Serpent Baga, Bansonyi or Baga Snake



Baga Snake (Serpent Baga) collected in the village of Bok'e in 1970 (detail)

The serpent Baga (Baga Snake), *Kalimbe*, or *Bansonyi*, refers to a protective spirit manifested in the form of a snake that presides over male initiation ceremonies among the Baga culture in Guinea, West Africa. Typically, during the days preceding the initiation ceremonies, two carved *Bansonyies* appear in the village and are decorated with streamers and colorful banners. The two sculptures are then supported by scaffolding and carried by several men hidden under palm leaves and cloth.



Baga Snake (Serpent Baga) collected in the village of Bok'e in 1970

When two snakes appear, they represent “husband” and “wife,” commonly interpreted as the parents of the initiate. Manifest in the parents is the protective spirit, which has brought the initiate up to this point. The parents dance in a “mock duel,” signaling the opening of the initiation festival and proving that both are equally strong. Sometimes, a single snake may appear, representing the protective spirit as manifest in all adults. Whether one or two snakes appear, all celebrate the initiation of boys into men and are empowered to spiritually protect all aspects of village life.

Baga Serpents (or Baga Snakes) are extremely valuable and sought after by collectors. View Baga Snakes similar to the ones in PRIMITIVE's collection that went up for auction; one in 2012, and another earlier in 2013.



Above: 20th centruy Baga Snake or Serpent Baga(Bonsonyi) from Guinea · West Africa. This Baga Snake stands at over 10 feet tall.



Bansonyi or Serpent Headdress (detail) · Baga People · Guinea, West Africa · 20th c. · Wood and Pigment, based · 12 W x 12 D x 108 H inches

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