

# ‘One speaks softly, like in a sacred place’: collecting, studying and exhibiting Congolese artefacts as African art in Belgium

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Many publications have dated the European ‘discovery’ of ‘primitive art’ in the beginning of the twentieth century or even after the 1914–18 war. Overall, they argue that African objects, collected between the fifteenth and the eighteenth century, ended up as curiosities in European ‘Cabinets of Wonders’. During an ethnographic phase in the nineteenth century, travellers and museum staff were believed to be mostly interested in the functional aspects of these objects, as they ‘failed to see the beauty; curiosity was great, but it was mixed with pity.’<sup>1</sup> Finally, these publications state that the true art value of these objects was discovered during an aesthetic phase in the beginning of the twentieth century by artists such as Henri Matisse, André Derain, Georges Braque, and Pablo Picasso.<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that Africans were of course the first to appreciate the beauty of their own objects (something that was not always recognized in the West), the Western interest in African art was supposedly linked to the need among European artists for ‘new sources of inspiration outside the continent to rejuvenate its old civilisation. Disgusted by the modern world, its steel machines and its pitiless brutality, the period after the 1914–1918 war turned passionately towards the primitive, and especially the “Negro” ’.<sup>3</sup>

The widely publicised exhibition ‘*Primitivism in the 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*’ in the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1984–85), and the introduction by William Rubin in the catalogue, confirmed this ‘modernist myth’.<sup>4</sup> ‘Primitivism’ or ‘the interest of modern artists in tribal art and culture, as

<sup>1</sup> J. Van Hoof, ‘Une contribution à l’histoire du goût dans la période contemporaine. L’influence de l’art nègre’, *Problèmes d’Afrique centrale*, 13: 44, 1959, 132. ‘On ne voit pas la beauté; la curiosité est grande mais elle est mêlée de pitié.’

<sup>2</sup> H. Guillaume, ‘La Sculpture Nègre-africaine’, *Problèmes d’Afrique centrale*, 13: 44, 1959, 97. Albert Maesen, ‘Styles et expérience esthétique dans la plastique congolaise’, *Problèmes d’Afrique centrale*, 13: 44, 1959, 85-86.

<sup>3</sup> Van Hoof, Une contribution à l’histoire du goût dans la période contemporaine, 132. ‘[...] sources d’inspiration nouvelles en dehors du continent pour rajeunir sa vieille civilisation. Dégouté du monde moderne, de ses machines en acier et de sa brutalité impitoyable, l’après-guerre 1914-1918 s’est tourné avec passion vers le primitif et plus spécialement vers le « nègre ».’

<sup>4</sup> Wilfried van Damme introduced the term ‘modernist myth’ in this regard in his article ‘Not What You Expect: The Nineteenth-Century European Reception of Australian Aboriginal Art’, *Konsthistorisk Tidkrift / Journal of Art History*, 81: 3, 2012, 135.

revealed in their thought and work',<sup>5</sup> was seen as a typical Western, twentieth-century phenomenon. The beginning of the admiration for so-called tribal art by modern artists was dated in the period 1907–1914. In the nineteenth century, Rubin confirmed, 'tribal objects were not then [...] considered art at all'.<sup>6</sup> First, it was believed that primitive objects fell 'outside the parameters of Beaux-Arts and salon styles' of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Second, ethnographic museums and ethnologists before 1900 were supposed to have made no distinctions between art and artefact. 'As artefacts were considered indices of cultural progress, the increasing hold of Darwinian theories could only reinforce prejudices about tribal creations, whose makers were assigned the bottom rung of the cultural evolutionary ladder'.<sup>8</sup> Third, it was acknowledged that the first travellers and colonials had brought objects to Europe. 'But we owe primarily to the convictions of the pioneer modern artists their promotion from the rank of curiosities and artefacts to that of major art, indeed, to the status of art at all'.<sup>9</sup>

Other publications in the 1980s confirmed these ideas. In a reception study of pre-Columbian culture, Elizabeth Williams stated that the 'final task of revaluation of the *ars americana* was accomplished only in the wake of the "primitivist revolution" in European aesthetics'.<sup>10</sup> In his influential work *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Art, and Literature*, James Clifford offered a caustic review of Rubin's exhibition.<sup>11</sup> He correctly criticised the problematic use of concepts like 'affinity', 'tribalism', and 'abstraction' in the MOMA exhibition. Despite his critique, Clifford also dated the emerging distinction between the study of '(scientific) cultural artefacts' and '(aesthetic) works of art' in the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> According to Clifford, before 1900, non-Western objects were sorted as exotic curiosities. Again, Picasso and others were credited for the 'nonethnographic admiration' in the era of triumphant modernism. Their intuitive recognition of primitive objects as powerful art caused a modernist revolution. Only by 1920 were tribal objects more commonly seen as cultural witnesses and aesthetic masterpieces.<sup>13</sup>

Ideas belonging to the 'modernist myth' became widely accepted, and are still repeated in more recent publications.<sup>14</sup> Others do refer to an earlier, late-

<sup>5</sup> William Rubin, 'Modernist Primitivism: An Introduction', in William Rubin, ed, *"Primitivism" in the 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Rubin, 'Modernist Primitivism', 6.

<sup>7</sup> Rubin, 'Modernist Primitivism', 6.

<sup>8</sup> Rubin, 'Modernist Primitivism', 6.

<sup>9</sup> Rubin, 'Modernist Primitivism', 7.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth A. Williams, 'Art and Artifact at the Trocadéro. *Ars Americana* and the Primitivist Revolution', in George W. Stocking Jr., ed, *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, 148.

<sup>11</sup> James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Art, and Literature*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988, chapter 9.

<sup>12</sup> Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 190, 198 and 222.

<sup>13</sup> Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 190, 198 and 228.

<sup>14</sup> Shelly Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress*, Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998. Sarah Van Beurden, 'The Value of Culture:

nineteenth-century, pre-modernist recognition of African art, but discuss this early attention to aesthetic qualities as a sort of introduction to the 'actual discovery' of African art in the twentieth century or the post-1914–18 war period.<sup>15</sup> This article wants to make clear that the discovery of African art in Belgium can be dated to before 1900. In contrast to many art history publications on primitivism, I will not limit myself to the study of the European art world. The broader colonial culture and scientific debate will be scrutinized. Attention will also be paid to the importance of individual opinions, for example among armchair savants, European travellers, museums curators and art dealers.<sup>16</sup> As will become clear, the worlds of 'art' dealers and 'ethnography' curators were not as separated as one might assume, since objects often crossed these imagined 'boundaries'. In order to explain the early discovery of African art in Belgium, the category of art will also be broadened to theatre, literature, architecture, music and dance, in contrast to most studies which limit their scope to sculpture and painting. Finally, the contrast between fine arts and decorative arts will also be discussed. By returning to the end of the eighteenth century, I will argue that by 1897, it was not surprising that African objects were exhibited as 'art', on the same level as European artwork, during the World Exhibition in the Palace of the Colonies in Tervuren. However, it will also become clear that the recognition of African art in Belgium was a gradual and discontinuous process. Appreciation was often combined with, or followed by, the denial of aesthetic quality.

### Armchair savants

Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, located the birth of humankind and the arts in the centre of the Asian continent; an elevated area, far away from volcanos and floods, with a favourable climate and fertile land: [...] 'it is in this privileged

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Congolese Art and the Promotion of Belgian Colonialism (1945-1959)', *History and Anthropology*, 24 : 4, 2013, 473-475.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph-Marie Jadot, 'L'Art nègre au Congo belge', *Ligue coloniale belge*, 2: 1, 1940, 1–11, 15. Joseph-Marie Jadot, 'Les tendances actuelles des arts plastiques au Congo belge', *Problèmes d'Afrique centrale*, 13: 44, 1959, 110–131. Gaston-Denys Périer, 'Notre art nègre', *Revue congolaise illustrée*, 22: 4 (1950) 7–9. Jean-Louis Paudrat, 'Entre fin-de-siècle et années folles: la « découverte » des arts africains', in Ezio Bassani, ed, *Arts of Africa. 7000 Ans d'art africain*, Monaco: Skira / Grimaldi Forum, 2005, 375-394. Pierre Salmon, 'Réflexions à propos du goût des Arts Zaïrois en Belgique durant la période coloniale (1885-1960)', in Marc Quaghebeur and Emile Van Balberghe, eds, *Papier blanc, encre noire: cent ans de culture francophone en Afrique centrale (Zaïre, Rwanda et Burundi)*, Brussel: Labor, 1992, volume 1, 179–201). Patricia Van Schuylenbergh, *Les débuts de l'art congolais en Belgique – 1920-1930 - : Histoire d'une découverte*, Louvain-La-Neuve, UCL, 1988. Zoë Strother, 'Looking for Africa in Carl Einstein's Negerplastik', *African Arts*, 46: 4, 2013, 8–21. Kathryn Wysocki Gunsch, 'Art and/or Ethnographica? The reception of Benin Works from 1897-1935', *African Arts*, 46: 4, 2013, 22–31.

<sup>16</sup> Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, 'Between Metropole and Colony. Rethinking a Research Agenda', in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997, 1–56.

area that the first people worthy of that name were formed, worthy of all our respects, as creators of sciences, arts and all useful institutes'.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, Johann Gottfried Herder considered India to be the birthplace of man. In his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte* (1784-1791) he described the 'bramins' as elegant, friendly, clean, simple and harmless, and, importantly in this context: '[...] they are not destitute of knowledge, still less of quiet industry or nicely imitative art [...]'.<sup>18</sup> As Léon Poliakov has demonstrated, the 'passion for India' and the ideas on the Asian source of the arts quickly spread over Europe thanks to authors like Friedrich von Schelling, Friedrich von Schlegel, and Thomas Henry Huxley – although the latter attributed 'the essence of our religion' to the Semites.<sup>19</sup>

While Buffon still described Africa as a 'burning and desolate'<sup>20</sup> region, it was, perhaps surprisingly, Arthur de Gobineau, who stated in his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853–55) that the origin of art was to be found in Sub-Saharan Africa and not in Egyptian or Assyrian culture. Although de Gobineau also stated that the white race had emerged from northern Asia – Christoph Meiners probably was the first modern thinker who argued that man had originated in Africa – he was also convinced that '[...] the source where the arts sprout up is unknown to the instincts of the civilisers. It is hidden in the blood of the blacks.'<sup>21</sup> According to de Gobineau, the 'power of the imagination' was linked to the 'melanic principle'. To future critics, accusing him of placing 'a very beautiful crown on the deformed head of the negro',<sup>22</sup> he already replied that without the necessary ingredients, no harmonious music or inspired singing would be possible.

Certainly the black element is indispensable for developing the artistic genius of a race because we have seen what profusion of fire, flames, sparks, passion, and thoughtlessness resides in his essence and how much the imagination, this reflection of sensuality and all the concupiscence towards

<sup>17</sup> Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Les époques de la nature*. Paris : Imprimerie royale, 1780, 170. '[...] c'est dans cette contrée privilégiée que s'est formé le premier peuple digne de porter ce nom, digne de tous nos respects, comme créateur des sciences, des arts & de toutes les institutions utiles.' Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth. A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe*, New York: Basic Books, 1974, 183-184.

<sup>18</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte*, Riga/Leipzig: Johann Friederich Hartknoch, 1787, Dritter Theile, 40. '[...] doch fehlt es ihnen nicht an Kenntnissen, noch minder an stillem Fleiß und fein nachahmenden Künsten [...].' Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*, 186-187.

<sup>19</sup> Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*, 186, 190-192, 195-196, 212.

<sup>20</sup> Buffon, *Les époques de la nature*, 169. '[...] ces contrées étoient encore brûlantes & déferées.'

<sup>21</sup> Arthur de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*. Paris: Editions Pierre Belfond, 1853-1855, 300. '[...] la source d'où les arts ont jailli est étrangère aux instincts civilisateurs. Elle est cachée dans le sang des noirs.' See also : Christopher L. Miller, *Blank Darkness. Africanist discourse in French*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985, 88-90.

<sup>22</sup> de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, 300. 'C'est, dira-t-on, une bien belle couronne que je pose sur la tête difforme du nègre [...].'

matter make him proper to undergo the impressions that the arts produce, in a degree of intensity completely unknown to other human families.<sup>23</sup>

Despite these rather progressive ideas, remaining 'without echo'<sup>24</sup> for a long time, de Gobineau also stated that African civilisation was a 'nullity' and that whites were superior to the 'branches of Cham'. The African was easily overwhelmed by artistic emotions, but he was slow to understand and unable to elevate himself above a humble level from the moment he needed to think, understand, compare and draw conclusions. Hence, the great artistic sensitivity remained limited to the most miserable practices: 'She enflames and becomes passionate, but to what end?'<sup>25</sup> Africans were able to create dance and music, but only as a result of their uncontrollable passion closely connected with sensuality, resulting in 'inarticulate sounds'. Only whites, guided by science and reflection, were able to use the magic of sounds to create a fantastic horizon of the morning sun, where listeners could feel the fresh warmth and smell the flowers. 'The negro sees nothing of this all.'<sup>26</sup>

The ideas of de Gobineau on the African, and not Asian, origin of art were not widely accepted. Francis Pulszky called Count de Gobineau's *Inequality of human races* 'a work sparkling with genius and originality, if indulging in some wild hypothesis not supported by history.'<sup>27</sup> In his contribution to *Indigenous Races of the Earth*, edited by the polygenists Josiah C. Nott and George R. Gliddon, Pulszky referred to the idea that the 'aptitude for art' derived from 'Black races', as a 'strange and altogether-gratuitous hypothesis'.<sup>28</sup> According to the fellow of the Hungarian Academy, art did not even exist in Africa: 'Long as history has made mention of negroes, they have never had any art of their own.'<sup>29</sup>

It is interesting to see that Pulszky, in contrast to de Gobineau, limited his attention to sculpture and painting, art forms that, in his time and place, were supposed to represent reality in a true-to-life manner. This 'imitative art' had almost certainly only flourished among 'progressive races': white, yellow, and some brown and red nations.<sup>30</sup> Some people were considered to be artistic by nature, depending

<sup>23</sup> de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, 301. 'Certainement l'élément noir est indispensable pour développer le génie artistique dans une race, parce que nous avons vu quelle profusion de feu, de flammes, d'étincelles, d'entraînement, d'irréflexion réside dans son essence, et combien l'imagination, ce reflet de la sensualité, et toutes les appétitions vers la matière le rendent propre à subir les impressions qui produisent les arts, dans un degré d'intensité tout à fait inconnu aux autres familles humaines.'

