamessing at the present time.

3) Mbengwi

The chiefdom of Mbengwi is located some 35 km west of Bamenda. It is also the seat of the District Office of Momo Division. Recently, pottery-making has declined in Mbengwi, the former clay excavation site being now almost unusable owing to severe cave-ins.

The clay used at Mbengwi is thought to be essentially the same as that employed in Bamessing. However, compared with the Bamessing clay it has a high rough particle content and poor plasticity.

Formation here is the same as in Bamessi. A lump of clay is placed on a wide banana leaf on the ground, and a hole is formed and gradually widened in the center of the clay with the fingertips. The pot is made by working and pulling the clay upwards.

At first the rim is trimmed and evened with a wooden modeling tool and then smoothed by rubbing with a moistened coffee tree leaf.

In this stage the body and upper portion of the pot are formed, leaving the area from the body to the base unformed. Once the already formed section has somewhat dried, the left hand is inserted into the pot from the mouth, and it is held upside down. The potter then beats with his right hand against the upheld base of the pot until it becomes rounded. Meanwhile, the hand that supports the pot from within forms

at first so that the base of the pot rounds naturally when it is beaten from outside.

After the base is completed, the pot is left in its upside down position to dry. When the outer walls are dry, the pot is placed right side up, on a round mat of woven banana leaves, and the inner walls skimmed with a scraper, thus evening the thickness of the pot.

The forming method in Mbengwi and Bamessing is not the same, however, since a pot in Mbengwi is not turned upside down, but rather is formed from the bottom up from the very beginning. It thus falls into a different category.

The methods used in Mbengwi have something in common with those of Bamessi, yet differ from those of Bamessing, which are in something of a midway position.

4) Barombi Mbo

Barombi Mbo is a small chiefdom of about 20 households in Southwest Province, located about 4 km northwest of Kumbo, on the northwest shore of Lake Barombi Mbo. It is well known among the neighboring chiefdoms and towns for the manufacture of exquisite water pot and sauce bowl.

In this chiefdom the pottery is made exclusively by women. The clay of Barombi Mbo is unlike the red clay used in other areas, since it is gray with rather fine rough particles. Also, it contains less mica than other clays in the region and has a high plasticity.

Pottery is formed in Barombi Mbo by coiling methods "wazumi". This is the only chiefdom in the area where these methods are used, and therefore the only instance during the course of this fieldwork where I could observe it.

At first, pieces of old broken water jugs, from the shoulder to the upper portion and rim, which have been trimmed into a round shape (*tuku*), are placed downwards on the ground mouth and used in place of a revolving stand for forming pots.

To make a water pot, a slab of clay about 20 cm in diameter is placed on the *tuku*. A thin rope of clay is attached to the circuference of this slab and piled upwards. When the clay is joined, the fingers press it flat and even out its thickness. At a height of about 15–20 cm, the inside of the pot is smoothed and touched up with a modeling tool made from a crescent-shaped piece of thick plantain fruit peel. More coils are added, and the joining and smoothing operation is repeated as the pot takes shape.

5) Kembong

Kembong is a small chiefdom in the west Bamenda Highland. It is located near the confluence of the Cross River and the Munaya, River and close to the Nigerian border.

The pottery-forming method used in Kembong resembles that of Bamessing. First, a ring of clay is worked upwards. In Kembong, too, the upside down pot is shaped into a dome. This is the same as in Bamessing, but the kinds of tools used here are somewhat different in being made not of metal. Rather they are simple and either made of wood or are just a simple natural product. For example, the shell of

the African snail is used as a scraper to add finishing touches to the thickness of the pottery walls. Besides that, crude pieces of wood are used as tools. Also, almost all the pottery made here is adorned with a rope pattern, which is pressed onto the surface of an undried pot with a rope made from braided plant fibers (*efele*).

DISCUSSION

In Bamessi, Mbengwi, Kembong and Ma Marom, I observed techniques of pulling clay upward "kakiage" in Japanese, which are believed to be similar within the limited area of the Northwest, Southwest and West Provinces of West Cameroon.

However, although these techniques may all be grouped into the "kakiage" category, my research reveals that they may be sub-divided into two further classes. One is where a hole is made in a round lump of clay with the fingers in the initial stage of formation and then widened until it is large enough to admit a hand. Then it is worked and pulled upwards. This category is found in Bamessi, Mbengwi and Ma Marom. In the second method, a thick ring of clay is initially placed on the ground and worked into a dome. After slight drying, the pot is turned right side up and placed on a circular banana leaf mat. More clay is attached to the top of the rim and the body and upper portion are formed. This method is used in Bamessing and Kembong.

Bamessing and Bamessi are only 30 km apart, nevertheless these differences occur. Informants in Bamessing and Founbam recounted that their present methods of pottery-making developed in the same way, under the influence of the Bamoun tribe. The pottery displayed in the Foumban Art Museum shows clearly that the present day pottery types of Bamessing and Bamessi have much more in common than do those from any other areas. In particular, the sauce dish used by men, called *kubuto* in Bamessing, *lan* in Bamessi, and *mbu* in Foumban are so similar they hardly warrant comparison.

Despite this, the similarly formed pottery of Bamessing, Bamessi, and Ma Marom can be classified as being different.

In general, the forming techniques of pottery have, from a historical perspective, become progressively more complex as they developed. It is also generally believed that as the process of formation becomes more intricate, styles diversify. However, as demand decreases the opposite trend tends to emerge. Techniques are gradually forgotten, until finally everything is lost.

The examples of Bamessi and Mbengwi clearly are of the latter case. Few kinds of pottery are made there today, and it appears that techniques are gradually being lost. The styles of pottery being made in Ma Marom are changing, as are technology and design also.

In Bamessing, on the other hand, as the demand for pottery increases, styles become diversified, and higher quality techniques are adopted. The pottery made in Bamessing today is richer in variety than that produced elsewhere. Moreover,

Bamessing potters are unsurpassed in the techniques and skills they apply to their many kinds of smoking pipes, known far and wide as the "Cameroon pipes."

When we think about pottery-forming techniques we must consider at the same time the people who possess these skills and how they came to settle in their present homes. For example, only the Barombi Mbo in West Cameroon form their pots by the coil-making "wazumi" technique. According to the Barombi Mbo their ancestors were a tribe who came from the north and settled in the vicinity of Lake Barombi north. It is not clear when they imigrated southwards, but in my opinion, their techniques are thought to bear some similarity to the Sudanese techniques used in Uganda and elsewhere in East Africa, among other places.

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