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Hidden Histories and Multiple Meanings: The Richard Dennett Collection at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter.

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**HIDDEN HISTORIES AND MULTIPLE MEANINGS:
THE RICHARD DENNETT COLLECTION AT THE ROYAL ALBERT
MEMORIAL MUSEUM, EXETER.**

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

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Faculty of Arts

In collaboration with the
Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter

September 2011

Sara Craig Ayres

**Hidden Histories and Multiple Meanings:
A Study of the Richard Dennett Collection in the Royal Albert
Memorial Museum, Exeter.**

Abstract

Ethnographic collections in western museums such as the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) carry many meanings, but by definition, they represent an intercultural encounter. This history of this encounter is often lost, overlooked, or obscured, and yet it has bearing on how the objects in the collection have been interpreted and understood. This thesis uncovers the hidden history of one particular collection in the RAMM and examines the multiple meanings that have been attributed to the objects in the collection over time.

The Richard Dennett Collection was made in Africa in the years when European powers began to colonise the Congo basin. Richard Edward Dennett (1857-1921) worked as a trader in the Lower Congo between 1879 and 1902. The collection was accessioned by the RAMM in 1889.

The research contextualises the collection by making a close analysis of primary source material which was produced by the collector and by his contemporaries, and includes

publications, correspondence, photographs and illustrations which have been studied in museums and archives in Europe and North America.

Dennett was personally involved with key events in the colonial history of this part of Africa but he also studied the indigenous BaKongo community, recording his observations about their political and material culture. As a result he became involved in the institutions of anthropology and folklore in Britain which were attempting to explain, classify and interpret such cultures. Through examining Dennett's history this research has been able to explore the Congo context, the indigenous society, and those European institutions which collected and interpreted BaKongo collections.

The research has added considerably to the museum's knowledge about this collection and its collector, and the study responds to the practical imperative implicit in a Collaborative Doctoral Project, by proposing a small temporary exhibition in the RAMM to explore these histories and meanings. In making this proposal the research considers the current curatorial debate concerning responsible approaches to colonial collections, and assesses some of the strategies that are being employed in museums today.

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At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other university award without prior agreement of the Graduate Committee.

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Relevant seminars and conferences were regularly attended at which work was often presented; external institutions were visited for consultations purposes and a paper was prepared for publication.

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'Richard Dennett: Passionate Amateur and his Professional Relationships' at the Museum Ethnographers Group Conference on *Amateur Passions/Professional Practice*, at the University of Bristol, April 2009.

'Hidden Charms: Writing, On, Around and About a Congo Collection', at the Museum Ethnographers Group Conference on *Words and Objects: Writing On, Around and About Things*, April 2011.

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Chapter One. Introduction.

The Collection.

The Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter (RAMM) houses an ethnographic collection of Designated Status in its World Cultures collection, which is recognised for its national and international significance.¹ Among the many objects in these ethnographic holdings is a collection known as The Richard Dennett Collection which is made up of seventy-one objects collected between 1879 and 1889, from the area of West Central Africa that became known as “the Congo”.² [Fig. 1, Fig. 4.]

This collection includes baskets, musical instruments, pots, metal-working equipment and clothing. There are also *minkisi*, those complex agencies connected with the hidden world of the ancestors and spirits which could be activated by a specialist, the *nganga*. Richard Edward Dennett (1857-1921) made this collection during his first decade in Africa, when he was working for the Hatton and Cookson trading company in the Lower Congo. [Fig. 3.] He went to Africa in 1879 and his collection was accessioned by the museum in Exeter ten years later.

The Collaborative Research Project.

This thesis presents the results of an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded Collaborative Doctoral Award project, undertaken with the University of Plymouth and

¹ The Royal Albert Memorial Museum World Cultures Collection received Designated Status from the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council in 1998. The collection includes more than 12,000 objects. See South West Museums Council. *World Cultures Collections in the South West of England*, Taunton: South West Museums Council, 1995, for an overview of the collection.

² Today seventy-one objects survive, accessioned in 1889 as 1889/9/39 to 9/1889/113. The register shows that three animal skins had to be destroyed. The date was not recorded. Albert Memorial Museum Accession Register, 1873-1901, *RAMM Archive*.

the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, (RAMM) Exeter.³ The museum itself is therefore integral to the study: it is the site from which the research launches and it is the place to which the discussion returns in the final chapter. It is kept in mind throughout the study of the objects' and the collector's histories.

The collector, Richard Dennett, was a prolific writer and amateur ethnographer. His published and unpublished records allow access to some important contextual information concerning the collection. He lived in times which saw great turmoil in Africa and the devastating events that he witnessed in the Congo in the last decades of the nineteenth-century had direct impact on the community that created the objects in his collection. By studying Dennett's records and history, an attempt has been made to recover some of the buried histories that surrounded the objects in their African context, as well as to explore some of the many meanings that have been attached to them over time.

Because Dennett recorded his experiences, interpretations and observations in a wealth of documentation, it has been possible to examine not only the context in which the collection was made, but also the setting into which it was delivered and reinterpreted, in Britain. Dennett's interest in collecting, writing and ethnographic research gradually introduced him to influential scholars of anthropology and folklore in Britain. Thus two disparate contexts, the perceived colonial "frontier" and the academic world of Europe, may be approached through Dennett's history and his collection.

³ The award and research project commenced in October 2007.

Methodology.

The study has taken a period of history and used primary documentation to scrutinise events that took place, and the fieldwork element of the research was carried out mainly in western museums and archives. These have allowed documentation and collections which were contemporary with Dennett's, to be accessed. This examination has led to a better understanding of the multiple interactions which led to such collections being made for western museums. The research has used Dennett's specific history as a lens through which to view the particular conditions that accompanied the making of his collection at the end of the nineteenth century, so that commercial activities in Africa, indigenous institutions, and Victorian museum practices, all come under scrutiny.

Because this was a time when the African voice in the western record was limited, there is an inevitable shortage of indigenous comment from the period. This is a typical reflection of the circumstances under examination, and Dennett's history reveals some of the conditions that led to this silence. The archives and texts are to be understood, as Jonathan Benthall has written of the Royal Anthropological Institute's photographic collection, as 'precious deposit[s] of human understanding and misunderstanding'.⁴ The viewpoint revealed in these documents is often flawed and one-sided but this excavation of Dennett's history reveals some of the reasons behind this, both in the colonial context and in the ethnographic museum. The research is a study of the past, but it is a study which can prepare the ground for further, more reciprocal research, in the present, and the future.

⁴ Benthall, Jonathan. 'Foreword' in Edwards, Elizabeth, ed. *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920*, New Haven: Yale, 1992. p. viii.

While this single collection in the RAMM has been selected for close examination in this research, there are many others in the World Cultures department whose meanings and histories would also be illuminated by a study of their collectors. However, Dennett is a particularly productive collector to study because he recorded his strong opinions about colonialism and about African philosophy; and because he engaged with circles of anthropological influence in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century.

Traditionally the collector's history has not been emphasised in permanent museum displays; indeed, objects may still be presented in some museums with no accompanying information about the original collector or donor. Nevertheless, recent initiatives have been drawing more attention to the agency of collectors. For example the Manchester Museum [Fig 5] makes a point of presenting some of the narratives which are connected with different donors in an introductory Museum Gallery. This illustrates the varied routes by which objects of many different kinds were brought to the museum. The re-developed RAMM will also make a feature of collectors' histories in a new gallery which is due to open after the museum's four-year re-development, in December 2011, under the title of 'Finders Keepers?'⁵

Two recent studies edited by Anthony Shelton confirm this movement which extends the attention being given to collectors.⁶ The two books concentrate solely on collectors and their impact on museums. One volume considers *Collectors: Expressions of Self and Other*; the second assesses *Collectors: Individuals and Institutions*.⁷ The first was prompted by a Horniman Museum Research Conference in 1997, where numerous

⁵ Tony Eccles. Personal communication 24 June 2011.

⁶ Anthony Shelton has also noted the contribution made by the *Journal of the History of Collections* (established in 1989) in fostering scholarship on the subject of collectors. Shelton, Anthony, ed. *Collectors: Expressions of Self and Other*, London: Horniman Museum, 2001(a), p. 17.

⁷ Shelton, 2001, and Shelton, Anthony, ed. *Collectors: Individuals and Institutions*, London: Horniman Museum and University of Coimbra, 2001(b).

museum professionals turned their attention to the collectors represented in their collections finding that individual case studies supported multiple valuable lines of enquiry.⁸ Shelton explained:

Simple and crude oppositions between positive objectification and subjective knowledge are now better acknowledged. Furthermore, exhibitions on ethnographic collectors....have demonstrated the public demand and appreciation of exhibitions that look at the subjective motivations underlying collecting.⁹

In the same way this project will engage with the personal observations of the individual collector. His life can be used as a means of understanding more about the colonial and anthropological institutions in which he functioned, but his history also illuminates the collection, revealing information about the role of the objects, the society that produced them and the differing interpretations that have been applied to them over time. At the end of the collaborative research project these interconnected narratives will be presented in a small temporary exhibition to be held at the RAMM when it re-opens.¹⁰

Approaching the collection through its collector's history has called for a multi-disciplinary methodology, which allows the multiple contexts in which Dennett and the objects operated to be assessed. Aspects of pre-colonial and colonial African history, early anthropology and ethnography, museum theory and art history have all been required in the analysis. As the introduction will show, critical methods from postcolonial studies, cultural theory and the anthropology of art have all informed the research.

⁸ Shelton, 2001(a), p.17.

⁹ Shelton, 2001(a), p.17.

¹⁰ The RAMM will re-open after the thesis is submitted. The exhibition is not, therefore, an element to be examined but is seen as a valuable collaborative experience and a stimulus for discussion about the practical issues and responsibilities involved in contemporary museum ethnography.

The study is structured around four strands in Dennett's accounts which shed light on different but interconnected areas: Colonialism; indigenous culture; material culture; and museum collecting. The second chapter explores his involvement with the urgent acquisition of land and goods by the new colonial regimes in Africa. Dennett's accounts record the events leading up to European expansion in the Congo region, and his letters and publications show he expressed vigorous criticism to some of the Free State's methods. The third chapter investigates Dennett's changing interpretations of indigenous social and political systems. His changing perspectives influenced the way that Dennett understood the objects that he had collected, and these interpretations are the subject of the fourth chapter. This is a longer section than the other chapters, as it is intended to provide the RAMM with a contextualised interpretation of individual pieces in the collection. The fifth chapter examines Dennett's involvement with European museums and with anthropological scholarship and it highlights the important role that traders in the Congo played in the formation of ethnographic collections. The investigation then moves in the sixth chapter to the present day, and situates the research in the context of contemporary museum practice. It asks, in the spirit of the collaborative project, how these insights about the collection might be used in an exhibition in the RAMM today. The final chapter reviews the research and the proposed exhibition and assesses the methodology which has allowed so many hidden histories and meanings to be unearthed, examined, and presented, in the thesis and the display.

Richard Dennett.

Richard Edward Dennett worked in Africa between 1880 and 1918. He left England in December 1879 and worked at various sites in Hatton and Cookson's trading "factories"

on the Congo River and coast, until he moved to Nigeria in 1902.¹¹ In Nigeria he became an Assistant Conservator of Forests for the British Colonial Service.¹² Dennett's family was based in Devon when he began his career and it is possible that his father, a clergyman in a parish outside Exeter, had encouraged him to contribute his collection to what was then named the Albert Memorial Museum.¹³ This study concentrates on the period when Dennett was working in the Congo region, between 1879 and 1902, but because his key work on the BaVili was not published until after he had left the Congo, the time-span under consideration is extended to include the years 1905 and 1906.¹⁴

Plentiful documentation connected with the collector has allowed a picture to be built up of the man, his ideas, and the complexities of the contexts in which he made his collection. Early in his career Dennett began to study the political and spiritual world of the BaKongo and his interpretations and theories were published in various forms throughout his life. Dennett was also involved in several incidents in the events of the "Scramble for Africa": meeting with Pierre Savorgnan De Brazza, being involved in the treaty of Chimfuma (in which Portugal made its claim to land north of the Congo River) and he was even proposed to lead the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition, (which was supervised, in the event, by Henry Morton Stanley). Dennett vigorously opposed the extreme strategies employed by the "Congo Free State" to monopolise profits under King Leopold II of Belgium. He vociferously resisted the actions of the concession

¹¹ "Factories" will be discussed further in Chapter Two, but these were not centres of manufacture, but were rather depots for the collection and storage of African goods brought from inland sources, to be traded with European goods brought to the coast by ship. Some processes were carried out at the factories, for instance, to prepare palm kernels into palm oil, but they were primarily centres for the exchange of goods.

¹² Dennett, Richard Edward. 'Agricultural Progress in Nigeria.' *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 18, no. 72, (1919), p. 267.

¹³ The Albert Memorial Museum was given the designation 'Royal' after the Duke and Duchess of York came to Exeter to open the recently built 'York Wing' in 1899. Exeter City Council. *The Royal Albert Memorial Museum: A Brief Description of its History and Collections*, Exeter: Cole and Sons, 1964, p. 3.

¹⁴ For example see Dennett, Richard Edward. 'Bavili Notes.' *Folklore*, Vol.16, no. 4, (1905(a)) pp. 371-406; and Dennett, Richard Edward. *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, London: Macmillan, 1906.

companies which dominated the State, and he worked to expose the cruelties that accompanied their methods of rubber and ivory collection from the Congo interior. His activity resulted in his expulsion from the Free State and Dennett was moved to the then French Congo. His career with Hatton and Cookson came to an abrupt end in 1902 when European concession companies, like those in the Free State, were also introduced in the French possessions.¹⁵

After Dennett left the Congo coast he began to support Edmund Dene Morel and Consul Roger Casement, in their campaign for Congo reform. The three men became, and remained, good friends. Dennett was also influenced by Mary Kingsley who had stayed at his factory in Cabinda in 1893 and who arranged to have his work published by the Folklore Society. Dennett and Kingsley shared the hope that colonial governments would make more use of ethnographic research in their management of African societies. They were also united by their deep interest in the spiritual world of African communities, studying their indigenous rituals and laws.

Dennett's collection in Exeter reflects this interest in the spiritual life. Many of the objects are connected with the invisible world of the ancestors. As well as masks and costumes there are several *minkisi* figures. There are also *minkisi* in the form of shells, horns, baskets, a rattle and pots. All these *minkisi* acted as containers for carefully composed *bilongo*, the active compound which was made by the specialist from ingredients which included grave-earth, mixed with visually or verbally significant material. As well as *minkisi* there are masks, a fringed waistband that was probably used by an *nganga*, and a full feathered costume with a double-faced mask.

¹⁵ See Morel, E. D. *The Black Man's Burden*, London: The National Labour Press, 1920, p. 42.

There is no contemporary first-hand indigenous account to explain the meanings of these objects and if Dennett left any explanatory information with the collection in Exeter it has long-since disappeared. This study has examined Dennett's writing to glean interpretations about how the material functioned in its original context, but it has also been necessary to draw on later sources in order to balance his views with interpretations that privilege an indigenous viewpoint. In particular the works of Wyatt MacGaffey, which draw on the texts that were gathered by the Swedish Protestant missionary Karl Laman, have been consulted to gain this balance.¹⁶

Over time Dennett's ethnographic interpretations became increasingly eccentric and speculative. He began to argue that he had found a formula in the languages and socio-political structures of French Congo and Southern Nigeria, a formula which he imagined lying 'at the back of the black man's mind'.¹⁷ Dennett's formula gained little recognition among his peers, but he was nonetheless convinced of its universal value, and he continued his search for evidence of this after leaving the Congo.¹⁸ His enthusiasm led him to search for philosophical meaning in the structure of other African languages and this apparently surpassed any earlier interest in material culture such as that which had led to the collection now kept in the RAMM.

Terminology, Geography and Apology.

Before discussing the literature which provides the academic background to this study, an explanation is required for some of the problematic vocabulary that has had to be

¹⁶ See p. 21 of this chapter on Karl Laman.

¹⁷ Dennett explained that he named his study of BaKongo society *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind* 'to imply that I would like to get there [rather] than to assert that I have actually solved all the problems that lie concealed there'. Dennett, 1906, p. vi.

¹⁸ See for example, Dennett, Richard Edward. *My Yoruba Alphabet*, London: Macmillan, 1916, p. ix, p.1.

used in this thesis. The material at the core of the research arises from a place and a time whose terminology is shot through with difficulty. The geography alone is complicated, and its language loaded: “The Congo” was defined by people who had originated outside Africa in the nineteenth century. Long before that the region from coastal Ambrizette, inland to Mbanza Kongo, (both south of the Congo River) up to the Quilo River (north of the Congo River) had been known as the Kongo Kingdom.

[Fig. 2, Fig. 3.]

Portuguese exploration at the end of the fifteenth century had found a flourishing centralised kingdom with its capital at Mbanza Kongo, which the Portuguese named San Salvador.¹⁹ After initial contact with the west in 1482 the expansion of the Atlantic slave trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries so weakened the Kingdom’s authority that new sub-kingdoms gained power.²⁰ In Dennett’s time these were known as Ngoio, Kacongo and Loango, with Sonyo south of the Congo River’s mouth.

[See Fig. 3 and Fig. 4.]

Between 1880 and 1885 these lands were appropriated by France, Portugal and the Congo Free State, with little regard to existing indigenous political and social groups. In subsequent years the colonised states were included in French Equatorial Africa (known as Middle Congo), Angola and Belgian Congo. At Independence, both Belgian Congo and French Congo became Republics, distinguishing themselves by their capital cities,

¹⁹ For a history of the region see Martin, Phyllis. *The External Trade of the Loango Coast 1576-1870: The Effects of Changing Commercial Relations on the Vili Kingdom of Loango*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972; Thornton, John. *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; Vansina, Jan. *Paths in the Rainforest: Towards a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990; and Friedman, Kasja Ekholm. *Catastrophe and Creation: The Transformation of an African Culture*, Chur: Harwood, 1991.

²⁰ The trade in slaves arose within decades of the arrival of the Portuguese and resulted in the breakdown of Kongo authority. For detailed history of this process see Martin, 1972.

Brazzaville and Leopoldville.²¹ Under President Mobutu, Congo-Leopoldville was known as Zaire and the capital became Kinshasa. Since 1997 it has been called the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and its neighbour, the Republic of Congo. The contested exclave of Cabinda, once a Portuguese Protectorate, is claimed by Angola but continues to insist on its autonomy.

At the time that Dennett and his colleagues were trading, the whole area was regularly designated as the Congo, without making a distinction between the Portuguese, French and Free State. In Europe the Congo River Basin had been referred to in discussions accompanying the initial negotiations over European possessions and “the Congo” became a commonly used, abbreviated term.²² It has proved necessary to use this term in this study, despite its lack of specificity and its colonial taint, since so many of the primary sources do not indicate precise geographical locations. Places are often referred to generically as the Congo in these texts with little use of indigenous names. When “the Congo” is used here it will therefore signal a reference to events from the nineteenth- or early twentieth-century colonial era. Any allusions to post-independence history will use the current nations’ names.

Members of Kongo society are known as the BaKongo (Kongo people). Their language is called KiKongo or Kongo. In this study the term “Kongo” will be used to indicate the people or the language but not the place. The words BaKongo or Kongo may be used in the text to replace Dennett’s frequently used term “native” unless a direct quote is being given. Dennett studied the particular sub-group of the BaKongo known as the BaVili

²¹ i.e. Congo-Brazzaville and Congo-Kinshasa.

²² See Stanley, H. M. *The Congo and the Founding of Its Free State: A Story of Work and Exploration*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1885. Harry Johnston discussed the popular adoption of the term ‘Free State’ in Johnston, Harry Hamilton. *George Grenfell and the Congo: A History and Description of the Congo Independent State and Adjoining Districts of Congoland*, London: Hutchinson, 1908, p. x.

after 1890, and their name will be used wherever this is supported by the evidence.²³

Dennett often used the spelling, “Bavili” rather than “BaVili”; however, for consistency, this thesis will use “BaVili” to designate the Vili people, but Dennett’s variations of the word will be reproduced as they appear in quotations from his writing and in the titles of his texts.

The BaKongo were also known colloquially as “Fjort” or “Fiort”, a term which Dennett thought to be a corruption of the Portuguese word *filhote*, meaning a young son, a boy, or a ‘rascal’.²⁴ However Phyllis Martin has refuted this derivation, and has argued that the term originates in the KiKongo word for ‘black’.²⁵ She chose not to use the term since it has been used so inaccurately and loosely: she explained that it has been used ‘to describe the Vili, the inhabitants of the Loango kingdom at its widest point, all Kongo peoples living north of the Congo River and the Kongo language’.²⁶

The language used to discuss the actual collection at the centre of the study must also be explained. The umbrella term “artefact” or “object” has been chosen over the term “art” here, not because the creative, communicative or technical qualities of the objects are called into question in any way, but because a contemporary western understanding of the word “art” raises notions of aesthetics, criticism, collecting, and the art-market which were not active in the society that produced the objects at the time.²⁷ While

²³ The KiKongo dialect used by the BaVili was pronounced as “TchiVili”. Dennett chose to write this as “XiVili” and explained his use of the letter X (in contradistinction to Reverend Bentley’s and Monseigneur Carrié’s orthography) in *At the Back of the Black Man’s Mind* (Dennett, 1906, p. 5). His use of X is distinctive and it has helped to identify his handwriting in connection with another collection of Congo objects now at the Pitt Rivers Museum. (See Chapter Five).

²⁴ Dennett, 1906, p. 4. This term, like “native”, is therefore avoided for its paternalistic and racist overtones.

²⁵ Martin, 1972, p. 3.

²⁶ Martin, 1972, p. 3.

²⁷ The subtlety of this distinction is of course problematic but is meant to draw a time-specific distinction. This art/artefact issue is discussed further in the literature review below.

inadequate on many other levels the words “artefact” or “object” have been used to avoid these connotations.²⁸

It was impossible to use an indigenous term to refer to the collection as a whole because so many different genres of items are included in it. There are bits of wood-bark, horns, bowls, bellows, musical instruments, a ball of tobacco and several pipes as well as the masks, costume and rattles that point to ritual or divinatory use. Those objects with spiritual or magical properties are especially difficult to classify with one term. Where possible, the terms *nkisi* (singular) or *minkisi* (plural) have been used, but it is not always clear if an object (such as a horn or a box or a basket) has definitely been used as an *nkisi*. The frequently-used terms from the time were or “fetish” or “charm” but these connect *minkisi* with European ideas of idolatry, magic, folklore and superstition, which are structured in western assumptions of culture, progress and civilisation.²⁹ As the word “fetish” was also used to denote the stockroom where the Europeans stored their imported goods in the factories, it serves to give an indication of the value that both African and European white traders placed on these goods.³⁰ When referring to *minkisi* Dennett preferred to avoid the term “fetish” and used variants of the word *nkisi* instead. Direct quotes from Dennett in this thesis have retained his original spelling, which may include the forms *nkisi*, *nkiss*, *nkici* or *nkissi*.

²⁸ These terms are also inadequate as they are artificial constructs which attempt to imply neutrality and objectivity but they can obscure the maker’s creativity. Alternatives have been sought but so far no word has been found that will adequately convey both the creativity of the maker and the cultural significance of the thing made, without unhelpful connotations from western value systems. The term “power object” has been used recently for *minkisi* but MacGaffey has questioned this. While recognising it as a ‘laudable’ attempt to escape the concept of the “fetish”, he argues nonetheless that the term simply reclassifies the Kongo object within another system that belongs to the western viewer’s ‘cognitive and moral universe’. MacGaffey, Wyatt. “‘Magic, or as We Usually Say, Art’: A Framework for Comparing European and African Art” in Schildkrout, Enid and Keim, Curtis, eds., *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 228.

²⁹ Other definitions of “fetishism” and its connection with excess, deficiency, and ‘the West’s hidden history of sex, mind and commodity’ are analysed in Shelton, Anthony, ed. *Fetishism: Visualising Power and Desire*, London: Lund Humphries, 1995(a), (citation from Shelton’s ‘Introduction’ to the book, p. 8).

³⁰ See Dennett, Richard Edward. *Seven Years among the Fjort: Being an English Trader’s Experiences in the Congo District*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887(a), p. 134.

There are also a number of words in this study which may disguise questionable practices with an apparent cloak of neutrality. “Collection” is one of them, “ethnography” is another.³¹ These words are used here in the understanding that the innocent-sounding activity of “collecting” could in fact be manipulative, destructive and damaging, and that “ethnography” has been used at times to repress communities and to impose racist hierarchies.³²

Finally an apology must be made for the use of the terms “western” and “non-western”. “Western” uses a geographical marker to indicate a complex that is in fact conceptual and which does not exist in geographical space: (the “west” is only defined in opposition to the “east” as a conceit arising from cultural distinction).³³ “Non-western” adds a negative to this already questionable term and alienates the identity it creates with a further exclusion. However, despite a search for alternatives no satisfactory alternative has been found. The terminology of the “west” and “non-western” has reluctantly been employed, while recognising the limitations of this vocabulary.³⁴ When

³¹ On the vagaries of “collecting” in the Congo see Fabian, Johannes. *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa*, Berkley: University of California Press, 2000; also Fabian, Johannes. ‘Curios and Curiosity: Notes on reading Torday and Frobenius’ in Schildkrout, Enid and Keim, Curtis, eds., *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 79-108.

³² This has been addressed in many works, but for a discussion of how racist representations were sustained through museum ethnography, see Coombes, Annie. *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. For works about ethnography that were influential at this time see Keane, A. H. *Man Past and Present*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899 and Keane, A. H. *Ethnology*, 1895, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916.

³³ These terms are discussed at length in Hall, Stuart. ‘The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power’ in Hall, Stuart and Gieben, Bram, eds. *Formations of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, pp. 276-331. Olu Oguibe uses the term ‘Western’ when discussing the experience of contemporary African artists as in, for example, Oguibe, Olu. *The Culture Game* (1993), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. However the same subject is discussed using the terminology of the Global South, in the exhibition catalogue, *South Meets West*, Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 2000.

³⁴ Perhaps it is necessary to follow Susan Hiller in acknowledging that very many ‘constructed categories deriving from a specific history’ are used in this discussion and that these words ‘*should always be read as entirely problematic and as though surrounded by inverted commas/quotation marks*’ [Hiller’s italics]. Hiller, Susan, ed. *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art*, London: Routledge, 1991, p. 4.

referring to present-day cross-cultural situations it is hoped that specific artists and communities can be named rather than using such generalised terms.³⁵ Finally, the generic term “European” has sometimes been used here to indicate the dominant expatriate power in the Congo despite the fact that individuals from other parts of the world, including the United States of America, were active in the region at the time. For example (see Chapter Two) Henry Morton Stanley falls into both camps as he was born in Wales but reinvented himself as an American. *The New York Herald* famously financed his expedition to find Henry Livingstone in 1871, and this paper was joined by the British *Daily Telegraph* in funding Stanley’s expedition from the East to the West coast of Africa in 1875-1877. Colonel Williams was an African American; while King Leopold II’s colonial project was supported by American financier, Henry Shelton Sanford.

The Literature.

The multiplicity of issues being considered through Dennett’s history is reflected in the wide range of literature that has informed this study. As stated already, the core of the investigation is framed around the four main areas which engaged Dennett’s attention in the period between 1880 and 1905. These, the colonial context; the indigenous society; the objects themselves; and the museum and scholarly institutions in Europe where such collections were interpreted, are addressed first in this literature review.³⁶ Then, because

³⁵ The distinctions between global cultures are, of course, less clear now than they were in Dennett’s day. Indeed as Per Rekdal has argued, ‘[i]t has hardly any meaning any more to talk about “the West” and “western forms of expression” as something having its dynamism localized to Western Europe and North America. The “Western” is now a global form of expression with just as many variants, places of origin and places of use as cars, clothes, TV’s, soccer games and contemporary art’. Rekdal, Per. ‘From Primitive Art, to Modern Art, to Contemporary African Art.’ Unpublished discussion sent with personal communication from Tone Simenson, University of Oslo. I am grateful to Tone for her interesting conversations about this research.

³⁶ These dates have been made into a round number of twenty-five years but in fact Dennett arrived in Africa in 1879, and left French Congo in 1902. The collection was accessioned in Exeter in 1889, but it

this collaborative project is also concerned with the current life of the museum, the survey will also address some of the key issues that face curators in ethnographic museums today. To conclude, the “methodology of multiplicity” which has been adopted in this thesis will be explained with reference to ideas from anthropological and museological writers who deal with the construction of alterity and identity, arguing for plural, interdisciplinary approaches to research.

The Colonial Context.

Chapter One draws attention to the conflicts that Dennett himself experienced in Africa at the time the collection was made. Kajsa Ekholm Freidman has analysed the disruption that followed the “opening up” of the Congo region.³⁷ She clearly distinguished between the social cohesion that existed before colonisation and the disintegration that followed. Freidman argued that the rise in witchcraft, poison ordeals and increased use of *minkisi* in Kongo communities after 1879 was a direct response to the violence and incomprehensible behaviour meted out by the white foreigners, who had broken up existing communities and undermined indigenous systems of government. She suggested that colonial disruption led chiefs to lose power and those who had previously controlled the means of government were now undermined by the increasingly dominant *banganga*³⁸. Dennett’s early observations certainly indicate that the *banganga* and the retributive *badungu* were particularly active on the coast when he arrived and that accusations of witchcraft were rife.³⁹ The powers of the *minkisi* *minkondi* to hunt down and punish an ill-doer were also in great demand.

was not installed with the other ethnographic collections until c. 1904. because of this, and because some of Dennett’s key ethnographic writing was not published until after he moved away from Loango, the study has been loosely bracketed by the years from 1880 to 1905.

³⁷ Friedman, 1991.

³⁸ Singular *nganga*, plural *banganga*.

³⁹ The *ndungu* was a costumed and masked figure who judged the people’s misdemeanours.

Phyllis Martin's study of the trade systems in the Congo prior to the colonial period demonstrates how Africans and Europeans had interacted over exchange of goods (and slaves) for over three hundred years.⁴⁰ The trade was conducted at the coast and the inland supply routes were managed by Africans. As the nineteenth century saw the last slave-ship depart (and this was not until 1867) trade in other products increased, notably in palm oil and ivory. The trading factories were established in the locations where slaving ports had been. Boma on the River Congo and Loango were two of the most significant of these.⁴¹ Trading arrangements were based on the involvement of an African middle-man who was able to become wealthy as he negotiated the prices between the factory and the supplier, taking a commission for his services. Dennett's contemporary, the Reverend William Holman Bentley explained that the linguists, or middle-men, could take thirty to fifty per cent of the profit made in these transactions.⁴²

Like Friedman and Martin, John Thornton has also used the records of European travellers from the fifteenth century onwards, to examine the cultures that existed along the coast of Africa. He has shown how Africans played an active role in the development of commerce in the Atlantic world.⁴³ However, completely different conditions were introduced under the new rules of the concession companies of the Congo Free State. Africans lost autonomy in these procedures of trade and were forced into unwaged labour as a form of taxation by companies who now claimed all unoccupied land and its produce. Jan Vansina has called this time an 'apocalyptic

⁴⁰ Martin, 1972.

⁴¹ Boma was the initial 'capital of the Congo'. Vansina, Jan. 'Photographs of the Sankuru and Kasai River Basin Undertaken by Emil Torday (1876-1931) and M. W. Hilton Simpson (1881-1936)' in Edwards, Elizabeth, ed. *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, p. 193.

⁴² Bentley, William Holman. *Pioneering on the Congo*. London: Religious Tract Society, 1900, Vol. 1, p. 73, cited in Friedman, 1991, p. 52.

⁴³ Thornton, 1998, p. 44.

conquest' in the equatorial rain forest and the period after 1879 is defined by him as the one which brought about the 'death of a tradition'.⁴⁴

Dennett witnessed these rapid changes. His concerns about the injustices of the system were raised in articles and correspondence for the Manchester Geographical Society in 1886, 1887, and 1890.⁴⁵ He also voiced his observations about the impact of Europeans in the Congo in his first book, *Seven Years Among the Fjort* in 1887, and explained this further in personal correspondence with Morel in 1914.⁴⁶ Photographs in his books and in his lantern slide collection present a fixed picture of the trader's settlements on the rivers and coasts of the Congo, but his texts indicate how rapidly these were being challenged and adapted by the competitive companies pushing inland.⁴⁷

Other contemporary accounts amplify or clarify Dennett's commentary on the Europeans' impact on the local people. The works of the Baptist missionaries, William Holman Bentley and John Weeks, also describe the expansion of colonial forces into the interior of the region.⁴⁸ The British explorer, artist, writer and colonial administrator, Harry Johnston provides a vivid account, initially celebratory and later critical of the Belgian King's "Free State".⁴⁹ Henry Morton Stanley's own books present his particular

⁴⁴ Vansina, 1990, p. 239.

⁴⁵ Dennett, Richard Edward. 'The Congo: From a Trader's Point of View.' *Manchester Geographical Society*, Vol. 2, nos. 7-12, (1886), pp. 283-306; Dennett, Richard Edward. 'Correspondence.' *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, Vol. 3, nos. 1-6, (1887(b)), pp. 112-123; Dennett, Richard Edward. 'The Fjort: The Manners and Customs of the Native Congo People.' *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, Vol. 6, nos. 1-3 (1890), pp. 26-29.

⁴⁶ Dennett, 1887; Letter from Richard Dennett to E. D. Morel, from the Royal Societies Club, St James Street, London, 23 December 1914. London School of Economics, *E. D. Morel Archive* ref. F8/38/M473.

⁴⁷ Dennett's lantern slide collection is kept at the Royal Anthropological Institute, London, and is known as the *Richard Dennett Collection*.

⁴⁸ Bentley, Rev. William Holman. *Dictionary and Grammar of the Kongo Language*, London: Baptist Missionary Society, 1887; Bentley, 1900; Weeks, John H. *Among Congo Cannibals*, London: Seeley, Service and Co., 1913(a); Weeks, John H. *Congo Life and Folklore*, London: The Religious Tract Society, 1911.

⁴⁹ Compare Johnston, Harry Hamilton. *The River Congo from Its Mouth to Bolobo*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1884, and Johnston, 1908.

version of the colonial project which he had encouraged by his mapping of the Congo River.⁵⁰

These observations of the transition that took place in the years immediately after Dennett arrived in Angola and Congo are usefully supplemented by the commentary of another trader, R. Cobden Phillips. Phillips' thoughtful analysis, *The Social System of the Lower Congo* of 1887, explains his understanding of how Kongo society had regulated itself before the European forces began their appropriation of land and domination of communities.⁵¹ Like Dennett, Phillips warned against the methods the foreign governments had adopted, but was ignored.

All these are inevitably Eurocentric accounts, but they present a vivid picture of the traumatic events that occurred in the brief period from 1879-1890 and which led to the rise of independent concessionary companies. These unregulated companies sought maximum profit so that threats, violence, enslavement and murder became their methods of coercion and thousands of Africans were forced to collect and carry rubber and ivory over long and hazardous treks to the depots.⁵²

The attitudes expressed by the writers vary greatly. Dennett and Phillips had great respect for African traders and were suspicious of white treaty-makers; on the other hand many missionaries suspected the white traders and criticised their morals and

⁵⁰ Stanley, Henry M. *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*, 2 Vols., London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1878; Stanley, 1885; Stanley, Henry M. *In Darkest Africa, or the Quest, Rescue and Retreat of Emin Governor of Equatoria*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1890.

⁵¹ Phillips, R. Cobden. 'The Social System of the Lower Congo.' *The Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, Vol. 3 (1887), pp. 154-169.