<sup>24</sup> Jadot, 'L'Art nègre au Congo belge', 1.

<sup>25</sup> de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, 302. 'Elle s'enflammera et elle se passionnera, mais pour quoi?'

<sup>26</sup> de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, 302. 'Le nègre ne voit rien de tout cela.'

<sup>27</sup> Francis Pulszky, 'Iconographic researches on human races and their art', in Josiah Clark Nott & George Robbins Gliddon, eds, *Indigenous Races of the Earth, or, New chapters of ethnological inquiry; including monographs on special departments contributed by Alfred Maury, Francis Pulszky, and J. Aitken Meigs. Presenting fresh investigations, documents, and materials*, Philadelphia / London: J. B. Lippincott & Co / Trübner & Co, 1857, 188.

<sup>28</sup> Pulszky, 'Iconographic researches on human races and their art', 188.

<sup>29</sup> Pulszky, 'Iconographic researches on human races and their art', 188.

<sup>30</sup> Pulszky, 'Iconographic researches on human races and their art', 98-99.

on their 'mental culture and level of civilisation'.<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, it was unlikely that art ever flourished among 'passive races', including some red, most brown nations and all 'blacks'. Pulszky clearly acknowledged the existence of Pre-Columbian and Asian art, but not of African art. Pre-Columbian art, unconnected with Asian culture according to Pulszky, was characterized by beauty, exquisite finish of execution, earnest expression, but still was inferior to European and Chinese art. Besides Africa, Pulszky also ranged Hungarians, Fins, Turks, Celts, Slaves and Scandinavians among the 'unartistical races'. 'The genius of art has never smiled upon them.'<sup>32</sup> In contrast to de Gobineau, Pulszky supported a clear polygenetic view quoting Voltaire: 'The first white man who beheld a negro must have been greatly astonished; but the reasoner who claims that the negro comes from the white man astonishes me a great deal more.'<sup>33</sup> Still, Pulszky refused to state that some races were lower than others. 'They are all *men*; that is to say, beings possessing reason and conscience, responsible for their actions to their Creator, to mankind and to themselves, able to recognize truth, and to discern between right and wrong, and therefore they are equally entitled to "life, liberty and pursuit of happiness."' <sup>34</sup>

The same criticism on de Gobineau could be heard in the doctoral dissertation by Léon Vanderkindere of 1868. According to this Belgian historian and ethnologist, de Gobineau considered art to be the exclusive talent of the black race. Other races could only be called artistic depending on the level of mixture with black blood. Vanderkindere clearly disagreed and stated that only Aryan races, with sufficient logical capabilities, '*finesse de cœur*' and 'aspiration towards the ideal', were capable of true art and great literature.

Beyond any doubt, Negroes are more endowed with music and dance than Mongols, but are they better than the pure Aryans? That would be imprudent to claim. In fact, their talents are only natural talents, similar to these manifested by children and often visible among animals; one of their most developed abilities is imitation, giving them easily the competence of a comedian, but in reality only testify of their affinity with the ape.<sup>35</sup>

On the contrary, Vanderkindere, like Pulszky, did accept the existence of Chinese art. 'The Chinese excel in the detailed and fine reproduction of nature; but their

<sup>31</sup> Pulszky, 'Iconographic researches on human races and their art', 96-97.

<sup>32</sup> Pulszky, 'Iconographic researches on human races and their art', 192.

<sup>33</sup> Pulszky, 'Iconographic researches on human races and their art', 191.

<sup>34</sup> Pulszky, 'Iconographic researches on human races and their art', 192.

<sup>35</sup> Léon Vanderkindere, *De la race et de sa part d'influence dans les divers manifestations de l'activité des peuples*, Bruxelles/Paris: Claassen/Hachette, 1868, 122. 'Sans doute les nègres sont mieux doués pour la musique et la danse que les Mongols; les ont-ils mieux que les Aryens purs? C'est ce qu'il serait imprudent de prétendre. Au fond leurs talents ne sont que des talents naturels, semblables à ceux que manifeste l'enfant et qui se voient souvent chez les animaux; aussi une des facultés les plus développées chez eux est celle de l'imitation, qui leur donne aisément les habilités du comédien, mais ne témoigne en réalité que de leur parenté avec le singe.'

realism prevents them from distinguishing the forms of art'.<sup>36</sup> Still, he called the Chinese representatives of the most fortunate inferior races. Likewise, 'Semites' were capable of music and painting, the most 'subjective' forms of art. Nevertheless, both Chinese and Semites were inferior to Aryans, 'who possess the gift to passionately pour out their most intimate sentiments, and know the way how to correctly and strongly develop an action with all its intrigues in which all the multiple motives of the human heart are involved.'<sup>37</sup> According to Vanderkindere, the triumph of Aryan art was realized in theatre, the most objective form of art, showing the 'dominant concepts' of a people. However, this art form did not originate in Africa, but in Asia. Vanderkindere pointed out the 'evident affinity' between the Sanskrit play *Mrichchakati* and works of Shakespeare and defended the Asian origin of Aryan culture.<sup>38</sup>

The belief in Aryan supremacy also characterized the work of the Belgian musicologist François-Joseph Fétis, who used music and instruments, instead of physical features, as 'emblems of race and culture'<sup>39</sup> to delimitate superior from savage people. Remarkably, after a presentation of his theory in the Société d'Anthropologie de Paris in February 1867, even the physical anthropologist Paul Broca accepted the role of art, and especially music, in the classification of races.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps musicology had not the same importance as linguistics, but since 'music is one of the first manifestations of the feelings of man', it could be of value in the delimitation of races. Referring to the contribution of Pulszky on the artistic history of human races, Broca stated: 'Why would we eliminate music from anthropology, when we justly and favourably have welcomed sculpture and the art of drawing.'<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Vanderkindere, *De la race*, 123. 'Les Chinois excellent dans la reproduction détaillée et fine de la nature ; mais leur réalisme les empêche d'entrevoir même les conditions de l'art, qui ne vit que l'idéal.'

<sup>37</sup> Vanderkindere, *De la race*, 124. '[...] ceux-ci tout en possédant le don d'épancher avec passion leurs sentiments les plus intimes, connaissent seuls le moyen de développer correctement et puissamment avec toutes ses péripéties une action où les mobiles multiples du cœur humain sont engagés.'

<sup>38</sup> *The Mrichchakati, or The Toy Cart, A Drama*. Calcutta: Holcroft Asiatic Press, 1826. Translated from Sanskrit by Horace Hayman Wilson, Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Vanderkindere, *De la race*, 125. Robin W. Dennell, 'From Sangiran to Olduvai, 1937-1960: The quest for "centres" of hominid origins in Asia and Africa', in Raymond Corbey and Wil Roebroeks, eds, *Studying Human Origins: Disciplinary History and Epistemology*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2001, 45-66. Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. 2006. Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth. A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe*, New York: Basic Books, 1974.

<sup>39</sup> Jann Pasler, 'The Utility of Musical Instruments in the Racial and Colonial Agendas of Late Nineteenth Century France', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 129: 1, 2004, 29.

<sup>40</sup> Claude Blanckaert, *De la race à l'évolution : Paul Broca et l'anthropologie française (1850 - 1900)*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Broca, in the discussion after François-Joseph Fétis, 'Sur un nouveau mode de classification des races humaines d'après leurs systèmes musicaux', *Bulletin de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris*, Série 2, 2: 1, 1867, 134-146. 'Pourquoi éliminerions-nous la musique de l'anthropologie, quand nous avons justement et favorablement accueilli la plastique, l'art du dessin ?'

In his unfinished *Histoire générale de la musique depuis les temps les plus anciens jusqu'à nos jours* (1869–1874), Fétis gave a remarkable overview of the history of world music in five volumes, making him one of the first ethnomusicologists. According to the first director of the Brussels Conservatory, not theatre, but music was 'the ideal oeuvre of humanity'.<sup>42</sup> For Fétis, the history of music and races was inextricably linked, because musical capacity depended on the 'cerebral constitution'. Hence, not all populations had reached the same level of progress; 'science and experience agree on the finding of this sad truth.'<sup>43</sup> Based on physical anthropology, ethnology, archaeology and linguistics, Fétis tried to determine in which favourable and limiting circumstances music and art were created and which races had developed that quality. However, Fétis soon made clear that the 'progressive transformations' of music as a 'satisfaction of an instinctive, sentimental and traditional need' into 'art', were only realized in modern Europe.<sup>44</sup> Influenced by Max Müller, Franz Bopp and other linguists defending the Asian origin of Aryan languages, Fétis looked for the origin of music and musical instruments in India and Persia and not in Africa. However, the Belgian musicologist refused to accept polygenist views and agreed with the view of 'first-rate erudites' on the 'affinity of varieties'.<sup>45</sup> According to Fétis, Aryan races had spread from Asia, over the Middle-East into Europe. Subsequently, he ranged Indians, Persians, Semites, Greeks, Turks, Etruscans, Romans, Hebrews, Phoenicians, Assyrians, Arabs and Egyptians among the Aryan stem. Aryan musical scales were more complex, because the 'nervous sensibility of the antique Aryan race needed a multitude of intonations to accentuate his singing by a great quantity of nuances in the expression of passionate movements of the soul.'<sup>46</sup> On the contrary, 'primitive races', characterized by a 'cerebral inferiority', were unable to create artistic music. Limited tones and formal monotony, especially common among cannibalistic races, proved the impossibility of 'progress by intuition'.

Hence, Fétis did not agree with de Gobineau's opinion on the black race's 'disposition for arts; experience shows that this assessment did not work for painting, architecture, nor for music.'<sup>47</sup> Relying on information provided by the British armchair anthropologist James Cowles Prichard, Fétis even attributed animal and childlike features to the 'Negro race', as Vanderkindere did. 'Condemned to a perpetual social infancy, they find themselves in a situation today in which they will stay for thousands of years; because three quarters of the population vegetate in

<sup>42</sup> François-Joseph Fétis, *Histoire générale de la musique depuis les temps les plus anciens jusqu'à nos jours*, Paris: Didot, volume 1, 1869, ii.

<sup>43</sup> Fétis, *Histoire générale de la musique*, ii. '[...] la science et l'expérience s'accordent pour constater cette triste vérité.'

<sup>44</sup> Fétis, *Histoire générale de la musique*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Fétis, *Histoire générale de la musique*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> Fétis, 'Sur un nouveau mode de classification des races humaines', 136. 'La sensibilité nerveuse de la race antique des Aryans avait besoin de cette multitude d'intonations pour accentuer son chant par une grande quantité de nuances dans l'expression des mouvements passionnés de l'âme.'

<sup>47</sup> Fétis, *Histoire générale de la musique*, 29. '[...] disposition pour les arts ; l'expérience démontre cependant qu'elle n'a réussi ni dans la peinture, ni dans l'architecture, ni dans la musique.'



slavery, which refrains them from getting out. This race has no history, no literature and no arts deserving of the name.<sup>48</sup> However, as he never visited Africa himself, Fétis had to rely on subjective accounts, written by soldiers untrained in musicology, such as Richard Francis Burton and John Hanning Speke.<sup>49</sup> The former seemed to have a very limited interest in music and art: 'Nothing worse than the music in this region'.<sup>50</sup> According to the English explorer, African musicians lacked creative inspiration, innovative spirit and made no progress whatsoever. The latter described African singing as 'a constant repetition of senseless words, which stand in place of the song to the negroes; for song they have none, being mentally incapacitated for musical composition, though as timists they are not to be surpassed.'<sup>51</sup> Based on these publications, Fétis described African music as monotonous, repetitive, uncreative, meaningless and 'very unpleasant' for the European ear. 'Following the law of musical capacity, based on the conformation of the brain, the conception of the relations of tone intonations can only exist in the restricted limits of a race, poorly favoured by nature.'<sup>52</sup> However, on other occasions Speke mentioned musicians playing 'large nine-stringed harps, like the Nubian tambira, accompanied by harmonicons.'<sup>53</sup> An illustration of a 'court orchestra'<sup>54</sup>, copied by Fétis in his *Histoire générale de la musique*,<sup>55</sup> indicated the existence of a far more complex musical culture (Fig. 1).



Figure 1 Anonymous engraver, after drawings by James Augustus Grant, 'L'orchestre de la cour, au Karagoué', plate from John Hanning Speke, *Les Sources du Nil*, 1864, page 189. Paris: Hachette. The engraving showed drums, flutes, a seven string 'harp' and a 'cymbalo' with fifteen wooden bars.

<sup>48</sup> Fétis, *Histoire générale de la musique*, 28. 'Condamnés à une perpétuelle enfance sociale, ils sont aujourd'hui dans la situation où ils durent se trouver il y a quelques milliers d'années ; car l'esclavage dans lequel végètent les trois quarts de la population ne leur permet pas d'en sortir. Cette race n'a ni histoire, ni littérature, ni arts qui méritent ce nom.' Saskia Willaert, 'The Growth of an "Exotic" Collection. African Instruments in the Musical Instruments Museum, Brussels (1877-1913)', in Ignace de Keyser, ed, *Annual Meeting of the International Committee of Musical Instrument Museum and Collections. COMCIM 2011 - Terouren. Reports*, Tervuren: Koninklijk museum voor Midden-Afrika, 2012, 62.

<sup>49</sup> John Hanning Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1863. Richard Francis Burton, *Voyage aux grands lacs de l'Afrique orientale*, Paris: Hachette, 1862.

<sup>50</sup> Burton, *Voyage aux grands lacs de l'Afrique orientale*, 602.

<sup>51</sup> Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, 20.

<sup>52</sup> Fétis, *Histoire générale de la musique*, 29.

<sup>53</sup> Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, 288.

<sup>54</sup> John Hanning Speke, *Les Sources du Nil: Journal de voyage du Capitaine John Hanning Speke*, Paris: Hachette, 1864, 189.

<sup>55</sup> Fétis, *Histoire générale de la musique*, 39.

**Are you experienced?**

Figure 2 Wenzel Liepoldt, *Productions of the Industrial Arts of the Niam-Niam*, plate XIV from Georg Schweinfurth, *Artes Africanae*, 1875. Leipzig: Brockhaus. The illustrated page shows Congolese 'harp-guitars' (top left and right corner) and a carved stool (centre).

