

A Tribute to Father Jean Jacques Corbeil

The Moto-Moto Museum is in Mbala that was called Fort Roseberry until after the battles with the Germans in the First World War. The road was rough, covered in wash-board ripples and very dusty at times.

Father Jean Jacques Corbeil met us at the door of the new museum and took us on a tour of the cultural exhibits. Father Corbeil was a most gracious host. For the better part of a whole day he took our family into his life's work.

He explained that he had to court, pay a bride price, and marry each of the special "talking drums" that were in his collection. This was the only way the various chief of the Bemba people would allow him to take their talking drums to his museum. In Bemba culture the chiefs reasoned that if he married the drums he would be faithful to them and look after them very well. This was the reason Father Corbeil loved to joke that he was the only Catholic priest with five wives. He demonstrated their correct use and could play many of the different drums and thumb pianos. He took a special interest in teaching the Bemba cultural ways that would be of interest to our two young sons age eight and nine at that time. The whole family learnt a great deal about Northern Zambian culture over those fact-filled hours and gained a love of the Bemba people.



Father Corbeil was one of the many French Canadian Roman Catholic missionary who served the people of Zambia for the long and sometimes sad history of colonization of Africa . He collected and documented musical instruments of Zambia's Bemba people from nineteen hundred on in the twentieth century. He compiled the first Bemba dictionary with some 11,000 words.

The official opening of the museum took place in 1974, when it became one of the National Museums of Zambia run by the National Museums Board of Zambia.

The museum was divided into different epochs of human evolution and cultural development of

humankind from the Stone Age to the Iron Age. The Stone Age epoch dated as far back as 50 000 years to the Iron Age to 2 000 years back. The Stone Age epoch brought out different technologies used for human survival ranging from tools such as hand axes, scrapers, arrowheads, bored stones, cleavers and many microliths that had been found at an archaeological site near Kalambo Falls, which is the second deepest falls in Africa, and lies 38km from the museum.

The Iron Age display comprises various iron artefacts of different shapes, forms and functions. A replica furnace that was used for iron smelting in the northern Zambia with ingenious bellows, centuries old tools such as tongs, hammers, and other tools related to iron smelting.

At the end of our escorted tour we passed to a small shop where Father Corbeil had collected may rare cultural and artistic pieces that were from surrounding areas but not directly of Bemba origins. He asked us to choose an item of our preference to purchase to support the financing of his museum.

I fell in love with the woven hunting shrine from the Gwembe Area pictured below.

The shrine pot is about 300 mm by 200 mm that is constructed of knit fine fibres and filled and coated on the inside with some black gum to make in waterproof and hung in a rawhide leather harness.

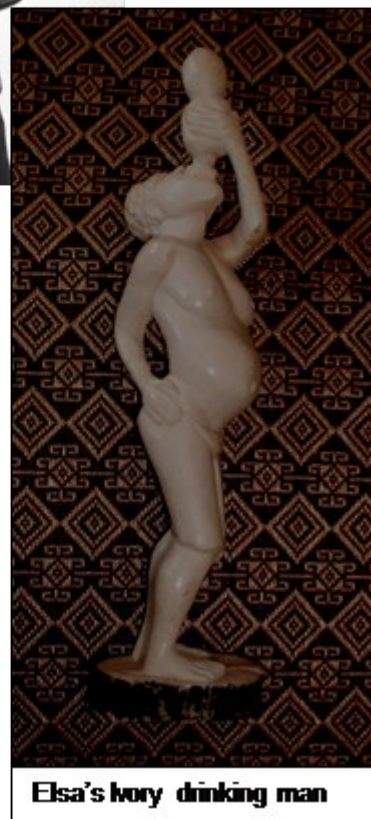
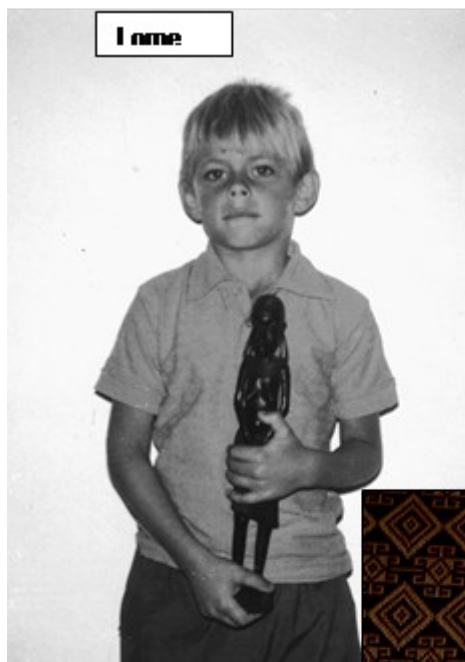
I have not been able to confirm or get any more learned opinions as to the providence of this artefact.