⁵² Morel's chapter on 'The Story of the Congo Free State' in Morel, 1920, pp. 109-126, presents some of the statistics; see also Phillips, 1887 and Johnston, 1908.

involvement with the “liquor trade”. Some early ethnographers were critical of the proselytising activities of the missionaries, while explorers disagreed over the merits of Africa and her people. Despite their differences these all became subject to the vagaries of the colonial powers directed from the distant capitals of Europe.

Indigenous Society.

Because of the long history of contact between Africa and the west from 1482 onwards, a number of early accounts of the indigenous coastal societies and their kingdoms exist. Those of Olfert Dapper, Jerome Merolla, Abbé Proyart, Andrew Battel and Filippo Pigafetta provide notable descriptions of the communities which were later known to Dennett.⁵³ These works recorded a visual and verbal impression of the courts and the “laws and customs” of the BaKongo society over the centuries, describing the centre of power initially at *Mbanza Kongo*, and later under the King of Loango. Dennett was aware of these older sources. He referred in his work to the accounts of Kongo history given by all the above authors, except Dapper.⁵⁴ He also read the more recent travel records of James Tuckey, Richard Burton, William Winwoode Reade and John Joachim Monteiro.⁵⁵

⁵³ Battell, Andrew. ‘The Strange Adventures of Andrew Battel of Leigh in Essex, Sent by the Portugals to Angola, Who Lived There and in the Adjoining Regions, near Eighteen Years’; Dapper, Olfert. ‘Africa: Being a Description of the Regions ... Customs, Modes and Manners ... And Inexhaustible Treasure’, 1670; Merolla, Jerome. ‘A Voyage to Congo and Several Other Countries, Chiefly in Southern Africk’ 1732; and Proyart, L’Abbé. ‘Histoire De Loango, Kakongo Et Autres Royaumes’ 1766; are all in Pinkerton, John, ed. *A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in All Parts of the World*, Vol. 16, London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1814. Pigafetta, Filippo. ‘A report on the Kingdom of Congo, a Region of Africa ... Drawn out of the Writings of Odoardo Lopez by P. Pigafetta. Translated out of Italian by A. Hartwell, London, 1597’ in Churchill, Awnsham, ed. *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, London: Thomas and Osborne, 1745.

⁵⁴ Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘A Few Notes on the History of Luango (Northern Portion of Congo Coast).’ *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 3, no. 11 (1904(c)), pp. 277-280.

⁵⁵ Tuckey, Captain James. *Narrative of an Expedition to Explore the River Zaire, Usually Called the Congo in South Africa in 1816, under the Direction of Captain J.K. Tuckey*, London: John Murray, 1818; Burton, Richard. *Wanderings in West Africa from Liverpool to Fernando Po*, 2 Vols, London: Tinsley Brothers, 1863; Burton, Richard. *Two Trips to Gorilla Land and the Cataracts of the Congo*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low, and Searle, 1876; Winwoode Reade, William. *The African Sketch-Book*,

Robert Farris Thompson has drawn on these early sources to describe the old Kongo kingdoms.⁵⁶ Thompson identified the centre of government in Kongo society as a ‘cemetery’ which linked the living with those ancestors who had lived and died before.⁵⁷ In *Four Moments of the Sun* he developed ideas surrounding the two parallel worlds of the living and the dead in Kongo culture. Thompson drew both on the older, sixteenth- and seventeenth- century European authors and on more recent twentieth-century African accounts of Kongo social organisation to present his interpretation of the unseen world of the BaKongo.⁵⁸

Wyatt MacGaffey has studied the body of ethnographic work that was collected by the Swedish protestant missionary Karl Laman, in great detail and his extensive work has been an essential source for this project. The texts that Laman compiled were written by catechists and educated BaKongo at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. They provided answers to questions that had been posed by Laman in questionnaires about Kongo society and religious beliefs. MacGaffey first used these texts when working with John Janzen on *An Anthology of Kongo Religion* which was published in 1974.⁵⁹ Since then he has made many further detailed studies of Laman’s archive and used the indigenous texts to clarify our understanding of Kongo life, art and belief. His numerous works are invaluable to any study of *minkisi* and Kongo cosmology. *Art and*

with Maps and Illustrations, London, 1873; Monteiro, Joachim John. *Angola and the River Congo*, London: Macmillan, 1875.

⁵⁶ See Thompson, Robert Farris, and Cornet, Joseph. *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds*, Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1981.

⁵⁷ Thompson, 1981, p. 27.

⁵⁸ Many of Thompson’s ideas draw on those of Fu-Kiau Bunseki, from 1970-80. Although the interpretations in the *Four Moments of the Sun* are fascinating, I have chosen to concentrate my research on sources who were contemporary with Dennett.

⁵⁹ Janzen, John M., and MacGaffey, Wyatt. *An Anthology of Kongo Religion: Primary Texts from Lower Zaire*, Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1974.

Healing of the Bakongo Commented by Themselves, Astonishment and Power and *Kongo Political Culture* have been particularly useful to this study.⁶⁰

However Laman's findings cannot be applied wholesale to Dennett's accounts or to the RAMM collection, because the missionary's work was carried out in a different region and in a period that was distinct from that which in which Dennett was active. Laman worked inland in the Congo Free State, in the area that became known as Manianga.⁶¹ He gathered his information in the twenty years after Dennett had left the Free State. Laman began work in 1890, and continued, after the Free State became the Belgian Congo in 1910, until he retired in 1919. As Laman's field was missionary work which encouraged education and conversion, his relationship with local people would inevitably be very different from Dennett's. Nevertheless, Dennett's interpretations of material and political culture of the BaKongo are idiosyncratic and Eurocentric and it has been important to compare his accounts with those supplied by these indigenous catechist writers. They supplement and sometimes support Dennett's interpretations about the way BaKongo viewed the world, confirming that Kongo political culture was based on a cosmology that included *minkisi* and kingship as the 'principal forms of legitimate power'.⁶²

Dennett's investigation of BaKongo political culture runs through his numerous books, articles and correspondence. As well as his first impressions, which were recorded in 1887 in *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, Dennett published a more ethnographically

⁶⁰ MacGaffey, Wyatt. *Art and Healing of the Bakongo Commented by Themselves*, Bloomington: Indiana University press, 1991; MacGaffey, 1993; and MacGaffey, Wyatt. *Kongo Political Culture: The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000(a). I have also drawn on MacGaffey, Wyatt *Religion and Society in Central Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

⁶¹ MacGaffey, 2000(a), p. 35.

⁶² MacGaffey, 2000(a), p. 43.

detailed paper, *Laws and Customs of the Fjort or Bavili Family, Kingdom of Loango*, in 1905. It is possible that his later work was informed by such publications as the contemporary guide, *Notes and Queries on Anthropology for the use of Travellers and Residents in Uncivilised Lands*.⁶³ Dennett also presented his ideas about BaVili society and the importance of the king, in his 1906 book, *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind* which also drew on information he had gained from new informants in Loango.⁶⁴

Dennett's later writings from Nigeria will not be considered in detail in this study, although some will be mentioned because they develop ideas that originated in Loango and which reflect his conviction that he had identified a formula that proved the existence of a mystical 'universal order' running through all creation, which could be traced in the some of the unspoiled languages of Africa.⁶⁵

Dennett himself has been the subject of recent research by Nicky Levell, Susan Andrew, and by Tabitha Cadbury.⁶⁶ Dennett was also discussed in Anthony Shelton's analysis of the origins of western fetishism, in 1995, and was cited in Alfred Gell's *Art and*

⁶³ British Association for the Advancement of Science. *Notes and Queries on Anthropology for the Use of Travellers and Residents in Foreign Lands*, London: Stanford, 1874 (also later edition, 1892).

⁶⁴ Dennett, 1906, p. 8.

⁶⁵ Dennett, 1916, p. ix. See also Dennett, 1905(a) and the following texts, all by Dennett: *Notes on West African Categories*, London: Macmillan, 1911; 'A Common Basis of Religion [sic] Part I, or, the Order in Genesis One with the Order in the Categories in West Africa.' *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol.12, no. 47, (1913(a)), pp. 256-275; 'A Common Basis for Religion: Part II.' *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 13, no. 49, (1913(b)), pp. 33-44; and *My Yoruba Alphabet*, London: Macmillan, 1916.

⁶⁶ Levell, Nicky. 'Discontinuous Histories: The Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter and Its African Collection, 1868-1996' in Shelton, 2001, Anthony, ed. *Collectors: Expressions of Self and Other*, London: Horniman Museum, 2001, pp. 181-204. Andrew wrote an unpublished paper on Dennett for the University of Plymouth; Cadbury's research on Dennett has been published as Cadbury, Tabitha. 'A Trader in Central Africa: The Dennett Collection at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter.' *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, Vol. 20, (March 2008), pp. 109-119. She has also produced a survey of the Central African Collections at the RAMM in which Dennett's collection is a significant part. The Central Africa survey at the RAMM may be accessed on the RAMM World Cultures Online website:

<http://www.rammworldculturesonline.org.uk/Research/Central-Africa/About>

I am very grateful for the assistance both Sue Andrew and Tabitha Cadbury have given me in this project, sharing their ideas, research, and enthusiasm for the subject so generously.

Agency.⁶⁷ Levell examined how Dennett's collection contributed to nineteenth-century discourses at the RAMM. Andrew's unpublished work on Dennett uncovered valuable supporting material about his biography and his local connections in Devon. Cadbury's research into the Central African Collections at the RAMM led to a paper on Dennett in 2008: *A Trader in Central Africa: The Dennett Collection at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum*, which drew attention to Dennett's connections with the Folklore Society. Cadbury also researched some of the *minkisi* in the collection with RAMM's conservator Cathy Daly, using x-ray photography.⁶⁸ These studies are referred to again in the following chapters.

Kongo Material Culture.

The key literature on the material culture of the BaKongo is the work that has already been discussed with respect to the organisation of indigenous society. Thus Laman's archive, through MacGaffey, and Thompson, has provided the best insights into objects such as those in the Dennett collection at the RAMM. Nevertheless other sources also allow valuable comparisons to be made with similar artefacts in worldwide collections. Information and illustrations have been sourced in exhibition catalogues such *Africa: The Art of a Continent; Africa Meets Africa; Masterpieces from Central Africa; Kilengi: African Sculpture from the Bareiss Family Collection; Art and Oracle: African Art and*

⁶⁷ Shelton's essay examined the comments of early writers on Kongo "fetishes" in a discussion of the connections that were made with African religion and sexuality in western constructs of fetishism. See Shelton, Anthony. 'The Chameleon Body: Power, Mutilation and Sexuality' in Shelton, Anthony, ed. *Fetishism: Visualising Power and Desire*. London: Lund Humphries, 1995(c), pp. 11-52. Alfred Gell used Dennett's description of how a nail fetish was to be made, on page 61 of *Art and Agency* after mistakenly describing Dennett as a 'missionary anthropologist' on page 60. Gell, Alfred. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1998.

⁶⁸ Cadbury, Tabitha. 'A Trader in Central Africa: The Dennett Collection at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter.' *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, Vol. 20, (March 2008), pp. 109-119; Cadbury, Tabitha and Daly, Cathy. 'X-pect the Unexpected: X-Radiographic Investigations of Power Bundles from Central Africa.' *The Conservator*, Vol. 30, (2007), pp. 39-47.

Rituals of Divination; and *Roots and More: The Journey of the Spirits*.⁶⁹ Thompson and MacGaffey's studies have also shown how Kongo ideas and practices have been adopted in the religious practices of *Santeria* and *Vodun* in Cuba and Brazil, and in the traditions of the Southern States in the United States of America. Objects found in these Atlantic world cultures prompt fertile connections with those from the Congo. The recent exhibition *Roots and More: The Journey of the Spirits* explored these spiritual connections, while *Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art* looked at how African techniques and aesthetics re-emerged in basketry made in South Carolina.⁷⁰

The fourth chapter of this thesis examines Dennett's understanding of the objects in his collection and so his own writing forms the main focus for this appraisal. Dennett's early texts reveal typical western prejudices against witchcraft and superstition which were probably influenced by the travel writers whose works he had read prior to his departure for Africa. Later, as his interest developed in the way the community operated, Dennett adopted an ethnographic methodology using indigenous informants. The role of material culture in this society was discussed in his work but Dennett did not supply an exact interpretation of the individual items in the RAMM.⁷¹ Although he rarely mentioned specific objects in his texts, Dennett made a few references to some individual pieces in Exeter and Manchester in *Bavili Notes* and in *At the Back of the*

⁶⁹ Phillips, Tom, ed. *Africa: The Art of a Continent*, London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1996; Beumers, Erna, ed. *Africa Meets Africa*, Rotterdam: Museum of Ethnology, 1996; Verswijver, Gustaaf, ed. *Masterpieces from Central Africa: Tervuren Museum*, Munich: Prestel, 1996; Roy, Christopher. *Kilengi: African Sculpture from the Bareiss Family Collection*, Washington: University of Washington Press. 1997; La Gamma, Alisa, ed. *Art and Oracle: African Art and Rituals of Divination*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000; Hübner, Irene and Welling, Wouter, eds. *Roots and More: The Journey of the Spirits*, Berg en Dal: *Afrika Museum* 2009. I would particularly like to thank Len Pole for suggesting some of these titles.

⁷⁰ Hübner and Welling, 2009; Schildkrout, Enid, Rosengarten, Dale, and Rosengarten, Theodore. 'Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art.' *African Arts*, Vol. 42, no. 2, (2009), pp. 44-55.

⁷¹ For example, the illustrations in Dennett's *Folklore of the Fjort* of 1887 are particularly revealing, as certain items from the museum can be identified in the artist's impressions of hut or *shimbec* which was used by the *nganga*.

Black Man's Mind.⁷² He wrote his most specific paper concerning *minkisi* about the *nkisi Mavungu* which was once in Mary Kingsley's possession, and which is now in the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford.⁷³

To supplement the written data Dennett supplied, this study has also used his photographs and sketches of Kongo material culture. A photograph that shows the whole collection, taken before the collection was accessioned in Exeter, has been compared with Dennett's notes and published drawings. [Fig. 1.] Other photographers' pictures have also helped to contextualise the information that Dennett recorded. Katrin Adler and Christine Stelzig have conducted detailed research on the trader Robert Visser who was a direct contemporary of Dennett's.⁷⁴ Adler and Stelzig's interpretation of Visser's photographs is therefore particularly pertinent to this study. Other photographs by Visser appear in Christraud Geary's study of photography in the Central Africa from 1885-1960.⁷⁵ Some of these were published as postcards to show the *nganga*, *ndungu*, *minkisi* and other significant figures and these have allowed valuable comparisons to be made with the objects in Dennett's collection.

Museums and Collecting.

Robert Visser was one of many Europeans who, like Dennett, made collections of artefacts from the Congo in the years before the Free State and the French and Portuguese possessions were established. Many of these objects were destined for European museums. Collectors who supplied Dutch ethnography museums at this time

⁷² Dennett, 1906; Dennett, 1905(a).

⁷³ Dennett, Richard Edward. 'The Religion of the Fjort or Fiote: "Mavungu"'. *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 1, no. 4 (1902(b)), pp. 452-454.

⁷⁴ Adler, Katrin and Stelzig, Christine. 'Robert Visser and his photographs from the Loango Coast.' *African Arts*, Vol. 35, no. 4, (2002), pp. 38-51, 92-93.

⁷⁵ Geary, Christraud M. *In and out of Focus: Images from Central Africa, 1885-1960*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2002.

have been studied by Joost Willink.⁷⁶ Willink has argued that contemporary evolutionary theories drove some curators to amass material, in the belief that the “primitive” communities of Africa were not likely to survive the arrival of “superior” races. It was therefore seen as a matter of great urgency to collect the material culture of these societies and to record their physical traits, for scientific research.

In Britain the larger provincial museums also became motivated to amass first “curios” and then “specimens” from Africa. Louise Tythacott has shown how this transition in approach took place in the Liverpool Meyer Museum. She has studied how Arnold Ridyard, the Chief Engineer on the Elder Dempster Shipping Line, began collecting for the museum. Ridyard, who travelled regularly down the West Coast of Africa making collections after 1895, was also known to Dennett.⁷⁷

Once collections arrived in museums they were subject to the anthropological discourses that Annie Coombes has examined in *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*.⁷⁸ Coombes has argued that museums often endorsed and sustained a stereotypical image of Africans as “savage” and “primitive” which was also presented through large colonial, national, and international exhibitions and in exhibitions mounted by missionary societies.⁷⁹ Coupled with publicity about the potential riches of the continent, this invented vision served to generate public support for the so-called

⁷⁶ Willink, Robert Joost. *Stages in Civilisation: Dutch Museums in Quest of West Central African Collections (1856-1889)*, Leiden: CNWS, 2007.

⁷⁷ Tythacott, Louise. ‘From the Fetish to the Specimen: The Ridyard African Collection at the Liverpool Museum 1895-1916’ in Shelton, Anthony, ed. *Collectors: Expressions of Self and Other*, London: Horniman Museum, 2001, pp. 157-179.

⁷⁸ Coombes, 1994.

⁷⁹ Objects, images and even humans themselves, were presented to the public to support these ideas in exhibitions such as the *Stanley and Africa* exhibition, at the Victoria Gallery, Regent Street, London, in 1890, or the *Briton, Boer and Black in Savage South Africa* exhibition at Olympia, London, in 1899-1900. Coombes, 1994, pp. 78-79; p. 86. Coombes, 1994, p. 62.

“civilising” project in Africa.⁸⁰ The place of anthropologists in this popular view of Africa has been relevant when considering Dennett’s involvement with the discipline and museums in Chapter Five.⁸¹

Although Dennett may have been motivated by different ideas from those identified by Coombes in making his collection, the artefacts were subjected, nevertheless, to prevailing theoretical models once they entered the museum. Nicky Levell has analysed this process at the RAMM by applying Foucault’s ideas to explore how the modern epistème was expressed in the museum’s history.⁸² In *Discontinuous Histories: The Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter and its African Collection*, she examined the constraints that nineteenth and twentieth-century discourses had imposed on interpretations of ethnographic collections. Dennett’s collection was identified by Levell as evidence of a regime which was concerned with ‘systematic’ collecting, guided by ‘an intellectual rationale’.⁸³ It seems likely in fact that Dennett’s process of collecting and the museum’s methods of presentation were both less orderly and ‘systematic’ than Levell suggests. His collection, like others made at the time, depended greatly on serendipity, and any interpretation he attached to the objects before 1889 was modified over the next decade. The museum had not directed Dennett’s collecting activity, and there is little evidence of communication between Dennett and the institution. Nor is there any indication that the collection was presented as a “series” within the museum,

⁸⁰ Anthony Shelton has warned that the complicity between anthropologists and colonialism has been oversimplified, but he has also analysed the tropes by which ‘exoticised objects’ have been assembled in museums to support colonialism and provide ‘a rational order that helped hold the European empires together’ in *Museum Ethnography: An Imperial Science*. See Shelton, Anthony. ‘Museum Ethnography: An Imperial Science’ in Hallam, Elizabeth and Street, Brian, eds. *Cultural Encounters*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 157.

⁸¹ Coombes, 1994, p. 62.

⁸² Levell, 2001, p. 191. See also Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*, (1970), London: Routledge, 2002, especially Chapter Ten, ‘The Human Sciences’ pp. 375-422.

⁸³ Levell, 2001, p. 189.

even though it appears as a whole in Dennett's own photograph, taken before it was accessioned. [Fig. 1.]

Levell also proposed that Mary Kingsley had guided Dennett's collecting practice, but in fact the collection was made at least six years (and maybe more) before Kingsley and Dennett met.⁸⁴ Indeed, Dennett explained in correspondence with E. Sidney Hartland as late as 1897, that he had felt bereft of guidance when he was working on his ethnographic research, an observation which not only suggests his isolation but which also explains the maverick nature of some of his conclusions.⁸⁵

Kingsley's impact on Dennett was, however, considerable, and it led to a strong connection between Dennett and the Folklore Society, which resulted in a number of publications.⁸⁶ Another collection from "French Congo" has been identified in the course of this research, with which both Dennett and Kingsley were connected. This was a Folklore Society Collection which was lodged with the Cambridge University Museum by the Folklore Society in 1900. It is now in the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford.⁸⁷ The collection is discussed further in the fifth chapter of this

⁸⁴ Levell, 2001, p. 190. According to Kingsley's account Dennett and Kingsley only met once, in 1893 (see Chapter Five). That they met after the collection was donated to the museum has also been noted by Len Pole in his discussion of Levell's argument, in Pole, Len. 'Relocating Each Other: Discontinuities at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, 1863-1999', in Shelton, Anthony, ed. *Collectors: Individuals and Institutions*, London and Coimbra: Horniman Museum and University of Coimbra, 2001, pp. 343-363.

⁸⁵ Letter from Richard Dennett to E. S. Hartland, from Loango, 10 March 1897. National Library of Wales, *E. S. Hartland Archive*, ref. 6819B.

⁸⁶ For example, see Dennett, Richard Edward. 'Death and Burial of the Fjort.' *Folklore*, Vol. 8, no. 2, (1897) pp. 132-37; Kingsley, Mary. 'The Fetish View of the Human Soul.' *Folklore*, Vol. 8, no. 2, (1897(a)), pp. 138-151; Dennett, 1905(a), pp. 371-406.

⁸⁷ Pitt Rivers Museum accession numbers 1965.1 to 1965.47. A paper on this subject was presented by the author to the conference of the Museum Ethnographers Group, (MEG) in April 2011 at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, 15 April 2011, 'Writing On, Around, or About Objects'. My thanks are due to Jeremy Coote and the Pitt Rivers Museum staff for their assistance in this branch of my research. I am also grateful to Tabitha Cadbury for suggesting that these donor-unspecified 'French Congo' objects in the Folklore Society Collection might be connected with Dennett or Kingsley.

study and its discovery has shed light on Dennett's involvement with later collections, and with museums other than the RAMM.

Richard Dorson's study of *The British Folklorists* and J. D. Fage's research asking 'When the African Society Was Founded, Who Were the Africanists?' have shown how frequently the circles of anthropologists, scholars, folklorists, Africanists and curators overlapped in the last years of the Victorian era.⁸⁸ These works describe the communities in which Dennett's history as an ethnographer was played out in the last years of the nineteenth century and in the first years of the twentieth, in the institutions which were peopled not only by anthropologists and scholars, but by colonial administrators and business magnates as well.

The Ethnographic Museum Today.

By using Dennett as a focal point this thesis will therefore explore a number of different contexts in Africa and Europe in which Dennett and the collection co-existed. However, the research is also concerned to address issues of representation in the present-day museum, and so the discourses that surround the current interpretation of collections such as Dennett's will also be reviewed here. The survey must inevitably be selective but two key areas have been identified as particularly significant in this discussion. These are the notion of "othering" and the place of art and aesthetics regarding ethnographic collections.

⁸⁸ Fage, J. D. 'When the African Society Was Founded, Who Were the Africanists?' *African Affairs*, Vol. 94, no. 376, (1995) pp. 369-381. Dorson, Richard M. *The British Folklorists*, (1968), London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

Museum theorists and practitioners alike have been anxious about “othering” processes at work in museums for several decades. The principles that Edward Said had identified behind the west’s construction of the fictional Orient, whereby European culture apparently gained in strength by setting itself against the Orient as a sort of ‘surrogate or underground self’ were found to be operating in museums where collections from Africa, Oceania and the Americas were displayed.⁸⁹ Rasheed Araeen has used Said’s description of Orientalism as ‘a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness ... the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all non-European peoples and cultures’.⁹⁰ Araeen suggested that we can substitute the word ‘primitivism’ for ‘orientalism’ in this quotation.

Museums and art galleries that showed African collections without appropriate contextualisation have encouraged primitivist constructions. According to Christopher Steiner such methodologies allowed objects to appear ‘silent outside their natural community of spokespersons ... tabula rasa, virgin icons upon which observers impose their own signification and interpretation’.⁹¹ Originating or source societies were thereby construed as simple, fixed in the past, voiceless, and vulnerable to what the west constructed as development, evolution and progress.

When William Rubin’s exhibition, *Primitivism in Twentieth Century Art* was mounted at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1984-1985, it generated heated debate about the western appropriation of non-western artefacts in the service of modernist

⁸⁹ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*, (1978), New York: Vintage Books, 2003, p. 3.

⁹⁰ Said, 1978, cited in Araeen, Rasheed. ‘From Primitivism to Ethnic Arts’ in Hiller, Susan, ed. *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art*, London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 166-167. (Araeen does not provide the page number of his citation from Said.)

⁹¹ Steiner, Christopher. *African Art in Transit*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 13.

aesthetic paradigms. Thomas MacEvelley asserted that *Primitivism* had ‘treated the primitives as less than human, less than cultural - as shadows of a culture’. This was a consequence of the absence of information about the original context or purpose of the objects on show.⁹² As Kenji Yoshida has noted, this exhibition resulted in the discussion being opened up to the wider attention of anthropologists and historians, and a similarly cross-disciplinary audience is likely to spearhead museological criticism whenever a new exhibition using “non-western” collections is presented today.⁹³

Some critics suspect the power of the state to be active in processes of “othering”. As discussed earlier, Annie Coombes examined the way museums connected with anthropology contributed to racist interpretations of Africa and Africans at the end of the nineteenth century.⁹⁴ Her model followed Foucault’s ideas of the regulatory society, and identified the museum as instrument by which the public could be manipulated. The possibility that the state might still act on its citizens in this controlling way has been proposed by Kylie Message in *New Museums and the Making of Culture*.⁹⁵ Message has suggested that theoretically postmodern museums have been encouraged to foster multiculturalism in the same way as modernist museums were engaged to stimulate education and class-reform in the past. Coombes had argued that museums were serving the imperialist need for social modernisation at the end of the nineteenth, and beginning

⁹² MacEvelley, Thomas. *Art and Otherness: Crisis in Cultural Identity*, New York: Documentext, 1992, p. 47.

⁹³ Yoshida, Kenji. ‘Ethnographic Museums Today’ in Yoshida, Kenji and Mack, John, eds. *Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Africa: Crisis or Renaissance?*, Woodbridge: Unisa, 2008, p. 157. A parallel may be found when curating modern African collections. Bernard Fibicher has warned that ‘no synthesis is possible, only strategic mistakes, inequalities, unfairness, discrimination ... One must venture into curatorial no man’s land’ and he warns: ‘Hic sunt leones’. Fibicher, Bernard. ‘Hic Sunt Leones’ in *South Meets West*, Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 2000, p. 23.

⁹⁴ Coombes, 1994.

⁹⁵ Message, Kylie. *New Museums and the Making of Culture*, Oxford: Berg, 2006.

of the twentieth century; Message has added that the emphasis on the representation of “others” in new museums could be seen as an instrument of globalised markets.⁹⁶

In *The Birth of the Museum* Tony Bennett identified how processes of categorisation and display encouraged the interpretation of mankind’s ‘existing savages’ in evolutionary terms in museums.⁹⁷ He provided the example of Henry Lane Fox Pitt Rivers whose displays at the Bethnal Green Museum in 1874, reinforced a narrative of evolutionary progress, literally step-by-step, as the visitor walked alongside the displays.⁹⁸ William Ryan Chapman’s research on this collector has also shown that Pitt Rivers believed an appreciation of the long, slow, sequential movement of evolution could even act as a corrective force to restrain revolutionary tendencies in society.⁹⁹

In 2006 a resurgence of anti-primitivist rhetoric was provoked by the opening of the *Musée Quai Branly*. Nelia Dias found a homogenising *égalité* in the museum which represented an oversimplification of complex cultural differences and imposed western values under the banner of ‘Universal’ aesthetics.¹⁰⁰ Dias argued that by seeking dignity in other peoples’ art, France had found a way to avoid acknowledging it in other aspects

⁹⁶ Coombes, Annie. ‘Ethnography and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities’ in Hiller, Susan, ed. *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art*, London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 189-214.

⁹⁷ Bennett, Tony. *The Birth of the Museum*, London: Routledge, 1996, p. 196. (Pitt Rivers was still known as Lane Fox in 1875.)

⁹⁸ Bennett 1996, pp. 177-208.

⁹⁹ Chapman, William Ryan. ‘A. H. L. F. Pitt Rivers (1821-1900) and the Institutional Foundations of British Anthropology.’ D. Phil Thesis, Oxford, University, 1981, p. 515, cited in Bennett 1996, p. 197. Pitt Rivers had been working on this theme of progression since the 1860’s when he had filled his home with specimens arranged to show man’s technological progress (see Chapman, William Ryan. ‘Arranging Ethnology: A. H. L. F. Pitt Rivers and the Typological Tradition’ in Stocking, George W. Jnr., ed. *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, p. 29). Pitt Rivers’ collection was accepted for display in Oxford in 1882, and the Pitt Rivers Museum was finally opened in 1887. The first Keeper of the University Collection was E. B. Tylor, who had presented the case for cultural evolutionism in his book *Primitive Culture* in 1871, so academic anthropology was closely associated with the evolutionary paradigm in this museum. See Tylor, Edward. *Primitive Culture*, London: Murray, 1871. Tylor was promoted to become Reader in Anthropology in 1883.

¹⁰⁰ Dias, Nelia. ‘Cultural Difference and Cultural Diversity’ in Sherman, Daniel J. ed. *Museums and Difference*, Bloomington: Indiana, 2008, p. 125.

of these communities.¹⁰¹ Some critics questioned how far France could even be considered postcolonial when judged by the presentation within this museum.¹⁰² The debate in Paris is still continuing: in a recent review of an aestheticised exhibition of the private collection of Jacques Kerchache at the *Fondation Cartier* in April 2011, the critic asked now-familiar questions about whether the show ‘dignifies tribal tradition, or simply further exoticises Africa’.¹⁰³

James Clifford was a vocal critic of the *Musée Quai Branly* project. In 2007, he called for a more ‘multidiscursive approach’ in the museum.¹⁰⁴ He argued that the museum needed to recognise that its audience was diverse; that Paris was itself a ‘changing contact zone’; and that the museum was responsible to more varied and changing constituencies than those of art connoisseurs and social scientists alone.¹⁰⁵ Curator Hamet Bâ was also critical of the western paradigms at work in the Paris museum. ‘This museum is just a logical expression’ he argued ‘of western stupidity that consists in wanting to judge, analyse and study others. By reducing the unknown to the known, by bringing back to its own criteria objects that do not match these criteria...we fall into absurdity.’¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Dias, 2008, p. 126.

¹⁰² Blasselle, Agnès and Guarneri, Anna. ‘The Opening of the Musée Du Quai Branly: Valuing/Displaying the “Other” in Post-Colonial France.’ <<http://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase/200-the-opening-of-the-musee-du-quai-branly-valuing-displaying-the-other-in-post-colonial-france>> 2006, accessed October 2007.

¹⁰³ Review of the exhibition *Vodun: African Voodoo* at the *Fondation Cartier*, Paris. ‘African Voodoo: The Dark Arts.’ *The Economist*, 16 April 2011. <http://www.economist.com/node/18557364>, accessed January 2012. Sally Price has made a lucid assessment of the debates in concerned with ethnographic displays in her assessment of the collaboration between French President Jacques Chirac and the art dealer Jacques Kerchache when creating the Quai Branly Museum. See Price, Sally. *Paris Primitive: Jacques Chirac’s Museum on the Quai Branly*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

¹⁰⁴ Clifford, James. ‘Quai Branly in Process.’ *October*, no. 120, Spring, (2007), p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ Clifford 2007, p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ Pierre Hamet Bâ, interviewed in Chevallay, Annie, Boutang Pierre André, and Seligmann, Guy. *Le Musée du Quai Branly*, Arte France, 2007 [DVD].

In Britain the British Museum's Sainsbury African Gallery had opened in 2001, and it also came under fire. Ruth Phillips found modernist canons still firmly in place in the African displays.¹⁰⁷ Lissant Bolton identified a tension between two museological approaches in the British Museum. She argued that the African galleries upheld the use of aesthetics as a classificatory standard, while her Wellcome Living and Dying Gallery aimed to show other cultures' objects in terms of their 'agency ... in systems of knowledge and practice'.¹⁰⁸

As early as 1992 Shelton had argued that the aesthetic/ethnographic divide was a false opposition in exhibition planning. He had pronounced that the divide was only between 'good exhibitions that acknowledge the formal or aesthetic or technical qualities of works and provide historical contextualisation, and bad exhibitions that choose between aesthetic and "contextual" presentation and regard their visual and narrative codes as absolute.'¹⁰⁹ He cited John Mack's 1991 exhibition, *Images of Africa, Emil Torday and the Art of the Congo 1900-1909* as an example of 'a new paradigm of exhibition that acknowledges the importance of engaging visual presentation ... firmly structured by strong historical and cultural narrative'.¹¹⁰

Universal aesthetics has proved a tenacious idea nonetheless, and Alfred Gell has pointed out that the concept can even flourish among anthropologists.¹¹¹ Gell realised that it was contentious to ask a contemporary audience to ignore aesthetics when

¹⁰⁷ Phillips, Ruth. 'Exhibiting Africa after Modernism: Globalization, Pluralism and the Persistent Paradigms of Art and Artifact' in Pollock, Griselda, ed. *Museums after Modernism: Strategies of Engagement*, Malden MA: Blackwell, 2006, p. 99.

¹⁰⁸ Bolton, Lissant. 'Living and Dying: Ethnography, Class, and Aesthetics in the British Museum' in Sherman, Daniel J. ed. *Museums and Difference*, Bloomington: Indiana, 2008, p. 350.

¹⁰⁹ Shelton, 1992, p. 15.

¹¹⁰ Shelton, 1992, p. 15.

¹¹¹ Gell, Alfred. 'The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology' in Coote, Jeremy and Shelton, Anthony, eds. *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1992, pp. 40-63.

approaching the subject of art, because the arts now hold an equivalent place to that held by religion, before the enlightenment.¹¹² Gell likened the west's regard for aesthetic values to the conviction felt by a theologian towards his or her faith.¹¹³ But, he insisted, a 'methodological philistinism' is necessary, if a universally cogent method of art analysis is to be found.¹¹⁴

Gell's model, which is described in *Art and Agency*, proposed that art objects are products of skilful technology, which are created to operate in a nexus where they "do" something.¹¹⁵ Robert Layton explained that for Gell, '[a]rt is defined by the distinctive role it plays in advancing social relationships constructed through agency'.¹¹⁶ Other writers have seen the anthropology of art as a way to identify aesthetic systems in other cultures, but Gell insisted that such a humanist approach was entirely inappropriate to the social science of anthropology.¹¹⁷ Aesthetics is essentially a western value system he argued; anthropology's concern should be with the 'production, circulation and reception' of objects which is 'the social context' of art'.¹¹⁸

Virtue and art are closely connected in western thought and Gell has noted that 'it is widely agreed that ethics and aesthetics belong in the same category'.¹¹⁹ It is therefore not surprising that museums, which are commonly considered to be institutions

¹¹² Museums have been likened to temples; museum-going to rituals; paintings and performances provoke rapture and hushed reverence. See for example, Duncan, Carol. 'Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship' in Karp, Ivan and Lavine, Steven, eds. *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1991, pp. 88-103. Also see Bouquet, Mary and Porto, Nuno, eds. *Science, Magic and Religion: The Ritual Process of Museum Magic*, Oxford: Berghahn, 2005, for further ideas on the simile of museum activities and religious processes.

¹¹³ Gell 1992, pp. 40-43.

¹¹⁴ Gell 1992, p. 42. Gell's term is developed from Peter Berger's idea of 'methodological atheism' in Berger, Peter. *The Social Reality of Religion*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967, p. 107.