Although most scientists in the 1870s were still very reluctant to accept the mere existence of artistic expression in Africa, as has been demonstrated in the first part of this text, European 'explorers' in Africa did start to point to African 'culture, art and industry'.<sup>56</sup> Travelling from Khartoum to Bahr-el-Ghazal between 1868 and 1871, passing through the North of Congo (Uele), the German Georg Schweinfurth<sup>57</sup> referred to the Madi as 'passionate musicians, who know how to produce on this instrument [a bamboo-cane flute] very agreeable and well-rehearsed pieces'.<sup>58</sup> Parts of musical instruments of the 'Niam Niam', like the head of a 'harp-guitar' were 'ornamented with a carved figure-head, upon which the instrument-maker bestows great pains' (Fig. 2).<sup>59</sup> Zande wooden sculptures, like a stool with 'pierced work of the foot and the symmetrical arrangement of its entangled parts deserve our especial admiration' (Fig. 2).<sup>60</sup> In his *Artes Africanae*, Schweinfurth also mentioned

<sup>56</sup> Georg Schweinfurth, *Artes Africanae: Abbildungen und Beschreibungen von Erzeugnissen des Kunstfleisses centralafrikanischer Völker*, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1875, VII.

<sup>57</sup> Curtis A. Keim, 'Artes Africanae: The Western Discovery of "Art" in Northeastern Congo', In Enid Schildkrout and Curtis A. Keim, eds, *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 109–132.

<sup>58</sup> Schweinfurth, *Artes Africanae*, IX.

<sup>59</sup> Schweinfurth, *Artes Africanae*, XI.

<sup>60</sup> Schweinfurth, *Artes Africanae*, XI.

pottery with 'blameless symmetry', 'artistically wrought' weapons, and even spoke of African architecture among the Mangbetu.<sup>61</sup> Although he often portrayed Africa as a place of war and cannibalism, he was also critical of a European presence. International relations normally helped to create higher levels of civilisation. In modern Africa however, Europe had a 'destructive effect on native arts' caused by a 'desire of imitation' as Africans copied cheap European products that were exchanged for rubber 'gathered playfully in the wood.'<sup>62</sup> As a result, the culture of 'Kaffers' and 'Hottentots' had become a barren field for ethnographic research. According to Schweinfurth, the most original weapons were already to be found in the 'incomplete' museums in Europe. Still, he urged other travellers to collect 'indigenous art' quickly, before it was too late; a mantra that would be repeated in western publications throughout the rest of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>63</sup> 'Hurry is needed, for the destructive tendency of our industrial productions obtruding themselves upon all the nations of the earth, menaces, sooner or later, to sweep away, even in Africa, the last remnants of indigenous arts.'<sup>64</sup> Schweinfurth was convinced that these objects could provide more information on how primitive nations had attained a higher degree of culture. However, he also seemed reluctant to situate the origin of culture in Sub-Saharan Africa. Schweinfurth called local civilisation stagnant due to slavery. Even the tree of the Egyptian culture, in origin 'an Asian plant on a African trunk', seemed exhausted forever as a source of culture.<sup>65</sup>

Another famous, but rarely cited book, *Through the Dark Continent* (1878) by Henry Morton Stanley, describing the first European trans-African expedition (1874–1877), also contains several marks of appreciation for African objects.<sup>66</sup> Among the treasures, trophies and curiosities in the 'museum' of the Karagwe king Rumanika in present Tanzania<sup>67</sup>, Stanley found 'admirable specimens of native art', like a fly swatter, and exquisite native cloth. 'The royal stool was a masterpiece of native turnery, being carved out of a solid log of cotton-wood.'<sup>68</sup> In what is now Congo, Stanley also was impressed by local metal workers and even believed in the possibility of progress.

The art of the blacksmith is of a high standard in these forests, considering the loneliness of the inhabitants. The people have much traditional lore, and it appears from the immunity which they have enjoyed in these dismal retreats that from one generation to another something has been

<sup>61</sup> Schweinfurth, *Artes Africanae*, XI.

<sup>62</sup> Schweinfurth, *Artes Africanae*, VIII.

<sup>63</sup> Glenn H. Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 32.

<sup>64</sup> Schweinfurth, *Artes Africanae*, IX.

<sup>65</sup> Schweinfurth, *Artes Africanae*, VIII.

<sup>66</sup> Henry Morton Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent or The Sources of the Nile Around the Great Lakes of Equatorial Africa and down the Livingstone River to the Atlantic Ocean*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 2 volumes, 1878.

<sup>67</sup> Israel K Katoke, *The Karagwe Kingdom: A History of the Abanyambo of North Western Tanzania, C. 1400-1915*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1975.

<sup>68</sup> Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*, I, 474.

communicated and learned, showing that even the jungle man is a progressive and an improvable animal.<sup>69</sup>

Among the Aruwimi, he found 'beautifully carved' peddles, splendid long knives 'like Persian kummers', gourds that exhibited taste in ornamentation, and spears 'designed more for ornament than use'. According to Stanley, the Aruwimi were 'clever, intelligent and more advanced in the arts than any hitherto observed since we commenced our descent of the Livingstone [Congo river].'<sup>70</sup> Elsewhere in Congo he found beautiful spears (Fig. 3), double bells producing 'very agreeable musical sounds'<sup>71</sup>, stools 'carved in the most admirable manner' and the representation of human forms carved in a door.<sup>72</sup>

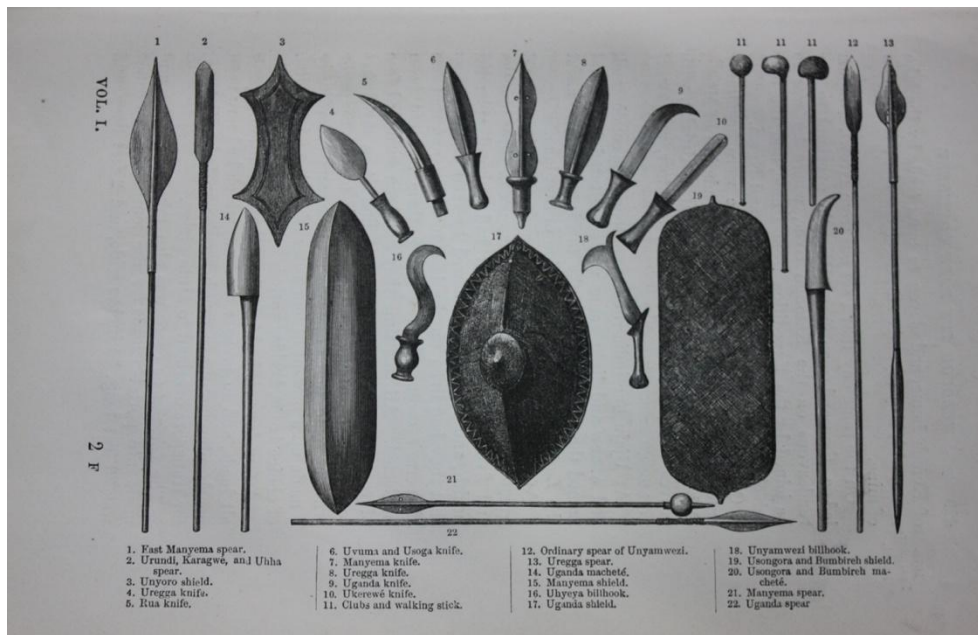


Figure 3 Anonymous, *Implements and Weapons of Central Africa*, plate 46 in volume 1 from Henry Morton Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*, 1878. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington. According to Stanley, Maniema spears (first object on the left) in the eastern part of Congo were 'the most perfect in the world.'

Stanley did collect some objects during his first voyage in Africa and kept on doing so after he had joined the International Association of Congo (IAC) in service of the Belgian king Leopold II, who united the Congo Free State, later to become the Belgian Congo, and Belgium in a personal union. After the first part of his Upper Congo Expedition (1879–1882), when Stanley had to return sick, he visited Maximilien Strauch in Brussels, the secretary-general of the IAC. Already at the end

<sup>69</sup> Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*, II, 142-143.

<sup>70</sup> Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*, II, 273.

<sup>71</sup> Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*, II, 289.

<sup>72</sup> Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*, II, 70.

of 1882, Stanley mentioned the plans of the IAC to start a museum in the Belgian capital.<sup>73</sup>

I had an interview with Col. Strauch at 7 rue Brederode where he was comfortably established, with assistants and clerks, and specimens of native goods of all kinds about him, besides the beginnings of a museum, which some day will be valuable. Though during the passage home I had greatly recovered from the effects of the last haematuria fever, he understood at a glance that I was as subject to a colocynth & calomel & quinine diet, as any raw young Belgian.<sup>74</sup>

Stanley left several boxes in Brussels with musical instruments and weapons, such as ‘spear-blades six feet long and four inches broad’<sup>75</sup> with ‘elegant forms.’<sup>76</sup> The news of Stanley’s return spread quickly. Lindor Serrurier, the director of the ethnographical museum in Leiden, also wanted to meet the explorer in Brussels to discuss possible gifts to the Netherlands. However, no trace of Stanley’s objects can be found in the Leiden museum archives. In Belgium, according to Stanley’s wishes, Strauch only opened the boxes in August 1884, ‘to take out the things destined for our Museum, so as to preserve the objects susceptible of spoiling.’<sup>77</sup>

Other colonials, like the Belgian soldier Emile Storms, also became fascinated by African art. He joined the International African Association (IAA) in 1882 and created the first European colonial outpost Mpala on the western shore of Lake Tanganyika.<sup>78</sup> With the upcoming World Exhibition in Antwerp of 1885 in mind, Storms was encouraged by colonial administration to collect objects: ‘We have the intention to participate at the World Exhibition in Antwerp. We will not only exhibit products from Congo, but also those from the east coast [...]; if [...] you would be able to collect interesting objects, we would be very pleased to incorporate these in the compartment that will be reserved for us.’<sup>79</sup> According to the secretary-general of the IAA, quick action was needed. Like Schweinfurth, Maximilien Strauch feared that ethnographical objects would soon disappear. The last traces of a disappearing

<sup>73</sup> The existence of the IAC museum in 1882 is confirmed in a letter by Cambier addressed to Thys. RMCA, HA.01.171, Thys, 4, 25 January 1882.

<sup>74</sup> RMCA, Stanley Archives, 35, Journal Congo, vol. 2., 1882-1884, September 1882, 1.

<sup>75</sup> Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*, II, 356.

<sup>76</sup> Anonymous, ‘Nouvelles et informations’, *Mouvement Géographique*, 1: 13, 1884, 55.

<sup>77</sup> RMCA, Stanley Archives, 35, Journal Congo, vol. 2, 1882-1884, 24 August 1884, 468. Sabine Cornelis, ‘Le Musée du Congo belge, vitrine de l’action coloniale (1910-1930)’, in Dominique Taffin, ed, *Du Musée Colonial Au Musée Des Cultures Du Monde*, Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2000, 71-72.

<sup>78</sup> Allen F. Roberts, *A Dance of Assassins. Performing Early Colonial Hegemony in the Congo*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013. Couttenier, *Congo tentoongesteld*, 73-89.

<sup>79</sup> RMCA, HA.01.017, Storms, Letter from Strauch to Storms, 30 January 1885. ‘Nous avons l’intention de prendre part à l’exposition internationale d’Anvers; non seulement nous y ferons figurer les produits du Congo mais encore ceux de la côte orientale [...]; si [...] vous pouvez recueillir des objets intéressantes nous serons heureux de les exposer dans le compartiment qui nous sera réservé.’

African culture had to be conserved. 'Within a few years they will have become very rare and therefore there should be great price for scientists who try to write the history of these populations and their entry into civilisation.'<sup>80</sup> Due to several setbacks, such as ants eating his ethnographical collection, and a fire destroying his fortress in Mpala at the end of his term, Storms was unable to present his collection in the colonial pavilion of the World Exhibition in Antwerp. At the end of December 1885, Storms was still in Zanzibar and the Expo had closed on the second of November.

However, the next year, Storms was invited by the Anthropological Society of Brussels (ASB), to exhibit his private collection. Victor Jacques, the secretary and driving force behind the Society,<sup>81</sup> published an extensive ethnographical study on the 'Oriental part of Equatorial Africa' in collaboration with Storms. Information from Storms's journal and memory was thematically organised according to the categories of the *Questionnaire de sociologie et d'ethnographie*, published in 1883 by the Anthropological Society of Paris: nutritive life, sensitive life, emotional life, social life, and intellectual life.<sup>82</sup> The text shows that Storms paid attention to body art, such as painting, hair styles, scarifications and piercings. He also provided ethnographic information on music, dance and singing. In the chapter on intellectual life, special attention was paid to 'industry, crafts and professions'. According to Storms, basketry showed 'a certain refinement' and 'a taste for decoration'. The makers were seen as masters who were able to compete with European workers. Storms especially showed respect for the blacksmiths and sculptors. 'The art of the blacksmith is possibly the most noble of all'.<sup>83</sup> With relatively simple tools, they were able to come to 'surprising results'. The sculptor's art was visible in neck supports and stools. Chairs with a sculpted back, representing human or animal figures, were seen as 'real art objects'.<sup>84</sup> According to Storms, one Tabwa chair showed a human figure with an umbilical hernia (Fig. 4 and 5) and another with a knotted hair style.

The art is naïve: there is nothing hideous or monstrous like in sculptures of some peoples, but only the concern to imitate nature as completely as possible. Without a doubt, it provokes laughter to see these grotesque figures with too short legs, too flat feet, a too long torso, and a too thick head, but the artist did not omit any detail: the lips are thick, the genitals are well marked and even the umbilical hernia is not forgotten; as for the hair style,

<sup>80</sup> RMCA, HA.01.017, Storms, Letter from Strauch to Storms, 20 July 1883. 'D'ici à quelques années ils seront très rares et par cette raison ils auront un grand prix pour les savants qui tenteront d'écrire l'histoire de ces peuples en l'histoire de leur avènement à la civilisation'.

<sup>81</sup> Maarten Couttenier, 'Jacques (Victor)' *Biografisch Woordenboek van de Belgen Overzee*, 2012. [http://www.kaowarsom.be/nl/notices\\_bio\\_jacques\\_victor](http://www.kaowarsom.be/nl/notices_bio_jacques_victor).