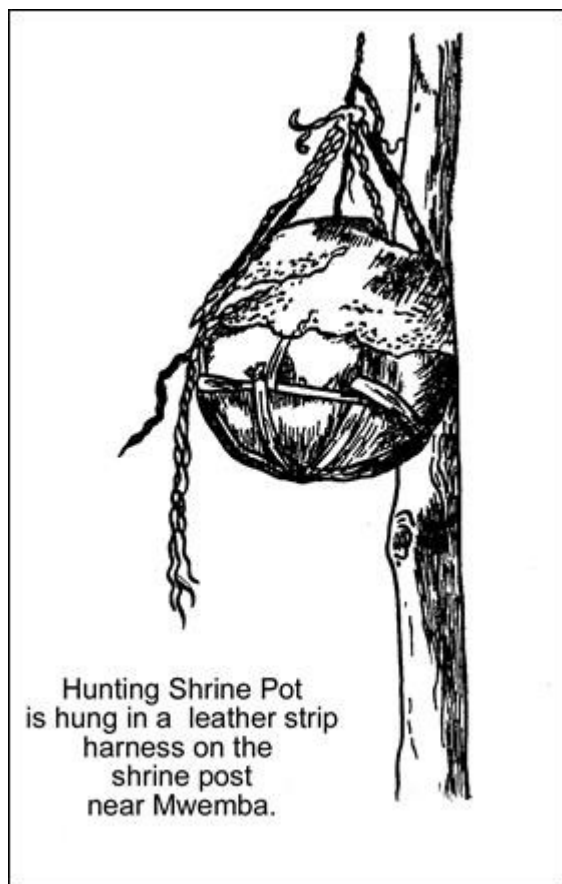
Elsa liked the beautifully carved elephant ivory Tonga man drinking beer form a gourd.

Lorne bought a Masai woman carved from *Dalbergia melanoxylon* (African Blackwood, Granadilla, or Mpingo) wood and perhaps got the best deal as it is exquisitely carved.

Unfortunately I do not remember what Dale chose to buy.

We bought our four “memory” items at a very reasonable price and have cherished them ever since as we think of this wonderful man of God and his love and understanding of the Bemba people.





Kalambo Falls

The next day we traveled with Mrs. Fibek and her daughter north to the beautiful border of Zambia and Tanzania. A small creek falls over the rift for 550 meters (1700 feet) in free fall to pound the rocks far below. The trees were in bloom all around. I took pictures of cherry blossom like blooms on trees all about. We were offered a kind of coconut that I had not tried before. It was bright yellow orange in colour and smaller than our regular coconuts in the husk that we see in Canada for sale. It was broken open and the wet stuff around the fibre was sweet and was sucked off the fibre and the large coconut seed inside was ignored. The flavour was something like mango. The texture was like as if sweet fruity custard was being sucked out of a coarse floor mop. I can't remember the name in Bemba. We had a picnic and visited a village over the little bridge on the Tanzanian side of the stream.