¹¹⁵ Gell, 1998.

¹¹⁶ Layton, Robert. 'Art and Agency: A Reassessment.' *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 9, no. 3, (2003), p. 448.

¹¹⁷ Layton, 2003, p. 449.

¹¹⁸ Layton, 2003, p. 449.

¹¹⁹ Gell, 1992, p. 41.

intended for our moral benefit, have sometimes emphasised the aesthetic aspects of their ethnographic collections. A belief in the virtue of art may also explain the frequent involvement of contemporary artists in ethnographic exhibitions, as if they are expected to bring an additional moral value to exhibitions. The presence of contemporary artists in ethnography galleries seems to be generally understood as “A Good Thing”.

However Polly Savage has suggested that African pieces may be more likely to be interpreted according to a western paradigm of art if a work by a contemporary artist such as Sokari Douglas Camp is shown alongside them.¹²⁰ Although Douglas Camp’s work might appeal to curators because it ‘seems to undermine the stability of troublesome binaries such as traditional/contemporary, art/artefact, aesthetic/didactic and gallery/museum’, Savage contends that ‘the artist remains in identity-based frameworks’ which are not shared by the originating culture.¹²¹ The contemporary art work therefore creates a tension ‘neither fully contesting nor fully complying with the politics of their display’.¹²²

To criticise artists’ interventions in exhibitions of ethnographic collections is not to deny the often fertile juxtapositions that contemporary artists can make with older collections. Many productive observations have arisen from art installations which use museum collections as a stimulus, such as those by Fred Wilson.¹²³ Indeed Shelton has argued that conceptual artists’ installations in some ethnographic museums have ‘taken the lead in problematising the West’s relationship with other cultures’.¹²⁴ However, the

¹²⁰ Savage, Polly. ‘Playing to the Gallery: Masks, Masquerade and Museums.’ *African Arts*, Vol. 41, no. 4, (2008), pp. 74-81.

¹²¹ Savage, 2008, p. 75.

¹²² Savage, 2008, p. 75.

¹²³ See Putnam, James. *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium*, 2001. London: Thames and Hudson, 2009.

¹²⁴ Shelton, Anthony. ‘The Recontextualisation of Culture in UK Museums.’ *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 8, no. 5, (1992), p. 16.

different epistemological framework from which this new art emerges must be seen as distinct from the ones which produced the objects in most ethnographic collections.¹²⁵

Alana Jelinek, an artist-in-residence at the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (CUMAA) in 2010, has warned against curators using contemporary art as if it could to provide a ‘silver bullet’ to meet all their exhibitionary needs.¹²⁶ She argued that ‘art interventions and institutional critique’ are important ways to comment on relationships between collector and collected, and even to air ‘the more harrowing aspects of colonial history’, but the language employed by contemporary artists must be recognised as was different from that which is used in the non-art museum. Artists were understood to be free to use ‘complex and nuanced storytelling’ but in the ethnographic museum this language might mystify rather than clarify. Her argument was clear: ‘Art is neither education nor interpretation and must not be used as such.’¹²⁷

The Methodology of Multiplicity.

In presenting the histories of Dennett and his collection this study has sought a pluralist approach, endeavouring to avoid oversimplified interpretations and explanations. It argues for a more multivalent view than the binary constructions of the “self and other” have allowed in the past. Hybridity and creolisation have been put forward as alternative models for self-definition. Clifford has suggested that the politics of hybridity could be

¹²⁵ For a discussion of ‘art-world’ see Gell, Alfred. ‘Vogel’s Net: Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps’ in Morphy, Howard and Perkins, Morgan eds. *The Anthropology of Art: A Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, p. 222. See also Clifford on the ‘art/culture system’ in Clifford, James. *The Predicament of Culture*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1988, pp. 215-251; and MacGaffey on the institutional approach to a definition of art in MacGaffey, 1998.

¹²⁶ Jelinek, Alana. *Words and Objects: The Many Things We Know but Don’t Communicate*. Unpublished paper for the Museum Ethnographers Group (MEG) Conference on *Objects and Words: Writing on, Around and About Things*, at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, 14-15 April, 2011.

¹²⁷ Jelinek, 2011.

an antidote to the 'virulent currency of nationalism'.¹²⁸ Creolisation, according to Nicholas Thomas, might present a challenge to 'contemporary primitivisms' and an opportunity to subvert 'colonialism's culture'.¹²⁹

However, Olivia Harris shows that the concept of hybridity holds an inner contradiction:

To talk of mixing, syncretism or creolization depends on the prior assumption of recognisable difference based on relatively stable identity. This in turn begs many questions, since contrary to the Mendelian concept of identity as a closed system of reproduction, all cultural traditions are open to outside influences and are constantly borrowing and adapting to new encounters.¹³⁰

Harris has shown that there are multiple ways in which new knowledge has arisen from 'European annexation and evangelisation' where the transfer of information is not always unidirectional from the coloniser to the colonised; for example, agency is exercised by the colonised culture when elements are selectively 'borrowed' from the dominant power.¹³¹ Moreover, she argues that two different knowledge systems may run parallel to each other, without either of them adopting foreign paradigms. Also, alternative cultural forms may be created autonomously, in ways that do not emphasise their origins in either the dominant or dominated society.¹³²

Strict adherence to cultural boundaries can result in nationalism and racism, as Anthony Appiah has argued. Discussing 'authenticity' in *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of*

¹²⁸ Clifford, James. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, p.10.

¹²⁹ Thomas, Nicholas. *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, p. 10.

¹³⁰ Harris, Olivia. 'Knowing the Past: Plural Identities and the Antinomies of Loss in Highland Bolivia' in Fardon, Richard, ed. *Counterworks: Managing the Diversity of Knowledge*, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 111.

¹³¹ Even wholesale 'identification' (as in the Andes, where an Indian can only become a *mestizo* by rejecting his or her Indian name, diet, language and clothing, for example) is nevertheless recognised by Harris as evidence of indigenous agency. Harris, 1995, pp. 111-112.

¹³² Harris, 1995, p. 113.

Strangers, Appiah concludes that ‘cultural purity is an oxymoron’.¹³³ He advocates not hybridity but universality, or ‘cosmopolitanism’ as an alternative paradigm. Appiah’s ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’ does not deny the value of shared histories and local loyalties but asks for these to co-exist with liberal virtues of autonomy, dialogue, and reason.¹³⁴

Seeking an alternative to binary oppositions, Gerd Baumann and Andre Gingrich have shown that there are other models of alterity which are more flexible, and not mutually exclusive.¹³⁵ They treat alterity and identity as inseparable terms because one unavoidably creates the other. The authors vigorously resist those essentialising models of “the other” which have arisen from Heidegger’s and Lacan’s theories of identity and difference. They argue that Gayatri Spivak’s significant work has been influenced by both of these theorists, and that it imposes too strong a boundary between self and other.¹³⁶ A basic binary separation leads to essentialism, and indeed, in some cases to nationalism.¹³⁷ They call for a more plural model of ‘identity/alterity’, one that is ‘weak, non-binary ... multidimensional and fluid’.¹³⁸

Baumann and Gingrich have defined three ‘classificatory structures’ by which to analyse identity construction.¹³⁹ The first is drawn from Said’s classic study of Orientalism in which an “other” is both repellent and attractive at the same time. Thus the Oriental has some qualities which the Occidental knows to be lacking in him or herself and appreciates in the other. The Oriental is admired but at the same time

¹³³ Appiah, Anthony A. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, London: Penguin 2006, p. 113.

¹³⁴ Kauffman, Eric. ‘Review of Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *The Ethics of Identity*.’ H-Net Reviews <<http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=11868>> (2006), p. 3, accessed 2008.

¹³⁵ Baumann, Gerd and Gingrich, Andre, eds. *Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach*, Oxford: Berghahn, 2004.

¹³⁶ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, Landry, Donna and MacLean Gerald, eds. *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, London: Routledge, 1996.

¹³⁷ Baumann and Gingrich, 2004, p. 12-13.

¹³⁸ Baumann and Gingrich, 2004, p. 17.

¹³⁹ Baumann and Gingrich, 2004, p. x. The authors agree there may be other models to add to these.

remains subordinate.¹⁴⁰ Their second model or grammar derives from Edward Evans-Pritchard's study of the Nuer people of Sudan.¹⁴¹ It exists where numerous sub-groups, which appear to be in conflict with each other, will nevertheless combine forces to combat a shared greater enemy. This enemy will also combine with the sub-groups if another, greater, threat arises.¹⁴² The third 'grammar' follows research carried out by Louis Dumont on the Indian system of caste.¹⁴³ The caste system has strict distinguishing levels but the 'higher' level community 'imperiously' believe that they 'encompass' the subordinate category.¹⁴⁴ These three 'grammars' provide a helpful alternative to the binary forms of alterity/identity construction and allow space for multiple interactions to shift and flow between people, insisting that identity and difference are not fixed but fluid.

In an art context, Sally Price has noted shifts away from binary paradigms in the recent treatment of non-western art. In 1989 Price had drawn attention to the oversimplification of 'them' and 'us' in the presentation of non-western art in *Primitive Art in Civilised Places*, but in an afterword to that book in 2001, she was able to note a number of changes.¹⁴⁵ She observed that art history was beginning to set non-western art works in their context, recognising them as 'contextualised productions undergoing contextualised readings.'¹⁴⁶ Moreover she noted that the 'site of artistic production' was now likely to be seen in a 'global arena' where contributions came from all over the

¹⁴⁰ This they call the 'Grammar of Orientalization'. Baumann and Gingrich, 2004, p. 20.

¹⁴¹ Evans-Pritchard, E. E. *The Nuer*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1940, cited in Baumann and Gingrich, 2004, p. 21.

¹⁴² This is called the 'Segmentary Grammar'. Baumann and Gingrich, 2004, p. 22.

¹⁴³ Dumont, Louis. *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, cited in Baumann and Gingrich, 2004, p. 25.

¹⁴⁴ This third model is therefore called the 'Grammar of Encompassment', Baumann and Gingrich, 2004, p. 25.

¹⁴⁵ Price, Sally. 'A Case in Point and Afterwords to *Primitive Art in Civilised Places*' in Morphy, Howard, and Perkins, Morgan, eds. *The Anthropology of Art: A Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006. pp. 167-185.

¹⁴⁶ Price, 2006, p. 178.

world, ‘from every kind of society and from every chamber of the artworld’s vast honeycomb.’¹⁴⁷ In 1994 Homi Bhabha had sought to avoid the ‘politics of polarity’ drawing attention to the potential of occupying those interstitial spaces which had commonly been overlooked.¹⁴⁸ Price’s observations now resonated with Bhabha’s aspiration as she recognised that scholars were directing their attention to the ‘doorways where artistic and aesthetic ideas jostle each other in their passage from one cultural setting to the next.’¹⁴⁹ As Price explained, artistic interchange was no longer solely ‘a one-way route’, and, she added, ‘it’s not just the objects that are travelling’.¹⁵⁰

This wide ranging discussion from multiple disciplines on the issue of identity and otherness has informed the multidisciplinary methodology that has been used in this research. Beginning with a collection that has been designated (by outsiders) as “ethnographical” it was inevitable that this study would need to address the issue of “the other”. The very basis of the discipline is founded in making distinctions. But as the foregoing discussion has shown, this distinction need not be bounded in binary terms of “them and us”. This study has used approaches from cultural studies, anthropology and art history, to accommodate multiple, fluid, models. Dennett is not seen therefore as a representative of a monolithic colonialism in whose service he had little agency; but he is rather acknowledged as a person whose roles and opinions were varied and whose actions often contradicted his peers’ expectations.¹⁵¹ He was an involved observer:

¹⁴⁷ Price, 2006, p. 178.

¹⁴⁸ Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*, 1994, London: Routledge, p. 39.

¹⁴⁹ Price, 2006, p. 178.

¹⁵⁰ Price, 2006, p. 179. Olu Oguibe had observed the western art world’s resistance to two-way influences in the 1990’s. He proposed that while the west would happily assimilate non-western aesthetics, it was still unwilling to accept the reverse happening in Africa. Oguibe argued that the western art market had shown a robust resistance to African artists embracing European art forms, and that Europe’s ‘customary quest for cultural essences’ was at odds with the ‘shared contemporaneity’ that had been created through what he called ‘myriad bloody and cataclysmic copulations’. Oguibe, 2004, p. 8.

¹⁵¹ To some of the Belgian officials Dennett was a thorn in the side, to others he was a valued ally. Son of an Anglican priest he was nevertheless full of praise for his Catholic neighbours at the Landana Mission; but highly critical of American Missions. He kept his private life discretely veiled, but a public audience

Dennett was moved and even changed by his engagement with BaKongo culture.

Moreover his African informants also exercised their agency. Dennett's records show how the power travelled in both directions in matters of trade and travel, land rights, hospitality and in self-imaging.

Nicholas Thomas has argued that colonialism is not a 'unitary totality' and that 'only localised theories and historically specific accounts can provide much insight into the varied articulations of colonising and counter-colonial representations and practices.'¹⁵²

This thesis aims to provide one such localised and historically specific account. By identifying 'a wider and more plural formulation', Thomas also hopes that we will be better equipped 'to contest contemporary forms of colonial culture which tend not to be recognised as such'.¹⁵³

The activities which became defined as anthropology, folklore, and ethnography in the nineteenth century were also fluid and not contained by tight divisions. By studying the primary sources for this thesis it has become clear that these so-called disciplines were not homogenous entities. Many individuals operating within these loosely defined areas did not discern barriers between themselves and their colleagues who were working in what we tend to classify as natural history, archaeology, ethnography, psychology, natural theology, or history. Individual personalities, such as Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt Rivers, Edward Burnett Tylor, Alfred Cort Haddon, Edwin Sidney Hartland and George Laurence Gomme exerted considerable influence within overlapping areas of common interest. Several societies and associations arose from these scholarly alliances,

was actively sought for his writing and theories. His opinion of the Africans he worked with varied no less than the views he expressed about the Americans and Europeans he encountered.

¹⁵² Thomas, 1994, p. ix.

¹⁵³ Thomas, 1994, p. 10.

but conflicts were also common.¹⁵⁴ Work that was seen as “folklore” in one context might become “anthropology” in another. By the same token an “anthropologist” might become embroiled in hypnotism or ‘telepathic scrying’.¹⁵⁵ Later narratives simplify the complexity, but a close reading of events at the time indicates that it is necessary to have a methodology that accommodates the multiplicity of these ideas and agencies.

Objects, like people, have also defied being bounded by categories in this study.

Following changes in thinking in the twentieth century, objects can now transfer conceptually from positions in natural history or anthropology, to be found in art and art history. Thus artefacts such as those in Dennett’s collection may now be understood to exist and “act” in numerous different territories. These transitions have generated dialogue and debate across many disciplines. Anthropology has made room for the anthropology of art; philosophers contribute to exhibition catalogues; anthropologists proffer opinions on art exhibitions; artists critique the work of curators; and curators subvert their own exhibitions.¹⁵⁶

Such a multidisciplinary web has also informed this collaborative research project. The study has drawn on evidence and theories from art, art history, anthropology, colonial history, postcolonial theory, and museology.¹⁵⁷ The pluralistic methodology has been stimulated in part by the multiple interests of the writer, who has approached African artefacts in the past as an artist, an educator, and an art historian both in Britain, and in

¹⁵⁴ See Stocking, 1987, on the disputes between the ‘Anthropologicals’ and the ‘Ethnologicals’, for example. Also Chapman, 1985, on Pitt Rivers’ arguments with Oxford University; and Dorson, 1968, on conflicts within the Folklore Society.

¹⁵⁵ For example see Chapter Five on Northcote Whitridge Thomas, who wrote, with Andrew Lang, a book on hypnotism and telepathy. See Thomas, Northcote Whitridge, and Lang, Andrew. *Crystal Gazing, Its History and Practice : With a Discussion of the Evidence for Telepathic Scrying*, London: Moring, 1905.

¹⁵⁶ Examples of such curatorial practices will be found in Chapter Six.

¹⁵⁷ This model of interrelated disciplines also recognises that Said’s theories of *Orientalism* and Bhabha’s on the *Location of Culture*, arose from a background of English and Comparative Literature. Said, 1978 and Bhabha, 1994.

Africa. But it is also a reflection of the institutions involved in the collaboration. The Department of Art History at Plymouth University has expanded the global outlook of the art history curriculum and has created partnerships which further the contextualised study of material culture.¹⁵⁸ The Ethnography Department at RAMM has been one of these partners, working with the Department of Art History in past exhibitions, and collection research.¹⁵⁹ In *Museums and Difference* Daniel J. Sherman appealed for this kind of engagement between academia and museums. In a conference by the same name, he celebrated the multivocality that could result from the productive engagement of museum scholars, whether based in a museum or university. ‘Refusing the absoluteness of singular identity claims, such dialogue acknowledges the multiple alterities in which we all participate.’¹⁶⁰ Like many others supported by the collaborative doctoral scheme in British universities, this study has been built on the same positive attitude to cross-institutional exchange, debate and creative dialogue.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ In 2004 Dr Stephanie Pratt, Reader in Art History at the University of Plymouth, received funding from a HEFCE launched sub-project organised to help increase the range and depth of art history curriculum in Higher Education Institutions in the UK. Her project is described under the relevant pages in the website for the GLAADH (Globalising Art, Architecture and Design History) project, <www.glaadh.ac.uk>. Pratt was co-curator for the 2007 exhibition *Between Worlds: Voyagers to Britain, 1700 – 1860* held at the National Portrait Gallery, London, from March 8 - June 17, 2007.

¹⁵⁹ In 2004 Dr. Pratt mounted the temporary exhibition, *Crowfoot and the Crown* with the Assistant Curator of Ethnography, Jane Burkinshaw at the World Cultures Gallery at RAMM. See <<http://www.rammworldculturesonline.org.uk/Research/Blackfoot/About/>>(accessed August 2011). Dr Pratt and the curator of Ethnography Tony Eccles are continuing to develop dialogue with the Blackfoot community and Tony Eccles recently presented a talk on the RAMM’s Blackfoot regalia at the *Blackfoot Shirts* conference at the Pitt Rivers Museum, 30-31 March, 2011. <<http://blackfootdigitallibrary.com/en/asset/royal-albert-memorial-museum-collection-presentation-tony-eccles>> accessed August 2011.

¹⁶⁰ Sherman, Daniel J. ‘Introduction’ in Sherman, Daniel J. ed. *Museums and Difference*, Bloomington: Indiana, 2008, p. 9.

¹⁶¹ Meeting other Collaborative Doctoral Award researchers over the past years has indicated that the range of these degrees is great and the outcomes are rich and varied. They frequently involve multidisciplinary approaches which make for a stimulating research with practical outcomes although, as many admit, this method can also create a complex research experience.

Process.

Much of this collaborative research has been conducted in museums. The collection is held at the RAMM but other museums have connections with Dennett, notably Manchester (University Museum), Liverpool (World Museum), Oxford (Pitt Rivers), and Cambridge (CUMAA). The archives in each of these museums have been consulted to establish a record of Dennett's collecting activity and his connections with other agents who were collecting from the coast of the Congo at the end of the nineteenth century. Accession books, correspondence, photographs and other documentation have supplied valuable primary information and prompted new discoveries.

The Dutch ethnography museums at Leiden (*Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde*), Berg en Dal (*Afrika Museum*) and Amsterdam (*Tropenmuseum*) were also visited as they hold important comparable key collections. These visits yielded relevant information about further collectors who were contemporary with Dennett, and also informed the discussion about current ethnographic display methodology. Curators at these museums generously guided these visits.¹⁶²

Other trips have also been made in order to research exhibitions. Waehle's exhibition about colonial interaction between Scandinavia and Congo was seen at Gothenburg's World Cultures Museum in 2008. In Washington D. C. the different approaches to African displays were compared at the National Museum of African Art (NMAfA) and in the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH). Discussions with curators in many of these museums have allowed the curatorial approaches of these museums to be

¹⁶² I am grateful for the welcome at the Leiden museum in June 2008 and thanks to Annette Schmidt for sharing ideas with me about recent research on Dutch nineteenth-century collectors in the Congo. Daan van Dartel spent valuable time with me in the African Galleries at the *Tropenmuseum* in the same month and I would like to thank her for many interesting conversations in the course of this research. I would also like to thank Irene Hubner for her help and suggestions, and for guiding me round the *Afrika Museum* in Berg en Dal.

explored, and the participants in the Smithsonian's past exhibition, *Astonishment and Power* (1993-1994) also kindly agreed to be interviewed.¹⁶³ The Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archive at the NMAfA also produced valuable imagery of the historical context of the Congo.

Information has also been gathered outside museums. Dennett and Kingsley's correspondence with the Chairman of the of the Folklore Society's Publications Committee was studied in the E. Sidney Hartland archive in the National Library of Wales. Dennett's correspondence with his later publisher George Macmillan is found in the University of Reading's Special Collections and his unpublished manuscript about Kingsley's visit to Cabinda is housed at the Highgate Literary and Scientific Institution, London. These were also consulted.¹⁶⁴ Further research has been carried with Folklore Society in London and Dennett's lantern slide collection has been accessed at the Royal Anthropological Institute in London.¹⁶⁵ A large number of Dennett's manuscripts were recently archived by the Lilly Library at the University of Indiana, in March 2011.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ I am very grateful to Bryna Freyer for giving me time at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C; also to Wyatt MacGaffey for sharing his time and knowledge so generously; and to Renée Stout for a most valuable and enjoyable discussion about her art and about exhibitions of African material, in Washington in October 2008.

¹⁶⁴ National Library of Wales: *E. Sidney Hartland Archive*; University of Reading, Special Collections: *Macmillan Archive*; Highgate Literary and Scientific Institution: *Kingsley Collection*.

¹⁶⁵ The Folklore Society reference collection and card catalogue are kept at the Warburg Institute, University of London. I am grateful to Dr. Caroline Oates at the Folklore Society Library and Archive at the Warburg Institute, University of London, for her help with this research. The Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) recorded in its Minutes for the Council Meeting of 9 May 1922 that the Society would 'express grateful thanks to Mrs M. Bannerman for her offer to present the lantern slides, negatives of the slides, photographs and books belonging to her brother, the late Mr. R. E. Dennett, to the Institute and to accept it and to preserve the slides as one collection to be known as the R. E. Dennett Collection'. The slides have been found, but no other pictures have been uncovered unfortunately.

¹⁶⁶ The *Dennett MSS* are kept at the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA. See <http://www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/lilly/mss/index.php?p=dennett> . The documents were purchased from a London bookseller in 2005-2006 and were accessioned in 2008-2009. The inventory has only recently been completed, in March 2011. I have been in email communication with the archivist and librarian at the Lilly (from April to July 2011) and have established that most of the manuscripts relate to Dennett's later published works, written after 1900. There are no photographs and no writing about Dennett's artefact collections in the archive. I have acquired copies of selected documents, including the one piece of correspondence and a late unpublished paper, *The Soul in Sound*, which was mentioned in one of Dennett's last letters to his publisher George Macmillan, in 1921 (see Letter from Richard Dennett to

Copies of some of these have been studied, and digital copies of Mary Kingsley's letters from the National Library of South Africa have also been analysed.¹⁶⁷

The beginning of this introductory chapter explained that the research project has been driven by a museum-based imperative. It seeks to uncover the hidden histories of the museum objects and to examine the different interpretations they have received, through a study of their collector's history.¹⁶⁸ The next chapter uses Dennett's personal accounts to explore the nature of the culture-contact that took place when he was gathering the objects in his collection, both before and after Congo's colonisation by France, Portugal and the Free State. In the third chapter, the focus is narrowed, and it turns from the international powers and their impact in the Congo to concentrate on the indigenous authorities and their own operations of power, before and after colonisation. Dennett's understanding of the place held by artefacts in the institutions of BaKongo culture is explored in the fourth chapter. His interpretations led him to draw some contestable conclusions, but his intense and committed philosophical search resulted in observations which can shed light on the objects he gave to the RAMM.

The fifth chapter brings the RAMM itself into view as it examines the way that the

Dennett collection, and others like it, were appropriated and transported to museums in

George Macmillan, from Temple Bar House, London, 18 January, 1921. University of Reading, Special Collections, *Macmillan Archive*, ref. 87/63.) This manuscript is discussed further in Chapter Five.

The London bookseller has no information about the papers or their acquisition which was made in 2001 but the papers match those which were mentioned in Dennett's will as bequeathed to 'Miss Ivy Viola Green'. They were identified as being in 'two sets of drawers and in the writing desk' belonging to his step-mother, Beatrice Dennett. Dennett also gave Miss Green the rights to any of his publications. Further information on Ivy Viola Green has not been identified yet, but a marriage certificate suggests that she married Alexander Gilmour in 1924. Gilmour is referred to as a 'Civil Servant, Nigerian Government' and so he may have known Dennett in Nigeria. The Will announced that Dennett's books and pictures were left to his sister Mary D'Arcy Bannerman, and many of these were passed to the RAI (see previous footnote).

¹⁶⁷ National Library of South Africa: *Mary Kingsley Collection*, ref. MSB 278.

¹⁶⁸ Each of the following chapters therefore opens out an aspect of the collection's 'cultural biography' as well as that of Dennett. Kopytoff, Igor. 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process' in Appadurai, Arjun, ed. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, (1986), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

the west, and how they were then interpreted according to museum and anthropological frameworks. The sixth chapter considers the implications of these uncovered histories and multiple interpretations for the museum today, and includes an examination of the curatorial debate which attends such collections as Dennett's, in a post-colonial age. The chapter puts forward a proposal for a small exhibition to present the collaborative research in the World Cultures gallery at the RAMM which situates the research within the context of contemporary curatorial practice. The final chapter concludes the thesis by revisiting the findings of the earlier chapters and evaluating the methodology which has allowed multiple hidden histories and meanings to be uncovered, and given practical expression, in a museum display.

Chapter Two. Dennett and the Colonial Context.

This thesis seeks to contextualise the collection of BaKongo artefacts that were collected by Richard Edward Dennett in the region known as the Lower Congo between 1879 and 1899, and to consider the issues of representation that such a collection raises for the museum in which, as a result of complex intercultural interactions, it is now held. Little was known about the conditions surrounding this collection which is now kept at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter, but under the Collaborative Doctoral Research scheme this study has been able to uncover many previously hidden histories by undertaking a detailed analysis of the collector's published and private writings and photographs. These documents make up a unique body of work which describes not only the Congo context between 1879 and 1902, but also the European world to which the objects were brought in the same period. Richard Dennett contributed to European commercial projects in the Congo but he also engaged with the local African community and studied their culture. He then shared this ethnography, and his collections, of material culture, with museums and scholarly circles in Europe. This chapter will examine the first of these contexts, broadly termed "colonial", focussing on the processes by which European powers took control of the Congo basin. This will prepare the ground for an analysis of Dennett's interpretation of BaKongo institutions and their material culture which follows in the third and fourth chapters.

The record Dennett provides is particularly valuable because he arrived before the European colonies were established in the Congo. His collection therefore belongs to the period just prior to the intense appropriation of land and labour, and the ensuing

‘scramble’ for African Art.¹ Dennett worked for the British trading company Hatton and Cookson between 1879 and 1902, years which witnessed enormous upheaval in this part of Africa. After centuries in which interaction with Europeans had taken place only along the coast and at the mouth of the River, a colonising initiative was driven after 1879 by King Leopold II of Belgium who presented it initially as a scientific and humanitarian mission.² Agents of the International Association of the Congo arrived by sea, and went to build roads and research stations further inland. Following the Congo River these communication networks made it possible for an area the size of Western Europe to be explored for commercial exploitation within ten years. Dennett experienced this process, and his accounts provide first-hand documentation of the increasingly disruptive colonial presence, its impact on the existing African societies and, by extension, its influence on their material culture.

Dennett bridges the pre-colonial and the colonial eras; when he arrived, Europeans still limited their work to the coast. By the time he left, the inner Congo region was mapped and powerful concession companies had monopolised the land and its produce. Because he studied local languages and engaged with the African population, Dennett’s narrative records indigenous as well colonial agency in the many interactions that accompanied these great shifts. Relationships between these societies were complex and Dennett’s accounts reveal how the balance of power between the foreigner and the African did not always favour the expatriate. His descriptions, in books, letters and imagery, expose the multi-faceted, sometimes chaotic and often contingent nature of African and European

¹ This phrase is drawn from the title of the book edited by Enid Schildkrout and Curtis Keim which is concerned with artefacts from Congo acquired at the time of colonisation. See Schildkrout, Enid and Keim, Curtis, eds. *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

² See Morel, E. D. *The Black Man’s Burden*, London: The National Labour Press, 1920; also Stanley, Henry M. *The Congo and the Founding of Its Free State: A Story of Work and Exploration*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1885; and Johnston, 1908.

interactions in the Congo, and they counter concepts of monolithic colonialism with an insistence on the particular.

Early Trading on the Coast.

The Congo coast has been an important location for international trade for several centuries. Soon after first contact with Europeans in 1482, the Kongo King had established trading and cultural exchange with Europe. Prestige goods such as china and glass, metal and textiles were exchanged initially for redwoods and ivory but very soon the Portuguese wanted another commodity. Human labour was in demand in their new-found possessions in San Thomé and Brazil.³ A form of slavery had already been operating in the Kongo kingdom in which individuals were obliged to serve when they had committed crimes or fallen into debt. These slaves were sold on to the Europeans. However the new Portuguese plantations called for greater numbers than the Kongo King could provide from the immediate community. Inevitably the market was pushed inland where slaves were captured and marched to the coast to be sold to westerners and shipped to the New World.

The power of the Kongo kingdom diminished during the seventeenth century as a result of this European contact and it was superseded by other kingdoms to the north of the Congo River. Thus Loango, Kacongo, Ngoio and Sonio gained significance, with ships from Spain, Brazil and the Caribbean calling at their ports. [Fig. 3, Fig. 4.] Slaving ships continued to call at the coast well into the nineteenth century. The trade was sustained despite growing calls to bring it to an end. Britain and France agreed to patrol the West

³ See Martin, Phyllis. *The External Trade of the Loango Coast 1576-1870: The Effects of Changing Commercial Relations on the Vili Kingdom of Loango*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972; also Thornton, John *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

African Coast in 1831, to reduce the slave traffic, but it only ceased after 1862 when the United States of America finally agreed to allow their ships to be searched.⁴

It was from these existing slaving ports that the factories such as Hatton and Cookson's began the next phase of trading after 1850.⁵ Cabinda, in Ngoio, was at the centre of this trade, while Banana became an important locus for collecting goods.⁶ Dennett was to work at both places, as well as being active further north in Loango. The Dutch trading company *Afrikaansche Handelsvereeniging* (AHV, later the *Nieuwe Afrikaansche Handelsvereeniging*, NAHV) was also quick to establish factories at these sites, and the histories of the AHV and the Hatton and Cookson Companies were closely connected at this time. For both companies the initial opportunity to make a profit arose from an increasing European demand for ivory and palm oil. Although rubber was not yet known as the valuable commodity it would become after 1890 (when pneumatic tyres were first commercially produced) the land was harvested for palm kernels, valuable tropical woods and ivory, which was in great demand for false teeth, piano keys, billiard balls and exotic ornaments.

In the years before Henry Morton Stanley had made the treaties which allowed the African International Association (AIA) to travel inland, Europeans had been forcefully discouraged from going further into Congo by the Africans. Trade routes were carefully

⁴ Martin, 1972, p. 148.

⁵ The Hatton and Cookson Company is also known simply as Hatton Cookson. The firm of Hatton and Cookson was founded by Edward Hatton and his brother-in-law, Thomas Worthington Cookson, in 1840. Cookson died in 1867 and Hatton in 1880. The family continued the business. The names of the family and the firm can be confused because one of Cookson's sons was named Edward Hatton Cookson, after an uncle, Edward Hatton. (Edward Hatton Cookson was mayor of Liverpool from 1888-1889.) Another son, T. W. Cookson., bore the same initials as his father. Information drawn from Sharples, Joseph. *Living in the City: Urban Elites and their Residences. Merchants' Houses in Residential Liverpool*. Unpublished online paper, Liverpool University. <<http://library.panteion.gr:8080/dspace/bitstream/123456789/454/1/SHARPLES.pdf>,> accessed 13 January 2010.

⁶ Friedman, Kasja Ekholm. *Catastrophe and Creation: The Transformation of an African Culture*, Chur: Harwood, 1991, p. 16; see also Martin, 1972, p. 153.

monitored by the chiefs of each region and tariffs were imposed on any goods caravans that passed through. A system of levies existed along these routes and a payment was taken each time the goods passed hands.⁷ Chiefs were anxious to preserve these profits and resisted any European traders' attempts to by-pass the process by sourcing goods directly.

This autonomy was lost as soon as concession companies were established. When the Free State parcelled out land which had been deemed "vacant" by the European powers, the concessionaires saw no reason to pay rent on uncultivated land. On the contrary, they felt entitled to impose taxes on the African population, or to demand labour in lieu. These practices overturned the indigenous systems by which chiefs had received wealth which was then redistributed among the community.⁸ Enforced labour broke up families as men were taken away to labour as a means of paying their "dues" and women were held hostage if the men's work failed to meet required levels.

Dennett's accounts provide a personal commentary on this period of upheaval and transition in the Congo. He arrived in the Congo in the same year that Stanley was sent to the region to build roads and to agree treaties in the service of the AIA.⁹ Stanley had been given orders to supervise the construction of the roads which would connect the

⁷ Freidman, 1991, p. 52-53.

⁸ Friedman, 1991, p. 56.

⁹ Some confusion exists about the terminology of the organisations that opened up the Congo for Europeans. Early work by Stanley was done under the auspices of the *Comité d'Études du Haut Congo* which secured territory from Banana to Stanley Pool. The *Association Internationale Africaine* replaced the *Comité d'Études du Haut Congo* in 1882. The Congo Independent State was recognised a sovereign state in 1885 at the Berlin Conference (Johnston, Harry Hamilton. *George Grenfell and the Congo: A History and Description of the Congo Independent State and Adjoining Districts of Congoland*, London: Hutchinson, 1908, pp. 446-447). The AIA was sometimes called the AIC, as it was also known as the *Association Internationale du Congo*. Dennett referred to the AIA, translating this as the 'African International Association' (Dennett, 1887 (a), pp. 113-114). Johnston also used the term AIA. The Congo Independent State became popularly known as the Congo Free State and Johnston noted that '[t]he native name [for the State] is *Bula Matadi*'. This was the uncomplimentary nick-name which had originally been given to Stanley (see Johnston, 1908, p. 445, fn. 1).

coastal ports with the navigable river at Stanley Pool.¹⁰ Here the steamers, which had been carried piece-by-piece from the coast, in order to by-pass the rapids and the falls in the Lower Congo region, would patrol the river, convey personnel, and carry goods back to the settlement that later became known as Leopoldville.¹¹ From Leopoldville, merchandise could be carried by road, and later by rail, down to the coast for export.¹²

The AIA had been established on the understanding that it would be a humanitarian and scientific organisation funded largely by King Leopold II of Belgium. Much of the land appropriated by the AIA was claimed as the personal possession of King Leopold. The AIA proposed to bring education and employment to the Congo region, and to identify valuable natural resources while mapping the new territory. Popular support for the project was gained in Europe by arguing that the administrative bases further inland would also allow the Arab slave traders to be brought under control.