<sup>82</sup> Ernest-Théodore Hamy, Charles Letourneau, Julien Vinson, and Abel Hovelacque, 'Questionnaire de sociologie et d'ethnographie', *Bulletin de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris*, 3e Série, 6, 1883, 578–97. See also Mersmann in this issue.

<sup>83</sup> Victor Jacques and Emile Storms, 'Notes sur l'ethnographie de la partie orientale de l'Afrique équatoriale', *Bulletin de la Société d'Anthropologie de Bruxelles*, 5, 1886, 183. 'L'art du forgeron est peut-être le plus noble de tous'.

<sup>84</sup> Jacques and Storms, 'Notes sur l'ethnographie', 183.

which might have been executed imperfectly, it nevertheless constitutes a document of high importance.<sup>85</sup>



Figure 4 A Tabwa chair sculpted out of one piece of wood, with the representation of a human figure, was regarded as a 'real art object'. Genus: *Erythrina*, Species: *abyssinica*, 78 × 30 × 33cm. EO.0.0.31654, collection RMCA Tervuren; photo J. Van de Vyver, RMCA Tervuren ©

<sup>85</sup> Jacques and Storms, 'Notes sur l'ethnographie', 201. 'L'art est naïf : il n'y a là rien de hideux et de monstrueux comme dans les sculptures de certains peuples, mais le souci d'imiter la nature aussi complètement que possible. Cela prête à rire, sans doute, de voir ces figurines grotesques aux jambes trop courtes, aux pieds trop plats, au torse trop long, à la tête trop grosse, mais l'artiste n'a omis aucun détail : les lèvres sont épaisses, le sexe et bien accusé et la hernie ombilicale même n'a pas été oublié ; quant à la coiffure, quelque imparfaitement qu'elle soit rendue, elle n'en constitue pas moins un document d'une haute importance.'



Figure 5 A Detail of Tabwa chair . Genus: *Erythrina*, Species: *abyssinica*, 78 × 30 × 33cm. EO.0.0.31654, collection RMCA Tervuren; photo J. Van de Vyver, RMCA Tervuren ©

During a meeting in 1888 of the ASB, Storms again presented some African objects, like a Maniema axe and a Sankuru cup 'with very elegant and very complicated ornaments'.<sup>86</sup> According to Storms, these objects denoted 'a certain art and a certain evolution in the taste for ornamentation'.<sup>87</sup> They were only to be found in isolated regions, inaccessible to the influence of civilised people like Europeans and 'Arabs'. Like Stanley before him, Storms was convinced that Africans were capable of an autonomous development towards civilisation. He even referred to the possibility of degeneration from an unknown 'Golden Age'. 'One could really state that the African populations have reached more progress in civilisation, because they have been isolated and in this way they had to draw from their own instinctive desire for beauty. Hence, the art of the Maniema seems to point to the existence of an older, more civilised era, with a present tendency to return to barbarism.'<sup>88</sup> In the discussion afterwards, Victor Jacques clearly disagreed: 'I don't think that isolated populations can reach a certain degree of civilisation. On the contrary, I believe that progress could only have been caused by an external influence and an adaptation to the environment. I cannot understand how an

<sup>86</sup> Victor Jacques and Emile Storms, 'Présentation de pièces', *Bulletin de la Société d'Anthropologie de Bruxelles*, 7, 1888, 166.

<sup>87</sup> Jacques and Storms, 'Présentation de pièces', 167.

<sup>88</sup> Jacques and Storms, 'Présentation de pièces', 167. 'On dirait vraiment qu'en Afrique les populations ont fait d'autant plus de progrès dans la civilisation qu'elles sont restées plus isolées, parce qu'elles doivent alors puiser en quelque sorte en elles-mêmes une aspiration instinctive vers le beau. L'art dans le Maniéma semble indiquer, d'ailleurs, l'existence antérieure d'une époque plus civilisée avec tendance actuelle à un retour vers la barbarie.'



isolated population would begin to think that they would benefit from behaving differently from their ancestors who didn't act that way.'<sup>89</sup> However, Storms held his ground and argued that colonial contact caused disintegration. 'Still, I think that when a population comes into contact with civilised people, for example Negroes with Europeans, then the national art shows no more progress. It even gets lost because it takes over strange products of which they soon see all the advantages.'<sup>90</sup> The differences between the armchair anthropologist Victor Jacques, an adherent of polygenism, and the 'experienced' colonizer, unwilling to accept physical anthropological theories, show that scientific discourse was not always homogenous.<sup>91</sup> Although Storms pointed to the possibility of a progressive development, early Belgian anthropologists failed to formulate a theoretical debate concerning cultural relativism like in Germany, with authors such as Herder already pointing to the diversity of cultures.<sup>92</sup>

### Antwerp 1885

Despite the limited number of objects at their disposal in the 'ethnographical museum' in the Brederode Street, the IAC agreed to participate in the first Belgian World Exhibition in Antwerp.<sup>93</sup> Already in July 1884, plans were made within the IAC to organize a commercial section and a scientific exhibition on ethnography, geology, fauna, and flora. In the 'picturesque part', a 'Negro village' was to be erected 'in order to give a reduced, but exact idea of the Congolese villages'.<sup>94</sup> However, during the period between July 1884 and the opening of the World Exhibition in Antwerp in May 1885, Leopold II was primarily concerned with political issues and the International Conference in Berlin (November 1884-February 1885). Louis Haneuse was charged with the constitution of the Congo Free State

<sup>89</sup> Jacques and Storms, 'Présentation de pièces', 167. 'Je ne pense pas que les peuplades isolées puissent par elles-mêmes parvenir à un certain degré de civilisation; je crois, au contraire, que tout progrès est le résultat d'une influence extérieure et d'une adaptation au milieu. Je ne comprendrais pas qu'un peuple isolé trouvât lui-même un avantage quelconque à faire autrement que ne faisaient ses ancêtres et, pour ce qui nous occupe, à créer de toutes pièces un art qui lui fût propre.'

<sup>90</sup> Jacques and Storms, 'Présentation de pièces', 167. 'Je crois cependant qu'une peuplade qui vit sur elle-même doit tout naturellement chercher à embellir tout ce qui l'entoure, tous les objets dont elle se sert. Au contraire, si elle est en rapport avec des peuples plus civilisés, comme les Nègres au contact des Européens, son art national ne progresse plus ; il se perd même, parce qu'elle adopte les produits étrangers dont elle comprend bien vite tous les avantages.'

<sup>91</sup> Cooper and Stoler, *Tensions of Empire*.

<sup>92</sup> Annemarie de Waal Malefijt, *Beelden van de mens. Geschiedenis van de culturele antropologie*, Baarn: Ambo, 1977, 58 (orig. published as *Images of Man: A History of Anthropological Thought*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974).

<sup>93</sup> René Corneli and Pierre Mussely, *Anvers et l'Exposition Universelle de 1885*, Anvers: Bellemans, 1886, 100 and 102. Couttenier, Congo tentoongesteld, 89-96. Paul Greenhalgh, *Fair World: A History of World's Fairs and Expositions from London to Shanghai 1851-2010*, Berkshire: Papadakis, 2011.

<sup>94</sup> Anonymous, 'L'Association à l'Exposition d'Anvers', *Le Mouvement Géographique*, 1: 8, 1884, 29.

collection, but the number of collections was limited and budgets were restrained.<sup>95</sup> In the colonial press, the Belgian administration already seemed to fear competition from other European nations, such as France and Great-Britain: 'The public has to be aware of the fact that the enterprise [Congo Free State] was born yesterday and it cannot yet possess rich collections that old states certainly will display'.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, the Commercial Museum in Brussels was asked to install an export-import display in the main exhibition hall.<sup>97</sup> The scientific exhibition was mainly limited to ethnography and was organized in collaboration with the Royal Geographical Society of Antwerp (RGSA) in a separate colonial pavilion.

The RGSA was able to use the showcases and collections of the Congo Free State, although the objects were 'not yet classified methodically'.<sup>98</sup> Still, the objects allowed the visitor to be 'initiated in the customs of the populations of the African centre, to understand their character, to identify their present needs and to deduce their future'.<sup>99</sup> A limited number of objects were collected by Alexandre Delcommune, Henry Morton Stanley, Louis Haneuse and Edouard Destrain.<sup>100</sup> As already explained, Storms was unable to provide any collections for the World Exhibition. Due to the lack of objects, the SGRA also had to contact private collectors in Brussels via the Congo Free State. Even after the exhibition had already opened, several collectors received invitations to collaborate: Théodore Nilis, Auguste Boulanger, Victor Harou, Charles Braconnier, and Edouard Manduau, a marine lieutenant and one of the first colonial painters and critics of the Congo Free State, who had just returned from Congo.<sup>101</sup> However, not all collectors were willing to participate. S. R. Fleming apologized to Henri Wauwermans, the first president of the RGSA: 'I very much regret that my museum<sup>102</sup> cannot participate in the Antwerp exhibition. It is organized at my place [50, Avenue de l'Hippodrome, Ixelles, Brussels] in a very special way which makes the removal of objects very hard. Moreover, I don't like, even momentarily, to part with souvenirs of friends to which I attach the highest price.'<sup>103</sup> Henri Avaert, on the other hand, who had travelled

<sup>95</sup> Edmond Menzel, 'Haneuse', *Belgische koloniale biografie*, volume 4, 1955, 376-377.

<sup>96</sup> Anonymous, 'Le Congo à l'exposition d'Anvers', *Le Mouvement Géographique*, 2: 9, 1885, 34. 'Le public ne doit pas perdre de vue que l'entreprise est née d'hier et qu'elle ne peut encore posséder les riches collections que de vieux États ne manqueront pas de mettre en ligne.'

<sup>97</sup> A.-M. Oomen, *Herinnering aan de Wereldtentoonstelling: brieven in het Handelsblad van Antwerpen*, Antwerpen: Claes, 1885, 19. Alfred Geelhand, 'Le Congo à l'exposition d'Anvers', *Bulletin de la Société royale de Géographie d'Anvers*, 11, 1885, 385.

<sup>98</sup> UA, SRGA Archive, Autographs 349, Letter from Haneuse to Wauwermans, 4 May 1885. Geelhand, 'Le Congo à l'exposition d'Anvers', 386.

<sup>99</sup> Geelhand, 'Le Congo à l'exposition d'Anvers', 386. '[...] s'initier aux mœurs des populations du centre africain, de comprendre leur caractère, de constater leurs besoins actuels et d'en déduire leurs besoins futurs.'

<sup>100</sup> Geelhand, 'Le Congo à l'exposition d'Anvers', 398. Menzel, 'Haneuse', 376-377. Marthe Coosemans, 'Destrain', *Belgische koloniale biografie*, volume 2, 1951, 284-286.

<sup>101</sup> Van Schuylenbergh, *Découverte et vie des arts plastiques*, 38.

<sup>102</sup> A rather overblown name for his private collection.

<sup>103</sup> UA, SRGA Archive, Autographs 340, Letter from Fleming to Wauwermans, 7 May 1885. 'Je regrette beaucoup ne pouvoir faire participer mon musée à l'exposition d'Anvers. Celui-ci est organisé chez moi d'une façon toute spéciale qui rend l'enlèvement des objets fort

through Congo in the period 1882–83, sent a collection with a value of 1,130 francs.<sup>104</sup> Other objects were put at the disposal of the SGRA by the wealthy industrial Jacques Ernest Osterrieth and his wife Leonie Mols, the sister of the painter Robert Mols. Their Rococo-style home on the Antwerp Meir, a posh shopping avenue, was already a meeting place for European artists. The SGRA also contacted the banker Léon Lambert and his wife Zoé de Rothschild, 'Parisienne' and painter herself.<sup>105</sup> Lambert was one of the bankers supporting the colonial endeavour of Leopold II and also took care of the King's personal capital. The Claes brothers, among the dealers in African objects in Antwerp, also collaborated and received a silver medal from the organization.

Frans and Vincent Claes already collected archaeological, folklore and natural history collections in their childhood and turned the home of their parents into a private museum. In order to obtain African objects, the Frères Claes had direct contacts with Belgian colonials, like Arthur Hodister who worked in French Congo (Republic of the Congo) and the Lower Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo) in the period 1882-1884.<sup>106</sup> Like Storms, Stanley and Schweinfurth, Hodister was impressed by the aesthetic qualities of the objects he saw in Africa: 'beautiful alcarrazas in red and brown clay [...] with elegant forms and reliefs made with taste and symmetry, marking a truly artistic feeling.'<sup>107</sup> Hodister collected an impressive amount of objects, including 'a very beautiful bonnet of a chief'<sup>108</sup> and 'knives with bizarre shapes with copper inlay, very beautiful and so well done that a lot of people in Europe would refuse to admit that the objects were made by blacks, [often seen?] as creatures with only the appearance of man but with an intelligence that does not surpass the level of an animal.'<sup>109</sup> Other rich collectors in Antwerp, like Henri Melges with his 'frantic and pathological personality' who 'combined an extraordinary connoisseur talent with an insane view of life, comic and tragic at the same time', also provided the Claes brothers with objects from all over the world.<sup>110</sup>

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difficile. Ensuite je n'aime pas à me dessaisir, même momentanément, de souvenirs d'amis auxquels j'attache le plus grand prix.'

<sup>104</sup> UA, SRGA Archive, Autographs 308, Letter from Avaert to Wauwermans, 8 May 1885.

<sup>105</sup> In 1900 she painted a portrait of the art historian Edouard Fétis, the son of François-Joseph Fétis.

<sup>106</sup> RMCA, Fonds Hodister, Letter from Hodsiter to Frères Claes, 26 July 1886. Marthe Coosemans, 'Hodister', *Belgische Koloniale Biografie*, 1, 1948, 514-518.

<sup>107</sup> RMCA, Fonds Hodister, Journal, 8. '[...] jolies alcarazas en terre rouge et brun [...], dont les formes élégants et les reliefs fait avec goût et symétrie, révèlent un véritable sentiment artistique.'

<sup>108</sup> RMCA, Fonds Hodister, Journal, List of objects collected during his first term. 'très beau bonnet de chef'.

<sup>109</sup> RMCA, Fonds Hodister, Journal, 8. '[...] des couteaux aux formes bizarres, aux incrustation de cuivre, très beaux et tellement bien faits que beaucoup de personnes en Europe se refusent à admettre que les objets sont fabriqués par les noirs, [illegible] comme des êtres n'ayant que les apparences de l'homme mais dont [...] l'intelligence ne dépasse pas le niveau de celle de l'animal.'

