

Carving of a witch

Over the past forty years, Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art has formed many carvers who, not only make a living out of their skills, but express their cultural world view in a unique way. Some of them are specialists of witchcraft carvings. The variety is endless. Basic elements appear generally the same.

Here is a sample of a female witch who is emphasising the aspect of bloodline associated to witchcraft. As a matter of fact, in the Chewa matrilineal society in particular, the bloodline goes from mother to daughters.



- **Head:** The head is full of humps. This is abnormal. Therefore, anyone with a physical deformity on the head, like a deformed skull or a hump, will be more likely targeted to be a witch. Or else, such

person with a physical deformity will be seen as being bewitched. Symbolically, the carving shows how the use of witchcraft deforms the character of the witch.



- **Cuts:** Many people have cuts on their body. It means that they have seen a witchdoctor to acquire some protective medicine. It could also be inserted through those cuts in order to deliver someone being bewitched as a way to mediate with the invisible world. The latter is needed for witchcraft, but also for protection against witchcraft. Its powers are ambivalent.

In the case of our carving, the presence of cuts all over the body of the witch is a contradiction by itself. It shows that the cuts are actually ineffective as witch themselves are using them. It is a way to ridicule the habit of having protective cuts.



- **Noose and the tongue:** The prominence of the noose looking like a snout and the excessive long tongue are a reminder of the aim of any witch. Their intention is always to suck the life of the dead.

Snout and elongation of the jaw make the witch looking like an animal.

- **Female features:** This is obviously a female witch. The signs are the breasts, the beads around the waist and the baby witch in the womb including the pubic hair.

- **The snake:** All substances from human body like saliva, sexual fluid, excrement or urine, are used by witches to make evil medicine. This could explain why the carving shows the snake coming through the ass of the witch even though a snake can at other times be associated with good spirits. Similarly, this snake could be a familiar witch which



is related to the shadow or soul of the witch.



Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art in Malawi, founded by Father Claude Boucher, Missionary of Africa, gives an exceptional opportunity to discover the roots of the three main tribes of Central Malawi; the Ngoni, the Chewa and the Yao.

Refer to their website for more information:

<http://mafrsaprovince.com/kungoni-centre/>