As the AIA took possession of numerous African chiefdoms through notoriously deceptive or ambiguous treaties, other nations began to compete for territory. Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza made a contract for France with the chief of the BaTeke in 1882, while Portugal acquired Cabinda through a rushed treaty which Dennett witnessed, agreed on the beach at Chimfuma in 1883.¹³ These rivalries compelled the European interested parties to come to an agreement. After much debate among the leaders of

¹⁰ As explained in the introduction, the colonial names in use at the time will be used here although other names have been introduced under subsequent governments. Because European writers used the generic term of “The Congo” more often than providing specific indigenous place names, it has been necessary follow suit. Many attitudes expressed in the primary sources which document the history of the region are no longer found acceptable, and I hope it is understood that they are used in this thesis as historical documents and my intention is not to endorse Eurocentric, colonial or racist viewpoints.

¹¹ Leopoldville was founded in 1881-1882 (Freidman, 1991, p. 79).

¹² The railway between Matadi and Stanley Pool was started in 1889 and finished 1898 (Freidman, 1991, p. 78).

¹³ ‘Makoko’ was the word meaning the ‘chief’ of the BaTake, and not the name of the particular man that de Brazza made his treaty with. <http://www.brazza.culture.fr/en/missions/le_royaume_makoko.htm> accessed June 2011.

European nations, meetings were held in Berlin between 1884 and 1885, and the creation of the Congo Free State was announced in 1885. France and Portugal would take control of the surrounding lands and coast, with a strip of coast below Cabinda and the River assigned to the Free State.

Between his arrival at the coast and his first period of leave, Dennett witnessed these enormous changes.¹⁴ He collected his artefacts at a time of rapid expansion. This chapter will trace some of these developments as described in Dennett's records and correspondence. It will also draw also on the commentary of his personal acquaintances and his contemporaries to assess the circumstances in which the collection was made.

Dennett in the Congo.

Initially Dennett was stationed at Kinsembo 'a place then in the neutral zone south of the Congo', which is now known as Angola.¹⁵ He described his initial feeling of isolation on arrival: 'Kinsembo appeared a wretched and desolate place enough, a sandy desert, in fact. When we had discharged and loaded the steamer, she again returned to Cabenda leaving me as an assistant at Kinsembo'.¹⁶ He had arrived early in 1880. Shortly after Easter of that year he was moved to Ambrizette to assist a trader who was sick for a few weeks and then he returned to Kinsembo.¹⁷ [Fig. 6.]

¹⁴ Traders were due a period of leave after seven years in their post. A photograph of the collection [Fig. 31] was made in Britain and appeared in print in 1887, and so Dennett's collection was therefore probably made before the end of 1886. See Dennett, Richard Edward. *The Folklore of the Fjort*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887(a), facing p. 48.

¹⁵ Letter from Richard Dennett to E. D. Morel, from the Royal Societies Club, St James Street, London, 23 December 1914, *E. D. Morel Archive*, London School of Economics, ref. F8/38.

¹⁶ Dennett, 1887(a), p.15. The spellings have been left as Dennett wrote them in each quote; a variety of spellings and differences in orthography appear in his writing throughout his oeuvre. For example, Cabinda may also be written Kabinda, Kabenda and Cabenda; Fjort may be written Fiort; and Loango may be written Luango.

¹⁷ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 20.

Dennett described the typical “factory” in his account of his first years in Africa in

Seven Years Among the Fjort :

The south-west coast of Africa is thinly dotted here and there with traders’ stations, called factories. A factory generally consists of a block of buildings constructed either of rushes neatly sewn together, with roofs of thatch, composed of the dried leaves of the bamboo, or of bamboos, and planks, with roofs of felt or corrugated, galvanized iron. The dwelling-house contains [a] dining-room, two or three sleeping apartments and the *feteich* or shop. The big store for stowing rum and merchandise received from home and the produce collected for shipment home, the oil-shed and palm kernel measuring-room, the kitchen, washhouse, bath-rooms, powder-house, and dispensary, complete the factory.¹⁸ [Fig 7.]

The traders remained at the factory most of the time, relying on their head men and linguists to deal with the African traders who brought their goods for exchange. The white population might include an agent, a sub-agent, a trader and an assistant trader.¹⁹ Work was carried out between six in the morning and six at night, and for recreation, as Dennett explained, ‘there are three billiard-boards, some sixty miles apart, on the south-west coast between Gaboon and Boma, and these are the only amusement’. He added philosophically, ‘the trader passes his time as best he can.’²⁰

Despite the lack of what Dennett called ‘society’ in the early days, these factories were regularly replenished with European goods. Indeed the food supplies could be lavish. Stanley was impressed by the delicacies he was given when he arrived at the Hatton and Cookson station at Boma in 1877 after his lengthy exploration of the Congo River. Crossing the continent Stanley had met no other Europeans and had struggled latterly to

¹⁸ Dennett, 1887(a), pp. 133-134.

¹⁹ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 136.

²⁰ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 138.

find food at all. But here, in the capable hands of the agents of Hatton and Cookson, he was treated to champagne and the ‘dainties of London and Paris’.²¹

He also praised the conditions at the *AHV* factory at Banana, two years later:

The whites may be best seen at dinner, ranged on the sides of two long tables. A glance at their faces serves almost to reconcile one to Africa. It may be said to be quite assuring when we are asked to partake of the hospitality ... When I was first ushered into the dining-room and saw the array of plates, the *tout ensemble* was to my view extremely like a Port Said *table d’hôte*.²²

Stanley also gave a vivid picture of the goods that might be found in the stores of the factories at Banana:

In them may be seen enough to make a Manchester cotton manufacturer weep with pleasure, for there may be, piled up in bales, a million yards of cotton, from the finest to the flimsiest quality; huge dry goods cases, where the British Government seems to have disposed of old the red coats of their army years ago.

He continued with a description of the metal goods that would cause ‘Birmingham and Sheffield’ to rejoice which included ‘flintlock muskets and percussion guns’ among the cutlery, kettles and pans.²³ Harry H. Johnston especially appreciated the Portuguese wines that were enjoyed at the factories.²⁴

By the middle of the 1880’s the factories along the coast were regularly visited by European ships. R. Cobden Phillips explained that ‘no less than five lines of steamers’

²¹ Stanley, Henry M. *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*, 2 Vols. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1878, Vol. 2, p. 463.

²² Stanley, 1885, pp. 72-75, cited in Freidman, 1991, p. 23.

²³ Stanley, 1885, pp. 72-75, in Freidman, 1991, p. 23.

²⁴ Johnston, Harry Hamilton. *The River Congo from Its Mouth to Bolobo*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1884, p. 56.

called at these ports ‘outwards and homewards ... at intervals of a month or less’.²⁵

Many Africans were employed at a factory and it was seen as an opportunity for social advancement for the children of important local families to be engaged as servants to a European agent.²⁶ As well as employing the local people to make barrels, prepare palm oil and carry goods, the factories also depended on ‘*Kroo*’ sailors and labourers who came from Sierra Leone and Liberia. They were renowned for their strength and skills with steamships and with handling cargo.²⁷ Dennett explained that these ‘*Kroo Boys*’ would be taken on for a year’s employment at a time and would then return home from the Loango coast.²⁸ Other Africans whose work was valued by the international organisations, were the ‘Zanzibaris’ from East Africa and the ‘Kabindas’ from the Congo coast.²⁹

The most powerful position was held however by the linguist who acted as the broker between the European factory agent and the indigenous trader.³⁰ The linguist negotiated the prices between the factory and the African trader who supplied the goods. He took a commission in the process. Historically the linguist had been the intermediary between the chiefs or kings and the Europeans because he spoke Portuguese, the language of trade.³¹ Linguists stood to benefit from this position and could become very wealthy.³² Indeed by the 1780’s in Loango these brokers had become ‘the key figures in BaVili society’.³³ Their wealth ultimately undermined the

²⁵ Phillips, R. Cobden. ‘The Social System of the Lower Congo.’ *The Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, Vol. 3, (1887), p. 137.

²⁶ Friedman, 1991, pp. 55-56.

²⁷ Dennett, 1887(a), pp. 7-8.

²⁸ Dennett, 1887(a), pp. 7-8.

²⁹ Friedman, 1991, pp. 26-28.

³⁰ Wyatt MacGaffey gives ‘*madingizi*’ as the Kongo term for ‘linguist’ and ‘*dingizi*’ for ‘middleman’ in MacGaffey, Wyatt. *Kongo Political Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, p.18, and p. 21.

³¹ MacGaffey, 2000, p. 18.

³² Martin, 1972, p. 153.

³³ Martin, 1972, pp. 161-162.

power of indigenous chiefs or kings, who had previously accumulated the greatest riches in the community through tributes or taxes.³⁴

Dennett was initially cynical about the linguisters but in later years he came to value this intermediary as someone who could explain the traditions, language and laws of the BaKongo to him.³⁵ It is likely that these middle-men knew of Dennett's developing interest in the local beliefs and way of life, and it is possible that the items in the Dennett Collection were acquired through their co-operation.³⁶

The BaKongo community had considerable influence in their relationships with Europeans when Dennett first arrived in the Congo. By restricting the movement of the white trader to the coast, they could control the prices of the goods they supplied. Dennett described an incident that arose when someone blocked the river in this way in *Seven Years Among the Fjort*.³⁷ Complex negotiations followed and Dennett described how eventually the offender was fined for their perceived opportunism.³⁸ Individuals could also charge tariffs on certain stretches of river where trading canoes passed up and down. The factory managers were also charged an annual rent on top of an initial levy which was paid when the factories were first built, and since all significant communication went through a linguister, the trader acknowledged that the situation on the coast was one in which power was shared.³⁹

³⁴ Martin, 1972, p. 163.

³⁵ Dennett, 1887(a), pp. 134-135.

³⁶ Two of Dennett's linguisters, Francisco and Antonio, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. Dennett was invited to photograph the funeral following the death of his linguister Antonio.

³⁷ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 80 ff.

³⁸ The negotiations are described further in Chapter Two.

³⁹ Phillips, 1887, p. 157.

When the AIA began to operate, these conditions were challenged. Although Stanley made a payment to the local chiefs who agreed that he could build International Stations on their land, it was not understood by the community that the Association had also assumed sovereign rights over the land in the process.⁴⁰ Instead of charging the Europeans for the rent, Africans now found the State was charging them.

Phillips' explained how destabilising this process was for the local communities:

The general policy of the powers who have divided up this part of Africa is to say as little about it as possible to the natives, letting them believe in their own independence, but making prisoners or burning down villages from time to time in a most unintelligible and arbitrary manner.⁴¹

Dennett described in *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, how the traders, both 'black and white' had co-operated when he was first in the Congo.⁴² After negotiation at the factory a local trader would take a canoe filled with imported goods up the river to an area where he would be made welcome, and could safely enter into exchange. This trip could take up to three months.⁴³ His cargo of rum, china, textiles, salt or metal goods might be traded for rubber, camwood, copal, ivory, copper, palm oil kernels, or palm oil. Dennett embellished this narrative with illustrations which were 'worked up' from his own sketches.⁴⁴ A set of drawings shows how the kernels of the palm, *Elias Guineensis*, were purchased and then processed, when they were brought back to the factory.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ After 1892 the whole region was claimed either by the *Domaine de la Couronne* (the Belgian Crown) or by the State (the *Domaine Privé*) with the remainder rented to the unregulated concession companies. Johnston, 1908, pp. 452-453.

⁴¹ Phillips, 1887, p. 165.

⁴² 'Traders Black and White' was the title of the Sixth Chapter in Dennett's book. See Dennett, 1887(a) pp. 133-144.

⁴³ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 142.

⁴⁴ Dennett, 1887(a), p. vi.

⁴⁵ The same material is covered in a paper read to the Manchester Geographical Society in 1886. See Dennett, Richard Edward. 'The Congo: From a Trader's Point of View.' *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, Vol. 2, nos. 7-12, (1886), pp. 283-306. Because of the narrative sequence, it seems

The African dealer acquired large number of cylindrical baskets or ‘*matets*’ of kernels.⁴⁶ Dennett’s illustration shows the place in the factory where these were measured. A European is shown supervising this procedure. [Fig. 8.] He is portrayed tilting his chair back in a casual manner while the African tradesman leans forward to ensure his goods are accurately assessed. Through the door of the warehouse the rest of the “factory” may be seen, with the shore of the river or sea visible on the left. The factory store was built on stilts and these are probably indicated in the lines below a distant building in the drawing. In the middle-distance a porter is shown carrying a further *matet* while a child runs in front. The Portuguese overseer has a large book at his side, a ledger in which the volume of goods would be recorded.

The oil would be boiled off the kernels in large riveted metal cauldrons. [Fig. 9.] A thatched canopy provided shelter from the direct sunlight while the open sides of the building would allow some of the heat from the fires to escape. After boiling, the oil could be separated from the sediment and measured again. As an alternative to shipping the kernels to the factory, the villagers could boil the pulp themselves then sell the oil. A contemporary photograph, used as a postcard, shows this process being carried out in a BaVili village. [Fig. 10.] The image shows pressure being applied to the pulp which surrounded palm kernels before it could be boiled and sold.

The sketch of the factory’s ‘feteich’ or store in *Seven Years Among the Fjort* is particularly interesting.⁴⁷ The drawing shows how the imported goods were screened off as if in a sanctuary adding adding weight to the idea of the white man’s store being seen

likely that this 1886 talk was illustrated with lantern slides of the images that appear in *Seven Years Among the Fjort*.

⁴⁶ Dennett, 1887(a), pp. 142-143.

⁴⁷ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 134.

as his 'feteich'.⁴⁸ [Fig. 11.] The illustration shows the store, raised on stilts for security, and with rows of goods from Europe lining its shelves. The African trader is seen at the window of the store, permitted only to appear at the window for his payment. An armed associate is shown alongside this trader to provide protection in this transaction. This rifle-bearer was also shown in illustrations of the trader on his journey into the bush, to conduct business with villagers inland.⁴⁹

Dennett and Travellers.

It was while Dennett was engaged in this professional *milieu* that he encountered so many of the Europeans who would shape the new administration in the Congo. In 1882, Dennett was stationed north of the river mouth, in Cabinda, where he and Sir Harry Johnston met.⁵⁰ Johnston was a British explorer, an artist, and later a colonial administrator. He was also a linguist. He recorded how impressed he had been to find that the new assistant at Cabinda was already mastering the languages of the Kongo people, within a couple of years of his arriving in Africa.

I was travelling to Portuguese Angola with the Earl of Mayo to explore the lands on the verge of South-West Africa and was already greatly interested in the Bantu Languages. The principal agent of Messrs Hatton and Cookson introduced me to his assistant, Mr. R. E. Dennett, as likewise engaged in that particular study, and as having already put together some remarkable vocabularies on the Loango dialects...⁵¹

⁴⁸ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 134. Friedman also comments on this idea: 'The storehouse where the European goods were kept was sometimes called *nkisi* ... by the Africans, to the derisive joy of the Whites.' Friedman, 1991, p. 55.

⁴⁹ The armed guard was also shown on the illustrations of the journey to the bush, but not in the scenes in the factory where the oil kernels were measured and processed.

⁵⁰ Johnston gives the location as Cabinda, which could refer to the town or to the region in which Dennett worked. The region was also called KaKongo or KaCongo.

⁵¹ 'A. C.' and Johnston, Harry Hamilton. 'Obituary Notice.' *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 20, no. 80, (1921), p. 308.

Not all travellers were as welcome as Johnston appears to have been. Dennett soon became troubled by representatives of the new Africa International Association. At first he was impressed by the apparently philanthropic mission of the AIA.

Shortly after my return to Chiloango, [probably in 1883] Captain Bailey, Hurst, Dekuyper, Vetch, Hodister and Harou came to stay with me. They had been sent by Stanley on behalf of the African International Association. They told me that this association had been formed by the King of the Belgians and Stanley, to make roads and help open out the interior for the benefit of the natives and the traders. They were all gentlemen and I believe that they were convinced of the greatness of their mission, and believed what the King or Stanley had told them, i.e. that the work was purely philanthropic, and that it was not the intention of the King to turn the African International Association into a Belgian Colony.⁵²

To support this project when the local population voiced doubts, Dennett even acted as a personal guarantor for the good intentions of the Association. He was already well known to the local population by this time and admitted that he ‘had gained some influence with the natives from Cabinda to Massabe’ so he agreed to settle disputes and ‘to stand as a surety for the good behaviour of the officers of the AIA’⁵³ Dennett therefore felt deeply betrayed, both personally and as a representative of British interests when

...we discovered that the African International Association was not a philanthropic concern after all, but a semi-political trading company working entirely for its own ends. Henceforth the traders became the bitter enemies of the African International Association.⁵⁴

Dennett described how Dutch and British traders had been baffled and disturbed by the AIA’s far from altruistic motives. Their representatives began to trick and cajole local leaders into signing treaties in which rights were surrendered, and almost immediately they also imposed taxes on the traders on the coast.

⁵² Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 1.

⁵³ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 3.

For Dennett, travellers had played a major part in this disruption of business. Sometime in 1882 he had met one of the most significant of these near Landana. This was Savorgnan de Brazza, Italian-born, but representing French interests in Africa.⁵⁵

A great traveller this one, a heavy explorer; you should have seen him—compasses, pedometers, instruments of all kinds slung about his body, his dusty hat, his careworn scraggy appearance, as, with a small piece of flannel girt about his loins, his tattered pants hung across his arm, he manfully waded through the swamp just behind our house ... And when we offered him a bath and clean clothes he refused them as he wished to proceed a mile or two further in order to present himself to our own dear doctor, a friend of his. Wasn't it dirty of him? However we thank him; we thank him ... By means of these travellers our country has been brought unduly forward and nearly ruined.⁵⁶

Dennett's proprietorial tone about 'our country' stands out here; his expression betrays the arrogant stance that was commonly held by representatives of British interests in overseas, in this paternalistic and imperial age.

His anxiety about the traveller's lack of hygiene was no doubt connected with the importance of maintaining the "civilised standards" of the home country, which distinguished the European from the "barbarian" and which entitles him to govern "the native".⁵⁷ Dennett also noted in *Seven Years Among the Fjort*:

We could not persuade de Brazza to have a bath, or change his clothes, so, having donned a very ragged pair of explorer's pants and taken a cup of coffee, he proceeded to present himself in Landana.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Dennett met de Brazza at Chiloango 'a few months' prior to reading about the 'Makoko treaty' which was made in 1882. Dennett, 1887(a), pp. 112-113.

⁵⁶ Dennett, 1886, p. 298.

⁵⁷ See Fabian, Johannes. *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, pp. 59-60 for more about the perceived connection between cleanliness and authority, in Africa at this time.

⁵⁸ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 112.

Perhaps because of his eccentricities the traders did not take de Brazza's purposes seriously. He admitted that '...[w]e grinned when, a few months later, we read of his Makoko treaty, and laughed outright when we heard of a serious nation having ratified it.'⁵⁹ Dennett explained that '[t]he French ... seemed to consider that the coast from Gaboon to Landana belonged to them, merely, I suppose, because de Brazza had travelled from Gaboon to Brazzaville and hence to Landana'.⁶⁰

In 1883 Dennett met another "troublesome traveller", Henry Morton Stanley, on his initial visit to Stanley's new stations on the River Congo.⁶¹ From his base at Chiloango, on the coast, Dennett had travelled to Matadi by the steamer *Itumba*. He recorded that this was the first time steamer had been through the rapid waters at Hell's Mouth and he noted that 'and we had a very exciting time.'⁶² Stinking mangrove swamps and sandy banks with grassy islands surrounded the boat from the point of departure at the mouth of the river as far as Porta da Lenha.⁶³ [Fig. 3.] Here the palm tree replaced the mangrove and the firmer ground had allowed some huts to be built on the shore. Only at Boma were the river banks visible on both sides, with rocky islands between.⁶⁴

At Boma Dennett saw those factories where Stanley had recovered after the ignominious end of his journey across what he had called the 'dark continent', in 1877.⁶⁵ Stanley had spent almost a thousand days travelling from the east coast of

⁵⁹ Dennett, 1887(a), pp. 112-113.

⁶⁰ Dennett, 1886, pp. 298-299.

⁶¹ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 1.

⁶² Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 1.

⁶³ The course of the journey is described in Dennett's letters to the Manchester Geographical Society in 1887. See Dennett, Richard Edward. 'Correspondence.' *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society* Vol. 3, nos. 1-6, (1887(b)), pp. 112-123.

⁶⁴ Dennett, 1887(b), pp. 114-116.

⁶⁵ Stanley, 1878.

Africa to find and trace the course of the Congo River.⁶⁶ He had driven his party near to starvation before contact was finally made with some European traders on the lower reaches of the river. Portuguese assistants were sent to rescue the party and then Stanley was carried by hammock to Boma where Hatton and Cookson had their factory.

Stanley's disorientation was evident as he described strange, unfamiliar architecture coming into view after two and a half years of travelling. He interpreted the steamer which came to take him on board, as the approach of civilisation itself.

August 9 1877...It was a gradual slope through a valley, which soon opened into a low alluvial plain, seamed here and there with narrow gullies, and then over the heads of the tall grass as I lay in the hammock, I caught a glimpse of the tall square box of a frame-house, with a steep roof, erected on rising ground... It approached nearer and larger to the view, and presently the storied box rose on piles with a strangeness that was almost weird. It was the residence of those in charge of the English factory. But just below the landing a steamer was ascending- the *Kabinda*, John Petherbridge, master. How civilisation was advancing on me!⁶⁷

Under the care of Hatton and Cookson, Stanley recovered. He was taken to Boma and then looked after at Cabinda for eight days, before he returned with his remaining porters to Zanzibar, and thence to Europe.⁶⁸ [Fig.12, Fig 13.] Within two years Stanley had returned to the Congo in the service of the King of Belgium. He was commissioned with the task of to establishing a trade route to use the navigable sections of the River in the interests of the future Congo State.

At the time he was rescued, Stanley had expressed his hostility towards the river in melodramatic terms:

⁶⁶ Stanley explained his journey had taken '999' days. Stanley, 1878, p. 461. At this point Stanley was referring to the Congo River as the 'Livingstone River', after the missionary he had sought out on his first trip to Africa.

⁶⁷ Stanley, 1878, p. 464.

⁶⁸ Stanley, 1878, p. 472.

Looking from the house, my eyes rested on the river. Ah! The hateful, murderous river, now so broad and proud and majestically calm, as though it had not bereft me of a friend, and of many faithful souls, and as though we had never heard it rage and whiten with fury, and mock the thunder. What a hypocritical river!⁶⁹

On his return he turned the river bank into his own outpost of “civilisation” at the station at Vivi, which was where Dennett met him in 1883.⁷⁰

When Dennett visited Vivi he recorded that it ‘was in full swing’ and wrote wryly,

...we were overwhelmed with chiefs of all sorts, among whom were the chief of stores, the chief of the beach, and the chief of mules. We tramped up the hill to interview the chief of the station and had the pleasure of catching a glimpse of Stanley’s great road, about which so much was written.⁷¹

This was the road that Stanley had commenced in 1879, financed by Leopold II and created partially with dynamite, which was explained to be the reason behind his nickname, *Bula Matadi*, or ‘Breaker of Rocks’.⁷² Later explanations have argued that the term was actually given to any individual who achieved his purposes by ruthless aggression.⁷³

Dennett was unimpressed with the results of the AIA’s methods of road building:

...we looked about us for a path we knew once existed, but our search was in vain. It turned out that some of the clever engineers of the African International Association had been throwing dynamite about with the intention of improving the native road.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Stanley, 1878, p. 464.

⁷⁰ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 1

⁷¹ Dennett, 1887(b), p. 116.

⁷² Stanley, 1885, Vol. 1, pp. 147- 148.

⁷³ MacGaffey, Wyatt. *Religion and Society in Central Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 35.

⁷⁴ Dennett, 1887(b), p. 116.

Harry Johnston described the red clayey road to Stanley's station on its cliff top location as an arduous ascent after he visited in 1882.⁷⁵ However his impression of this station was more favourable than Dennett's. As an explorer and future colonial administrator, Johnston was able to be more appreciative, as his livelihood was not threatened by the AIA in the way that Dennett's was. Johnston enjoyed the 'beautiful view' where 'many comfortable chairs' were set out in which he could 'rest...half dreamily, with a nice book from the well-furnished library'.⁷⁶ He would return to Vivi whenever he needed to rest, using the mornings to 'walk or botanise' and the afternoons to sleep.⁷⁷ Meals would be accompanied by 'Lisbon wine and Bordeaux' and after dinner,

...the wine and cigars were placed on the table and we would grow so interested in discussions as to the relative methods of the governments, the journals and the theatres of our respective lands, that in our conversation we were completely transported back to Europe.⁷⁸

In this way the foreigners kept alive the image of the world which they had left behind.

1883-1885. Political Problems.

During this time, Dennett became embroiled in problems concerning the conflicting claims on coastal territory that were being raised by the French, the Portuguese and the local Africans. The French, he said, went 'with cloth and presents in one hand and arms in the other' to win over the village leaders. By such treaties they had taken possession of Loango and Pointe Noire.⁷⁹ The traders had hoped that all parties with business interests would 'amalgamate, and (getting the natives to hand over their territory and rights to them) protest against any occupation or interference on the part of any foreign

⁷⁵ Johnston, 1884.

⁷⁶ Johnston, 1884, p. 52.

⁷⁷ Johnston, 1884, p. 55.

⁷⁸ Johnston, 1884, pp. 55-57.

⁷⁹ Dennett, 1886, p. 299. (Formerly Pontada Negra.)

power.’⁸⁰ But before this could be done, the Portuguese Treaty of Chimfuma was rushed through in 1883, allowing the Portuguese to take possession of Landana as a protectorate. Dennett considered this a great ‘piece of humbug’.⁸¹

This was the ‘Chimfuma’ Treaty by which the natives of Kakongo and Massabe were supposed to place themselves under the *protection* of the Portuguese. Now these countries are not protected, they are annexed. Is such bullying, trickery and robbery worthy of enlightened Governments?⁸²

Dennett attended this meeting but refused to sign the treaty.⁸³ He was appalled at the undignified, ill-considered, and illicit rush to claim possession of land which was far from vacant. Instead of allowing traders the freedom to build up their long-held partnerships with the coastal BaKongo, these interfering international powers had, in his view, taken an unfair advantage by using force and fraud. Dennett himself ‘refused to acknowledge their authority ... until after the decision of the Berlin conference became known.’⁸⁴ At this infamous conference, hosted by Chancellor Bismarck of Germany, the claims for land around the mouth of the Congo were resolved to Leopold’s advantage.⁸⁵ These were the very lands in which Dutch, British and Portuguese trading companies had their factories. The Belgian king’s sovereignty over what would become *L’État Indépendent du Congo* was now recognised. Dennett described how, in the interim,

...all was confusion, until those busy-bodies at Berlin, by what right nobody knows, divided our country, giving France so much because she was strong enough to take it if they refused her, and taking so much from Portugal because she was weak; besides creating a childish and puerile state to undertake the government of a country that it has neither the experience or the money to carry on.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Dennett, 1887(a) p. 122.

⁸¹ Dennett, 1887(a) p. 124.

⁸² Dennett, 1886, p. 299.

⁸³ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 3.

⁸⁴ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 125.

⁸⁵ Hochschild, Adam. *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. (1998) London: Pan, 2006, pp. 84- 87.

⁸⁶ Dennett, 1887(a) p. 126.

Conflict in Banana.

After 1885, Dennett's working life was disrupted by the inevitable increase in colonial bureaucracy and officialdom. He took the opportunity of communicating his frustrations about the political situation in the Congo to the Manchester Geographical Society in a paper read at the Manchester Athenaeum in October 1886. This explained the situation in Africa 'from a trader's point of view'.⁸⁷ [Fig.14.]

In his paper, Dennett expressed his bitterness about the Association in sarcastic and even vitriolic terms.⁸⁸ He possibly intended to provoke the audience of Manchester merchants to act to protect their trade interests in the Congo from the AIA. He railed about the increasing interference from travellers and treaty-makers such as Stanley and de Brazza. In a passage of invective from Dennett's paper, one particular traveller was complained about. Dennett did not identify the person in question, but the activities he described connect the passage to Stanley:

One, for instance, crossed Africa at terrible cost of life and money; had to slaughter some of us, went home and wrote a book, came back to us as a FRIEND with the full determination and purpose of relieving us from all further bother in ruling our own country, in short- of taking our country from us in a quiet and polite fashion; embroiled us in endless squabbles with foreign powers with whom hitherto we had always been at peace, and, finally called a meeting of great *politicians* to decide the exact way in which our country was to be divided and distributed ... He thus robbed us of our country, and the different foreign Powers are now actually settled in respective capitals in our country, endeavouring to administer laws we do not understand, and upsetting our own laws, customs and habits. Yes, we owe this traveller a deep debt of gratitude, for of course, he did all for the best.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Dennett, 1886, p. 283.

⁸⁸ For example, see Dennett, 1886, pp. 301-302.

⁸⁹ Dennett, 1886, p. 297.

To Dennett such meddlers had disrupted the trading arrangements that had been carefully established over the decades with local Africans. In his opinion this was the ‘perfect system of *free trade*’ which ‘was being established between the S.W. coast of Africa and the *world*’ [Dennett’s italics].⁹⁰ To emphasise the problems the new governments had presented, Dennett explained his working method to the Manchester Geographical audience:

I could easily talk to you by the hour of the products of the country, its natural riches- nay I could show you samples of most of the mineral products of the country, but I am a trader, and have to look at these matters from a practical and business-like point of view. How can I turn these great riches, so much talked about, into some advantage to the country in which I reside, and to the world at large? Yes, here comes the difficulty. As a trader I have to study the country, and the customs, habits, and modes of thought of its people. I have to study the important question of *labour*, and to calculate the expenses any one of these products would demand in its transit from its birthplace to its market – expenses that may vary in their extent according to circumstances at times quite unforeseen. Imagine the change, for instance, the fact of our having had the three Governments of three different Powers let loose upon us ... who hitherto have only had the indigenous to deal with.⁹¹

His view was that before the ‘two money-grabbing and one infant Government’ had disrupted things in the Congo, where previously ‘trader and Fjort’ had ‘worked hand in hand helping each other to help themselves’.⁹²

Dennett was convinced that free trade carried a high moral worth. He believed it was an improving impulse, not exploitative, but mutually beneficial. Free trade, according to Dennett, had elevated conditions for the African. He expressed this idea in paternalistic and evangelistic terms:

Slavery almost abolished, legitimate trade and its marvelous [*sic*]and intricate mechanism swelling each individual with engrossing thoughts and still higher

⁹⁰ Dennett, 1886, p. 296.

⁹¹ Dennett, 1886, p. 283-284.

⁹² Dennett, 1886, p. 305, p. 296.

hopes, busying the tiny limbs of the otherwise helpless and unemployed child as well as the heretofore besotten and priest-ridden mind of the now intelligent *Nkissist*.⁹³

For Dennett, these mutual benefits for trader and local were now being eliminated. The advantages that he believed ‘legitimate trade’ conferred were compromised by the dishonest methods used by the AIA as it entered into competition over profits. He was not alone in his protests. His friend and colleague, Donald Fraser, had written to the Acting British Consul at Loanda about the interference the traders were experiencing at Banana.⁹⁴

The traders’ had held previously rights to ship goods which had been produced south of the Congo, from the north bank at Banana without paying duties to the Independent State. These were now, he complained, ‘entirely disregarded, and traders are forced to pay customs’.⁹⁵ Dennett expressed his disgust unambiguously:

The Congo Free State - that association that was supposed to be exercising such great influence on the banks of the Congo, erecting shelter and scientific stations ... that great and powerful philanthropic association that assured the Portuguese that their flag floated to the exclusion of all other over the stations created by Stanley ... this State, founded as you may say principally through the actions of the Manchester merchants in that they protested against the Anglo-Portuguese treaty, in the hope that thus they might secure free trade in the Congo! This State...is objecting to the free transit of goods in the Congo.⁹⁶

Dennett’s anger at the way the new State had smuggled in taxation under the banner of humanitarianism is clear and it was probably exacerbated by his certainty that the State only survived because of the traders’ co-operation:

⁹³ Dennett, 1886, p. 296. ‘*Nkissist*’ was the name Dennett had created for the followers of the indigenous belief system that Dennett had called *Nkisism* as an alternative to the more commonly used “Fetishism”.

⁹⁴ Dennett, 1886, p. 302. The letter is printed in full in the article printed in the *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*. It was dated 11 August 1886. Fraser had appealed to the Acting Consul in Loanda, R. J. Newton, H. M. B., to intervene on behalf of British traders whose profits were being destroyed by the heavy and illegal tariffs that the new Free State was exacting.

⁹⁵ Dennett, 1886, p. 302.

⁹⁶ Dennett, 1886, pp. 303-304.

Is this breach of the Berlin Congo Treaty to be allowed to pass unnoticed by us traders, who, if we wished to combine and agitate the country against this infant State, could, at one blow, utterly annihilate it and sweep it off the face of the earth?⁹⁷

Such incendiary phrases no doubt led to the censure that Dennett received from the friends and supporters of the AIA.⁹⁸ The content of his paper was not well received by all the members of the Manchester Geographical Society either, as many had an interest in the AIA.⁹⁹

After his period of leave in 1886, Dennett replaced Donald Fraser at Banana.¹⁰⁰ From Banana he began to write letters to draw attention to the ‘cruelties in connection with a pernicious recruiting system and also ... barbarities committed on helpless natives by certain low class officials.’¹⁰¹ The disciplinary practices that would become notorious under the Belgian Concessionaire system had begun.

Dennett sent letters to alert his audiences in England to these cruelties and to the State’s breach of trust with the traders. He wrote to Eli Sowerbutts, the secretary of the Manchester Geographical Society and also to W. H. Le Fevre, the president of the Balloon Society of Great Britain.¹⁰² Copies of his letters were sent to the Foreign Office and Dennett believed some might have been sent to King Leopold himself.¹⁰³ It is probably because of the controversy generated by these letters that Dennett’s obituary read: ‘He figured in more than one diplomatic “incident”...and the Foreign Office knew

⁹⁷ Dennett, 1886, pp. 303-304.

⁹⁸ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 3.

⁹⁹ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 4.

¹⁰¹ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 4.

¹⁰² This apparently generated correspondence in *The Times* as well as in the Manchester papers. Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 4.

¹⁰³ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 4

his name well.’¹⁰⁴ Dennett reported that when ‘influential friends of His Majesty’ in Manchester ‘threatened to resign their membership of the Geographical Society, if any more of my letters were published’, he eventually felt compelled to resign from the Geographical Society himself.¹⁰⁵

The Emin Pasha Relief Expedition.

More complaints of cruelties in the Congo were voiced following the expedition which was sent to rescue the Governor of Equatoria, Oscar Schnitzer, who was known as Emin Pasha. After General Gordon had been defeated by followers of the Mahdi at Khartoum in 1885, persistent Mahdist attacks forced Emin Pasha to retreat from southern Sudan to Wadelai on the banks of Lake Albert. British authorities decided that he must be rescued from this refuge, and at one point it was suggested that Dennett could lead the mission. In *The Times*, in January 1887, Dennett’s correspondent Le Fevre had written that he was confident that,

...with the assistance of Mr. R.E. Dennett, the well-known author of *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, who was now on the West Coast, and ready to give whatever assistance was required of him, the expedition was bound to be successful.¹⁰⁶

In support of this proposal Mr R.S. Gowdie had also recommended Dennett saying that he:

...had known Mr. Dennett some considerable time, and he believed that there was no man on the West Coast of Africa who would be more competent, should he be placed in command of the expedition ... Mr Dennett was a young man endowed with a robust constitution and was thoroughly acclimatized.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ ‘A. C.’ and Johnston, 1921, p. 307.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 5. After this, Dennett complained to the Acting British Consul for the Congo who was then based in Calabar. Little response was forthcoming.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Emin Pasha’ *The Times*, 27 January, 1887. It is possible that Dennett had discussed this mission with R. S. Gowdie while in England on his leave, the previous year. The article in *The Times* explains that Dennett had sent letters to the society, ‘on his voyage to the Congo’.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Emin Pasha’ 1887.