<sup>110</sup> Jan Denuce, 'Voorwoord', *Gedenkboek Frans Claes*. Antwerpen: De Sikkel, 1932, 7-9. Denuce described Melges as an 'uitzinnige, pathologische verschijning'. 'Bij een Henri Melges ging een buitengewoon kennerstalent gepaard met een waanzinnige levensopvatting, komisch en tragisch tegelijk.'

Unfortunately, the Melges collection, with objects from India, China, Japan, Senegal, Congo, Benin, Somalia, New-Zealand, Java, Samoa, Australia, etc., was sold during a public auction in December 1892. Most of the sold Congolese objects were also collected by Arthur Hodister who was killed earlier that year during the 'Arabic campaign'.<sup>111</sup>

To solve the lack of objects in the Antwerp exhibition, Haneuse also suggested to Wauwermans to exhibit not only objects from Congo, but from the larger Central African region.<sup>112</sup> In the end, the organizers of the Belgian World Exhibition even contacted collectors in France and the Netherlands, like Gerard Frederik Westerman, creator of the Zoo in Amsterdam, and Conguy Senior, an 'art' dealer in Paris who had previously exhibited Congolese ivories at the World Exhibition of 1878 in the Trocadéro.<sup>113</sup>

The exhibition was immensely popular and attracted up to 15,000 (!) visitors a day. The police could hardly keep order.<sup>114</sup> Unfortunately, due to lack of photographs of the interior, the design of the exhibition is unknown, but written documents reveal that the public was attracted by pottery, basketwork, musical instruments, clothing, ivory and copper jewellery, furniture, bellows, etc. A necklace made out of human teeth fuelled the imagination on supposed cannibalism.<sup>115</sup> About thirty 'fetishes' 'revealed a talent for sculpture'.<sup>116</sup> The biggest among them was the *nkisi* of the Boma chief Né Cuco, 'collected' by Delcommune during a military conflict (Fig. 6). The statue, covered with hundreds of nails and thousands of pieces of cloth, made quite an impression on the visitors in Antwerp. Since labels were missing, the public was unaware of collecting conditions. According to one of them, the statue could easily be recognized by 'a deep scar on his forehead, caused by the rubbing of fingers of the natives, always rubbing on the same place.'<sup>117</sup> Again,

<sup>111</sup> *Catalogue de l'importante collection d'antiquité, d'armes, armures, grès, porcelaines, argenteries, feronneries et objets ethnographiques, préhistoriques et de fouille délaissée par feu M. Henri Melges et dont la vente publique aura lieu à Anvers, les lundi 19 décembre 1892 et jours suivants.* Anvers: F. & V. Claes, 1892.

<sup>112</sup> UA, SRGA Archive, Autographs 349, Letter from Haneuse to Wauwermans, 4 May 1885.

<sup>113</sup> Oomen, *Herinnering aan de wereldtentoonstelling*, 138-139.

<sup>114</sup> Henri Wauwermans, 'Exposition Universelle d'Anvers. Exposition du Congo organisée par la Société Royale de Géographie d'Anvers. Rapport du Comité d'organisation', *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie d'Anvers*, 10, 1885, 175.

<sup>115</sup> Oomen, *Herinnering aan de wereldtentoonstelling*, 136-137. William Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1979. Shirley Lindenbaum, 'Thinking about Cannibalism', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33 (2004) 475-498.

<sup>116</sup> Oomen, *Herinnering aan de wereldtentoonstelling*, 136.

<sup>117</sup> Geelhand, 'Le Congo à l'exposition d'Anvers', 400. '[...] une profonde cicatrice qu'il porte au front et qui a été produite par le frottement du doigt des indigènes frottant toujours à la même place.'



Figure 6 The nkisi of Né Cuco, one of the nine kings of Boma, captured by Alexandre Delcommune in 1878 during military conflict, was one of the most spectacular objects on show during the World Exhibition in Antwerp 1885.

The object is now kept in the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren. Genus: *Canarium*, Species: *schweinfurthii*, 115 x 45 x 33 cm. EO.0.0.7943, collection RMCA Tervuren; photo Plusj, RMCA Tervuren ©

the appreciation for beauty and 'artist talent' was combined with disdain.<sup>118</sup> On the one hand, 'magnificent Maniema war axes, richly decorated with drawings of good taste and a handle covered with copper leaf made out of Katanga copper minerals', Aruwimi 'parade spearheads of extraordinary dimensions', chief hats of 'supreme elegance', and Yanzi shields 'ornamented with coloured drawings to a really original effect', all showed the remarkable skills of the Africans and the wealth of natural resources in the colony.<sup>119</sup> One calabash even showed the creation of the colonial station in Philippeville (now Madingou in Congo-Brazzaville). One could see a European man arriving as he was carried by two Africans in a hammock, accompanied by armed Zanzibar porters carrying cloth, and workers cutting down trees.<sup>120</sup> On the other hand, this admiration had its limits: 'We wouldn't dare to say that the Negro loves and understands beauty, but he undoubtedly likes ornamentation. His arms, pottery, and objects in plaiting are ornamented with designs of good taste; his ivory sculptures show a certain artistic cachet.'<sup>121</sup> Likewise, the musical talent of Africans was questioned:

<sup>118</sup> Geelhand, 'Le Congo à l'exposition d'Anvers', 401.

<sup>119</sup> Geelhand, 'Le Congo à l'exposition d'Anvers', 398. 'Témoins les magnifiques haches de guerre du Manyéma, richement ornées de dessins de bon goût, au manche recouvert d'une feuille de cuivre rouge fabriquée avec le minerai de cuivre du Katanga ; témoins encore les fers de lance de parade, de dimensions extraordinaires, fabriqués par les populations du haut Aruwimi.'

<sup>120</sup> Geelhand, 'Le Congo à l'exposition d'Anvers', 401.

<sup>121</sup> Geelhand, 'Le Congo à l'exposition d'Anvers', 401. 'Nous n'oserions dire que le nègre aime et comprend le beau, mais à coup sûr il aime l'ornementation. Ses armes, ses poteries,

The negro shows little initiative himself and because he rested without contact with civilised nations, and lived without worries and without preoccupations about the future in an environment with a luxurious nature, he obviously stayed a naïf and good child. He is cheerful, he likes noise. [...] Anyhow, the Negro is a poorly refined musician: all that he wants is to make a racket and to make it as often as possible.<sup>122</sup>

Plans existed to create a permanent museum in Antwerp in commemoration of the World's Fair of 1885, but the exhibition also attracted the attention of other European museums.<sup>123</sup> Felix von Luschan, assistant-director of the Royal Museums in Berlin, visited the colonial exposition, looking for possible acquisitions among 'double' objects.<sup>124</sup> He transferred a list of 183 objects to Wauwermans, and several objects were sold to the ethnographic museum in Berlin.<sup>125</sup> In 1886, the Claes brothers contacted the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden to sell natural history, archaeological and ethnographic objects from Japan, China, Senegal, New-Zealand, Calcutta, Indonesia, Sudan, Mozambique and Congo, the latter again collected by Hodister. In order to persuade Lindor Serrurier in Leiden, Frans Claes even made allusions to the interest of other museums, like the 'Ethnographic Museum of Brussels', whose executive committee would meet 'next Tuesday'.<sup>126</sup> Although no such institute existed, Serrurier was incited to select and buy ca. 180 natural history and ethnographic objects from Congo and Angola: a marimba, clothing, plaiting and a tusk with 150 sculpted small figures (February 1887). The 'pièce de résistance' was a 'Fertility Goddess with child, taken away from its place in September 1884 [during] the m'pili war'.<sup>127</sup> In 1904, Frans Claes created his own private museum 'de Gulden Spoor'. Later on, he became curator at 'Het Steen' and the arts and crafts museum 'Vleeschhuis'. While it would take until 1898 before a

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ses objets en vannerie sont ornés de dessins de bon goût; ses sculptures en ivoire présentent un certain cachet artistique.'

<sup>122</sup> Geelhand, 'Le Congo à l'exposition d'Anvers', 400-401. 'Le nègre ayant peu d'initiative par lui-même et étant resté sans contact avec les nations civilisées, vivant sans soucis et sans préoccupation de l'avenir au milieu d'une nature luxuriante, est resté tout naturellement naïf, bon enfant. Il est gai; il aime le bruit. [...] Le nègre est d'ailleurs un musicien peu raffiné: tout ce qu'il désire c'est faire du tapage et en faire le plus possible.'

<sup>123</sup> Wauwermans, 'Exposition Universelle d'Anvers', 177.

<sup>124</sup> UA, SRGA Archive, Autographs 316, Letter from Comte de Brandenburg to Wauwermans, 1 October 1885. Letter from von Luschan to Wauwermans, 5 October 1885.

<sup>125</sup> Penny, *Objects of Culture*, 60.

<sup>126</sup> Joost R. Willink, *De bewogen verzamelgeschiedenis van de West-Centraal-Afrikaanse collecties in Nederland (1856-1889)*, PhD. Dissertation: Leiden University, 2006, 213: 'Het Etnographisch Museum', 'toekomstige dinsdag'.

<sup>127</sup> Quoted in Willink, *De bewogen verzamelgeschiedenis*, 214: 'Godin der vruchtbaarheid met kind, van zyne plaats ontnomen in september 1884 den oorlog m'pili'. All the objects sold by the Frères Claes to the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde are kept in Leiden in the series RMV 607.

permanent Congo Museum was created in Belgium, the trade in Congolese objects had already started among private collectors and museums in the 1880s.<sup>128</sup>

### Antwerp 1894

Only nine years later, Antwerp would welcome yet another World Exhibition.<sup>129</sup> Although this time the Congo Free State organized the colonial exhibition. Edmond Van Eetvelde, General Administrator of Internal Affairs and Finances in the colonial administration, clearly understood the power of colonial propaganda. In a letter to king Leopold II, written one year before the opening of the event, he stated that the exhibition had to show 'not only the resources of Congo and the social and economic life of its populations, but all the progress made with various ideas over the course of eight years.'<sup>130</sup> Hence, the final exhibition dealt with ethnography, 'political and moral development' and especially the economy. Since the exhibition mainly focused on the natural resources, most of the objects were presented by private companies. The Congo Free State only offered one fourth of the objects.<sup>131</sup> In the first room of the colonial pavilion, designed by the architect Jean-Laurent Hasse, chryselephantine sculptures were shown, made by Belgian artists including Julien Dillens, Charles Samuel, Thomas Vinçotte and Philippe Wolfers. As the initiator, Van Eetvelde encouraged Belgian art, but also propagated the possibilities of Congolese natural resources like ivory.<sup>132</sup>

For the ethnographical exhibition, the most attractive part of the colonial show according to some visitors,<sup>133</sup> Belgian colonials in Congo were asked to collect 'the most beautiful collection of objects possible'.<sup>134</sup> Among the collectors were Fernand Demeuse, Norbert Diderrich, François Michel, Paul Costermans, Charles de la Kethulle de Ryhove, Louis Chaltin, Léon Hanolet, Charles Lemaire, etc. The final ethnographical exhibition was geographically arranged by Fernand Demeuse,

<sup>128</sup> David Van Duuren, *125 Jaar Verzamelen*, Amsterdam: Tropenmuseum, 1990, 21.

<sup>129</sup> Couttenier, *Congo tentoongesteld*, 125-140.

<sup>130</sup> Archive Royal Palace, Brussels, Goffinet Archive, Correspondence Van Eetvelde, Letter from Van Eetvelde to Leopold II, 27 March 1893. '[...] non seulement les ressources du Congo et la vie sociale et économique de ses populations, mais tous les progrès accomplis dans les différents ordres d'idées depuis huit ans.'

<sup>131</sup> Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde Leiden, Museum Archive, Letter from Gericke van Herwijnen to Serrurier, 11 July 1894.

<sup>132</sup> Algemeen Rijksarchief, Archive Van Eetvelde, 8, Letter from Samuel, Vinçotte, De Rudder, de Vigne, Dillens, Lagae, de Tombay to Van Eetvelde, 1894. Théodore Masui, *Guide de la section de l'Etat Indépendant du Congo à l'exposition de Bruxelles-Tervuren en 1897*, Bruxelles: Monnon, 1897, 11-12. Tom Flynn, 'Taming the Tusk: The Revival of Chryselephantine Sculpture in Belgium During the 1890s', in Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, eds, *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum*, London: Routledge, 1998, 188-204.

<sup>133</sup> Jérôme Becker, 'Le Congo à Anvers', in Charles Vos, ed, *Anvers et son exposition*, Anvers: Diable-au-corps, 1894, 34.

<sup>134</sup> Philippe Marechal, 'Het Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika te Tervuren', in H. Balthasar and Jean Stengers, eds, *Dynastie en cultuur in België*, Antwerpen: Mercatorfonds, 1990, 331. Letter from Liebrechts to Dhansis, 5 June 1893.

according to the political organization of the colony. The advice of Victor Jacques and Lindor Serrurier, formulated a few years before the exhibition, to arrange the exhibition further by theme, was not followed.<sup>135</sup> Weaponry, peddles, and fishing and hunting gear were arranged in twenty-three 'panoplies' following the 'artistic taste' of Norbert Didderich, member of the Delcommune expedition in Katanga, and de Cock Legrelle, secretary of the section. Again, the advice of anthropologists Jacques and Serrurier, to avoid a 'picturesque' exhibition style with panoplies without mentioning the use and origin of the objects, was not taken into consideration.<sup>136</sup> Photographs made it possible to show objects that were already known, but were not represented in the exhibition, like two Wangata 'sarcophagi' photographed by François Michel and bought by Charles Lemaire in Equateur (Mbandaka) (Fig. 7).<sup>137</sup>



Figure 7 Photography allowed visitors to already 'see' remarkable objects that were 'known' but not yet 'on show' in Antwerp 1894. *Cercueil pour chefs indigènes Wangata*, AP.0.0.77, collection RMCA Tervuren, photo F. L. Michel, 1893, RMCA Tervuren ©

<sup>135</sup> Victor Jacques, 'Communication de M. V. Jacques sur l'organisation d'un Musée Congo', *Bulletin de la Société d'Anthropologie de Bruxelles*, 11, 1892, 177.

<sup>136</sup> Jacques, 'Communication de M. V. Jacques sur l'organisation d'un Musée Congo', 175.

