# Hands On Learning
## *with Reading Museum Service*

## ZAMBIA - BATONGA POT G113

The Batonga tribe, also known as the Tonga, lived along the Zambezi River on the border of Zambia and Zimbabwe. They moved there from central Africa in the twelfth century. The river was incredibly important, sustaining their life by giving food and water. They adapted their lives around the river. Their homes were built on stilts so as to avoid floods and predators from coming into their houses.






In 1957 the Zambian government began building a dam on the Zambezi river. This forced the Batonga to move from their homes. When the Kariba Dam was completed a giant, artificial lake was formed. It flooded the Batong communities where people had farmed, fished, worshipped, raised children and buried their dead for centuries.



The building of the dam was filled with problems. The Batonga believed a beast called Nyaminyami lived in the river. He was a legendary creature, a bit like the Loch Ness Monster, that looked like a dragon but with the body of a snake and the head of a fish. When there was no food he would let people cut slices of meat from his back to help them survive. The dam was to be built on the home of Nyaminyami. Anyone who trespassed his home was said to be dragged under the water forever.



*Above: The dam swamped the trees that had grown near the river*





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One of the worst floods in the region happened as the building work was nearing completion. It destroyed much of the dam, the equipment and killed many of the workers. The bodies could not be found anywhere. The Batonga people said that the flood was caused by Nyaminyami and that he had taken the bodies. A year later another attempt was made to build the dam and another strong flood destroyed it. The dam was only completed after the Batonga elders had appealed to Nyaminyami to stop.



*Above: A statue of Nyaminyami beside the Kariba Dam*

Nyaminyami is now said to be separated from his wife by the dam. The small earthquakes that occur in the area are him trying to get back through. The Batonga believe that one day he will succeed and smash the dam. When this happens the Batonga will be able to move back to the land that they had to leave.

### Batonga pot



This pot is called a *mutondo*. It holds water or homemade beer. The neck's shape allows liquid to be poured from it. When beer is being left to ferment, a piece of wood can be used to cover the neck and stop bugs flying into it.

Traditionally the majority of potters in Zambia have been women. Dry lumps of clay are pounded in a mortar. Old, broken pots are crushed up as well to make something called grog. The clay and grog are wetted and mixed together, this reduces the risk of the pot breaking during firing.

The clay is kneaded into a long, thick sausage shape and then coiled up. A second coil is placed on top of the first and the potter starts to try and shape the object. Using their hands, the coils are spread upwards and smoothed so a pot begins to form. A maize-cob is used to gradually bend the mouth of the pot giving the rim a slight lip to make it easier for pouring. Once the pot has been finished it is placed in a kiln. This is an important time as the pot could crack and smash. All the hard work would be wasted!

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Look at the patterns. It is common for a Batonga pot to have painted triangles on them. The double line of dots at the base of pot's neck have been made with a pointed tool before it was fired. Each tribe has their own designs. This makes the work recognisable but also shows how pottery is important for reaffirming their identity. The darker colours on the Batonga pot show burn marks from the kiln. The different shades give the pot a unique design.