However in the event, Stanley was elected to lead the mission. This allowed Leopold to gather new information about his territories in the Ituri Forest and beyond. Stanley's expedition brought many hardships on the porters and it has also been suggested that this strategy led to the devastating spread of *trypanosomiasis* (sleeping sickness) in this previously unaffected area.

Despite Stanley being selected as the leader, Dennett found he was nevertheless called upon to provide boats to support the mission. The Dutch company at Banana had been intended to service the start of the expedition, but the *NAHV* boats were unavailable when Stanley arrived unexpectedly on the River. The telegraph cable had been disrupted between San Thomé and Loanda and so no advance warning had been given.¹⁰⁸ Dennett had to offer Stanley the use of a British Congo Company steamer.¹⁰⁹ He avoided accompanying the explorer personally, explaining: 'I regret that I shall not be able to go up the river in the S. S. Albuquerque myself but I have instructed our Mr Cobden Phillips to do all in his power to assist you.'¹¹⁰ The steamer was to be rented at 'the rate of twelve pounds a day' and Dennett added that '[o]ur stores at Noki or Augo Augo are also at your disposal.'¹¹¹

Stanley's arrival at Banana in March 1887 caused a great deal of excitement, particularly as the S.S. Madura was a much larger steamer than was usual on the Congo River. The British Congo company and the Portuguese Company assisted Stanley's crew of almost eight hundred men and their cargo to travel upstream. Dennett took pride

¹⁰⁸ Dennett, 1887(b), p.118.

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Richard Dennett to Henry Morton Stanley on S. S. Madura, from Banana, 19 March 1887. Royal Museum for Central Africa, *Stanley Archive*, ref. 3309.

¹¹⁰ 'Mr Cobden Phillips' was also the author of *The Social System of the Lower Congo*, mentioned above. See Phillips, 1887.

¹¹¹ Letter from Dennett to Stanley, 1887.

in his company's show of British competence and efficiency. He explained in correspondence with the Manchester Geographical Society that despite the short notice, 'our steamer was alongside the Madura first thing.'¹¹²

Dennett was invited to join Stanley and his team on board the ship for a 'very pleasant dinner' when Stanley first arrived.¹¹³ He drew wry amusement from the presence of a former 'enemy of the State' in the assembly.¹¹⁴ The "Arab" trader and slave merchant 'Tippu Tib' had been engaged to assist in the rescue mission.¹¹⁵ The irony was glaring. Tippu Tib,

...whose men defeated the Congo Free State at Stanley Falls, has been appointed Governor-General of Stanley Falls and is going up the river with Stanley ... to take command of the very station his men have wrecked.¹¹⁶

He described Tippu Tib as a 'fine-looking old fellow' who drew up his chair after dinner to where Stanley was sitting 'and conversed with him a while...It is a grand stroke of Stanley's getting this old fellow's help. He will now have little difficulty arranging carriers at the Falls...'¹¹⁷

With personal observations such as these Dennett exposed the expedient nature of colonial politics in Africa. Anti-Arab sentiment had been used as an argument to open up the continent, and yet when it was useful to form an alliance, the Zanzibari slave dealer was readily employed as an escort to an expedition to the very territories in which his trade was conducted. Dennett observed and struggled with such vagaries throughout his career.

¹¹² Dennett, 1887(b), p. 118.

¹¹³ Dennett, 1887(b), p. 118.

¹¹⁴ Dennett, 1887(b), p. 118.

¹¹⁵ Dennett, 1887(b), p. 118.

¹¹⁶ Dennett, 1887(b), p. 118.

¹¹⁷ Dennett, 1887(b), p. 118.

Gathering Clouds.

During the years 1888-1890, Dennett also witnessed an increased in the use of violence among the government officials of the Free State. The *Force Publique* had been introduced in 1888 to police the State, its composition being drawn largely from mercenaries and press-ganged Africans. The *Force Publique* was intended to enforce regulations and subdue the rebellions which were becoming increasingly frequent in the oppressed community. Resistance was mounted to the forced taxation that required men to harvest rubber, work as porters or to build roads. If they resisted, the men could be chained together and made to collect and carry produce. Ivory, palm oil kernels and minerals all had to be sourced and then carried long distances, so porters' families were separated for long periods against their will. This meant that their fields were not dug or planted at the right time, and with no harvest, whole villages starved. Any crops that were grown successfully might be taken by force by the Free State officials without payment. When press-ganged men failed to work fast enough or began to resist the regime, their women could be held as hostage until the work quota was fulfilled.¹¹⁸

Appeals for consular backing from the British and Dutch companies met with little Foreign Office support. Hatton and Cookson's Agent, at Banana in 1889 was James McCreadie. He appealed to the Governor General of the Congo Free State at Boma in a letter in April, which was also signed by the chief agents of the Dutch and Portuguese companies. All were protesting at the inequalities the State was perpetuating.¹¹⁹ In

¹¹⁸ Freidman, 1991, p. 65; Morel, 1920, p. 135.

¹¹⁹ 'Les sous-signés déplorent que le l'Etat Indépendent du Congo n'accorde à tout le commerce, la même protection, établissant d'injustes inégalités...' Scott Newton then addressed the matter to the British Consul in Calabar, George Annesley. When Annesley finally replied in January 1890, he would only report that he had been assured by the Belgian Minister for the Free State, Mr Van Eetvelde, that the severe measures used to handle the protest had been necessary. National Archives ref. FO 629/1.

August of the same year he wrote to the acting British Consul in Loanda, Robert Scott Newton, concerning a riot that had arisen in Porta da Lenha over the privileges that the Free State was giving to Belgian traders, over the Dutch and British. Still no help was forthcoming.¹²⁰

Forced portage had been instated in the Free State in 1889. Two years later, an order was issued that every person must work on construction projects, and must collect firewood for the steamers as well as collecting rubber.¹²¹ If quotas were not met, the offender could be shot. One infamous regulation stipulated that all bullets used by State officials supervising the collection of rubber had to be accounted for. Severed hands were therefore presented as proof that bullets had not been used “wastefully”. Basketfuls were collected and to make up any shortfall in the evidence, many hands were cut from living adults and children.¹²²

The horrific conditions and cruelties were noted by Joseph Conrad during his six months working on the Congo River in 1890.¹²³ Some of his observations re-emerged in his serialised *Heart of Darkness* in 1899. However it was another visiting writer who became well acquainted with Dennett at this time. In 1890 Colonel George Washington Williams had come from North America to Africa to investigate Congo’s suitability as a site for the repatriation of fellow African Americans.¹²⁴ Dennett was concerned that the true nature of the Free State’s regime in the Congo was being hidden from Williams. He

¹²⁰ National Archives ref. FO 629/1.

¹²¹ Freidman, 1991, p. 77.

¹²² E. D. Morel compiled letters from agents and missionaries in the Congo who had witnessed such events, and published extracts from these as part of his campaign to draw attention to the abuse of Africans in the Congo Free State. See, for example, Morel, Edmund Dene. *King Leopold’s Rule in Africa*. London: Heinemann, 1904, p. 112, cited in Freidman, 1991, p. 65.

¹²³ Conrad’s diary for 1890 formed the basis for his novella *Heart of Darkness* of 1902, which had appeared in serialised form in 1899. Roger Casement also arrived in the area at this time and shared a room with Conrad at Matadi for some weeks. See Hochschild, 2006, pp. 196-197.

¹²⁴ Hochschild, 2006, pp. 106-107.

suspected that State officials were steering Williams away from any sites of negative evidence, and so he secretly arranged to accompany Williams up the river, to 'visit the factories and hear what the inhabitants had to say'.¹²⁵ After this he arranged for Williams to make his own way to Stanley Pool, helped by a Dutch agent, so that the Government would not be warned of his coming.¹²⁶

According to Dennett this subterfuge led to Williams witnessing 'sufficient to sicken him of the behaviour of the officials, and [he] became so convinced of their evil conduct that, instead of returning to the coast through the Congo State territory, he passed down via Brazzaville and Congo Français.'¹²⁷ Williams' experiences resulted in his writing an *Open Letter to His Serene Majesty, Leopold II* in 1890, in which he pointed out how Africans' land had been commandeered from them by trickery and force, and how locals had their food taken from them at gunpoint, murders were committed for sport, and slavery was used to provide the State's labour force.¹²⁸ Certainly no promised schools or hospitals had been built.

These accusations were not accepted; indeed they won Williams many enemies. In the open letter he had attacked Stanley, writing that 'Henry M. Stanley's name produces a shudder among the simple folk when mentioned; they remember his broken promises, his copious profanity, his hot temper, his heavy blows, his severe and rigorous measures by which they were mulcted of their lands'.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 6.

¹²⁶ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 6.

¹²⁷ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 6.

¹²⁸ Williams, George Washington. *An Open Letter to His Serene Majesty, Leopold II, King of the Belgians and Sovereign of the Independent State of the Congo*. Written at 'Stanley Falls Central Africa' July 18th 1890.' Full copy online at <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=george-washington-williams-open-letter-king-leopold-congo-1890> accessed January 2010.

¹²⁹ 'Twelfth Charge against His Majesty King Leopold's Government', Williams, 1890.

Stanley rebuffed Williams' report, declaring it was a failed attempt to blackmail the King of Belgium and the matter might have escalated had Williams not died on his return to England, a year after this trip.¹³⁰ Dennett observed to E. D. Morel later: 'Everything seemed to work against our endeavours to rouse Europe against this vile Congo system of judgement.'¹³¹ The concession companies' crimes continued unchecked for another decade and it was twenty years before the "Congo Atrocities" were officially investigated by the British Government, through their Consul, Roger Casement.¹³²

1891-1893 Departure from the Free State.

Appeals for a British Consul in the Congo had been voiced throughout the 1880s but little significant support was given. In 1891 Dennett started a newspaper. He sent copies of his handwritten Congo Mirror to the 'Sovereign of the Congo State, the Gov General, and the news agencies in London.'¹³³ In the paper he questioned the King's so-called philanthropic mission and drew attention to the slavery that continued in the Upper Congo. He requested that the financial accounts of the State's 'shops' should be examined.¹³⁴ He drew on reports from Baptist missionaries, but admitted that his efforts 'were of no avail.'¹³⁵ In fact his activities created further hostility and provoked the authorities into retaliation:

Without serving me with the summons required by the State Laws, the British flag was hauled down and my house at Malela was seized, and I was threatened with

¹³⁰ 'Col. William's Charges. Stanley says blackmailing has been attempted.' *New York Times*, 14 April 1891.

¹³¹ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 7.

¹³² Consul Roger Casement was sent to establish a Consulate in the Free State in 1900. In 1903 he presented his *Congo Report* to the British Government.

¹³³ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 7. I have not been able to trace any copies of this newspaper; as it was not printed but hand written, the circulation was probably very small.

¹³⁴ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 7.

¹³⁵ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 8.

all sorts of penalties if I went on accusing the State officials with the crimes I knew they had committed.¹³⁶

From this time on, Dennett was obliged to operate outside the Congo Free State. He went first to Kafimbula on the Portuguese bank of the Congo in 1891 and then, in 1892, he returned to the Loango coast, which was under French control.¹³⁷

1898-1900 French Concessions.

The British firms of John Holt and Hatton and Cookson were welcome in the French possession at this time and so Dennett began to concentrate on his ethnographic research. He explained that ‘it seemed as if the rest of my life were to be spent in Luango among the BaVili people’, and so he threw himself into ‘studying the natives’ habits and customs’.¹³⁸ During this time he made valuable contacts in the African community, who assisted him with information, stories and songs, and he began to consolidate his reputation as an authority on indigenous laws and customs.¹³⁹ It was in these years that he met Mary Kingsley when she arrived at Cabinda on her first trip to Africa in 1893.¹⁴⁰

However in 1899 the French Government was persuaded to introduce a similar concession system to that which was proving so profitable in the neighbouring Free State. The inevitable consequences followed. In 1890 forty parcels of land were ceded to concession companies which gave them complete ownership of the ‘negotiable products of the country’.¹⁴¹ This meant that the African trader had no right to collect or

¹³⁶ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 8.

¹³⁷ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 8.

¹³⁸ Dennett, Richard Edward. *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, London: Macmillan, 1906, p. 8.

¹³⁹ See Chapter Five.

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter Five.

¹⁴¹ Morel, 1920, p. 129.

to sell any product from their lands or forests as all now belonged to the concession company. Nor could the British companies on the coast deal directly with the African middle-men, as they had been doing for fifty years. Now such dealing was seen as theft.

Despite mounting a robust resistance to the new system many British traders were eventually driven out of the French Congo.¹⁴² Conditions for the African inhabitants of the colony were as dire as those experienced in the Free State, as the concessionaires enforced the same systems of taxation through rubber collection. They demanded ever-increasing harvests and controlled any unwilling communities with another *force publique*. After five years of the system, ‘tens of thousands’ of people were killed in reprisals for failing to comply.¹⁴³ De Brazza came out of his retirement in France to make an investigative journey to the colony in 1905 and was devastated to find that ‘river banks were deserted where formerly a numerous population had fished and traded. From the Ogowe and its affluents whole tribes had disappeared’.¹⁴⁴ To punish villagers who had failed to produce enough rubber, the Board of one concession company had encouraged the use of ‘that plaything which is called a Maxim’.¹⁴⁵ [Fig. 15.] Conditions became so bad under the new system that refugees who had initially gone to French Congo to escape Leopold’s regime were later found to be crossing back into the Free State again.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² The two principal British trading companies from the French Congo who were damaged by the introduction of the concession system were Hatton and Cookson and John Holt. See Morel, Edmund Dene. ‘The Position of British Merchants in the French Congo.’ *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 2, no. 5 (1902), pp. 38-43. See also Cookey, S. J. S. ‘The Concession Policy in the French Congo and the British Reaction, 1898-1906.’ *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 7, no. 2 (1966), pp. 263-278. Cookey refers to Morel as the author of ‘The Position of British Merchants in French Congo’ although the article was published in 1902 without Morel’s name attached. See Cookey, 1966, p. 27.

¹⁴³ Morel, 1920, p. 133.

¹⁴⁴ Morel, 1920, p. 134.

¹⁴⁵ Morel 1920, p. 135, (citing unidentified concession company correspondence).

¹⁴⁶ Hochschild, 2006, p. 180.

Dennett continued his protests and made use of another newspaper, called 'West Africa' to publicise further malpractice.¹⁴⁷ This was advertised as '[t]he Pioneer Paper in West African News', an 'Independent Weekly Journal for the Political, Commercial and Social interests of Western Africa.'¹⁴⁸ A contemporary article (published anonymously but written by Morel) explained that some of the French concessions were in fact 'financed by Belgian capital' and were 'closely allied to the groups which have acquired concessions in the *Domaine Privé* of the Congo State'.¹⁴⁹ [Fig.16.] Morel explained in the article that concession agents would intimidate the merchants or provoke them to violence. British factories were broken into and raided, employees were attacked, and fines were imposed.¹⁵⁰ Concessionaires claimed they had the 'sole monopoly over the products of the soil' and the horrors that had ensued from forced rubber collection in the Congo State were repeated in French Congo.¹⁵¹

Despite more protests and petitions to the Foreign Office, the position of Hatton and Cookson and John Holt's companies in French Congo soon became 'desperate in the extreme.'¹⁵² Eventually, as the threats to British traders escalated, the British Companies were forced to 'stop business entirely' in 1902, and with some haste Dennett was forced to leave the land and the profession that he had become so committed to.¹⁵³ Exactly when Dennett left the Congo is not clear. He was still in Loango in January

¹⁴⁷ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 9.

¹⁴⁸ Advertisements for the journal *West Africa* in the unnumbered front pages of Dennett, Richard Edward. *Notes on West African Categories*, London: Macmillan, 1911.

¹⁴⁹ Morel, 1902, pp. 38-43.

¹⁵⁰ Morel, 1902.

¹⁵¹ Morel, 1902, p. 42.

¹⁵² Morel, 1902, p. 42.

¹⁵³ Morel, 1902, p. 42.

1902, but by October the agents had been instructed to cease trading.¹⁵⁴ He recorded that he had already begun work in the forest service in Southern Nigeria in 1902.¹⁵⁵

Dennett's Private Life.

When Dennett referred to leaving Loango, he described himself as 'cruelly torn from the Congo'.¹⁵⁶ The poignancy of this statement may possibly reflect the impact that his departure made on his private life. There is some evidence to support the idea that Dennett had a family on the coast. Although nothing in his own words has yet been found to confirm this, a letter from Kingsley to a Cambridge friend, Hatty Johnson, indicates that Dennett had an African partner. Writing after her visit to Cabinda in 1893, Kingsley referred to a trader, whose circumstances match Dennett's, who had asked her to buy toys for his daughter.¹⁵⁷ Joking with Hatty that West Africa had appointed her as a 'consul general in England', Kingsley described the errands she was running for her new trader friends. One of these traders, she explained, 'sends up some native stories with the request that I will get them published'. She explained that '[t]his the Folk Lore Society have gladly undertaken to do and this man also wants me to buy him £1-11 worth of toys for his half cast daughter' [*sic*] and sourly added, '- an uncongenial task I assure you.'¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Dennett, 1906, p. 144. Morel's article explaining that the British companies had been instructed to cease business was published in October 1902.

¹⁵⁵ Dennett, Richard Edward. 'Agricultural Progress in Nigeria.' *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 18, no. 72, (1919), p. 267; In Dennett's letter to Morel of October 1903 he wrote that he had already become 'fast "chums"' with 'the Conservator'. (See Letter from Richard Dennett to E.D. Morel, from Benin City, Southern Nigeria, 5 October 1903. London School of Economics, *E. D. Morel Archive*, ref. F/8.) The Conservator Dennett referred to is probably Mr Thompson, Chief Conservator of Forests for Southern Nigeria who is pictured with Dennett and Morel in the photograph taken on Morel's visit to Nigeria in 1911. See Photograph Album, 1911. London School of Economics, *E. D. Morel Archive*, ref. F1/8/11.[Fig. 21.]

¹⁵⁶ Letter from Richard Dennett to George Macmillan, from Olokmeji, Lagos, Nigeria, 5 December 1916. University of Reading, Special Collections, *Macmillan Archive*, ref. 205/43.

¹⁵⁷ Letter from Mary Kingsley to Hatty Johnson, from Addison Road, Kensington, 2 August 1894, National Library of South Africa, *Mary Kingsley Collection*, ref. MSB 278. Letter 7 a-d, page 7.

¹⁵⁸ Letter from Kingsley to Johnson, 1894, p.7.

Another reflection of prevailing racial prejudices was communicated by Dennett when he wrote in 1887 that '[t]he trader, who cannot take out his wife ... oftentimes chooses that which he thinks least immoral and ... marries a negress.'¹⁵⁹ Expressing contemporary assumptions of racial and sexual superiority, Dennett had explained that to marry a local woman was not to take the easy option. Rather the white man

...has to be extremely careful in his actions, so as always to be able to hold his superiority to the negro in matters of truth, justice, patience, and general behaviour, and on no account allow a native a chance of proving him guilty of any offence unworthy of the bearing of a white man.¹⁶⁰

These words had been published five years before Kingsley met Dennett, so it may have been an autobiographical comment on his part. However as Kingsley gave no indication of the age of the trader's daughter at the time, we cannot determine exactly where and when he might have had his family. Nor do we know if a wife and daughter were able to accompany him when he had to go to Nigeria. Some photographs in Dennett's lantern slide collection show a young child who might be his daughter. There are several sensitive photographs in Dennett's lantern slide collection showing a young woman, and a very young child. Another slide shows a young schoolgirl who might be the same child, photographed a few years later. [Figs.17-20.] However, the daughter Kingsley referred to has not been traced, and no children were mentioned in Dennett's Will.

Similarly tender photographs were found in the private albums of a contemporary of Dennett's, the trader, Robert Visser.¹⁶¹ Visser was a photographer and collector as well as a plantation owner and trader for the *NAHV* in French Congo. Many of his photographs were reproduced as postcards, and often these support the dominant stereotypes of

¹⁵⁹ Dennett 1887(a), p. 137.

¹⁶⁰ Dennett 1887(a), p. 137.

¹⁶¹ Robert Visser will be discussed more fully in Chapter Five. Visser worked for the Dutch trading company in Loango from 1882 to 1904. See Adler, Katrin and Stelzig, Christine. 'Robert Visser and his Photographs of the Loango Coast.' *African Arts*, Vol. 35, no. 4, (2002) pp. 38-51, 92-93.

superstitious, primitive “natives”. However a private family album tells another story. It includes affectionate portraits of the woman who bore Visser’s son Anton.¹⁶² Katrin Adler and Christine Stelzig have described how these pictures differ from the common anthropological photographs of African women as specimens of “types”. Their comments about Visser’s photographic treatment of his companion could well be applied to the woman who appears in Dennett’s slide collection:

The personal relationship between the photographer and the photographed is tangible ... the woman is always dressed appropriately, or even well ... but she never appears to be dressed up exotically, nor is she presented in a sexual context. Her posture is as natural as the photographic techniques of the time allowed.¹⁶³

Dennett’s photographs convey the same kind of intimacy and serve as poignant reminders of the prevailing social prejudices concerning “mixed marriages” and their offspring at the time.

While it is not possible to identify this woman as Dennett’s partner with certainty, we do know that Dennett attacked ‘colour prejudice’ when it appeared in the racist theories of South African feminist writer Olive Schreiner; he wrote in an unpublished manuscript about her cry of ‘keep your races pure’ being a ‘sickening example’ of prejudice, ‘purity being with her not a moral quality, but a question of colour.’¹⁶⁴

1900-1904. Congo Reform.

Just before Dennett was forced to move to Southern Nigeria, a British Consul was finally appointed to the Congo Free State. Roger Casement had been working as Consul

¹⁶² A photograph of the young Anton is shown in Adler and Stelzig, 2002, figure 22, on p. 48.

¹⁶³ Adler and Stelzig, 2002, p. 48; also see fig. 19, on p. 46.

¹⁶⁴ Dennett, Richard Edward. *Miss Kingsley’s Visit to Cabinda, 1893, by R.E. Dennett, African Trader*. Unpublished, undated manuscript. Highgate Literary and Scientific Institute, London. *Kingsley Collection*.

to Angola in 1898 before this. He had begun his career in Africa as a purser on a ship of the Elder Dempster line, in 1883, and had spent parts of the next ten years working on the Congo River and for the AIA. Among his jobs for the AIA, Casement had provided supplies for the Emin Pasha Relief expedition.¹⁶⁵ Casement went on to work as a general services officer in Calabar for the Oil Rivers Protectorate before being appointed as a Consul to Mozambique in 1895. When he was then posted to Angola in 1898 he began to pressurise the British Government to act over the atrocities in Congo. Finally in 1900 he was directed to establish a Consulate in the Free State.¹⁶⁶

Casement began to investigate the multiplying reports of human rights abuses in the Congo and he spent the next two years drawing attention to the horrific treatment of enslaved Africans who were being forced to collect rubber. In 1903 an official investigation was authorised, and Casement's thorough and detailed report on the Congo was published in 1904. From this point forward he joined forces with E. D. Morel to form the Congo Reform Association to raise public awareness and bring pressure on British politicians.¹⁶⁷

It is likely that Casement had met Dennett in the Congo just before Dennett went to Nigeria. Certainly they were well-acquainted later. On one occasion Casement wrote to Morel that Dennett was 'a brick' and that he (Casement) was sorry to have missed him.¹⁶⁸ He also corresponded directly with Dennett in 1903 when he was in Congo.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Hochschild, 2006, p. 195, p. 196. The artist Herbert Ward had also accompanied this expedition. See Arnoldi, Mary Jo. 'Where Art and Ethnology Met: The Ward African Collection at the Smithsonian' in Schildkrout, Enid and Keim, Curtis, eds., *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 194.

¹⁶⁶ As a result of this appointment to Congo, Casement was invited to Belgium to meet King Leopold. Hochschild, 2006, p. 197.

¹⁶⁷ Hochschild, 2006, pp. 206-207.

¹⁶⁸ Letter from Roger Casement to E. D. Morel, no date, London School of Economics, *E. D. Morel Archive*, ref. F8/17.

In a letter to Morel, Casement referred to Dennett as ‘a sterling old soul’ and when Morel asked him for the name of a possible correspondent in West Africa, Casement had suggested Dennett.¹⁷⁰ Dennett also expressed respect for ‘Consul Roger Casement’, whose knowledge of the languages and traditions of the Congo he agreed with in his book, *At the Back of the Black Man’s Mind*.¹⁷¹

Morel was a successful campaigner who had astute methods of using publicity to keep the public’s attention on “the Congo question” in Britain and America, which forced Belgium to address it. He gathered information from many sources in the Congo and in 1904 he published *King Leopold’s Rule in Africa* in which he published letters and photographs from the Congo, including those which showed children with severed hands.¹⁷² One of his many correspondents was the Baptist missionary John Weeks who had been in the Congo for as long as Dennett. Weeks’ aspirations were that Europeans would bring hope and progress to the African community, but in 1904 he reported sadly that the people

...simply live on from year to year ... getting more impoverished every year. In what is now Congo State territory, near the Portuguese frontier, there used to be very large towns and villages. They are now quite abandoned, the natives preferring the rule of the Portuguese, which is not the best, to the rule of the Belgians, which is worse.¹⁷³

Dennett developed a significant friendship with Morel. He recorded that Morel contacted him in 1903 and that they met in 1904, while the Congo Reform Association

¹⁶⁹ Roger Casement’s 1903 Diaries, entry for 14 May 1903. Casement, Roger, Ó’Síocháin, Séamas, and O’Sullivan, Michael. *The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement’s Congo Report and 1903 Diary*, Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2003, p. 224.

¹⁷⁰ Letter from Roger Casement to E. D. Morel from the Savoy, Uxbridge, 8 March, 1906, London School of Economics, *E. D. Morel Archive*, ref. F8/22; Letter from Roger Casement to E. D. Morel from Lisbon, 3 March 1909, London School of Economics, *E. D. Morel Archive*, ref. F8/23.

¹⁷¹ Dennett, 1906, p. 4 and p. 132.

¹⁷² Morel, 1904.

¹⁷³ Letter from John Weeks to E. D. Morel, in Morel, 1904, cited in Freidman, 1991, p. 75.

was gathering strength.¹⁷⁴ To help Morel to gather evidence about the Free State, Dennett had sent him a notebook ‘given to me by a Belgian friend of mine some years ago, containing extracts from certain traders’ letters in the Upper Congo.’¹⁷⁵ In Nigeria, Dennett also received Morel’s new weekly newspaper, the West African Mail.¹⁷⁶ Through this paper Dennett kept abreast of the progress of the Congo Reform movement. He also contributed articles.¹⁷⁷

In 1905 an International Commission of Inquiry was initiated by King Leopold to examine the situation in the Congo.¹⁷⁸ It confirmed Casement’s report and Morel’s accounts. At last the disastrous management of the Free State was internationally acknowledged and Leopold was made to surrender his private possessions in the Congo. The Belgian Government took over the Free State as a colony in 1908. The Congo Reform Association was officially closed in 1913. Dennett wrote with feeling to Morel about the triumph of the Congo reform movement after his years of unheard protests: ‘No one, better than myself (who had worked so hard and fruitlessly) can appreciate the greatness of your work which you carried out to such successful issue.’¹⁷⁹

The mutual respect and affection that developed between Dennett and Morel can be sensed both in their correspondence, and in the photograph that was taken when Morel visited Dennett’s workplace in Okokmeji, near Lagos in 1911. [Fig. 21.] Morel was visiting West Africa to report for *The Times* and *The Manchester Guardian* on British

¹⁷⁴ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 9.

¹⁷⁵ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1903, n.p.

¹⁷⁶ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 9.

¹⁷⁷ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1903, n.p.

¹⁷⁸ Hochschild, 2006, p. 251.

¹⁷⁹ Letter from Dennett to Morel, 1914, p. 9.

Colonial developments in Lugard's Nigeria.¹⁸⁰ In the photograph Morel stands confidently next to the older Dennett. They share the frame with six Forest Guards, Dennett's Supervisor, H. N. Thompson, (the Chief Conservator of Forests) and Morel's young friend, Duabu. Morel adopts a relaxed and self-assured pose. His goals with Congo Reform had been achieved, Leopold had been internationally discredited and the Congo Free State had been dismantled and annexed by the Belgian nation.¹⁸¹

Morel was persuaded that reform had been accomplished, and he ended his campaign, but the upheaval in the Congo had taken its toll and the new Belgian Colony brought further changes to indigenous life. 'The bureaucrat replaced the freebooter' according to Wyatt MacGaffey and the Congo was carved up into districts to be managed by district officers.¹⁸² Although taxation may have appeared less arbitrary under the new system, the foreigners' administration of land now divided into new districts, posed barriers to movement and indigenous trade.¹⁸³

Summary.

This survey has shown that conditions in the Congo changed radically after 1879 when Dennett first arrived in Africa but that the Kongo kingdom had been a point of contact for traders over many centuries. Atlantic trade had developed from early relationships between the Portuguese and the Kongo chiefs. A trade in slaves had developed, which continued for three hundred years before the phase of the "legitimate" factory arose. As commercial opportunities developed, companies such as the *AHV* and Hatton and

¹⁸⁰ The album is in the London School of Economics Library, *E. D. Morel Archive*, London School of Economics, ref. F1/8/11.

¹⁸¹ The First World War, which saw Morel imprisoned for his anti-war activities with the Union of Democratic Control, was still in the future. See Hochschild, 2006, p. 289-290.

¹⁸² Macgaffey, 2000, p. 23. For more on the Europeans' destructive imposition of bureaucracy on the Congo see Vansina, Jan. *Paths in the Rainforest: Towards a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990, p. 239.

¹⁸³ MacGaffey 2000, p. 23.

Cookson began to operate. The factory system gained a hold for thirty years before the African International Association arrived, bringing further changes. This was the setting in which Dennett recorded his ethnographic observations and made his collection.

Dennett's accounts therefore represent one phase in a long-standing history of interaction between BaKongo and Europeans on the coast. The era that he describes was one of great upheaval and Dennett was close to the agencies which channelled European power in this process. His often unguarded and personal comments about the role of "travellers" in Africa provide an informal and frank commentary on a troubled historic period.

However Dennett was not only an acute observer of European political activity in Africa. He became increasingly interested in the way the African society around him was organised. He sought ways to engage with local people and with BaKongo figures of authority and he endeavoured to understand their institutions. The next chapter examines how Dennett developed his understanding of this community, and it explores his changing interpretations of the society which had produced the artefacts in his collection.

Chapter Three. Dennett and BaKongo Powers.

As Chapter Two has shown, Dennett's engagement with colonial powers and their considerable conflicts caused him to question western models of government in Africa. This chapter will assess his involvement with, and critique of, indigenous forms of government. As a trader Dennett had many daily interactions with the local people and these gave him the opportunities to study how their social institutions operated. Dennett gathered information through his linguists and through other staff at the factory, but he also attended coronations, funerals, and family gatherings. He witnessed witchcraft accusations; listened to conversations; recorded stories; wrote down the lyrics of songs; and latterly he found an *nganga* and a chief to help him in his study of BaVili philosophy.¹

However Dennett had few informed researchers to exchange ideas with, and over time his interpretations became increasingly idiosyncratic. He believed that he could find a "key" or a "formula" to understand the complexities of BaKongo thought, which could then be presented to a western audience. He hoped that his insights would encourage colonial governments to improve the way they ruled. Thus his ethnography was intended to serve practical ends and was driven by a philosophical search. To parody the title of his own book, this chapter might therefore be seen as a study of what was in this particular "white man's mind."²

¹ Although Dennett knew the term *fumu* he did not frequently use this word when referring to Kongo leaders in his work. He tended to favour the western terminology of chief, prince or king.

² Dennett, Richard Edward. *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, London: Macmillan, 1906.

Early Influences.

Dennett's ideas about Africa would have been shaped by the literature that was available to him before he left Britain. Several books about the exploration of the continent had been published in recent decades. A visual depiction of these books is found in a volume that was published while Dennett was still at school, by William Winwoode Reade.³ Reade was a Scottish explorer and later a correspondent for The Times who described his own journey across West Africa in 1868 in his *African Sketch-Book* of 1873. An extraordinary map was included in this book which provides an idea of the literature available to Dennett when he prepared for his first voyage to the Congo. [Fig. 22.]

Europeans had explored and conducted trade in the Congo for centuries since the Portuguese arrived at the Congo River in 1483, but recent explorations such as Tuckey's, Stanley's and Cameron's had drawn widespread popular attention to the region. Reade's map shows the names of those authors who had published their interpretations of the geography and peoples of Africa, by the time Dennett left England, and whose work might have contributed to Dennett's view of the West Central African coast. These were: Du Chaillu, Tuckey, Proyart, Battel, Pigafetta, Bastian, Merolla, Cardi, Cavazzi, Tams and Lopes de Lima. In a supremely confident display of Eurocentrism, Reade emblazoned the names of non-African writers onto the "blank spaces" of the continent, demonstrating a proprietary attitude to this physical geography, as if space could be appropriated through the merits of European literature.

The different type sizes on the map indicate the relative significance of the writer, as decided by Reade. His own name appears across Sierra Leone which had been his

³ Winwoode Reade, W. *The African Sketchbook*. London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1873.

personal destination in 1863, although he also travelled in Gabon in 1873. Among the other British names that Reade put on the map were his fellow Scotsmen, Livingstone and Mungo Park; also Speke and Burton. Significantly Stanley had only a small place on the map. When Reade published his *African Sketchbook*, Stanley had not yet made his journey across Africa from East to West, but his name appears above Lake Tanganyika, where he had met Livingstone in 1871. Stanley's *Through the Dark Continent* was published in 1878, just as Dennett was preparing to go to Africa. John Joachim Monteiro's *Angola and the River Congo* had appeared in 1875.⁴

With such a literary background it is not surprising that Dennett's initial ideas about Africa followed the prevailing views of the "dark continent". He adopted the stereotype of Africa as a savage and dangerous place where only British heroism and fortitude would prevail against the hazards that lay in store:

How Brave one feels, when, all preliminaries being arranged, he drives down to the docks to join the gallant little ship that is to bear him to a foreign clime, against which all he has heard is bad; where all is so dark and ungodly, as the south-west coast of Africa!⁵

Nineteenth-century travellers to Africa commonly wrote their accounts in these highly personal, subjective terms. Dennett's forerunners used titles which placed the doughty writer squarely at the centre of the book. For example: '*Narrative of an Expedition to explore the River Zaire...*', '*Wanderings in West Africa*', or '*Two trips to Gorillaland and to the Cataracts of the Congo...*'⁶ The master of this practice was of course,

⁴ Monteiro, Joachim John. *Angola and the River Congo*, London: Macmillan, 1875.

⁵ Dennett, Richard Edward. *Seven Years among the Fjort: Being an English Trader's Experiences in the Congo District*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887(a), pp. 1-2.

⁶ Tuckey, Captain James. *Narrative of an Expedition to Explore the River Zaire, usually called the Congo, in South Africa, in 1816, under the direction of Captain James Tuckey*, London: John Murray, 1818; Burton, Richard. *Wanderings in West Africa from Liverpool to Fernando Po*, 2 Vols., London: Tinsley Brothers, 1863; Burton, Richard *Two trips to Gorillaland and to the Cataracts of the Congo*, London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Low, and Searle, 1876.