<sup>137</sup> Hubert Droogmans, 'Notice sur l'Etat Indépendant du Congo', in *Le Congo à l'Exposition Universelle d'Anvers 1894*, Bruxelles: De Rycker, 1894, 60 and 63. Charles Lemaire, *Au Congo: Comment Les Noirs Travaillent*. Bruxelles: Charles Bulens, 1895, 98.



Although some African objects were still described as 'utensils', examples of 'native industry' and 'curiosities'<sup>138</sup>, other objects were seen as 'art' made by 'talented artists' 'in search of beauty'. In his *Congo et Belgique*, Charles Lemaire referred to Kasai axes with copper decorations, obtained by using complex techniques, as objects with an 'absolute artistic cachet'. He also saw 'delicate basketwork' and 'elegant pottery' made by 'workers who deserve more than disdain.'<sup>139</sup> Albert Thys, business man and one of the organizers of the exhibition, was also impressed by the decorations, drawings and sculptures. He referred to the calabash as representing the creation of the colonial station in Philippeville that already was on show during the 1885 exhibition. He concluded:

The negro loves and strives for beauty. [...] some of the designs on his weapons, doors, and objects in plaiting, often show very good taste. He also likes and encourages sculpture. The collection of sculpted ivory, on show in the Antwerp exposition, is particularly curious. Most of the objects have been derived from the private life or the artist has devoted himself to summarizing an important episode of tribal life.<sup>140</sup>

According to Jérôme Becker, member of the IAA, Africans were able to produce 'deliciously executed art'. Skilled blacksmiths made use of their 'extraordinary imagination' when they created weapons and execution knives. Others made 'delicate basketwork', 'superb cloth with coloured designs', and polychrome tambours. '[...] everything is characterized by ingenuity, and a search for an astonishing harmony.'<sup>141</sup> However, Becker did not fully recognize African originality and also referred to a supposed influence of Egyptian civilisation on 'primitive industries'.<sup>142</sup> Reactions of visitors also make clear that the distinction between 'authentic' material culture and objects with no traces of use was made. This difference, already made by Schweinfurth, is telling because it shows that even objects imitating European forms were now incorporated in exhibitions.<sup>143</sup> After the exhibition, the collection of African objects was moved to Brussels and was kept in

<sup>138</sup> Archive Royal Palace, Brussels, Cabinet Leopold II, 202, Léon de Béthune, *Rapport sommaire sur la section de l'Etat du Congo à l'Exposition Universelle d'Anvers en 1894*, 22 May 1894. Droogmans, 'Notice sur l'Etat Indépendant du Congo', 58.

<sup>139</sup> Charles Lemaire, *Congo et Belgique. A propos de l'exposition d'Anvers*. Bruxelles: Bulens, 1894, 135 and 166.

<sup>140</sup> RMCA, HA.01.171, Thys, 18, Note without title and date. 'Le nègre aime et recherche le beau. [...] certains dessins sur des armes, ses portes, ses objets en vannerie, sont souvent de très bon goût. Il aime aussi et protège la sculpture. La collection d'ivoire sculpté, qui figure à l'exposition d'Anvers, est tout particulièrement curieuse. La plupart des sujets sont tirés de la vie intime ou bien encore l'artiste s'est appliqué à résumer un épisode important de la vie de la tribu.'

<sup>141</sup> Becker, 'Le Congo à Anvers', 34. '[...] tout cela est d'une ingéniosité, d'une recherche et d'une harmonie étonnantes.'

<sup>142</sup> Becker, 'Le Congo à Anvers', 34.

<sup>143</sup> de Béthune, *Rapport sommaire*.

administration buildings of the Congo Free State in the rue de Brederode, and in a hayloft of the royal stables at the Place du Trône.<sup>144</sup>

## Tervuren 1897

### *Congolese art*

The collections of the Congo Free State were reused for the World Exhibition Brussels-Tervuren in 1897.<sup>145</sup> Since the objects for the Antwerp exposition were 'gathered rather hastily' and showed 'gaps that needed to be filled', the state inspector and acting General governor, sent a circular letter to all district commissioners.<sup>146</sup> Charles de la Kethulle de Ryhove, for example, co-author of the exposition guide, offered to the CFR 'one of the most beautiful series of his rare and interesting ethnographic collection'.<sup>147</sup> On their arrival in Europe, the social life of things changed.<sup>148</sup> In Tervuren, where the colonial section of the World Exhibition was organized, Congolese objects were exhibited both as 'art' and 'ethnographical objects'. In the 'salon d'honneur', the first room of the Palace of Colonies designed by the art nouveau architect Paul Hankar with 'an archaic luxury and good taste'<sup>149</sup>, both European objects, made out of ivory and other products from Congo, and African objects were exhibited as 'art'. Surprisingly, Congolese objects in metal, wood, ivory and fabrics were shown on the same level – meaning presented both 'in the same manner' and 'side by side' – as European furniture, silk embroidery and chryselephantine sculptures made by an impressive list of other renowned Belgian artists.<sup>150</sup> In the ethnographic room, also designed by Hankar, African objects were exhibited as 'ethnographical objects'. Still, objects in the second room were also perceived as 'art' by both exhibition organizers and visitors, as will be demonstrated in the next paragraphs.

<sup>144</sup> Alphonse de Haulleville, *Le Musée du Congo belge à Tervueren*, Bruxelles: Imprimerie Ve Monnom, 1910, 3.

<sup>145</sup> Couttenier, *Congo tentoongesteld*, 141-165.

<sup>146</sup> Félix Fuchs, 'Circulaire prescrivant de réunir les éléments destinés à compléter les collections du musée ethnographique', *Recueil mensuel des arrêtés, circulaires, instructions et ordres de service*, 1895, 48–49.

<sup>147</sup> Marcel Luwel, 'Geschiedenis van de tentooning van 1897 te Tervuren', in Marcel Luwel and Micheline Bruneel-Hye de Crom, eds, *Tervuren 1897*, Tervuren: Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika, 1967, 40.

<sup>148</sup> Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value', in Arjun Appadurai, ed, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 3–63.

<sup>149</sup> Anonymous, 'L'Exposition Congolaise', *Bruxelles Exposition. Organe Officiel de l'Exposition Internationale 1897*, 4, 1897, 44.

<sup>150</sup> Congolese fabrics were also exhibited in the last room of the museum, dedicated to the 'main cultures', coffee, cacao, and tobacco, next to paintings by the Belgian impressionist Rodolphe Wytzman and Art Nouveau furniture. The room was dominated by a wooden framework made by the architect George Hobé. Henry Van de Velde and Gustave Serrurier-Bovy were also contacted by Edmond Van Eetvelde to decorate the interior of the museum.



Figure 8 Congolese objects were exhibited as anonymous 'art' in the *salon d'honneur* of the Palace of the Colonies next to silk embroidery, luxury furniture and chryselephantine sculptures made by renowned European artists. HP.1960.5.1603, collection RMCA Tervuren; photo Alexandre, 1897, RMCA Tervuren ©

In the 'honorary salon'<sup>151</sup> (Fig. 8), the walls were decorated with polychrome Kasai fabrics, also known as 'velours du Kasai' or 'Kasai velvet', with linear and geometric patterns made by anonymous artists. These 'highly priced objects of value' were woven by Kuba men, and women took care of colouring and embroidery.<sup>152</sup> Portuguese colonisers had already become fascinated by Angolan and Congolese fabrics and shipped these valuable items to Europe between 1666 and 1674.<sup>153</sup> In the nineteenth century, European private collectors and museum staff became fascinated by Kuba textiles and their makers. Théodore Masui, a military man who served one term in Congo (1892-1893), was one of the main organizers of the Tervuren exhibition. He stated: 'The imagination of negro artists is of an extraordinary fecundity: with the help of lozenge, triangle and squares and the varied assembly of these geometric figures, they can find so much compositions that they bewilder the concepts of our most inventive decorators.'<sup>154</sup> During the 1897 exhibition in Tervuren, Congolese fabrics were exhibited on the same level as silk embroidery made by European artists. Again, like in the Kuba case, work on the European textiles was divided along gender lines. Isidore de Rudder made the

<sup>151</sup> The word *salon* already refers to the nineteen-century exhibitions of western art in Europe.

<sup>152</sup> Monni Adams, 'Kuba Embroidered Cloth', *African Arts*, 12: 1, 1978, 30 and 34.

<sup>153</sup> Georges Meurant, *Shoowa motieven. Afrikaans textiel van het Kuba-rijk*, Brussels: Gemeentekrediet, 1986, 111.

<sup>154</sup> Masui, *Guide*, 8. L'imagination des artistes nègres est d'une fécondité extraordinaire : à l'aide du losange, du triangle et des carrés, par un assemblage varié de ces figures géométriques, ils savent trouver tant et tant de compositions qu'ils déroutent les conceptions de nos décorateurs les plus inventifs.'

design and his wife H el ene du Menil was responsible for the embroidery. Four pairs of their silk art represented Congo 'before and after' colonization. 'Barbary', 'Slavery', 'Fetishism' and 'Polygamy' were opposed to 'Civilisation', 'Freedom', 'Christianity' and 'Family'.<sup>155</sup> Even before their installation in the room, a journalist from *Bruxelles Exposition* seemed impressed when he visited the artist's atelier: 'One can state that these art works will form a true illustration of the astonishing results obtained over ten years by the Congolese enterprise. [...] the walls will talk eloquently.'<sup>156</sup> While the walls almost seem to talk, the visitors appeared to behave like in an art museum: '[...] one speaks softly, like in a sacred place'.<sup>157</sup>

In the centre of the honorary salon, Congolese art objects in metal, wood and ivory were exhibited next to chryselephantine sculptures, luxury furniture made out of Congolese wood, and metal cups made by Wolfers, based on African models.<sup>158</sup> Some of the chryselephantine sculptures were put on pedestals that showed stylised elephant ears and tusks<sup>159</sup>, marking the influence of Congolese fauna on Belgian Art Nouveau, also called 'style Congo' at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>160</sup> According to Masui, the secretary-general of the exhibition, the bigger part of the Congolese metal objects in the ethnography room could also be shown in the honorary salon to demonstrate the 'harmony of the line' of the blacksmiths and their products' 'great elegance' and 'infinite diversity'. Only a few of their products could be selected: an Mbala axe set with red copper (collected in Malela, Bandundu), an Azande 'throwing knife' and 'execution knife', both with ivory haft, and a Teke necklace (Fig. 9).<sup>161</sup> From the 'masters in the art of wood sculpture' in the South of Congo, a few 'ravishing types' of Kuba cups were exhibited, as well as a Bena Luluwa object representing a human figure, forming a 'higher level in the art of sculpture'. The statue with 'exaggerated details' constituted 'a most curious ensemble'. Still, Masui noted, 'his expressive pose was certainly wanted'.<sup>162</sup> Another wooden object represented a European monk and was considered to be more than one hundred

<sup>155</sup> Marcel Luwel and Micheline Bruneel-Hye de Crom, 'L'Exposition de Tervuren et l'Art Nouveau', in Marcel Luwel and Micheline Bruneel-Hye de Crom, eds, *Tervueren 1897*, Tervuren: Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika, 1967, 45–103.

<sup>156</sup> Anonymous, 'L'Exposition Congolaise', 44. 'Ces  uvres d'art formeront, peut-on dire, une v ritable illustration des r sultats  tonnants obtenus en dix ans par l'entreprise congolaise. [...] les murs parleront  loquemment.'

<sup>157</sup> Anonymous, 'A Tervueren', *La Belgique Coloniale*, 3: 29, 1897, 338. '[...] on parle bas comme dans un lieu sacr .'

<sup>158</sup> Masui, *Guide*, 9.

<sup>159</sup> Fran oise Aubry, 'Tervuren 1897', in Fran oise Aubry and Jos Vanderbreeden, eds, *Art Nouveau in Belgi . Architectuur en interieurs*, Tiel: Lannoo, 1991, 198. This idea has been further developed by Debora Silverman, 'Art Nouveau, Art of Darkness: African Lineages of Belgian Modernism, Part I', *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture*, 18: 2, 2011, 139–81.

<sup>160</sup> Kathleen De Muer, "'La Beaut  est une arme!'" De theoretische geschriften van Henry Van de Velde uit zijn Brusselse periode 1893-1900', in *Henry Van de Velde. Art Nouveau Bookbinding in Belgium*, Brussels: Bibliotheek Wittockiana, 2010, 56–65. Thomas F hl, Sabine Walter, Werner Adriaenssens, and Thomas F hl, eds. *Henry van de Velde. Passie, Functie, Schoonheid (1863-1957)*, Tiel: Lannoo, 2013.

<sup>161</sup> Masui, *Guide*, 5.

<sup>162</sup> Masui, *Guide*, 6. Note that Masui referred to the object as a 'Kuba fetish'.



Figure 9 Due to the lack of archival material it is unknown which Teke necklace was exhibited during the 1897 World Exhibition. All the objects collected before 1897 were later catalogued as part of the *Ancienne collection*. This 'Old collection' contains several Teke necklaces similar to the one represented here. Similar Teke necklaces EO.0.0.19813, 19814, 19815, 19816, 19817, 19818, 19819 and 19820 also belong to the 'Old collection'. 30 x 1,5 cm. EO.0.0.19812, collection RMCA Tervuren; photo J.-M. Vandyck, RMCA Tervuren ©

years old.<sup>163</sup> Remarkably, from a present-day perspective, objects that already showed the influence of contacts between Europe and Africa, were nevertheless exhibited as art. The same goes for ivory objects. The public could for example admire an elephant tusk sculpted by Cabinda artists made to meet new demands.<sup>164</sup> Other ivory objects included a chief's cane with an ivory handle (Lower Congo), Azande ivory hairpins of 'great elegance', and some remarkable Hungaan pendants (collected in Djuma, Bandundu) representing a squatted human figure, like Hindu

<sup>163</sup> Anonymous, 'A Tervueren', *La Belgique Coloniale*, 3: 30, 1897, 353.