Stanley, whose narratives were shamelessly self-referential. The title of his account of his first journey to Africa in was *How I found Livingstone: Travels, Adventures and Discoveries in Central Africa, Including Four Months' Residence with Dr. Livingstone*.⁷ In such books the physical deprivations or psychological terrors that had been overcome were what endowed the author with his “authority”.⁸

First Impressions.

Dennett's first book was not, therefore an objective or scientific account, but was an individual's personal narrative of his years ‘among the *Fjort*’.⁹ Stressing his personal involvement, Dennett emphasised that the book resulted from ‘seven years of careful observation and experience’ and that all the illustrations were based on events ‘of which I have been an eyewitness.’¹⁰ He complied with the visions of savagery that a Victorian audience would have anticipated when he described how, soon after he arrived, ‘much to my horror... the natives burnt a woman for witchcraft within a hundred yards of our factory.’¹¹ He also introduced the figure known variously as *Pegasario*, *Badoongoo* or *Badungo* early on in his narrative.¹² [Fig. 23.] This costumed figure ‘in his hideous double-faced mask’ brought retribution to the community for certain forms of wrongdoing. For example an ‘irregularity in the fall of rain’ was thought to be caused by sexual misdemeanors in the community.¹³ The ‘*Pegasario*’ could enforce execution by

⁷ Stanley, Henry M. *How I Found Livingstone: Travels, Adventures and Discoveries in Central Africa, Including Four Months' Residence with Dr. Livingstone*. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low and Searle, 1872.

⁸ Until Kingsley wrote her books, (1897, 1899) the European author in this part of Africa at the time was, indeed, typically male.

⁹ Dennett, 1887(a), taken from book title.

¹⁰ Dennett, 1887(a), p. vi.

¹¹ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 10.

¹² As mentioned in Chapter One, Dennett's spelling varies across his oeuvre and in this one book alone there are three versions for the name of the masked figure.

¹³ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 11.

sword or by ‘crucifixion’ and an illustration of a crucifixion was provided for the reader.¹⁴

Initially Dennett explained incidents like these as superstitions or actions deliberately intended to obstruct the European traders. The witch-burning, he wrote, was meant ‘probably to annoy the agents and traders’, while members of a funeral procession that passed the factory were described as ‘noisy in the extreme, giving the agent a lot of bother, as they refused to pass without a *matabixo* or drink.’¹⁵ Any terms of admiration for ‘the native’ at this stage were reserved for issues of trade. For example when a *kabuka* of ivory was exchanged for a bundle of goods, Dennett explained that he ‘really admired the native for his cuteness and exact knowledge of the bundle.’¹⁶ Other Europeans also praised the acuity of the people of the Congo when judging the value of merchandise. E. D. Morel quoted Stanley’s admiration of their knowledge of trade goods and the way an African trader could tell, for example ‘by poising on the arm, what profit an ivory tusk purchased at Langa Langa, would be derived by sale at Stanley Pool’.¹⁷ The BaKongo were known as the skilled intermediaries in the trading processes between the BaTeke at Stanley Pool, and the European traders at the coast.¹⁸ Dennett’s attitude toward the ‘native’s mind in a religious sense’ was however unsympathetic; he patronisingly criticised the way ‘he does not seem able to grasp the entire beauty of a

¹⁴ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 11.

¹⁵ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 10.

¹⁶ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 16.

¹⁷ Morel, Edmund Dene. *The Black Man’s Burden*, London: The National Labour Press, 1920, pp. 111-112. (Stanley’s text is not named by Morel). Stanley had also commented that ‘this commercial knowledge has left its traces on their faces; indeed it is the same as our own cities in Europe ... especially on the Congo where the people are so devoted to trade’.

¹⁸ The BaTeke gathered goods from the inland areas which were reached by the complex waterways of the Congo and its tributaries. They exchanged these for the European cloth, metal, china, glass and beads as well as for guns and gunpowder which the BaKongo had carried up trails to bypass the cataracts between the Pool and the coast. See Morel, 1920, p. 111.

Christian idea, but only such a part of it as may ingratiate himself to the liking of his teacher'.¹⁹

Dennett's impression of indigenous spirituality in the early years was no doubt coloured by the reports he had previously heard from other Europeans. Initially he concurred with the common idea that the people were steeped in an unedifying mixture of Catholicism and fetishism. Instead of using this observation to defend evangelistic missions, Dennett saw it as evidence that the country was not yet ready for evangelism. He believed that other development should be carried out before Christianity could be accepted. Trade, agriculture and manufacture, he argued, would be the necessary means to pave the way for missionary work.²⁰ To hurriedly bestow education on a few Africans before establishing the discipline of productive labour was, in Dennett's eyes, a method of producing 'drunken barbarians, ever ready to annoy the traders and with knowledge enough to use their own native laws, customs, and superstitions with the worst and most awful effect either against their poorer and less favoured brethren or against the white man.'²¹ Dennett had described this sort of disruption occurring at the Hatton and Cookson factories, where he felt that powerful local individuals had exploited their educated position to manipulate the less-educated people, and turn them against the traders.²²

In his early writing Dennett revealed his disapproval of Catholicism. He believed that the years of Catholic influence in Africa after the conversion of the King of Kongo in

¹⁹ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 24.

²⁰ Dennett admired the Jesuit Missions in Gabon, Landana and Loango where the priests concentrated on training up 'carpenters, shoemakers, tailors and gardeners' rather than seeking conversions. Dennett, 1887(a), p. 36.

²¹ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 31.

²² An example of this is given in the person of Antonio da Costa in *Seven Years Among the Fjort*. Dennett, 1887(a), pp. 115-130.

1482, had produced ‘neither a Christian nor a heathen ... but a priest-ridden fearer of the evil spirit, and would-be reverer of the Virgin Mary, or *Nzambi*.’²³ The ‘use of images, amulets and other charms’ he condemned as ‘Roman idolatry’ and ‘a dangerous method by which to Christianize the heathen.’²⁴ As Dennett’s father was an ordained Anglican priest it is not hard to imagine the Vicar’s voice in Dennett’s accusations.

Dennett argued that Catholicism had added religious ‘images, amulets and charms’ to the existing superstitious armoury and equated the use of Holy Water with the ‘medicines’ or ‘*malongoes*’ used by the indigenous ‘priest’ or ‘*nganga*’.²⁵ His verdict was that Catholic evangelism had totally muddled Africans and left them with a *laissez-faire* attitude to the Christian God. He concluded that ‘the natives prefer their own faith ... and are more anxious to appease the wrath of the evil spirit whom they fear, than the *Nzambi* of the white man who, they are told, loves them.’²⁶

Although these are condescending remarks, Dennett’s criticisms show that he was engaging with the indigenous belief system and grappling with the BaKongo understanding of the invisible forces at work in their world. He soon dismissed the concept of a ‘female God’, *Nzambi*, whom the people were said to revere, as an adaptation of the Catholics’ Virgin Mary. He initially described the spirit or concept of ‘*Nkiss*’ (from which he had derived the name *Nkissism* for the belief system) as a channel of evil. It ‘pervades all things, and is eternal, invisible, to all save the *nganga*, uncreated but appears to be especially resident in different large *feteiches*, each one

²³ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 44.

²⁴ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 44.

²⁵ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 45.

²⁶ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 45. *Nzambi* here is used as a translation for ‘God’ but *Nzambi* was also understood as a female creator spirit. The identity of *Nzambi* is discussed further in *The Folklore of the Fjort* and in the correspondence between Dennett, Kingsley and Hartland in National Library of Wales, *E. Sidney Hartland Archive* 6819B.

inflicting, or being the means to avoiding, different evils.’²⁷ He would revise his thinking when he had studied further, but in the 1880’s, Dennett saw the African in the Congo as motivated only ‘by selfishness and suspicion, and the avoidance of the evil he is hourly expecting’.²⁸

BaKongo Government.

Dennett began to investigate the indigenous structure of government in his first years in Africa. As a trader he needed to know who the powerful members of BaKongo society were in order to smooth out process of trade, and facilitate the exchange of products and their subsequent transport to the coastal factories. Taxes were demanded and powerful *minkisi* could be used to regulate the use of the river, so Dennett was well aware of the individual chiefs and their spiritual means of maintaining their power.

The Kongo Kingdom had been divided into three further kingdoms in the areas north of the River Congo. [Figure 3, Fig. 4.] These regions, Loango, Kacong and Ngoio, were governed by what Dennett called “Princes”, but he also used the local names for leaders as well. Thus a *manifuma* presided over each area, with ‘*tekli fumas*’ below him.²⁹ Each of these held a court in their main town and each had ministers to support him. Dennett explained that with time, most of the *tekli fumas* had adopted the title *manifuma* themselves. ‘All these petty princes nowadays have assumed the title of

²⁷ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 49-50.

²⁸ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 49.

²⁹ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 73. See also Martin, Phyllis. *The External Trade of the Loango Coast 1576-1870: The Effects of Changing Commercial Relations on the Vili Kingdom of Loango*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 172. Also see Martin’s first chapter in this book for more about the long-standing hierarchies within the Vili court.

mani. Thus we have *mani-macosso*, *mani-sequiço*, *mani-Loango*, contracted into *Maloango*.³⁰

Dennett apparently had difficulty in finding a European equivalent for these titles and in the end he resorted to the generic term “prince”, but distinguished the higher *fumu* from the lower with a capital letter P. If a dispute arose in their towns the “princes” would hold a public hearing or palaver. This was an established way of gathering the people to hear the different sides in a dispute. Injured or implicated parties would make their case through an advocate who would explain their argument, perhaps using stories about animals or the environment to illustrate their point of view.³¹ Songs could be also sung to sway the mood of the audience. Dennett described how a song was once used in a palaver that concerned the traders. In an argument over river-trading routes, the traders’ linguist, Antonio, sang of the white man’s arrival and of his goodwill:

[Antonio] sang them snatches of the songs used by our servants as they paddled our canoes, rolled our casks, or sacked up our kernals [*sic*]; he mimicked the hammering of the cooper, and the Jack-wash as he washed our clothes; he sang to them of traders long ago dead and buried...The effect of so many being led by one who understood them so well, the earnest way they hung on to his every word was extremely touching.³²

Dennett also explained the complex system of tests which were used to determine who had committed a crime. An accusation would be followed up by the accused being forced to take a poison ordeal. This might require them to swallow an infusion made with the bark of the tree known as *cassia*, (*nkassa*, or *casca*) or the root of *mandioco*, (manioc) from the mouth of a ‘*feteich*’ figure.³³

³⁰ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 74. Only the highest *Fuma* had an executioner (Dennett, 1887(a), p. 75).

³¹ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 75-76. Tales such as these would be the basis for Dennett’s book, *The Folklore of the Fjort*. Dennett, Richard Edward, *The Folklore of the Fjort*, London: The Folklore Society, 1898.

³² Dennett, 1887(a), p. 92.

³³ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 77. This process is discussed further in Chapter Four.

Dennett was cynical about these processes:

There are two or more kinds of *mandioco*, one being in its raw state highly poisonous. Probably the surgeon, knowing the man to be innocent or guilty from previous knowledge, places the poisonous or non-poisonous in the mouth of the feteich accordingly.³⁴

He concluded that suspicion and fear were the essential motives behind the actions of his African neighbours, and he considered that debt was ‘at the bottom of all their actions’.³⁵ He explained his view that ‘unless they are or fancy themselves to be in debt, they will not move.’³⁶ Dennett had been brought up in an Anglican household, in Valparaiso, Chile, where his father was acting as pastor to the English expatriate community. His Christian upbringing no doubt brought with it a protestant work ethic, which would have been reinforced at his school at Marlborough, where he boarded with other children whose parents were also abroad in the service of the Empire.³⁷

Dennett therefore struggled with a worldview that he could not identify with. Just as he had railed at the flaws of his colonial colleagues, he was vigorous in his critique of what he perceived as the Africans’ shortcomings:

Duty forbids them to steal, to murder, to commit adultery; but so long as they can do one or all of these without being found out they consider they have done no wrong. Once they are discovered, they are in debt to the person they have injured and will do anything to pay off their obligation.³⁸

As well as taking a moral stance, Dennett betrayed his western capitalist attitudes when he described how a local trader would work hard for many days to go upriver to collect goods, and safely bring them down to factory for the white trader, but when he was paid

³⁴ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 77.

³⁵ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 79.

³⁶ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 79.

³⁷ Born in Valparaiso in 1857, Dennett was at Marlborough College in Wiltshire, England, between 1869 and 1874. *Marlborough College Archives*.

³⁸ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 79.

the African could squander all his wealth on a big party for his friends and family. This baffled the European who could not fathom such this behaviour. He saw it as superstitious ‘socialism’ caused by envy and fear.³⁹ Conspicuous wealth was dangerous in Kongo society where one person’s good fortune was frequently explained as the result of witchcraft or *kindoki*.⁴⁰ As the penalties for using such practices for personal gain were severe, individuals made a point of sharing out any wealth they received, even if it constituted what Dennett perceived to be their rightful earnings.

Dennett was, however, able to admit that the Europeans’ efforts could be equally devoid of reward sometimes: he acknowledged that hard-won profits might also disappear in a moment, if a wave was misjudged when goods were being carried out by canoe to a waiting ship. An illustration in *Seven Years Among the Fjort* shows how ‘the surf at one gulp often swallows up the produce it has taken the trader days to collect’.⁴¹

[Fig. 24.]

Dennett’s early observations of BaKongo ways of life show a curious mixture of irony and cynicism along with arrogance and *naïveté*. Many of the stereotypical views in his first book would be expressed in other writings from this period, but peppered among these comments are observations which suggest a more personal and privately-considered viewpoint emerging.

³⁹ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 238. In 1886 he wrote: ‘Socialism, envy and superstition has thus brought down Congo’s once powerful kingdom, to the mean and poor concern that it has now become - a prey to any foreign power or adventurer who cares to seize and divide it.’ Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘The Congo: From a Trader’s Point of View.’ *Manchester Geographical Society*, Vol. 2, nos. 7-12, (1886), p. 291.

⁴⁰ See MacGaffey, Wyatt. *Kongo Political Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, p. 33.

⁴¹ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 240.

Congo Belief.

Some of Dennett's emerging attempts to explain what he called 'Congo Belief' were voiced in his papers for the Manchester Geographical Society.⁴² In 1886 he presented 'The Congo: from a Trader's Point of View', in which he tried to find an equivalent in western religious thinking for the Kongo poison ordeal. He called on the *Old Testament* as an illustration to explain similar processes of divination:

You may consider it absurd that such a test should be considered as all-sufficient to prove one's guilt or innocence. But you must remember that the *Nkissist*, like the Jews of old, thoroughly believes in witchcraft, and may in his heart have been wishing evil to the deceased; perhaps he has openly done him a wrong. Once accused, he shows the working of the law in his heart ... and not having the answer of a good conscience, fear and trembling take possession of him, and thus he has not the strength to resist the fearful ordeal.⁴³

When Dennett described the portable *minkisi* that were worn as 'charms round their wrists, waists, legs and heads' of the BaKongo he compared these to 'the Jews of old [and] their phylacteries.'⁴⁴ In another paper, the *nganga* was compared to priests from other religions:

The prophets of the Hebrews, the wise men, magicians, soothsayers; the astrologers of Egypt, Phoenicia, and Chaldaea; the Brahmin or Buddhist of the Hindoo, have their unworthy and revolting equivalent in the '*Nganga*' of the *Fjort*.⁴⁵

⁴² Dennett, 1886.

⁴³ Dennett, 1886, p. 286. Dennett's contemporary, R. Cobden Phillips also described examples of poison ordeals and argued that many of these worked because of the 'physiological effects of fear on the system'. See Phillips, R. Cobden. 'The Social System of the Lower Congo.' *The Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, Vol. 3, (1887), pp. 162-163. The BaKongo explained that *nkasa* hunted out the special gland that was present in a witch or sorcerer. The person's physical reaction would prove their innocence or guilt. Dennett did not mention this gland (called *Kundu* by Karl Laman's informants), but Phillips referred to the 'structural peculiarities' of the stomach that occur in a witch at birth. Phillips, 1887, p. 161.

⁴⁴ Dennett, 1886, p. 287.

⁴⁵ Dennett, Richard Edward. 'Correspondence.' *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, Vol. 3, nos. 1-6, (1887(b)), p. 120. This 'correspondence' was later 'read to the members in the Library on October 11th 1889' with the title 'The Fjort: The Manners and Customs of the Native Congo People.' It was then printed in the *Journal* in 1890. See Dennett, Richard Edward. 'The Fjort: The Manners and Customs of the Native Congo People.' *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society* Vol. 6, nos. 1-3 (1890), p. 26. Dennett's text on 'Congo Belief' is a fascinating revelation of his knowledge of other world religions. He referred to Jewish, Egyptian, Persian, Chinese and Indian beliefs and even alluded to the

Despite his intolerant opinion of the *banganga*, Dennett saw a need for someone to try to examine the belief system of the BaKongo. He observed that other world religions had been studied through their monuments and statues to explain their underlying philosophy, but no-one had taken *Nkissism* seriously. '[W]ho is going to decipher the 'Wisdom of the Fjort from such a record of their history?' he asked. As no-one else had appeared to do a better job, Dennett argued, he would take on the challenge and 'continue to write as much as I can about it and you may deduce your own theory'.⁴⁶ Dennett's self-appointed task was to gather up evidence to show whether there had once been a divine teacher and an ancient religion in the Congo which was now lost or obscured, or whether the people had 'merely been following certain delusions'.⁴⁷

This goal of course identifies Dennett as a positioned researcher. He was not neutral in his mission. He did not carry out his project simply to "scientifically" record the traditions of the African people: he had set himself a philosophical or even theological problem to resolve. It was evident to him that 'the Fjort' acknowledged something beyond human comprehension.⁴⁸ Dennett determined to uncover what that 'something' was, and to discover whether there was a more significant philosophy behind this generalised idea.

Dennett was particularly concerned about the relative position of the African worldview in a philosophical hierarchy. World religions were not seen on a continuum of equivalence at the time, any more than different people groups were. Instead these were

recently translated *Zend-Avesta* sacred texts (see Mills, Lawrence, Darmesteter, James, and Müller, Max. *The Zend-Avesta*, 3 Vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1880-1887.)

⁴⁶ Dennett, 1887(b), p. 120.

⁴⁷ Dennett, 1887(b), p. 120.

⁴⁸ Dennett, 1887(b), p. 120.

viewed as hierarchical. For Dennett the apex, the superior religion, was Christianity.

The closer *Nkissism* could be brought to Christianity, the happier he would be. Dennett saw God-given ‘glimpses of virtue’ in the people he patronisingly called ‘poor Fjort’, and he set his course to find out more.⁴⁹

In correspondence with the Manchester Geographical Society in 1887, he presented his research as a quest for a philosophical meaning:

What if ... one could address the green spot of grass revered or worshipped by a tribe or family, or the wooden figure (*Nkissisi*) [*sic*] that has been in constant communication with the head of the family since it was a family; or if one could ask the thousand and one nails so securely driven into the *Nkissi* or figure of the of the tribal god what they were placed for and by whom; or even if we could get the tiny *Nkissakiss*, or figure, or charm borne by an individual to let us into the secrets of its master, why then we might bring *Nkissism* up to the level of a philosophy.⁵⁰

This statement forms the core of Dennett’s ambition. Perhaps this was the purpose behind the formation of his collection. It would certainly serve as a ‘mission statement’ for his collection and explain its presence in the museum. The comments that Dennett wrote for the Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society are probably contemporary with the time that he was finalising his collection as we know the collection was complete before 1887 because it appeared in a photograph in his book which was published that year.⁵¹ Dennett’s letters to the Geographical Society, which later became an article in 1890, are therefore likely to give a good indication of his thinking about BaKongo belief at the time that he made the collection.

⁴⁹ Dennett, 1887(b), p. 122.

⁵⁰ Dennett, 1887(b), p. 120 (later published as Dennett, 1890, p. 26).

⁵¹ See Dennett, 1887(a), facing p. 48. The collection was accessioned by the Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter in 1889.

After 1890.

A change in tone can be discerned in Dennett's ethnographic work after 1887. Between 1890 and 1891 Dennett had become caught up in conflicts with the Congo State's representatives and he had been forced to leave the Free State.⁵² He had to move to Loango and Cabinda, to work in the Hatton and Cookson factories in French and Portuguese Congo. In 1892 he determined to study the BaVili people, whom he had admired as the 'true *nkissists*' when he first came to Africa.⁵³

In his new location Dennett was happy to meet his new headman or *linguister*, Francisco. Francisco would become his new assistant in his research. He helped Dennett in the factory but he also spent hours explaining the customs, rituals and language of the BaVili to the enthusiastic amateur ethnographer. Indeed, Dennett explained that Francisco had complained about the 'double work' he had to do, ' "[f]or", he said, "I have not only the shop work but I have to keep coming to your office to answer your many questions about the *Fiote's* [*sic*] language and habits" '54

It is also possible that the shift in Dennett's work was connected with the anthropological guidelines that had been prepared by the British Association for the Advancement of Science, to help expatriates gather useful ethnographic information. Since 1874 a handbook had been available to direct their observations: *Notes and Queries on Anthropology for the Use of Travellers and Residents in Uncivilised Lands*. The book had a section of advice about studying 'Religion, Fetishes etc.' and this may

⁵² Dutch traders also left the Free State in 1893 and moved their headquarters from Banana to Brazzaville. See Freidman, 1991, p. 70.

⁵³ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 22.

⁵⁴ Letter from Richard Dennett to E. Sidney Hartland, from Loango, 11 October 1897. National Library of Wales, *E. S. Hartland Archive*, ref. 6819B.

have been used by Dennett.⁵⁵ The book had been initiated as early as 1872, when a committee had been gathered under Colonel Lane Fox, (later Pitt Rivers) to draw up these guidelines for expatriates who were willing to gather ethnographic data.⁵⁶ A second edition was published in 1892 which coincides with the time Dennett began to study the BaVili in depth. The questions on 'Religion' were compiled by Edmund Tylor who posed thirty-eight questions that could lead the observer to determine the beliefs of 'uncivilised people' about souls, spirits, dreams and ghosts.⁵⁷ Another twenty-seven addressed beliefs about the spirit after death while further sections asked questions on issues such as Obsession and Possession and Spiritualists.

In total there were two hundred and forty-five questions in Tylor's section on religion, and nearly all of these had relevance for Dennett. They covered *Fetishism, Idolatry, Spirits and Demons, Nature Spirits, Polytheism and Monotheism; and Worship, Festivals, Prayer, Sacrifice, Austerities, Purification* and *Special and Miscellaneous Ceremonies*.⁵⁸ Two papers written by Dennett after 1890 covered very similar material. These were *Death and Burial of the Fjort* and *Bavili Notes*.⁵⁹ Indeed, it is possible that Dennett's use of the word *Notes* in his later title may allude to *Notes and Queries*.

Tylor asked the observer of 'uncivilised people' to consider questions such as:

1. Is something of the nature of a human soul believed in? 2. What is its name? Is it associated with the breath, shadow etc? 3. Does it depart when the body dies?

⁵⁵ British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS), *Notes and Queries on Anthropology for the Use of Travellers and Residents in Foreign Lands*, London: Stanford, 1874, p. 50.

⁵⁶ BAAS, 1874, p.iii. See also Urry, James. "'Notes and Queries on Anthropology' And the Development of Field Methods in British Anthropology, 1870-1920.' *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1972, p. 46.

⁵⁷ BAAS, 1874, p. 50.

⁵⁸ BAAS, 1874, pp. 50-58. Tylor's other sections were equally apt for Dennett's field of study. They covered 'Superstition', 'Magic and Witchcraft', 'Mythology' 'Customs' 'Taboo' 'Language', and 'Poetry' and 'Writing' (BAAS, 1874, pp 59-118).

⁵⁹ Dennett, Richard Edward. 'Death and Burial of the Fjort.' *Folklore* Vol. 8, no. 2, (1897), pp. 132-137; Dennett, Richard Edward. 'Bavili Notes.' *Folklore*, Vol. 16, no. 4, (1905), pp. 371-406.

4. Does it go away from the body in sleep, trance etc? Are any ceremonies performed to bring back the soul when the patient is sick or dying from its absence?⁶⁰

Bavili Notes covers the same material. It begins with a discussion of ‘the difference the native draws between life, shadow, breath and intelligence on the one hand, and ghost, soul, spirit on the other’ and goes on to supply names for these.⁶¹ The *Xidundu*, for example, ‘is said to sleep in the body of its owner’, but could be stolen by an ‘*ndoxi*’ or witch.⁶² ‘*Ximbindi*’, who were revenants who inhabited the woods, were described by Dennett in *Folklore of the Fjort* as the ‘spirits of the good who have departed this life’.⁶³ He also mentioned two further type of spirit, ‘*Xilunzi*’ and ‘*Nkulu*’ of which, he explained, there were further different types.⁶⁴

In *Death and Burial of the Fjort*, Dennett had also shown his familiarity with the complex terminology that could be applied to spirits. For example he could distinguish between the different terms used in Loango and Kacongo for ‘revenant’ (*Chinyumba*, and *Chimbindi*). He also knew differences in the ways these spirits operated, so that if a certain revenant appeared to a family member, that person would die, while those from other families would not.⁶⁵ He explained in detail the ceremonies that were held over the dead person, and gave an account of how the ‘*nkulu*’ or soul of the deceased could be installed in the head of a relation by the *nganga*.⁶⁶

As well as handling this new kind of specialist knowledge, Dennett had abandoned his earlier cynical tone, used when describing BaVili cultural practices. This may reflect the

⁶⁰ BAAS, 1874, pp. 50-51.

⁶¹ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 372.

⁶² As discussed earlier, Dennett used the letter ‘X’ to represent the sound ‘Tchi’.

⁶³ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 373; Dennett, 1898, p. 11.

⁶⁴ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 374-5.

⁶⁵ Dennett, 1897, p. 136.

⁶⁶ Dennett, 1897, p. 115.

possible influence of Tylor again, who posed the questions in *Notes and Queries* with deliberate ‘scientific’ detachment. Tylor’s aspirations for anthropology were indeed to make it a science, at a time when others had doubted if the subject was ‘amenable to scientific treatment’.⁶⁷ By sifting and comparing great quantities of evidence, Tylor’s aim was ‘to show that the development of institutions may be investigated on a system of tabulation and classification’.⁶⁸ Dennett was also keen to tabulate his findings and his later work is permeated with this methodology.

Tylor proposed that it was possible to trace the origins of mankind through investigating what he saw as the ‘survivals’ of beliefs and practices from less developed ages. He explained his thesis in *Notes and Queries* in the section on ‘Conservatism’:

The indisposition of most men to change of habits ... has special value to anthropologists as a means of tracing the history of civilisation. This is ‘survival’ which takes place when old arts and fashions, though superseded for ordinary purposes, are kept up under special circumstances, especially in state occasions and in solemn ceremonies.⁶⁹

Conservatism and invention were therefore, according to Tylor, worthy of close study as a means of excavating man’s earliest primitive origins within ‘developed’ human societies’.

Notes and Queries covered a further anthropological subject which seems to have held no interest for Dennett at all. This was physical anthropology, introduced by Dr John Beddoe in the first section of the book. Beddoe recommended certain ‘instruments of precision’ for the traveller to carry in ‘uncivilised’ lands which included callipers, ‘to

⁶⁷ Tylor, Edward. ‘On a Method of Investigating the Development of Institutions; Applied to Laws of Marriage and Descent.’ *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 18, (1889), p. 245. Cited in Haddon, Alfred C. *History of Anthropology*, London: Watts, 1910, p. 130.

⁶⁸ Haddon, 1910, p. 130.

⁶⁹ BAAS, 1874, p.137.

measure anything from 2 to 11 inches' and dotted papers 'for testing distance and clearness of vision' as well as a 'box of watercolours'.⁷⁰ These were to allow eye colours and skin tints to be recorded, which could then be tested against Broca's eye colour and skin-colour charts, which were also included in the book.

However these *Notes*, which were intended to provide data for the armchair anthropologist, did not always reach the traveller in a distant land. When the Baptist Missionary John Weeks wrote a review of the 1912 edition of *Notes and Queries*, he voiced regret that he 'did not meet with [the earlier versions] twenty years ago when I first began to take notes in anthropology'.⁷¹ The well-recognised Baptist Missionary Society had apparently not been targeted to gather anthropological information from Africa.⁷²

After 1890 another handbook was potentially available for the Briton living in "undeveloped" societies. This was the Folklore Society's *Handbook of Folklore*, which was published in 1890.⁷³ This book also gave advice about how evidence might be collected from peoples who were believed to represent the earlier stages of human development. The *Handbook* was edited by Lawrence Gomme and was published just as Dennett was taking the new direction in his research. Gomme set out precise instructions for the collection of folktales, sayings, customs and superstitions. He even supplied a pull-out chart at the back of the book to demonstrate the approved method of 'Tabulation of Folk-Tales' and the 'Analysis of Customs and Superstitions'. It is

⁷⁰ BAAS, 1874, p. 2.

⁷¹ Weeks, John H. 'Review of 'Notes and Queries on Anthropology.' *Folklore*, Vol. 24, no. 3, (1913(b)), pp. 392-397.

⁷² Another travellers' guide book was the Royal Geographical Society's *Hints for Travellers* First printed in 1854 a new edition was published in 1883, with revised guidance on anthropology. Further editions were printed in 1889, 1893, 1901. (The last version was published in 1938.) Royal Geographical Society. *Hints to Travellers*, London: Clowes, 1889.

⁷³ Gomme, George Lawrence. *The Handbook of Folklore*, London: The Folklore Society, 1890.

possible that Mary Kingsley, who introduced Dennett's work to the Folklore Society, had known of this book.

Whether Dennett had seen these guidebooks or not remains unconfirmed, but by the time he met Kingsley in 1893 he was certainly collecting the sort of data that *Notes and Queries* called for. Possibly thanks to Francisco, Dennett could now, for example, distinguish between different kinds of ordeal bark. His paper on *Death and Burial of the Fjort* for the Folklore Society in 1897 explained that 'the bark named *Mbundu* is given to a man who owns to being a witch but denied killing the person in question' whereas *nkassa* bark 'is given to those who deny the charge of being witches altogether.'⁷⁴ He also knew a new name for the carved figures or 'family fetishes' which he now called '*Poomba*' and he had gained understanding about how these would be used in a palaver.⁷⁵ He described how these *minkisi* functioned, without a trace of his former cynicism, or hostility.

Then the elder addresses the prince and his people, and the strangers who have come to hear how the deceased has died, and offers them each a drink. When they have finished drinking he turns to the fetishes and tells them that they have allowed evil to overtake the deceased, but prays them to protect his guests from the same. Then the fetishes again have earth thrown at them and their heads are once more rubbed in the earth. And now the elder addresses the wives and tells them that their husband has been cruelly taken from them and that they are now free to marry another; and then, turning to the fetishes, he trusts that they will guard the wives from the evil that killed their husband; and the fetishes are again dusted and rubbed in the earth.⁷⁶

At the same time as recording such insights, Dennett was extending his collection of folktales and songs. A section at the end of his 1898 book for the Folklore Society, *The*

⁷⁴ Dennett, 1897, p. 134.

⁷⁵ Dennett, 1897, p. 135.

⁷⁶ Dennett, 1897, p. 135. In the next part of this account of the ritual, even the poison ordeal passed without Dennett's criticism. Instead he showed understanding of the subtleties of BaVili justice. For example he noted: 'If a witch has to undergo the bark-test, rum is given to the prince, and he is told that if he hears that the *ndotchi* has been killed he is to take no official notice of the fact.' Dennett, 1897, p. 136.

Folklore of the Fjort, he described the complex mnemonic device that was used to recall a song with over thirty verses. A boy would arrange a string and tie thirty-two different items onto it. These might include shells, sticks, nuts, feathers, skin or bark. Each knotted item would prompt him to recall a different verse of a song whose content ranged widely over subjects such as courtship, death, children, crime, trade and conflicts.⁷⁷

In this period after 1890 Dennett tried to clarify the meaning of the terms that had been translated as ‘God’ (*Nzambi*) and ‘witch’ (*ndoxi* or *ndotchi*). He observed that Europeans had interpreted *Nzambi* as ‘the equivalent of the White Man’s God’ but he felt that that this was not a true equivalent as ‘the natives consider the earth, as their deity.’⁷⁸ He also attempted to clarify the distinction between the European term ‘witch’ and the indigenous name ‘*ndotchi*’ and argued that witchcraft was largely a matter of the *ndotchi* administering poison in secret.⁷⁹

Dennett developed his awareness of Kongo cosmology from his study of folktales. He learned about the great snake in the sky, the rainbow called ‘*Chamma*’, and the legends surrounding the sun and moon and stars, the thunder and lightning. These were written down in *The Folklore of the Fjort*.⁸⁰ The sky, he wrote, ‘is spoken of as something to be bored through’, so in one tale a woodpecker made holes in the sky to allow suitors to gain access to *Nzambi*’s daughters.⁸¹ The clouds, seasons and months all had names,

⁷⁷ Dennett, 1898, pp. 151-155. Dennett explained that this song originated in Mayombe.

⁷⁸ Dennett, 1898, p. 3.

⁷⁹ Dennett, 1898, p. 17. Terms such as ‘sorcerer’ and ‘priest’ have been adopted in recent years to serve for *ndotchi* and *nganga*, but a satisfactory translation of such ideas proves elusive. Issues of translation are discussed further in Chapter Four and Chapter Six.

⁸⁰ Dennett, 1898, p. 6-7.

⁸¹ Dennett, 1898, p. 7. The story is given on pages 74-76.

and the sea demanded certain rituals, before fishermen could safely go to work there.⁸²

They must 'knock fetishes' by knocking them to the ground or by having the *nganga* knock in a nail as a petition for safety.⁸³

This nail was akin to sealing a contract, and it could be removed to undo the arrangement. Dennett's contemporary, Cobden Phillips, also explained his understanding of the process of nailing to seal a contract. He wrote in 1887 that a nail was driven into a 'fetish' figure as

...a mark - a kind of registration of a law, promise or act done by the keeper, with the very great advantage that any such act could be definitely cancelled by pulling out the nail. This is a large source of profit to the keeper. A nail can be driven into a fetish for a shilling or so: probably thirty or forty would be asked for its withdrawal.⁸⁴

Dennett also became familiar with the rituals surrounding death. Tylor had devoted a page of text to the questions surrounding this subject and discussing what happened to souls after death. Dennett wrote six pages on the subject following the death of his cook's father.⁸⁵ A funeral was an important event for the BaKongo because of their convictions about the proximity of the parallel world of the dead. Valuable goods would be carried on the coffin and laid on the grave. A body could not be buried until it was certain that witchcraft had not been the cause of death. The body of an important person would be smoked over a fire and preserved, while wrapped in blankets. The burial might not take place until some weeks, months, or even years later. In some cases a large wheeled coffin would be constructed and precious possessions would be arranged displayed on it at the funeral.⁸⁶ A photograph of the coffin made for Dennett's 'cook's

⁸² Dennett, 1898, p. 8.

⁸³ Dennett, 1898, p. 8.

⁸⁴ Phillips, 1887, p. 160.

⁸⁵ Dennett, 1897 (and Dennett, 1898, pp. 111-116).

⁸⁶ See illustration in Dennett, 1887(a), facing p. 104.

father', shows prestigious European objects on its surface, and imperial military imagery hanging on the walls behind. [Fig. 25.]

The same funeral shimbec is seen again in a photograph that Dennett used in *Bavili Notes* in 1905, where figures are seen seated in front of it, consulting the family fetishes.⁸⁷ [Fig. 26.] Dennett described the process of mourning, the sort of shroud that was used, the smoking of the body and the investigations that would take place following a death to ascertain if the deceased had been the victim of witchcraft.⁸⁸ He was also invited to photograph a funeral by a relative of Francisco, his linguist. Francisco had died after spending two days salvaging Hatton and Cookson goods after a tornado had hit the factory.⁸⁹ Dennett explained in a letter to E. S. Hartland, the Chair of Publications for the Folklore Society, that 'prince *Xikaia*' had asked Dennett to take a photograph, just as he had done when his steward's father had died.⁹⁰ Dennett explained to Hartland that he arranged to remove the side of the hut so that the wrapped body could be photographed, as ritual required that the corpse could only be moved after dusk, when no shadow would be cast.⁹¹ This photograph was printed in *The Folklore of the Fjort* in 1897.⁹² [Fig. 27.]

Higher and Lower 'Nkissism'.

In 1898, the King-elect of Loango joined Dennett's group of valued informants.⁹³ The French had accessioned Loango in 1883 when there had been no crowned *Maloango*, or

⁸⁷ This is discussed further in Chapter Four.

⁸⁸ Dennett, 1897.

⁸⁹ Letter from Richard Dennett to E. S. Hartland, from Loango, S.W. Coast Africa, 11 October 1897, *E. S. Hartland Archive*, National Library of Wales, ref. 16894B.

⁹⁰ The 'steward's father' was also described as 'my cook's father' in Dennett, 1897, p. 132.

⁹¹ The dead body was understood to have no shadow. See Letter from Dennett to Hartland, October 1897.

⁹² Dennett, 1898, facing p. 114.

⁹³ Dennett, 1906, pp.15-23.

chief, in Loango.⁹⁴ Then, apparently giving consideration to government ‘on native lines’, they proposed that a king should be returned to power.⁹⁵ Maniluemba was elected, and Dennett, who supported the idea, made an effort to become acquainted with him.⁹⁶ [Fig. 28, Fig. 29.]

It was about this time that Dennett began to formulate his ideas about the religion or philosophy of the ‘Fjort’ falling into two parts. He explained this theory in a paper which was prepared partly as a response to a questionnaire that had been set by a French colonial official. This was published in 1902 by the African Society as *Laws and Customs of the Fjort or Bavili Family, Kingdom of Loango*.⁹⁷ Dennett was friendly with Father Carrié at the Spiritan Mission in Loango and the priest had invited him to contribute to this French Government research on the local population.⁹⁸ At this time Dennett was trying to understand how there were parts of Kongo political culture which were positive and which sustained social relationships while others, like witchcraft and ordeals, appeared to break these up. To explain this conflict Dennett proposed that there was a higher class of *nkissism*, which was good, and a lower form that was connected with ‘witchcraft and fetishism’ which was evil. The higher part belonged to ‘to the children of God’ and was less conspicuous than the lower, base, part.⁹⁹ He called the two forms ‘*Nkici-ism*’ and ‘*Mudongo-ism*’ and he identified them as the binaries of the spiritual and the natural in Kongo belief.¹⁰⁰ The nobler part, he argued,

⁹⁴ Dennett, 1906, p. 6.

⁹⁵ Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘King Maluango’s Court.’ *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 3, no. 10, (1904(a)) p. 156.

⁹⁶ Dennett, 1906, p. 7.

⁹⁷ No exact date is given for the questionnaire but Dennett’s paper was published in 1902. He left the Congo in the same year. Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘Laws and Customs of the Fjort or Bavili Family, Kingdom of Loango.’ *Journal of the African Society*, Vol. 1, no. 3, (1902(a)), pp. 259-287.

⁹⁸ There had been a Spiritan Mission in Landana but when Landana was claimed by the Portuguese as part of Cabinda in 1883, another Mission had been established in French Congo at Loango. Dennett expressed high regard for the work of this Mission and for Father Carrié.

⁹⁹ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 282.

¹⁰⁰ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 282.

had ‘escaped our notice’ because it was less spectacular than the rituals and ordeals associated with ‘fetishes’ and ‘witchcraft’.¹⁰¹ Dennett concluded that, ‘judging the whole by the part most in evidence, we have branded their religion as all that is evil and repulsive, and have so done the natives an almost incalculable injury.’¹⁰²

It was unusual for a European to apologise for injuring the ‘uncivilised’ African at this time, and Dennett was entering unfamiliar territory by suggesting that an elevated moral code had existed in Africa which the whites had overlooked. This idea competed with the prevailing ideas which positioned Africans as un-evolved superstitious savages. Nevertheless he began to explain the religion of ‘the natives’ as falling into the two divisions, the elevated ‘spiritual’ part and the base ‘natural’ one.¹⁰³ He tailored his knowledge of BaVili belief to fit a Christian model with notions of good and evil framed by theological teaching.

Perhaps because of his new contact with the *Maloango* he began to emphasise the importance of the king in these divisions. The king and the priest became combined in his thinking and his language became increasingly biblical. Thus he described the first class of ‘*nkici*’ as the ‘*Bakici baci*, or the attributes of God on Earth, including the King made in his image as the speaking I or the preacher’.¹⁰⁴ This class, and the ‘*bilongo*’ or medicines, were the higher forms of ‘*BaKici*’ in Dennett’s model, and were forces for good.¹⁰⁵ The second class of ‘*BaKici*’ he identified were the nail fetishes and ‘household gods’ or ‘fetishes’ and ‘charms’ which were activated by the *nganga*; these,

¹⁰¹ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 282.

¹⁰² Dennett, 1902(a), p. 282.

¹⁰³ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 282.

¹⁰⁴ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 282.

¹⁰⁵ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 282.

he explained, were ‘*Zincauci*’, the ‘fetishes’ of the lower and evil form of the religion.¹⁰⁶

Dennett identified the *nganga* as the ‘aboriginal hearer’ who was therefore the counterpart of the initiator, who he defined as ‘the speaking I’ and who can be equated in biblical thought to ‘the Word’.¹⁰⁷ The lower division of the religion, (‘*Mudongo-ism*’) included witchcraft ‘and all its fearful evils’ such as poisoning and poison ordeals.¹⁰⁸ But Dennett decided that these evils were necessary adjuncts to the ‘fetishes’ or ‘*Zincauci*’; they were ‘predestined’ and would disappear in time, when the higher powers were allowed to flourish.¹⁰⁹ He thus explained the presence of evil in a created world as something that would eventually be eradicated when the higher spirituality took hold.¹¹⁰

It is impossible not to see a Christian paradigm in Dennett’s evangelical explanation of good and evil within BaVili religion. His narrative of good forces finally overcoming evil and of predestination within this moral struggle is an interpretation that reflects a western model, constructed in Dennett’s mind, rather than his informants’. Increasingly Dennett became zealous about his interpretation and the papers he published after 1900 were sometimes polemic and often controversial. Even this paper on *Laws and Customs of the Fjort or Bavili Family* was prefaced by an editor’s disclaimer which explained that ‘[i]t must be clearly understood that the object of the Journal is to gather information and that each writer must be held responsible for his own views’.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 283.

¹⁰⁷ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 282.

¹⁰⁸ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 283.

¹⁰⁹ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 283.

¹¹⁰ ‘In the creation of the *zincauci* ... the *Zi bakici* naturally predestined and necessitated the making of *Bakici Bankondi*, and will as naturally disappear with them.’ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 283.

¹¹¹ Editor’s Note, *Journal of the African Society*, Vol.1, no. 3, (1902(a)), p. 259.

However, despite his evangelistic stance and highly personal interpretations, the material that Dennett collected has provided a substantial body of research with which to consider the complex indigenous institutions which were rarely considered in such depth by other foreigners at the time. These findings can be used to contextualise the collection, but Dennett also intended his observations to be used by colonial governments to improve their management of African societies.

Government and Ethnography.

Dennett felt strongly that his ethnographic work should be used to further governmental improvements in the Congo. He laid out his understanding of the laws and social structure of the BaVili most clearly in his paper *Laws and Customs of the Fjort or Bavili Family*, because this was a response to a government questionnaire. He identified where he thought that foreign governments were failing to understand or adapt to these indigenous systems.

For example, a sophisticated indigenous system of taxation and labour had been broken up by the incoming colonial governments. Previously, land had been worked by rite of *usufruct*, granted to the under-prince or '*kongo zovo*' by the 'prince'.¹¹² In return for the right to use the land and water for his family, the *kongo zovo* owed the 'prince' allegiance. The form this might take was understood by Dennett:

- (1) [H]e must help the prince in his wars with armed men;
- (2) all leopards killed on the land must be sent to the prince;
- (3) the head and leg of the antelope, the wild ox and the pig must also be sent to him;
- (4) the backbone of any whale washed ashore, the heads of ... sea fishes ... the water pig ... and a small basket of fish from each net must also be sent to the prince;
- (5) his women must also send

¹¹² Dennett, 1902(a), p. 268.

him one-fifth of the palm nuts, and a basket of pea nuts and Indian corn harvested; (6) the rich man ... living on the property is expected to give the prince a feast and presents every year.¹¹³

The prince, in turn, owed goods and service to the King. The *Maloango* had the right to expect 'the skins of all animals killed, 3 pieces of chalk, 100 longs ... and 3 ... native money mats' annually, as well as assistance from the princes in any emergency.¹¹⁴

Systems such as these were ignored or dismissed by the European governments.

Instead, unpopulated land was viewed as "vacant" and it appeared to the uninformed that unoccupied labourers were plentiful. This mistaken appraisal proved disastrous.

Removing African men from their communities to labour for the State also removed the means of providing goods to be presented as tribute to the leaders. This destroyed hitherto long-standing allegiances and led to conflict.

Dennett's accounts provide a record of how the community had operated before these disruptions. Concerning property, Dennett revealed that 'Bavili [*sic*] have no word in their language to express proprietor or property. The nearest expression for proprietor is *Fumu Bima*, the chief or prince of all things' but the people understood that the *fumu* held land in trust for his people, and that a 'possessor of goods is only the temporary owner of goods belonging to his *Fumu*.'¹¹⁵ Thus the product of any labour, trade or cultivation was owed to a man or woman's *fumu*. However it was understood that the *fumu* would allow the producer to keep a share of it: 'all sources of wealth carry their responsibilities with them and all goods are in trust rather than in actual possession'.¹¹⁶

The subtlety of this trust might easily be missed by those Europeans who were eager to

¹¹³ Dennett, 1902(a), pp. 268-269.

¹¹⁴ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 269.

¹¹⁵ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 268.

¹¹⁶ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 268.

acquire land and make profits, which resulted in considerable disruption and conflict in the African community.

Similarly there were important expectations within marriage which colonial powers did not recognise:

[T]he woman plants, cooks, carries wood, and draws water, the man looks after the religious and fetish rites of the family, closely allied to the treatment of his sick relations, and their burial, finds his wife in dress, fish, the chase, palm nuts, etc., builds her house and cuts the bush where she may have chosen to plant.¹¹⁷

If either member of the marriage was taken away for long periods this social stability broke down. The elderly might be neglected, crops could fail and families would starve if either partner was removed. Dennett could see the damage that was inflicted on communities when a member was sent away to fulfil the foreigner's demands for labour, noting that this also promoted irresponsibility and 'weakened the authority of the head of the family.'¹¹⁸ Instead of serving unpaid apprenticeships, young people now expected a salary and when employed by Europeans they wished to keep any money that was paid to them. Their families lost wealth as a result. Villages were badly-built, and became shabby, and Dennett remarked that 'the old ideas of order and sanitation are conspicuous by their absence'.¹¹⁹

Dennett was critical of the French Government's double-standards regarding individuals' autonomy. On the one hand, the Government recognised children's independence from the family when it wanted employees, but on the other it tried to make the family 'responsible for the crimes of its members.'¹²⁰ He also believed that

¹¹⁷ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 264.

¹¹⁸ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 285.

¹¹⁹ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 286.

¹²⁰ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 286.

foreign interference had disrupted existing methods of maintaining law and order. Previously the BaVili community had regulated crime without the use of prisons. Severe offences had gone before the *Maloango* and had been decided in a formal *palaver*. Each party would put his case to a third party ‘or Reasoner, called *Nzonzi*.’¹²¹ A verdict of infringement of the law would be followed by a fine, which would be paid in goods. By failing to present these goods, the guilty party would have to become a slave until his or her family could pay off the fine. Meanwhile ‘the slave or pawn’ was ‘just as free of the village as any of the inhabitants’, and this avoided the need for prisons.¹²² Should a person become a drain on their family by becoming ‘a habitual criminal’ Dennett noted that the family might eventually decide it was worthwhile ‘to sell or kill the criminal to get him out of the way.’¹²³ Thus the BaVili community regulated itself.

However European views on the use of slavery had created a problem with this method of controlling crime. Philanthropic anti-slavery arguments were applied to the slaves in Congo communities and this led to the liberation of those who had been criminals. This undermined the indigenous judicial system and led to anarchy in the community.¹²⁴ It also had the effect of reducing the available labour force because slaves or criminals had traditionally been used to work on building projects.

¹²¹ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 278.

¹²² Dennett, 1902(a), p. 278.

¹²³ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 277.

¹²⁴ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 286-287.

Dennett's Recommendations.

Labour.

Dennett proposed a solution to meet the need for labour which would also help families who were suffering hardship. He suggested that the Government institute a 'labour bureau'.¹²⁵ The State could pay the fines imposed by indigenous courts, in return for the criminal's labour. The offenders could serve on a plantation or a factory to re-pay the fine. When families were in need they could exchange their labour for food or money as well. 'A great cry about the want of labour [in Africa] is being listened to in Europe' explained Dennett, 'but I am sure that a department of the Government taking this work up and managing it on business principles would ... make a very handsome profit out of it as well as earn the gratitude of the natives'.¹²⁶

"Fetishism."

Dennett's in-depth knowledge of BaVili traditions allowed him to make other recommendations regarding government in the Congo. He suggested that the perceived blight of "fetishism" which so distressed the missionaries and annoyed the traders, would be reduced if the French Government would support the indigenous leaders who represented traditional moral law. He argued that the white races' preoccupation with crushing the rampant witchcraft, or '*Ndoxi-ism*', was distracting them. Instead they should assist the rulers and kings and encourage these leaders to flourish. He was convinced that the BaKongo judicial system was highly effective. 'There is very little to alter in either the composition or procedure of the native courts, they are the outcome of thousands of years of accumulated experience of a people who know themselves and

¹²⁵ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 286.

¹²⁶ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 287.

their needs.¹²⁷ He believed that the indigenous government would bring witchcraft and poisoning under control naturally, if the French government would only support the indigenous leadership: ‘the first step of the Government should be to uphold the chiefs in their authority’, he argued.¹²⁸

It need not raid the towns for fetishes, but it must reorganise the ‘powers’ that work for the good of the people with a very strong hand, by upholding the chiefs in their endeavour to induce the people to respect the moral law.¹²⁹

Casca.

The use of *Casca* or *Nkasa* was another serious matter. Dennett could see that trials by ordeal would not be eradicated while witchcraft and poisoning continued. He suggested therefore that the poisonous bark’s use should be regulated by the French Government. Permission should be gained from ‘the chief, prince or King’ before it was used and the Government should also be informed.¹³⁰ This way, the missionaries could cease their battle with the ‘evil part’ of the local religion and concentrate on ‘tracing the working of the Word of God among these people’.¹³¹ It seemed plain to Dennett that if the civil authorities tackled witches and poisoners the BaVili would be able to recognise their King as ‘their guard and protection against *Nkauciism*’ and a representative of the spiritual King.¹³²

¹²⁷ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 282.

¹²⁸ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 283.

¹²⁹ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 283.

¹³⁰ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 282.

¹³¹ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 284.

¹³² Dennett, 1902(a), p. 284. *Nkauciism* was another name that Dennett had given to the ‘lower’ form of Kongo religion along with *Mudongoism*.

Sacred Groves.

Dennett had thus combined his evangelical ideas with his political recommendations and he continued to apply this model to other elements of BaVili society. He had been investigating the meaning of ‘sacred groves’ and had discovered that they played an important role in BaKongo rituals. His ideas were outlined in the book he published in 1906, *At the Back of the Black Man’s Mind*. Here Dennett explained that certain *banganga* were attached to these ‘groves’ or ‘*bibila*’, and particular animals were associated with them as well.¹³³ Bones and skin of certain birds, reptiles, fish and mammals were found in the groves. Applying his ideas about ‘higher’ and ‘lower religion’, Dennett placed these groves in the higher category, along with sacred lands and rivers, sacred trees, sacred animals, omens, and the seasons.¹³⁴ It followed that ‘sacred groves’, which were currently used when a person needed to petition a *nganga*, could easily be translated into meeting places which could serve as a church. ‘Why abolish them?’ asked Dennett. ‘Would it not be better to let educated native priests develop them into Christian Churches?’¹³⁵

Banganga.

The *banganga* however, came under attack. Dennett wanted to suppress the ‘money-grubbing swindlers at present known as the *Nganga Bilongo*’.¹³⁶ He suggested that the government should by assign an ‘educated native doctor’ to each *kongo zovo* who would be supervised by a white doctor ‘attached to the King’. This might be a way to by-pass what he saw as unscrupulous charlatans.¹³⁷

¹³³ Dennett, 1906, p. 97.

¹³⁴ Dennett, 1906, p. 100.

¹³⁵ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 284.

¹³⁶ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 284.

¹³⁷ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 284.

In all these proposals Dennett clearly betrayed his Eurocentrism and his Christian bias, but his recommendations also indicate his long-term commitment to the development of Africa. He understood that good governance had to be built up slowly and that previous encounters between the BaKongo and Europeans had led to centuries of disruption, and, in his opinion, corruption, through Catholicism. The process of colonisation would be equally destructive if it was rushed. Dennett had been prepared to spend his life in Africa and it seems he expected an equivalent dedication from his fellow expatriates.

The Maloango

As this chapter has shown, Dennett was well aware of the damaging consequences that ‘contact with the white races’ had brought to the Loango coast.¹³⁸ In response, he formulated his thesis that the ‘natives need a taking back to their ancient customs, before the slave trade and its abuses destroyed their natural beauty.’¹³⁹ Reinstating the king or *Maloango* was therefore an act that he approved.

However the hoped-for “coronation” was never carried out. Maniluemba was unable to afford the distribution of food and largesse that was required in every town he passed through on the way to his investiture. In the past such goods would have been gathered from his subjects, in tribute or taxes. But as some of Maniluemba’s people now lived in the Portuguese possession of Cabinda he was not allowed to petition them for contributions.

¹³⁸ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 282.

¹³⁹ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 282.

Because the French refused to provide any subsidy, the BaVili remained without a king. According to Dennett the people observed the way the Government disregarded the ‘king-elect’ and they also lost their respect for his authority; ‘Maloango, the natives noticed, was disparaged by the government and was simply used by it as a collector of hut tax or a recruiter of carriers. Surely the people had reason to make little of him also.’¹⁴⁰ He also concluded that the choice of Maniluemba had been biased by internal politics: behind the scenes the BaVili responsible for choosing their next leader had selected ‘a prince they thought the most likely to inconvenience them as little as possible.’¹⁴¹ Maniluemba, he later explained, was ‘an old man, rather deaf, given to drinking and otherwise harmless’.¹⁴² Nevertheless, he was blamed by the community for the lack of rain that followed his election, and was eventually forced to abandon the royal town of Buali.¹⁴³ He returned to his own village of Ndembuano where he thereafter made a minimal impact on political events.

Dennett regretted the French Government’s failure to support the “coronation”. He believed this event marked a moment where the French Government had lost an opportunity to ‘make its voice and influence heard and felt in an orderly way once and for all.’¹⁴⁴ He saw it as a failure to take up what Kipling had defined as the ‘white man’s burden’.¹⁴⁵ Dennett, like Kipling, saw colonial government in Africa as a calling to nurture those whom Kipling had called the ‘new-caught, sullen peoples’.¹⁴⁶ He showed this paternalistic stance again when he argued that chiefs such as the *Maloango*, should

¹⁴⁰ Dennett, 1904(a), p. 157.

¹⁴¹ Dennett, 1904(a), p. 157.

¹⁴² Dennett, 1904(a), p. 157.

¹⁴³ Dennett, 1904(a), p. 157.

¹⁴⁴ Dennett, 1904(a), p. 157.

¹⁴⁵ Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘A Few Notes on the History of Luango (Northern Portion of Congo Coast).’ *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 3, no. 11, (1904(c)), p. 280.

¹⁴⁶ Kipling, Rudyard ‘The White Man’s Burden’, (1899), *The Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994, p. 334.

have been given ‘white men’ as ‘resident guides and fathers ... so that they by their knowledge, patience and tact, may help the natives to assimilate their government to the more enlightened development of their protectors.’¹⁴⁷ Though slow, he argued, this would be the surest method of governing Congo.

In the past Dennett had applauded the French Government for their attempts to understand the indigenous community. He had seen the French official’s questionnaire a ‘pledge of the sincerity that rests at the bottom of the French colonial movement’.¹⁴⁸ He had commended what he thought was France’s ‘desire to govern the country on native lines by the re-establishment of *Maluango*.’¹⁴⁹ However, he was eventually to be disappointed. Once concession companies were instated in the French Congo, he was forced to admit that the fabulous riches that could be gathered by short-term profiteering would swamp longer-term ideals. In the process, both legitimate commerce and the African people would suffer.

[T]his part of Luango, under French rule, and no longer managed by its native rulers, has passed through a somewhat troublous time, which must result in damage to commerce unless the French Government wakes up and takes up the ‘white man’s burden’ in earnest, instead of trying to throw it on the shoulders of irresponsible concessionaires.¹⁵⁰

Dennett’s Conclusions.

Dennett’s observations of BaKongo society led him to certain conclusions. He found two particular themes in BaKongo belief that he wanted to bring to light. On the one hand, he wanted to publicise his certainty that there were two forms of *nkissism*, the higher form, which had been neglected, and a lower which drew all the attention. He

¹⁴⁷ Dennett, 1904(a), p. 158.

¹⁴⁸ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 259.

¹⁴⁹ Dennett, 1904(a), p. 156.

¹⁵⁰ Dennett, 1904(c), p. 280.

wanted to show that the BaKongo had therefore been misread by Europeans and could be encouraged to rise above the witchcraft and superstition that unscrupulous priests used to their advantage. Secondly he believed that ‘the Kingly Office’ was well understood by the BaKongo. He even drew up a chart to show the Kongo court in parallel with the British Constitution, which was an observation that a critic later described as a comparison likely to ‘raise a smile’.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless Dennett believed that colonial powers could find ways to work harmoniously with their BaKongo subjects by using the political structures that were already well established in the Congo.

Dennett’s ethnography was driven by a desire to discover the philosophical foundations of African life. These intangible, “spiritual” beliefs may have eluded him, but something- perhaps his friendship with the unsuccessful *Maloango*- convinced him that he could make sense of them if they could be listed, measured, identified, analysed, picked apart, and constructed into a “scientific” formula. By 1900 he had begun to develop and apply such a structure to his data.¹⁵²

The ‘Categories’ and the ‘Formula’.

Dennett’s work led him to identify six categories that seemed to permeate Kongo culture.¹⁵³ These he linked to ‘Water, Earth, Fire, Procreation and Motion, Fruitfulness, Life’.¹⁵⁴ To these basic ideas he connected the six departments of the ‘higher form of

¹⁵¹ Werner, Alice. ‘Anthropology and Administration.’ *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 6, no. 23, (1907), p. 282.

¹⁵² Dennett explained that his formula came ‘by the help of two or three intelligent non-Christian natives’ in an attempt to complete the philosophy of the BaVili (Dennett, 1906, p.122). He emphasised that he had ‘talked these questions over with [Maluango] many times’ (Dennett, 1906, p. 124). The ‘categories’ are shown in a chart in Dennett, 1906, pp. 108-109. [Fig. 30.]

¹⁵³ Dennett, 1906, p. 108.

¹⁵⁴ Dennett, 1906, p. 108.

religion'.¹⁵⁵ These were: '(1) sacred groves (2) sacred lands and rivers, (3) sacred trees, (4) sacred animals, (5) omens, and (6) the seasons'.¹⁵⁶

These six were linked by Dennett to the titles that were given by the BaVili to their king.¹⁵⁷ He could also associate them with six sacred symbols and with the six departments of the state. The King was therefore *Fumu*, an arbitrating judge, chief of lands and rivers. He was also and *Ntinu Lukene*, a reasoning judge, 'head of the custom of the Leopard and thus associated with the sacred animals'.¹⁵⁸ He was also *Nganga Vumbai*, a priest of the seasons who had to appease *Bunzi*, the West Wind.¹⁵⁹ As Head of State the king was *Maloango Xivanji*, the procreator and head of all the omens.¹⁶⁰ As *Muene* he was as an 'overseer of the morals of his people' who also 'presides over the sacred trees'.¹⁶¹ Finally the king was *Nkici Ci* which pointed to his identification with the spiritual agencies of the sacred groves, the *BaKici Ci*, who were approached through the rituals and ceremonies that were formerly conducted at these groves.¹⁶²

Dennett hypothesised that at one time there may have been sacred groves for each of the six titles of the king.¹⁶³ Each grove would have a 'sacred tree'.¹⁶⁴ The groves were also associated with the sacred animals which were 'tabu' or '*xina*' to the different groups of

¹⁵⁵ Dennett, 1906, p. 100.

¹⁵⁶ Dennett, 1906, p. 100.

¹⁵⁷ Dennett, 1906, p. 24 and p. 100.

¹⁵⁸ Dennett, 1906, p. 24 and p. 100.

¹⁵⁹ Dennett, 1906, p. 25 and p. 100.

¹⁶⁰ Dennett, 1906, p. 25 and p. 101.

¹⁶¹ Dennett, 1906, p. 25 and p. 101.

¹⁶² Dennett, 1906, p. 25. This name for the tutelary spirit was also written as *Nkisi nsi* in some of Dennett's texts.

¹⁶³ Dennett, 1906, p. 101.

¹⁶⁴ Dennett, 1906, p. 126. Dennett began to collect specimens of the bark of the 'sacred trees' and to photograph them. There are unlabelled slides showing trees in the *R. E. Dennett Collection* of lantern slides in the Royal Anthropological Institute and photographs of different tree types in *At The Back of the Black Man's Mind* (Dennett, 1906, facing pp. 12, 92, 131, and 132).

BaVili connected with that grove.¹⁶⁵ Dennett had found remains of different animals in these groves or ‘*bibila*’.¹⁶⁶ The groves were also connected with the ‘omens’ such as thunder and lightning, and the omen that was understood when a dog, *Mbulu* crossed one’s path at the start of a journey.¹⁶⁷

Once Dennett had identified these groups of six he developed his model to show how much of BaVili life, and not just the King’s court, was in harmony with these ideas.¹⁶⁸ He began to develop a formula that connected the categories with other ideas, and in 1906 he presented underlying the philosophy of the BaVili ‘in table form’.¹⁶⁹ [Fig. 30.] These ideas were then extended and developed in Dennett’s later work and they continued to occupy him in Nigeria.¹⁷⁰

Dennett’s Later Work.

When Dennett arrived in Benin City, aged forty-five, he started to examine the local language and society to see if evidence of similar categories existed. He concluded that they did, and from this he developed an ever more complex theory. He explained that his research had led him to believe that the ‘Black man’s mind in the Congo and Nigeria’ had uninterrupted ‘natural’ and ‘subconscious’ access to a natural form of

¹⁶⁵ Some of these animals are listed in Dennett, 1906, p. 97.

¹⁶⁶ Singular, *xibila*. See Dennett, 1906, p. 96.

¹⁶⁷ Dennett, 1906, p. 137-138.

¹⁶⁸ Linguist and student of African culture, Alice Werner referred to Dennett’s ‘categories’ in 1912, when she wrote of his findings favourably in connection with Emil Torday’s research on the ‘hierarchy of Bushongo courtiers and officials’. She noted in 1912 that ‘there appears to be much in Bushongo traditions which is calculated to throw light on the whole subject of “Categories” to which Mr Dennett and M. Van Gennep have devoted so much laborious research’. Werner, A. ‘The Bushongo.’ *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 11, no. 42, (1912), p. 212. See also note 148.

¹⁶⁹ Dennett, 1906, p. 237.

¹⁷⁰ The categories and formulae are revisited for example in Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘A Common Basis of Religion, [*sic*] Part I: Or, the Order in Genesis One with the Order in the Categories in West Africa.’ *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 12, no. 47, (1913(a)) pp. 256-275; and Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘A Common Basis for Religion, [*sic*]: Part II.’ *Journal of the Royal African Society* Vol. 13, no. 49, (1913(b)), pp. 33-44.

religion and government which had been ‘the foundation of his religious and social systems’.¹⁷¹

According to Alfred Cort Haddon, the practice of researching the mind of the African like this was new; it had ‘no history’.¹⁷² Indeed Haddon reported in 1910 that as recently as 1857, the German zoologist Hermann Burmeister had pronounced ‘I have often tried to obtain an insight into the mind of the negro but it was never worth the trouble’.¹⁷³ Haddon explained that this new sub-discipline of anthropology required the researcher to be resident among the ‘more backward races’ like Dennett had been, where he could endeavour ‘to reach their point of view by means of observation and experimentation’. He termed this methodology ‘Ethnical Psychology’ in his *History of Anthropology* in 1910.¹⁷⁴

Dennett claimed that he had lived ‘so long among the Africans’ that he had ‘acquired a kind of way of thinking black’ and that this had given him ‘a secondary instinct’ about the people he was writing about.¹⁷⁵ From this ‘instinct’, and from his conversations with his informants, he had begun to create his construct of what was ‘at the back of the black man’s mind.’ Dennett’s interpretation went beyond a purely observational ethnography: his method of analysis also drew on the sounds and structure of the BaVili language itself. He explained that he had enrolled the *nganga* of the sacred grove of *Lungululubu*, called Tati, to help him unravel some of the subtleties of meaning bound up in the sound made by the consonants and vowels in the BaVili language.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Dennett, Richard Edward. *Notes on West African Categories*, London: Macmillan, 1911, p. ix.

¹⁷² Haddon, 1910, p. 81.

¹⁷³ Burmeister, *Der SwarzeMensch* (no further reference given) cited in Haddon, 1910, p. 82.

¹⁷⁴ Haddon, 1910, p. 82.

¹⁷⁵ Dennett, cited in Haddon, 1910, p. 82.

¹⁷⁶ Dennett, 1913 (a) p. 267.

In his later research Dennett sought to prove that the six categories were present in the vocabulary of African languages. He explored these ideas in his work with Yoruba, which he called a ‘truly beautiful language’ and he aspired to develop from his research a philological equivalent to the periodic table.¹⁷⁷ Indeed his studies after 1910 became imbued with ideas of periodicity, the recurrence of characteristic properties of elements arranged in tabular form.¹⁷⁸ In *Notes on West African Categories* Dennett showed how the same ideas or ‘categories’ as he had identified in BaVili culture were also found in Yoruba government, family life and religion.¹⁷⁹ These were, in Dennett’s understanding, ‘forms of cognitive consciousness, universal principle[s]’ and as such they formed very foundation of human existence. Eventually Dennett distilled his universal categories into six overarching principles: ‘Authority; Morality; Potentiality; Willpower or Volition; Vitalisation; and Reciprocity’, and when he created a society called the ‘West African Union’ after 1916, he used these headings for the society’s emblem.¹⁸⁰

Dennett’s speculative theories reflect how far his work had diverted from mainstream ethnography after he left the Congo. Despite his desire to present universal values that were common to all humankind, his work came across as deeply idiosyncratic and subjective. Although he claimed to be perfecting a scientific model, Dennett’s work

¹⁷⁷ Dennett, Richard Edward. *My Yoruba Alphabet*, London: Macmillan, 1916, p.vii. When Dennett produced his *African Tables of Periodic Law* in 1916 he explained to his publisher that his work ‘seems to me in my ignorance to be far superior to that published by Soddy in his *Matter and Energy*.’ Letter from Richard Dennett to George Macmillan, from Olokmeji, Lagos, Nigeria, 5 December, 1916. University of Reading, Special Collections, *Macmillan Archive*, ref. 205/43. Frederick Soddy went on to win a Nobel Prize for his work, *Matter and Energy*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1911.

¹⁷⁸ Dennett saw a parallel between his work and ‘Newlands Law of Octaves’. ‘Newlands Law’ arose from the discovery that when the known elements were placed in order of their mass the eighth and the first elements were found to be similar. Dennett had put a first and eighth element on either side of his six categories and identified the equivalent reciprocal nature of these. For examples of tables see Dennett, 1913(b), pp. 43-44; also see Dennett, 1916, which applies Dennett’s categories to Yoruba linguistics.

¹⁷⁹ Dennett, 1911.

¹⁸⁰The emblem may be seen on his letter to George Macmillan, 18 January, 1921, from Temple Bar House, London. University of Reading, Special Collections, *Macmillan Archive*, ref. 87/63.

seemed instead to be a very personal interpretation, motivated by the notion that languages could allow direct access the 'inner consciousness of man'.¹⁸¹ Dennett thought that the 'Great Universal Order' could be accessed more directly through unspoiled African languages than via those of the developed western nations.¹⁸² In *My Yoruba Alphabet*, Dennett explained his belief that

...all the works of the Great Creator of the universe, whether mighty or seemingly insignificant, whether performed directly or apparently indirectly, conform without exception, to one definite, universal order and that the spirit, or inner consciousness of man, moves in conformity with this universal order, so long as that consciousness works in obedience to the dictates of its Great Author. There is no doubt in the writer's mind that, being the expression of the inner consciousness of man, the primitive construction of all languages complies with this great overruling principle.¹⁸³

According to one critic's review of this book, Dennett was attempting to link the actual sounds of the language, to the meanings he had identified in his categories. The critic explained that Dennett was apparently attempting to 'dive' into the mysterious 'rightness' that some words seem to hold for their meanings.¹⁸⁴ Despite this encouraging analysis, Dennett's approach had become so obscure by 1916 that his regular publisher, Macmillan, appears to have advised him to seek an alternative company to publish his work. In 1916, Dennett proposed to contact A. R. Orage, the editor of the left-wing modernist cultural periodical, *New Age*, to 'see if my ideas fall in with his'.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Dennett, 1916, p. ix.

¹⁸² Dennett, 1916, p. 8. In *My Yoruba Alphabet*, Dennett made it clear that he traced the 'Universal Order' to the Almighty, explaining that he hoped his book would demonstrate the conformity of the Yoruba language 'with the Great Universal Order which I believe was ordained by God'.

¹⁸³ Dennett, 1916, p. ix.

¹⁸⁴ 'Review of *My Yoruba Alphabet*.' *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 16, no. 61, (1916), p. 87. This comment was probably made by the linguist Alice Werner, who also commented that researchers in East Africa were also tackling similar question.

¹⁸⁵ Letter from Richard Dennett to George Macmillan, from Parliament Hill Mansions, Highgate, 11 July 1916, University of Reading Special Collections, *Macmillan Archive*, ref. 214/71. The *New Age Journal* had been started in 1907 and was, according to Wallace Martin, 'an unparalleled arena of cultural and political debate'. Martin, Wallace. *The New Age Under Orage: Chapters in English Cultural History*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969, p. 1.

Nevertheless, Dennett continued to write to Macmillan and in 1921 he sent him a manuscript for a book called ‘*The Soul in Sound*’ in 1921.¹⁸⁶ The manuscript for this has recently been traced in the Lilly Library archive in Indiana.¹⁸⁷ The proposed book was an attempt to ‘reconcile the order in Creation (Genesis) with the orders of the colours in the spectrum, production, propagation and the personal pronouns’.¹⁸⁸ The text was intended to be printed on coloured pages, on which Dennett would explain his ideas about the connection between light and energy, religion, and sound. His last submission followed three months later, a ‘little book’ called ‘*Self and Universal Order*’.¹⁸⁹ This was sent to Macmillan from a nursing home in Highgate a month before Dennett died. Its whereabouts have not yet been traced.