<sup>164</sup> The exhibition of 'tourist art' in Tervuren at the end of the nineteenth century can be called innovative. Moreover, these objects were also studied by Masui in the first ethnographic publication of the Annals of the Congo Museum: Théodore Masui, *Les collections ethnographiques du Musée du Congo*. Annales du Musée du Congo belge Tervuren. D: Anthropologie et ethnographie. Série 2: Ethnographie, volume 1, Bruxelles: Charles Vande Weghe, 1899. It was only in the 1970s that this subject became an 'acceptable' field of academic study. Daniel P. Biebuyck, 'The Decline of Lega Sculptural Art', in Nelson H. H. Graburn, ed, *Ethnic and Tourist Arts. Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World*, Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 1976, 334–349.

deities, adds Masui.<sup>165</sup> The reference to Hinduism can hardly be seen as accidental, since Masui, like Vanderkindere and Fétis, still defended the Asian origin of humankind (Fig. 10).



Figure 10 According to the first director of the Congo Museum in Tervuren, artistic Hungaan ivory pendants showed resemblances to Asian deities. Again, it is uncertain if this object, or a similar one, was exhibited during the World Exhibition in 1897. Other ivory Hungaan pendants were also collected in Djuma and belong to the ‘Old collection’: EO.0.0.30360, EO.0.0.30362, and EO.0.0.30363. Ivory, 7,8 cm x 4,7 cm. EO.0.0.30361, collection RMCA Tervuren; photo R. Asselberghs, RMCA Tervuren ©

In the exhibition guide, Masui stated that colonies were not only able to provide natural riches, but also could contribute to the field of beauty thanks to the naive and moving interpretation of nature. He was convinced that Congolese art was characterised by an absolute sincerity and purity and, in an unexpected way, could contribute to the development of our modern aesthetic feeling. According to Masui, Africans had an ‘innate need’ to shape objects in an elegant way, although their art was also influenced by history. Decorations on objects and more abstract art forms like music and dance, only appeared after the period characterized by the ‘struggle for life’. Dance was motivated by ‘the vital exuberance of these supple and sound creatures’. Music originated from ‘the need to accentuate speech and to make it more expressive.’ The feeling for beauty was also the result of the environment. In the interior, ‘where the black savages were still fiercely fighting nature over the right to exist’, objects had a ‘simple and harmonious appearance’ or decorations were still lacking. Dance was ‘unrefined and totally spontaneous’. Singers used savage melodies and music was disharmonic and discordant.<sup>166</sup> Around the forest,

<sup>165</sup> Masui, *Guide*, 7-8. Christine Valluet, ‘Hungaan et peuples proches’, in Marc-Léo Félix, ed, *White Gold, Black Hands : Ivory Sculpture in Congo*, Bruxelles: Tribal Arts, volume 3, 2012, 128–89. During a Sotheby’s auction in Paris in December 2011, an eight cm. Hungaan ivory piece, estimated between 30,000 and 50,000 euros, was sold for 780,750 euros. <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2011/arts-dafrique-et-docanie/lot.64.html>. Consulted on 15 September 2014.

<sup>166</sup> Masui, *Guide*, 4.

due to relative peace, the innate need to develop art resulted in the creation of valuable sculptures, basketwork of absolute delicacy, a great musical feeling and the creation of musical instruments like xylophones, marimbas and stringed instruments.<sup>167</sup> By contrast, on the Atlantic Coast, the long lasting influence of Europeans was noticeable '[...] and the artistic question has nothing to gain from it because the models that have inundated the country were ugly and also because the sheer abundance of these objects have caused natives to lose the need to make them and, in doing so, to perfect their taste.'<sup>168</sup>

With over one million visitors, the impact of the exhibition can hardly be overrated, but not everyone seemed to be impressed by the start of the exhibition in the honorary salon. Some museum visitors were fascinated by the 'harmony of the line' while looking at Congolese 'indigenous weaponry', but also stated that wooden sculptures from the coast region, with their exaggerated details, looked like 'baroque style' figures.<sup>169</sup> A journalist from *La Belgique Coloniale*, was glad to see the 'monotony' of the Kasai velvet interrupted by the silk embroidery by Hélène du Menil and Isidore de Rudder.<sup>170</sup> According to others, one could only see '[...] a certain number of objects in which the taste of the Primitives of Central Africa is translated by manifestations realising an elementary concept of beauty imagined by the naive children of the woods.'<sup>171</sup> Still, they were also fascinated by the first museum room that constituted '[...] a sort of summary of all the art manifestations provoked by the Congolese movement.'<sup>172</sup> The exhibition of art productions revealed the imagination and ability of their authors and resulted in a 'curious retrospective art collection'.<sup>173</sup> A journalist from *Le Petit Bleu de l'Exposition*, published daily during the World Exhibition of 1897, was overwhelmed, and used natural language metaphors to describe Congolese knives looking like lotuses, and leaf shaped javelins: '[...] it is sufficient to contemplate these lances unfolding towards the middle of the iron like a flower and then elevated straight and menacing like the pistil of a lily.'<sup>174</sup> Ancestral figures representing human figures were seen as signs of an 'incontestable progress'. Influenced by evolutionism, the author stated: 'As low as one can descend on the scale of civilisations, one can notice that an art exists; elevating man above the animals, giving him an ideal that he sometimes expresses

<sup>167</sup> Masui, *Guide*, 5.

<sup>168</sup> Masui, *Guide*, 6. '[...] et la question artistique n'a rien eu à y gagner, d'abord parce que les modèles dont les traitants ont inondé le pays étaient laids et aussi parce que l'abondance même de ces objets a fait perdre aux naturels l'occasion de s'en confectionner, par suite, de se perfectionner le goût.'

<sup>169</sup> Anonymous, 'Participation de l'Etat Indépendant du Congo à l'Exposition Internationale de Bruxelles, mai-novembre 1897', *Bulletin. Société Royale Belge de Géographie*, 21, 1897, 482.

<sup>170</sup> Anonymous, 'A Tervueren', *La Belgique Coloniale*, 3: 30, 1897, 352.

<sup>171</sup> Anonymous, 'L'Exposition Congolaise', 44. '[...] un certain nombre d'objets dans lesquels le goût des Primitifs du centre de l'Afrique s'est traduit par des manifestations réalisant une conception élémentaire du beau, tel que se le figure les naïfs enfants des bois.'

<sup>172</sup> Anonymous, 'L'Exposition Congolaise', 44.

<sup>173</sup> Anonymous, 'L'Exposition Congolaise', 44.

<sup>174</sup> Anonymous, 'L'art au Congo', *Le Petit Bleu: Edition Spéciale Quotidienne*, 4 August 1897.

'[...] il suffit de contempler ces lances s'épanouissant vers le milieu du fer comme des fleurs, puis s'élançant droites et menaçantes comme le pistil d'un lys.'

very incompletely, but that he expresses, contributing to infinity'.<sup>175</sup> The exposition made clear that '[...] these savage populations, as coarse as they might be, had artistic ideals revealing poetic tendencies, that are not expected to be found among the anthropophagus negroes, who are often mistaken, by some people, for curious beasts.'<sup>176</sup>

### *Ethnography*



Figure 11 The two efomba, still absent in Antwerp (1894) where only a photograph could be shown, were finally exhibited in Tervuren three years later. These were the only two objects that were exhibited behind glass.

HP.1960.5.1614, collection RMCA Tervuren; photo Alexandre, 1897, RMCA Tervuren ©

In the next room, African objects were shown in a more 'ethnographic' exhibition style, grouping several objects together according to their geographical provenance.<sup>177</sup> However, thanks to both the 'artistic and almost sumptuous décor', and the nature of the exhibited items themselves, Congolese 'artefacts' were also seen and described as 'art'.<sup>178</sup> The twelve different regions were grouped in six

<sup>175</sup> Anonymous, 'L'art au Congo'. 'Aussi bas qu'on puisse descendre de l'échelle des civilisations, on remarque qu'un art existe, élevant l'homme au-dessus des animaux, lui donnant un idéal qu'il exprime parfois très imparfaitement, mais qu'il exprime prenant sa part d'infini.'

<sup>176</sup> Anonymous, 'L'art au Congo'. '[...] ces peuples sauvages, aussi frustrés qu'ils puissent être, ont tous un idéal artistique qui les élève et révèle chez eux des tendances poétiques qu'on étonne de trouver chez des nègres anthropophages, que l'ignorance de certains confond parfois avec des bêtes curieuses.'

<sup>177</sup> Susan Vogel, Arthur Coleman Danto & Jerry L. Thompson, *Art/artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections*, New York: Center for African Art, 1988.

<sup>178</sup> Anonymous, 'Le Congo', *Bruxelles Exposition. Organe Officiel de l'Exposition Internationale 1897*, 7, 1897, 76.



compartments, separated by Art Nouveau partitions made by Hankar and decorated by paintings of 'indigenous scenes' by Edouard Duyck and Adolphe Crespin. Most objects were attached to the partitions of Hankar, but others were placed on floor carpets, made in Europe, but inspired by South Congolese motifs. According to Françoise Aubry, curator of the Horta Museum in Brussels, Hankar was influenced by African objects in his designs. The profile of bench and the form of the partitions looked like an 'African fetish'. She also interpreted the 'tiara' on top of the doorway to the third room as reminiscent of an African chief's hat.<sup>179</sup> Moreover, some objects were still arranged in panoplies, and all lacked labels. Again, ethnographic information on local use and geographical origin was missing, perhaps to help avoid the objects being seen as artefacts, and at least to allow for a more artistic interpretation of the objects.

In the museum guide Masui explains that the honorary salon only contained the quintessence of everything that was also shown in other rooms.<sup>180</sup> Hence, in an extensive chapter on the ethnography room in the exhibition guide, Masui was also able to point to basketwork of 'remarkable perfection', 'beautifully sculpted' stools, pipes with an 'artistically turned' ivory stem, 'fantastically sculpted and painted' masks, peddles that showed 'the love for sculpture', etc. In contrast to his earlier statements on the influence of geography on art, Masui now stated that objects from the interior also had an artistic value and a 'great purity of lines'.<sup>181</sup> The two Nkundu 'sarcophagi', already shown in Antwerp in 1894 by means of a photograph, were now brought to Belgium and exhibited in 'glass boxes'.<sup>182</sup> According to Masui, the 'coffins' or *efomba* represented a male and female figure and were placed on the grave of deceased chiefs.<sup>183</sup> In the museum, the sculpted genitals of the *efomba* were covered with loincloth, absent in their original state (Fig. 7 and 11).<sup>184</sup> Still, the South of Congo was regarded as the most interesting region. 'The ethnographic collections coming from Kasai can be ranged among "the most beautiful" one can find in the whole of the Congo basin. The objects amaze us with their diversity and the art with which they are made.'<sup>185</sup> Zappo Zap weaponry and Kuba fabrics and goblets, also exhibited in the ethnography room, indicated an 'artistic talent'.<sup>186</sup> In the exhibition section on the Kasai, a series of thirty-three axes was shown, made by 'our most skilful *ferronneries d'art*'.<sup>187</sup> In front, a life group of Zappo Zap blacksmiths, made in staff by Isidore de Rudder, showed how these metal objects were forged (Fig. 12). Thanks to a life group of a Teke chief, visitors of the Cristal Mountains region in

<sup>179</sup> Aubry, 'Tervueren 1897', 198.

<sup>180</sup> Masui, *Guide*, 4.

<sup>181</sup> Masui, *Guide*, 66, 100, 139, 144, 173.

<sup>182</sup> Michael M Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995.

<sup>183</sup> Masui, *Guide*, 104.

<sup>184</sup> Julien Volper, 'Les sarcophages des Nkundu', *Tribal Art*, 61, 2011, 108. A similar Nkundu figure was sold for 2,697,000 euros at a Christie's auction in Paris (11 December 2012).

<sup>185</sup> Masui, *Guide*, 192. 'Les collections ethnographiques provenant du Kassai peuvent être rangées parmi « les plus belles » que l'on puisse réunir dans tout le bassin du Congo. Les objets étonnent par leur diversité et par l'art avec lequel ils sont façonnés.'

<sup>186</sup> Masui, *Guide*, 192.

<sup>187</sup> Masui, *Guide*, 196.

Lower Congo could also see how the Teke necklace, exhibited in isolation as art in the first room, was worn 'in real life' by Congolese dignitaries.



Figure 12 A life group in the Kasai section, made by de Rudder, represented two blacksmiths at work. One of them is wearing the Kasai velvet. Unfortunately this life group is now destroyed. HP.1960.5.1607, collection RMCA Tervuren; photo Alexandre, 1897, RMCA Tervuren ©

Visitors to the ethnography room shared the feelings of Masui. Victor Jacques called the coffins in glass cases 'absolutely remarkable' and he also pointed out other objects with artistic qualities, like 'elegant' lances<sup>188</sup>, 'artistically sculpted' paddles,<sup>189</sup> fabrics with 'the most decorative patterns',<sup>190</sup> and weapons that 'showed great ability and even a certain art'.<sup>191</sup> Axes in worked iron 'could stand the comparison with the oeuvres of our most talented blacksmiths'.<sup>192</sup> After seeing the objects from the south of Congo in the ethnography room, Jacques now even admitted that 'populations which are capable of such art manifestations, must not only have reached a certain civilisation, but are also susceptible to a progressive

<sup>188</sup> Victor Jacques, 'Catalogue général de la classe d'anthropologie à la section des sciences de l'Exposition Universelle de Bruxelles en 1897,' *Bulletin de la Société d'Anthropologie de Bruxelles*, 16, 1897, 175. 'lances au fer élégant'.

<sup>189</sup> Jacques, 'Catalogue général', 175. 'artistiquement sculptée'.

<sup>190</sup> Jacques, 'Catalogue général', 176. 'les dessins sont de plus décoratifs'.

<sup>191</sup> Jacques, 'Catalogue général', 175-176. 'dénottant une grande habilité et même un certain art'.

<sup>192</sup> Jacques, 'Catalogue général', 176. 'soutiendraient la comparaison avec les oeuvres de nos plus habiles forgerons.'

development that elevates them to the level of European nations.<sup>193</sup> In the same line of thought, a journalist working for *Bruxelles Exposition* noted that the exhibited items showed marks of 'a vivacious and sure intelligence' and 'very brisk feelings' indicative of a 'great susceptibility to civilisation'.<sup>194</sup> He was even 'tempted to give the name art to all the products of the Negro industry such as we see them represented here.'<sup>195</sup> The objects with harmonious lines showed good taste and a feeling for proportions. 'Elegance seems instinctive, and in fact it is, because blacks don't have any guide other than personal and natural inspiration. This great notion of elegance is innate to them.'<sup>196</sup> In the end, Congolese art served as a means to criticize European decadence. Firstly, African objects still had a clear purpose, while European competition led to 'the deformation of products'.<sup>197</sup> A European vase for example, overloaded with haphazardly applied decorations, had become a piece of furniture instead of a utensil with a clear purpose. African dwellings were not used to exhibit useless items. Secondly, while the Congolese were responsible for all production phases, resulting in the 'homogeneity of form and material', the collective work of European factories had eliminated the possibility of 'personal artistic allure'.<sup>198</sup> While Bazoko pottery was completely made by Bazoko people, European objects were degenerated in form and substance because of all the changes applied by industrials of all nationalities. The journalist also witnessed that the ethnographic exhibition had a profound effect on the visitors. Although they seemed a bit disorientated at first, the feelings of astonishment, accompanied by hilarity and irony, soon calmed down and everyone left enthusiastically. 'It is a habit of people of the Aryan race, they smile if the signification is not immediately unveiled in front of their eyes. Progress that daily surrounds them has given their mind such a high opinion of themselves, that evidently they place all they can't immediately penetrate into the absurd.'<sup>199</sup>

<sup>193</sup> Jacques, 'Catalogue général', 176. '[...] on doit admettre que les populations qui sont capables de telles manifestations d'art, non seulement doivent être parvenues à une certaine civilisation, mais encore sont susceptibles d'un développement progressif qui les élèvera au niveau des nations européennes.'

<sup>194</sup> Anonymous, 'L'Industrie nègre', *Bruxelles Exposition. Organe Officiel de l'Exposition International 1897*, 20, 1897, 237.

<sup>195</sup> Anonymous, 'L'Industrie nègre', 236. 'Je serai tenté de donner le nom d'art à tous les produits de l'industrie nègre, telle que nous la voyons représentée.'

<sup>196</sup> Anonymous, 'L'Industrie nègre', 236. 'L'élégance semble instinctive, elle l'est, puisqu'il n'y a chez les noirs d'autre guide que l'inspiration naturelle et personnelle. Cette grande notion d'élégance leur est innée.'

<sup>197</sup> Anonymous, 'L'Industrie nègre', 236.

<sup>198</sup> Anonymous, 'L'Industrie nègre', 237.

<sup>199</sup> Anonymous, 'L'Industrie nègre', 236. 'C'est l'habitude des peuples de race aryenne, ils sourient de ce qui ne dévoile pas immédiatement sa signification à leurs yeux. Les progrès dont ils sont quotidiennement entourés ont donné à leur esprit une si haute idée personnelle qu'évidemment ils rangent dans l'absurde ce qu'ils ne pénètrent pas de suite.'

### The (Belgian) Congo museum

A year after the 1897 World Exhibition, the temporary exposition in Tervuren became a permanent museum.<sup>200</sup> Following the example of the museum in Leiden, the ethnographic collection in Tervuren was classified in twelve regions and twelve themes according to the 'scale of needs': food, clothing, dwelling, hunting and fishing, agriculture, navigation, commerce, industry, war, society, arts and religion. Populations first needed food and shelter. Only afterwards was there time to spend on art and religion. Masui only published one volume in the museum Annals dealing with the first group in the first region: objects related to food and drinks of the coastal region.<sup>201</sup> The scientific work was continued by Emile Coart, a former pharmacist who had already collected ethnographic objects in the Congo Free State for the Tervuren exhibition in 1897, and Alphonse de Haulleville, who was in charge of the central library of the Congo Free State administration in Brussels but never visited Congo. Before the 1914–18 war, they published volumes on the arts (1902), religion (1906) and pottery (1907) in the Annals.<sup>202</sup> Despite the title of the 1902 volume, *Les arts*, and unlike Masui, who had left the museum, Coart and de Haulleville now seemed to question the very existence of African art. Since they defined 'art' as the search for beauty without any direct use, only painting, sculpture, architecture, music, dance and singing, were regarded as true art forms. Surprisingly, as a result, the new museum staff found no objects with an aesthetic expression made by Congolese artists. Only objects belonging to 'industry' made by 'artisans' could be selected for their publications. However, these objects were not part of 'bel art' but rather belonged to 'art applied to industry'.<sup>203</sup>

African architecture simply did not exist. 'Decorative painting' on houses was described as 'very imperfect' and 'painted rather clumsily'.<sup>204</sup> Painted murals, like the ones in Lofoi, photographed by a member of the Lemaire expedition (1898–1900), belonged to the group of 'dwelling' and not to art (Fig. 13).<sup>205</sup> Sculpted ivory tusks made on the west coast for export, still exhibited in the honorary salon in 1897, were now seen as 'deprived of the cachet of originality' and became catalogued in

<sup>200</sup> Couttenier, *Congo tentoongesteld*, 172-223.

<sup>201</sup> Théodore Masui, *Les collections ethnographiques du Musée du Congo*. Annales du Musée du Congo belge Tervuren. D: Anthropologie et ethnographie. Série 2: Ethnographie, volume 1, Bruxelles: Charles Vande Weghe, 1899.

<sup>202</sup> Emile Coart and Alphonse de Haulleville, *Les arts*. Annales du Musée du Congo belge Tervuren. D: Anthropologie et ethnographie. Série 3: Notes analytiques sur les collections ethnographiques du Musée du Congo, volume 1/1, Bruxelles: Spineux, 1902. Emile Coart and Alphonse de Haulleville, *La religion*, Annales du Musée du Congo belge Tervuren. D: Anthropologie et ethnographie. Série 3: Notes analytiques sur les collections ethnographiques du Musée du Congo, volume 1/2, Bruxelles: Spineux, 1906. Emile Coart and Alphonse de Haulleville, *La Céramique*. Annales du Musée du Congo belge Tervuren. D: Anthropologie et ethnographie. Série 3: Notes analytiques sur les collections ethnographiques du Musée du Congo, volume 2/1, Bruxelles: Spineux, 1907.

<sup>203</sup> Coart and de Haulleville, *Les arts*, 5.

<sup>204</sup> Coart and de Haulleville, *Les arts*, 6.

<sup>205</sup> Coart and de Haulleville, *Les arts*, 6. Sammy Baloji and Maarten Couttenier, 'The Charles Lemaire Expedition Revisited. Sammy Baloji as a Portraitist of Present Humans in Congo Far West', *African Arts*, 47, 1, 2014, 66-81.

the group of 'industry'. Wooden or ivory sculptures, like Kuba ancestral figures or Hungaan pendants, also present in the first room of the *Palais des colonies* in 1897, suddenly belonged to the group of 'religion' and were only discussed in the second volume of the *Annals*.



Figure 13 After Masui had left the museum, curators classified mural paintings in the thematic group of dwelling and not in the eleventh group of 'art' that only contained musical instruments. *Peinture murale intérieure à Lofoi*, AP.0.0.933, collection RMCA Tervuren; photo F. L. Michel, 1898, RMCA Tervuren ©

As a result, the first volume on 'the arts' only dealt with 443 objects in the museum that could be related to music, dance and singing. Moreover, Coart and de Haulleville seemed to be more interested in the search for evolutionist series<sup>206</sup> and questioned whether Africans were able to produce 'harmonic manifestations' at all. African music was called noise without any harmonic order. Singing sounded more like monotonous screaming, and instrument builders showed no knowledge of chords or the diatonic scale. Musical phrasing remained without conclusion and resulted in an uncompleted sketch. Based on a very limited number of answers to the *Questionnaire ethnographique et sociologique* (1898),<sup>207</sup> an initiative that was based on the French example of 1883,<sup>208</sup> Coart and de Haulleville stated that only the Mangbetu and Zande in the North of Congo and the Kuba in the South had a relative feeling for harmony. This effect was explained by a supposed influence of Kushites, Sabeans and Hamites. To the North, the 'Egypt of the Pharaohs seemed to

<sup>206</sup> George W. Stocking Jr. *Victorian Anthropology*, New York: Free Press, 1987.

<sup>207</sup> Victor Jacques, Charles Lemaire, Fernand Demeuse, Paul Héger, and Adhémar Daenen, *Questionnaire ethnographique et sociologique. Etat Indépendant du Congo*, Bruxelles: Hayez, 1898.

<sup>208</sup> Ernest-Théodore Hamy, Charles Letourneau, Julien Vinson, and Abel Hovelacque, 'Questionnaire de sociologie et d'ethnographie.' *Bulletin de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris*, 3e Série, 6, 1883, 578–597.

have indirect commercial relations with the blacks of Uganda and Manica, through Abyssinia and Somaliland, the antique land of Punt.<sup>209</sup> However, real musical pieces were non-existent, virtuosity was simply imitation, and a right tone was merely the result of luck. Likewise, dances were described as bizarre and licentious.



Figure 14 Coart and de Haulleville acknowledged that some polychrome 'fetishes' had 'picturesque effects' despite the few colours the maker was able to use (Coart and de Haulleville, *La religion*, 241). Object collected by Alphonse Cabra, and part of the museum collection in Tervuren since 1903. Wood, vegetable fibres, EO.0.0.200-1, 100 cm. Collection RMCA Tervuren; photo Huysmans-Wuyts, RMCA Tervuren ©

Only in the later volumes on religion and pottery did Coart and de Haulleville partially accept the existence of Congolese art. In the 1906 volume on religion, they now admitted that some sculpted 'religious objects' showed 'a true artistic sentiment'.<sup>210</sup> Given the environment in which the sculptures were made, the 'black artisan' was admired for his 'professional handiness' and his ability to reach 'a certain degree of perfection' with relatively simple tools (Fig. 14).<sup>211</sup> A 'native artist' who used pearls to represent eyes was called 'ingenious'. Other sculptors were able to give 'personages an astonishing impression of life'.<sup>212</sup> Congolese art was called 'realistic' since objects were mostly made after models found in nature.

<sup>209</sup> Coart and de Haulleville, *Les arts*, 12. 'L'Égypte des Pharaons semble, en effet, avoir entretenu indirectement avec les noirs de l'Uganda et du Manica des relations commerciales par l'intermédiaire de l'Abyssinie et du Somaliland, l'antique pays de Punt.'

<sup>210</sup> Coart and de Haulleville, *La religion*, 150.

<sup>211</sup> Coart and de Haulleville, *La religion*, 237 and 239.

<sup>212</sup> Coart and de Haulleville, *La religion*, 242.

However, Coart and de Haulleville also stated that the black sculptor stood at the beginning of evolution. As a result of his 'doubtful habits full of uncertainty', he made bad copies and tended to exaggerate or simplify.<sup>213</sup> Examples of 'simplification' on the one hand were linked to a supposed 'natural laziness'. On the other hand, the black mind 'instinctively exaggerated'.<sup>214</sup> As a result, primitive decorative art tended to stress dominant lines and enlarge details. Sculptures with enlarged genitals for example, 'very obscene from the point of view of the civilised', were seen as the result of this 'exaggerated realism'.<sup>215</sup>

The same simultaneous acknowledgment and denial of African art characterized the volume on pottery, published in 1907. On the one hand, Coart and de Haulleville were impressed by '[...] the hazardousness of the form, the purity of the profile and the finish of the ornamentation, an incontestable effort towards Beauty'.<sup>216</sup> Pottery had a real intrinsic value and its study could contribute to the origins of art.<sup>217</sup> On the other hand, pottery was also placed among 'primitive industry' and 'decorative arts'.<sup>218</sup> 'The black, left on his own, seems not to have reached the phase of development in which the aesthetic feeling is detached from utilitarian preoccupations; his art is purely decorative.'<sup>219</sup> Ernst Grosse, author of *Die Anfänge der Kunst* (1894) and pioneer in the recognition of world art,<sup>220</sup> was only cited to support their evolutionist arguments. The only element that Coart and de Haulleville seemed to have learned from Grosse was that 'everywhere progress was accomplished more or less in the same way by primitive populations',<sup>221</sup> a typical evolutionist idea that allowed scientists to use what was known as the comparative method that assigned cultures worldwide to a rung on the assumed evolutionary

<sup>213</sup> Coart and de Haulleville, *La religion*, 241.

<sup>214</sup> Coart and de Haulleville, *La religion*, 240-241.

<sup>215</sup> Coart and de Haulleville, *La religion*, 151.

<sup>216</sup> Coart and de Haulleville, *La céramique*, 2. '[...] la hardiesse de la forme, la pureté du profil et le fini de l'ornementation, un incontestable effort vers le Beau.'

<sup>217</sup> Coart and de Haulleville, *La céramique*, 3.

<sup>218</sup> Coart and de Haulleville, *La céramique*, 1.

<sup>219</sup> Coart and de Haulleville, *La céramique*, 21. 'Le noir livré à lui-même ne paraît pas encore arriver à cette phase de développement où le sens esthétique se dégage des préoccupations utilitaires; son art est purement décoratif.'

<sup>220</sup> Ernst Grosse, *Die Anfänge der Kunst*, Freiburg: Mohr, 1894. On Grosse, see Wilfried van Damme, 'Ernst Grosse and the "Ethnological Method" in Art Theory', *Philosophy and Literature*, 34: 2, 2010, 302-312, 'Ernst Grosse and the Birth of the Anthropology of Aesthetics', *Anthropos*, 107, 2012, 497-509.

<sup>221</sup> Coart and de Haulleville, *La céramique*, 82-83. It is possible that Coart and de Haulleville only became familiar with the work of Ernst Grosse after the French translation in 1902. Ernst Grosse, *Les débuts de l'art*, Paris: Félix Alcan, 1902. Coart and de Haulleville referred to page thirty-one of the French translation, where Grosse stated: 'L'ethnologie a prouvé que la civilisation des peuples primitifs, à quelque race qu'ils puissent appartenir, a partout, jusque dans les moindres détails, le caractère d'une uniformité surprenante, uniformité qui disparaît pourtant peu à peu dans les civilisations supérieures.' See also the English translation, page 42: 'Ethnology has shown that the cultural attainments of the lower peoples, to whatever race they may belong, exhibit a striking uniformity even to details, while such an agreement is not evident in a like degree among peoples of the higher stages.'

ladder of cultural development.<sup>222</sup> The differences in opinion between Masui and Coart and de Haulleville show that, even within one institute, the same objects changed status from 'artefact' to 'art' and vice-versa, depending on the individual.

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<sup>222</sup> The comparative method was still used at that time, despite the criticism by Franz Boas, 'The Limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology', *Science*, 4, 1896, 901-908.