Summary.

Dennett’s last manuscripts were never published but their titles indicate the direction that his ideas had taken in the years since he had first arrived in Africa. Initially he had presented his observations and illustrations in a conversational style which he had adopted from earlier travelogues, books which set the white author apart from the black subject in Africa. Then, as his understanding of the local languages grew and his acquaintance with the people deepened, Dennett began literally to position himself among the BaVili gathering folktales by their fires, and learning about their beliefs. Attention to the initially spectacular forms of *nkissism* such as the *nganga* and the

¹⁸⁶ Letter from Dennett to Macmillan, January 1921.

¹⁸⁷ University of Indiana. *Dennett MSS*. The *Soul in Sound* manuscript was not published.

¹⁸⁸ Letter from Dennett to Macmillan, January 1921.

¹⁸⁹ Letter from Richard Dennett to George Macmillan from St Albans Villas, Highgate, 23 April 1921. This letter was written from the nursing home in which Dennett died a month later on 28 May 1921. Dennett wrote to Macmillan: ‘As you will see from the above address I am in a nursing home and with very little chance of living any length of time. I have written a little book called “Self and Universal Order”. It really sums up the work Mary Kingsley gave me to do and so I have dedicated the work to her memory’.

Badoongoo gave way to an earnest interest in the abstract forms of this complex political and legal system that lay behind these more dramatic expressions of power.

Once he identified a higher form of religion among the “Fjort”, Dennett hoped his research would be used to by foreign governments to improve relationships with their African subjects. He recognised that he would probably be thought ‘mad’ for proposing that ‘so evidently a degenerate race ...had formed so logical an idea of...God’ but he had nevertheless made his ideas available to the colonisers and he recommended strategies by which they could support the ‘higher’ forms of *nkissism* that he described.¹⁹⁰

After leaving Loango Dennett’s texts became increasingly inaccessible. He stubbornly applied his personal interpretation to the data he had collected and he adapted ideas from contemporary psychology and comparative religion in an attempt to formulate his message.¹⁹¹ As he became engrossed with the Yoruba language and religion in Nigeria, Dennett began to use the very sounds of the language as evidence for the categories he had identified ‘at the back of the Black Man’s mind’, arguing that African tongues arose naturally and spontaneously from man’s unspoiled unconscious, while European languages had been obstructed by centuries of rational thought.¹⁹²

These personal convictions permeate Dennett’s later ethnography. While he maintained that his information had been given to him ‘by the natives themselves’, this information was regularly moulded to fit his own constructs.¹⁹³ Indeed Dennett’s application of his formula became increasingly obsessive and inaccessible. However, amidst this personal

¹⁹⁰ Dennett, 1906, p. 166.

¹⁹¹ For example Dennett quoted a paper by Hartland printed in the *Journal of the History of Religion* and from W. H. Rivers in the *Hibbert Journal* to support his ideas in 1913. See Dennett, 1913(a), p. 261 and p. 263.

¹⁹² See Dennett, 1911, p. 184.

¹⁹³ Dennett, 1906, pp. 110-111.

interpretation, Dennett uncovered insights into the social and spiritual world of the BaKongo and he argued for this invisible world to be accommodated by the new colonial regimes. He was clearly unusual for discerning the political significance of BaKongo cosmology and his analysis allowed for a serious assessment to be made regarding the place of the *banganga*, the impact of the *ndotchi*, and the spiritual nature of the chief within this cosmology. Although the concepts behind these personalities were eroded and obscured as the colonial era wore on, they are still embodied in the objects that Dennett collected. Dennett's body of research forms a background against which his collection may be understood. The objects, and the interpretations that have surrounded them, are therefore examined in the next chapter.

Chapter Four. Dennett and BaKongo Material Culture.

The role played by material objects in Kongo culture is extraordinarily complex. Political, spiritual and economic powers in Kongo society were bound together in a way that is foreign to the western imagination which generally prefers to segregate these fields of activity. The ‘natural and the supernatural, the physical and the spiritual’ are divided in the west by what Wyatt MacGaffey has called a ‘conceptual cleavage’.¹ Such categories, he argues, do not exist in Kongo thought. However as this chapter will show, it is impossible to access the meanings held by some of the objects in the Dennett collection without revising some of these western distinctions. MacGaffey explains that what is banal in an African culture (such as the recognition of the dead in everyday life) is not considered to be mundane in the west. As a result there is a danger that our attempts to translate concepts such as witches who ‘eat’ their subjects creates sensationalist or over-exoticised substitutions.² On the other hand, some commentators have attempted to dilute the occult elements in African epistemology by portraying them as ‘symbolic’ or ‘mythological’; MacGaffey has called this ‘censorship by squeamishness’ and observed that is particularly common in ‘the strangely hybrid world of African art’.³

As the previous chapter showed, Dennett became increasingly aware of the gulf between his own cosmology and that of the BaKongo, and he attempted to bridge it by creating a system or formula of categories. After initially dismissing the apparently irrational and primitive behaviour he had witnessed as evidence of sheer superstition and savagery, Dennett had twenty years in which to become more sensitive to the

¹ MacGaffey, Wyatt. *Kongo Political Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, p. 57.

² MacGaffey 2000, p. 57.

³ MacGaffey 2000, p. 58.

complex system of connected ideas that supported these responses to invisible powers. He began to look beyond the spectacular behaviour that surrounded witchcraft, divination and retribution, to a more logical spiritual world. He believed that what appeared to be irrational behaviour to the western eye had a logical explanation in BaKongo culture.⁴

Through an examination of Dennett's writing and images, this chapter will attempt to excavate some of the indigenous meanings that have been carried by Dennett's collection in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter (RAMM). Again, Dennett will be the "lens" through which the objects are examined, and in this case the scopic metaphor is particularly apt because some of his own photographs will be used as reference points for the discussion. The images were found in Dennett's collection of lantern slides which is now in the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI).⁵ Two photographs in particular will be returned to in the course of the chapter.

[Fig. 1, Fig. 29.]

As well as his photographic imagery, this chapter will also refer to some drawings that Dennett made and which were 'worked up' for his first book *Seven Years Among the Fjort*.⁶ These drawings depict incidents in which supernatural agencies were encountered in events that Dennett witnessed in his first decade in the Congo. To supplement his own photos and drawings, some other contemporary imagery will also

⁴ In 1906 Dennett had written that 'the conception of God formed by the Bavili [*sic*] is so purely spiritual, or shall I say abstract that you are sure to think me mad to suppose that so evidently degenerate a race can have formed so logical an idea of god we all recognise and try in various ways to comprehend'. Dennett, Richard Edward. *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, London: Macmillan, 1906, p. 166.

⁵ Royal Anthropological Institute, *R. E. Dennett Collection*.

⁶ 'The drawings, worked up from my sketches may be greatly wanting from an artistic point of view; they are, however, original and faithful representations of scenes of which I have been an eye-witness.' Dennett, Richard Edward. *Seven Years among the Fjort: Being an English Trader's Experiences in the Congo District*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887(a), p. vi. Dennett did not name the artist who had 'worked up' the drawings.

be used. Robert Visser's photographs are particularly relevant in this instance. Some of these were published as postcards to be sold in French Congo and the Congo Free State. They show the *nganga*, the *ndungu*, *minkisi* and other significant figures from the spiritual and political world of the BaKongo, and they prompt fertile comparisons with the objects in Dennett's collection.

The "Ashton Photograph."

The "Ashton Photograph" shows the full collection which was accessioned by the RAMM in 1889. [Fig. 1] It has been called by this name here because this research has identified that the likely location of the scene in the photograph was the stable block of the Rectory at Ashton, near Exeter, where Dennett's father was Rector after 1882.⁷

Another version of this scene appears in Dennett's first book, *Seven Years Among the Fjort*. [Fig. 31.] The published version is attributed to Dr. H. J. Bennett and the RAI version was possibly made by Dennett himself. There is no written information about either of these pictures. The rectory itself burned down in 1921 but the stable block has survived.⁸ The doorways and brickwork in the photograph have been matched with those in the surviving building which has been located and visited.

The Reverend Richard Dennett moved to the parish of St John, Ashton, soon after Dennett had left for Africa. He had supervised repairs to the church after 1881 and it was re-opened in 1883.⁹ When Dennett returned from Africa his father and sisters were

⁷ I am grateful for the help I received from Ann Goulden, and from John Dunsford, Church Warden at Ashton Parish Church, during this part of my research.

⁸ 'Fire at Ashton: Outbreak at Thatched Rectory House.' *Express and Echo*, 27 May, 1921.

⁹ Dennett's sisters, Ada and Constance, were noted as having decorated the church with corn wreaths for the occasion. 'Ashton: Re-opening of the parish Church.' *Exeter Flying Post*, 7 November, 1883.

living in the Rectory. His mother Eleanor had died in 1882, and she was buried in the Ashton Church grave yard.

The photograph in Dennett's lantern slide collection has been taken from a position slightly to the right of Dr. Bennett's image which records the objects with a formal frontal symmetry for the reproduction in Dennett's book. The existence of two views of the same subject suggests that Dennett may have taken this second photograph himself. If so, it allows us to see a view that Dennett himself saw, and it reveals something of his attitude towards the collection in the way it is arranged. The photograph also represents a moment where Dennett's life in Africa is connected with his family's life in England, in an incongruous juxtaposition in a Devon stable-yard.

The Ashton Photograph presents the collection in transition; it is no longer in Africa nor is it yet in the hands of the museum. There is a poignant liminality to the photograph, where the Congo objects are already "out of context" as they travel to the utterly foreign world of the museum. The collection also appears curiously anglicised in the way the objects have been grouped and arranged like favoured items on a mantle-piece, despite their location in the Rectory courtyard. When the items arrived at the museum they were described as 'specimens' but here they seem akin to personally prized possessions.¹⁰

The arrangement of the collection for the photograph has been carefully considered. A strong symmetrical theme has been adopted, but within this, the scale of the objects and their colours and textures have also been given attention. Although contemporary technology only permitted black-and-white photography, we know that the strong red,

¹⁰ Twentieth Annual Report of the Committee of the Devon and Exeter Albert Memorial Museum, 1890, p. 4.

white and black colours of the *ndungu* mask would have been repeated by the colours of the figures on the top shelf in the picture. These would be picked up again in the fringes of the *nganga*'s belt and in the red and black feathers in the headdresses of the small nkisi figures on the second and third shelf down. The spots on the cat skin on the floor are echoed by those on the spread skin on the left of the arrangement whose shape is mirrored by the string-work cape above it, both being objects which carried associations of royalty, status, and power.

The range of technical skill presented in this collection is conspicuous. It demonstrates sophisticated basket-work, forged metal-work, pottery, and weaving and includes stringed and percussion musical instruments. Items associated with leadership are seen in the cape, the crowns (or *mpu*), the cat-skins and the long spear, which directs the eye back up to the figures at the top of the arrangement. There is also a Woyo ceremonial knife, or *cimpaba*, shown in the photograph but this has not been identified in the collection at the RAMM.¹¹

This is a very miscellaneous group of objects. Perhaps Dennett was eager to show the productiveness of the people he had been living among when he made this selection. The collection is representative of the manufacturing skills that he had witnessed in the Congo. For although the Congo Free State sometimes found it necessary to present the population of the Congo as indolent and unproductive, in order to justify its own sweeping appropriation of land and labour, this portrayal was often contradicted in other reports. For example E. D. Morel's research allowed him to construct a very different picture, albeit expressed in patronising terms:

¹¹ For an equivalent item see Blier, Suzanne Preston. *Royal Arts of Africa: The Majesty of Form*, London: Laurence King, 1998, p. 210.

We read of innumerable centres of population varying from 5,000 to 40,000; of settlements extending for hundreds of miles along the river banks; of communities of professional fishermen; others making a speciality of canoe building and fashioning brass-bound paddles; others proficient in pottery, basket-making, net-weaving, cane-splitting, carving wooden handles for hoes. We are shown a busy people manufacturing salt from the ashes of certain river reeds, and beer made from malted maize; making rat-traps and twine; digging and smelting iron; repairing thatch-roofed dwellings; turning out weapons for hunting and for war often of singularly beautiful shape, the handles of battle-axes and knives tastefully and richly ornamented; weaving the fibres of various plants into mats and handsome clothes of raised pile, dyed and designed with remarkable artistic instinct. The village forge is everywhere to be seen; sometimes the tannery. We are shown towns and villages, surrounded with plantations - on land hardly won from the forest, of sugar-cane, maize, groundnuts, bananas, plantains, and manioc in variety; tobacco, many species of vegetables such as sweet potatoes, tomatoes, vegetable marrows "as finely kept as in Flanders" writes one enthusiastic Belgian explorer. "If civilisation," exclaims a French expert observer, "were measured by the number of vegetable conquests, these people would rank amongst the most advanced in Africa".¹²

Thus while the editor of Dennett's book gave his photograph the caption 'Fetishes and Curios' it is possible that Dennett interpreted the objects as evidence of an organised and productive society.¹³

'Maloango Pongo Falls Sick.'¹⁴

Among the pieces which show the industry and artistic culture of the Kongo people, the photograph also shows items which were closely associated with the spiritual world through the activity of the *ndungu*, the *nganga* and the *nkisi*. At the top of the photograph, pride of place is given to the striking feathered *ndungu* costume which seems to explode above the rest of the collection. Below this the mask of the *nganga*

¹² Morel, E. D. *The Black Man's Burden*, London: The National Labour Press, 1920, p. 114.

¹³ This collection photograph contrasts, for example, with those of the *Stanley in Africa* exhibition which emphasised weaponry. See Coombes, Annie. *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, p. 70, plate 25.

¹⁴ Dennett, 1887(a), facing p. 56.

stares out from the top shelf with a ritual knife below it. A small pot with a horn sticking out of it, resting on the lower shelf, is another “fetish” object that Dennett was struck by, and sketched, in his first few years in the Congo.

A most useful source for identifying pieces in the collection is the drawing from Dennett’s book *Seven years Among the Fjort*, facing page 56, with the caption ‘Maloango Pongo Falls Sick’. [Fig. 32.] Dennett acknowledged that the drawings are ‘greatly wanting’ and this is borne out in certain aspects of this illustration, particularly in the nailed *nkisi* figure, or in the small *minkisi* which dangle like gingerbread men from the ceiling.¹⁵ However the detail is accurate enough for direct comparisons to be made with the objects in collection and in the Ashton Photograph. The drawing shows a view of the *nganga*’s hut or *shimbec* with the front wall cut away. This allows the *nganga* and his acoutrements to be seen at the same time as the *Maloango* and his wife outside are visible. In the middle distance there is a rope spanning two poles which Dennett described as a ‘arch of charms’; in the far distance, oil palms punctuate a village of further rectangular huts.¹⁶ By 1905 Dennett knew these protective gateways as ‘*Mabili*’.¹⁷

Inside the hut, further “charms” hang from the rafters and a shelf supports *minkisi* figures which can be clearly matched with objects in the photograph. The two animal *minkisi* [Fig. 33, Fig. 34] are stacked one on top of the other, on the left and next to them is the large standing male figure. [Fig. 35.] Beside this is the kneeling female figure, [Fig. 36] which is also paired with the male in the photograph. The pot with the

¹⁵ Dennett, 1887(a), p.vi.

¹⁶ Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘The Congo: From a Trader’s Point of View.’ *Manchester Geographical Society*, Vol. 2, nos. 7-12, (1886), p. 284.

¹⁷ Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘Bavili Notes.’ *Folklore*, Vol. 16, no. 4, (1905(a)), p. 378.

horn sticking out of it can be seen on the floor of the hut, while the *nganga* is conspicuously wearing the mask and fringed waistband that is now in the Dennett collection. [Fig. 37, Fig. 38.]¹⁸

The chickens at the *nganga*'s feet have proved a challenge to the artist, as has the great *nkisi nkondi* which stands on a platform at the back of the hut. This figure bears little similarity to the great nailed figures that were collected in the Lower Congo. [Fig. 39.] A long knotted bundle shown on the second shelf from the bottom of the photograph has also been misunderstood by the artist, who has depicted it as a snake dangling behind the *nkondi*. A sabre hanging on the wall is possibly supposed to represent the knife shown in the photograph under the *nganga*'s mask, indicating that the knife in the collection was part of the *nganga*'s equipment.

As Dennett claimed that he was an eyewitness to this scene, this image raises the question of how Dennett actually obtained the objects. Would the *nganga* have parted with them willingly? Although the BaKongo were great traders, who had worked with Europeans in the exchange of goods since first contact in the fifteenth century there is no evidence to indicate that objects of spiritual significance such as these would have been readily exchanged for European goods such as china, cloth, glass beads and metals.¹⁹

¹⁸ The pot with the horn has not been identified at the RAMM.

¹⁹ See Martin, Phyllis. *The External Trade of the Loango Coast 1576-1870: The Effects of Changing Commercial Relations on the Vili Kingdom of Loango*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972. As the demand for European goods among inland communities increased, the coastal BaKongo, and in particular the BaVili, would transport these products into the interior and return with African goods in exchange. See Morel, 1920, p. 111.

We have no information at all about the circumstances that allowed Dennett to take possession of any of these items of cultural importance. As Chapter Five will show, many Europeans were actively “collecting” costumes, *minkisi*, carvings and ceramics from the Lower Congo at the time that Dennett gathered his seventy-four objects but rarely are specific transactions described in detail. The German Expedition to the Loango Coast had created great interest in *minkisi* in Loango between 1873 and 1876. Headed by Adolf Bastian, a team of researchers obtained a great number of ‘*fetischen*’ for the Berlin Ethnological Museum with the help of the European traders, so a market had already been created before Dennett arrived.²⁰ [Fig. 40.] Bastian was driven by a fear that the societies like the BaKongo were threatened by western developed societies, and his collecting was a form of salvage anthropology. Nevertheless the ‘salvage’ inevitably contributed to the further destabilisation of indigenous communities²¹

Whether objects were thought of as “purchased” or “confiscated”, the European’s ability to acquire this material culture was facilitated by their growing dominance in the region. The consequences of this were significant and as the following chapter explains how, by 1885, collectors were reporting that they were finding it difficult to source items such as those Dennett acquired. The impact of this drastic loss of material culture was of more consequence to the indigenous society than it was to the foreigners, but poignantly it was not the contemporary voice of the BaKongo, but the European collectors’ complaints which were recorded.

²⁰ Willink, Robert Joost. *Stages in Civilisation: Dutch Museums in Quest of West Central African Collections (1856-1889)*, Leiden: CNWS, 2007, p. 126, pp. 130-131. This will be discussed more fully in Chapter Five.

²¹ See Köpping, Klaus-Peter. *Adolf Bastian and the Psychic Unity of Mankind: The Foundations of Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Germany*, Munster: Verlag, 2005, p. 107.

Maniluemba.

A third image that Dennett was personally involved with creating is the photograph of the *Maloango*-elect, Manilumeba, which Dennett made when visiting the chief early in 1898.²² Like the Ashton photograph there are two versions of this picture: one which has appeared in print in his book *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, and a second which is found in the lantern slide collection at the RAI.²³ [Fig. 28, Fig. 29.]

Maniluemba was a key informant in Dennett's ethnographic research. His assistance was crucial to the writing of *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, and to other work after 1898. Dennett's meeting with him took place after he had moved to French Congo from the Congo Free State in 1891, and after he had met Mary Kingsley in Cabinda in 1893. He had decided 'to confine [his] studies to a definite section of the Bantu people and become very intimate with them', and he had chosen the BaVili as his subject of close study. The potential coronation of a BaVili king promised to be a 'truly native' event and Dennett had 'determined, in the interests of folklore, to go and interview the king-elect'.²⁴

He described their first meeting:

We found Maniluemba wandering about, with his little fetishes, *Ntéu* and *Nkubi*, in his hand; and wearing his *Bicimbo* (a kind sash of iron boat chain) over his right shoulder and fastened under his left arm. Protected in this way whoever dared to wish him harm would have been killed by these fetishes which would have divined their very thoughts. When Maniluemba had greeted me he went

²² Dennett, 1906, p. 8.

²³ Dennett, 1906, facing p. 10.

²⁴ Dennett, 1906, p. 7. Dennett explained the circumstances: 'Early in 1898 the Administrator summoned Mambona and the other princes of Luango to the residence and informed them that it was their desire that a Maluango should be crowned and the native regime, under the government's protection be restored. The choice of the people fell upon Maniluemba, nephew of Maluango Prati; and Mambona and the princes went to ask him if he would accept the throne.' Dennett, 1906, pp. 6-7.

within his fence of rushes (called *Lumbu*) that guards the privacy of his wives to put his coat on.²⁵

Dennett then commented on Maniluemba's facial markings and clothing before describing how the two men 'had a long and interesting talk, and I took his photograph'. [Fig. 29.]

He described Maniluemba as 'humpbacked and short in stature ... but', he continued, 'he possesses a rather fine Jewish cast of face; and he is a bit of a dandy evidently for the ends of his moustaches were strung through the hollow centres of two amber beads'.²⁶ A cat-skin known as '*nkanda ndeci*' was worn around his waist; he had a *Lembe* marriage ritual bracelet on his wrist; and he also carried a pipe of tobacco which he shared with Dennett.²⁷ A line of red chalk ran from his hair to his nose, with a white one either side. There were similar marks from his ears to his eyes. He also had white chalk marks on both ears and a 'charm' worn round his neck.²⁸

In both the RAI photograph and that in Dennett's book, Maniluemba is seen seated, his male companion standing behind him in a European cap. This imported headwear contrasts with Maniluemba's own *mpu*. A young person is seated on the ground in the back of both pictures beneath the overhanging roof of a hut. These details suggest that the chief had chosen how to present himself and had determined to show his authority by remaining seated on a chair while those around him were standing or only had the ground to sit on. By retrieving his coat and applying chalk marks to his face, Maniluemba had exerted control over how he was seen. The *nkanda ndéci* around his

²⁵ Dennett, 1906, p. 11.

²⁶ Dennett, 1906, p. 11.

²⁷ Dennett, 1906, p. 11.

²⁸ Dennett, 1906, p. 11.

waist, and the pipe in his hand are presented clearly to the camera, possibly to draw attention to these significant emblems of office. Dennett may also have been equally keen to record these insignia of the chief's authority in a photograph.

The three images discussed here have supplied views of three very different contexts: the *shimbec* of the *nganga* on the outskirts of a village, whose entrance was guarded by a 'gate of charms'; the humble village of the king-elect who was not allowed to live in a house until he had fulfilled the traditional laws; and a stable yard in Devon where the objects' indigenous meanings were compromised by their decontextualisation but where they were nevertheless presented with respect. All three scenes are connected through Dennett himself, and they show the multiple relationships and subtle webs of influence that the collector was involved with, both in England and in Africa.

Within these settings the relationships of power were shifting and negotiated. Certainly they included western paternalism and authoritarian control, but they also allowed aspects of indigenous authority. As Elizabeth Edwards has suggested, images such as Dennett's drawings or photographs reveal 'not the making of the Other, but of many shifting Others within the complexity of the colonial imagination'.²⁹ Their meanings are multilayered and impermanent and they show that 'the relationship between colonialism and photography was not a monolithic given, but rather something complex, nuanced, contradictory, anxious and processual.'³⁰

²⁹ Edwards, Elizabeth. 'Photography and the Making of the Other' in Blanchard, Pascal, ed. *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008, p. 244.

³⁰ Edwards, 2008, p. 243.

The Dennett Collection.

Returning to the Ashton Photograph, the objects on display will now be considered individually and compared to the references that Dennett made to these or to similar material in his texts. The key personalities of the *ndungu*, and the *nganga* will be considered first. The *minkisi* will follow, and these will be divided into figurative and non-figurative forms. Dennett called the non-figurative *minkisi* ‘malongos’ and many of the objects in the collection fall into this category. The third section in this discussion will assess the items of body adornment and will suggest that these also functioned as body protection. Where necessary, other writers have been referred to in this chapter but the main purpose here is to uncover the information buried in Dennett’s own accounts and to distil his own understanding of the objects.³¹ Photographs by Dennett’s contemporaries, such as Robert Visser, have helped to contextualise Dennett’s observations.

Badungu.

Dominating the photograph at the top of the picture is the great feathered mask costume that Dennett had identified as ‘*Pegasario*’, ‘*Badoongoo*’ or ‘*Badungu*’ in his first book.³² This is commonly referred to now as *ndungu* or *ndunga*.³³ Displayed against a grass mat the figure is constructed on a framework of open mesh which can be seen on

³¹ As explained in the introduction to this thesis, the research arising from the work of Karl Laman has been used to supplement or confirm Dennett’s interpretations where necessary. The archive of the Swedish missionary and the subsequent work carried out on his data by Wyatt MacGaffey has been used to clarify aspects of Dennett’s record although this research has endeavoured to use primary documentation from Dennett’s specific context as far as possible.

³² All three names were used by Dennett in this book. See Dennett, 1887(a), p. 10, and the caption to his illustration, facing p. 10 in the same book.

³³ For example, see Beumers, Erna, ed. *Africa Meets Africa*, Rotterdam Museum of Ethnology, 1996, p. 109, where *ndungu* is used. Bleir, (1998, p. 226) uses *ndunga*. Dennett explained that the BaVili call people who engage in the black arts ‘*Bantu a Ndongo*’ and this has probably been contracted into the name ‘*Badungu*’ or ‘Ba Ndungu’. See Dennett, 1905(a) pp. 386-390, in which Dennett also uses the word ‘*ndongo*’ for a ‘wizard’ (p. 387).

the arms, projecting out from the costume at right angles. [Fig 41, Fig. 42.] (RAMM accession number 9/1889/43.) Early on in his time in Africa, Dennett had been struck by the fear and commotion this masked figure brought to Cabinda society.³⁴ Coming among them with a loud rustling of feathers, carrying a large swordfish spike, and wearing two faces, so nothing could escape him, the *ndungu* was a startling figure. ‘Everything he touches on his way becomes his property so that you may imagine the disturbance his visit creates: all is confusion and hurry, as the natives vainly attempt to hide their little all before his coming.’³⁵ The figure brought retribution for ‘certain indecencies’ committed by the people.³⁶ If a crime had caused the rains to fail, the *badungu* were ‘the king’s policemen’ who were appointed to detect wrong-doers in the community and, while on their rounds, to appropriate whatever goods they chose.³⁷

In *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, Dennett included two drawings intended to portray this figure in the process of pronouncing judgement on a suspect. One drawing bears the caption ‘*Badoongoo or Pegasario*’. [Fig. 23.] The other is called ‘Crucifixion’.³⁸ There are some differences between the mask costume in the RAMM and the drawing in *Seven Years Among the Fjort*. Perhaps in an attempt to convey something of the terror that the masked figure produced in the community, the artist of ‘*Badoongoo or Pegasario*’ portrayed a figure of exaggerated height. The mask in the illustration does not carry the radiating feathers seen in the RAMM, and the body is made of leaves. The oversize hands and the awkward “eyelashes” on the mask in these illustrations betray once again the marks of an artist who was not familiar with the material he was drawing. In the first picture the accused person is being led to a tree by the executioner,

³⁴ Dennett, 1887, pp. 10-11.

³⁵ Dennett, 1887, p. 11.

³⁶ Dennett, 1887, p. 11

³⁷ Dennett, 1906, p. 132.

³⁸ Dennett, 1887, facing p. 12. ‘Crucifixion’ was not a term Dennett used in the text.

Mancaca.³⁹ A wailing woman follows him. The *Badoongoo* oversees the action. In the second image the accused is shown hanging in the tree and the *Mancaca* has been joined by two ritual drummers and two men with rifles.

It is impossible to consider this scene without addressing the question of crime and punishment in the political culture of the BaKongo. As Chapter Three has shown, Dennett identified a sophisticated system of laws that had long been in place in the Lower Congo and he described the procedures and the courts by which these were sustained. However the uncertain conditions that arose with the arrival of the African International Association (AIA) and the Congo Free State disturbed these systems. Kasja Ekholm Friedman has argued that under the AIA the courts lost their power and the general population took over many of the procedures for implementing justice. Thus they began supervising witch hunts and executions themselves.⁴⁰ Initially only the king had been invested with the authority to take life through occult means and he was trusted to do this for the good of the community.⁴¹ Now others were taking the initiative and enacting their own violent forms of justice and retribution.

When Dennett wrote about the '*Badoongoo*' for the Manchester Geographical Society in 1886, he described the masked figure as 'some immense monster' that 'prowled around the town, seeking one whom he might accuse of ... sin'.⁴² From a clergyman's son this biblical language was surely intended to liken the 'monster' in his 'hideous double faced mask' to 'your enemy the devil' in the New Testament, 'seeking whom he

³⁹ Dennett, 1887, p. 166.

⁴⁰ Friedman, Kasja Ekholm. *Catastrophe and Creation: The Transformation of an African Culture*, Chur: Harwood, 1991.

⁴¹ MacGaffey 2000, p. 31.

⁴² Dennett, 1886, p. 286.

may devour'.⁴³ However Dennett's later assessment of the figure was more tempered and contextualised. He associated the *badungu* with the West Wind, *Bunzi*, who could be offended by impure acts, and whose disapproval would result in a drought:

The only secret society I know of among the Bavili [*sic*] is that of the *Badungu*, who are the king's policemen, and were chiefly used by him as detectives to deter his people from committing acts of immorality likely to cause the wrath of *Nzambi* or the power, *Bunzi*.⁴⁴

By this time Dennett had also become aware of the significance of the spiked, mace-like object that the *ndungu* is shown holding in the drawings. He continued: 'The *Badungu* wear a wooden mask and are dressed in feathers or banana leaves, carrying the snout of the saw fish in their hands as a sign of office.'⁴⁵

Other examples of feathered masked costumes from French Congo have been found in a photograph in the Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archive (EEPA). [Fig. 43.] The character in this postcard was called *Croquemitaine*. This is translated as 'Mischievous Spirit' in Christraud Geary's book, *In and Out of Focus: Images from Central Africa 1885-1960*.⁴⁶ However it has also been suggested by Nanette Snoep that the 'Croquemitaine' character was more malevolent than mischievous.⁴⁷ The spirit of Mavungu has been identified in the *ndungu* figure by John and Reinhild Janzen, and Mavungu was a spirit that Dennett came to know as one of the three most powerful *minkisi* in Kacongo.⁴⁸

According to Janzen and Janzen, the Rotterdam *ndungu* mask of 'the spirit of Mavungu,

⁴³ 'Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.' *Oxford King James Bible*, 1 Peter, 5: 8.

⁴⁴ Dennett. 1906, p. 132.

⁴⁵ Dennett. 1906, p. 132. The 'saw fish' has not been identified in the RAMM collection.

⁴⁶ Geary, Christraud M. *In and out of Focus: Images from Central Africa, 1885-1960*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2002. The photograph is dated by Geary to around 1910 although the postmark is given as 1925.

⁴⁷ Nanette Snoep, personal communication, November 2010.

⁴⁸ Dennett, Richard Edward. 'The Religion of the Fjort or Fiote: "Mavungu".' *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 1, no. 4, (1902(b)), pp. 452-454.

Mahungu, or Ndungu ... sets forth the nature of society's dualities and contradictions such as those of male-female, master-slave, elder-junior, hunter-hunted, citizen-outlaw'.⁴⁹ Dennett connected the word 'Mavungu' with 'reason and maternity but also with the idea of a covering hence, perhaps, invisibility'.⁵⁰

In the postcard, two masked figures are posed in a public square with a representative of the French administration's police force. The cultural juxtapositions are further complicated by the European significance of the event being celebrated: the *croquemitaines* are shown mingling with the crowd who are gathered to celebrate the great French institution of Bastille Day.

These masks are not identical with the Dennett costume: their white faces are strikingly different from the multi-coloured masks on the RAMM example. However another photograph in the EEPA, shows a mask that is closer to Dennett's. [Fig. 44.] In this photograph by Robert Visser, the mask bears feathers which radiate from the face like those on Dennett's example, and the quadrants of colour are also similar. A far-from-mischievous role of this character has been allocated to this masked figure as the title given to the photograph is 'Exécution'.⁵¹ The scene shown has been staged to situate the *ndungu* in a judicial process and a similar event is portrayed in *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, where the *nganga* and an executioner prepare to judge and then kill a suspected witch. [Fig. 45.]

⁴⁹ In Beumers, Erna, ed. *Africa Meets Africa*, Rotterdam Museum of Ethnology, 1996, p. 109. The source of these ideas offered by the Janzens is not given.

⁵⁰ Dennett, 1902(b), p. 454.

⁵¹ 'Exécution.' Photograph by Robert Visser. French Congo, between 1882 and 1904, stamped and postmarked in Belgian Congo, 1920. Smithsonian Institution, Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archive, CF 23-1.

In the postcard the *ndungu* holds a knife like the one seen in the Dennett collection. The second standing figure points to the victim, who is crouched before some an indistinct *nkisi* with a mirror at its centre. This second figure may in fact be Maniluemba, and indeed he carries the same insignia of the chief's *mpu*, pipe and *nkanda ndéci*. He also holds a staff, which was an item of great significance to a leader. The kneeling figure is not praying to the *nkisi* but showing respect for the power it presents. An image of a man in his pose was given the title 'Worshipping Before Idols' in Stanley's *How I Found Livingstone*.⁵² [Fig. 46.] This is a title which Hein Vanhee has challenged as it misrepresents the complexity of the operations of an *nkisi*.⁵³ Vanhee explains that this caption 'illustrates well the western construct of the "African Fetish" as an object of worship', but this is a construct which is both inadequate and inaccurate.⁵⁴

Although Visser's photograph would have been taken between 1890 and 1900 it was still in circulation as a postcard twenty years later.⁵⁵ Furthermore Visser had been based mainly in French Congo and Portuguese Cabinda, in the period before Belgian Congo came into existence.⁵⁶ Yet this card was available in the Belgian colony almost two decades after Visser had left. This example reveals the multiplicity of meaning that such images accrued across time and place in the colonial era and despite its grim subject matter, this particular postcard is breezily signed as an 'affectionate souvenir of Belgian Congo'.

⁵² Stanley, Henry M. *How I Found Livingstone: Travels, Adventures and Discoveries in Central Africa, Including Four Months' Residence with Dr. Livingstone*. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low and Searle, 1872.

⁵³ Vanhee, Hein. 'Agents of Order and Disorder: Kongo Minkisi' in Arnaut, Karel, ed. *Revisions: New Perspectives on the African Collections at the Horniman Museum*, London and Coimbra: Horniman Museum and University of Coimbra, 2000, pp. 89-106.

⁵⁴ Vanhee, 2000, p. 90.

⁵⁵ See Geary, Christaud M. *In and out of Focus: Images from Central Africa, 1885-1960*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2002, p. 28.

⁵⁶ According to Katrin Adler and Cristine Stelzig, Visser worked in Cayo, which became part of French Congo, from about 1882-1889. He also worked in Landana, in Portuguese Cabinda, around 1902-1904. Adler, Katrin and Stelzig, Christine. 'Robert Visser and His Photographs from the Loango Coast.' *African Arts*, Vol. 35, no. 4, (2002), pp. 38-51, 92-93.

A masked costume that is very similar to Dennett's was collected for a Dutch museum by one of his fellow traders. Anton Greshoff, like Visser, was an employee of the *Nieuwe Afrikaansche Handelsvereeniging (NAHV)*. He acquired a Janus-masked costume in 1888 which he sent to the curator of the Leiden ethnographic museum.⁵⁷ An illustration of it was painted at the time, in an illustrative style familiar from natural history illustrations, reinforcing the idea that these objects were seen as specimens. [Fig. 47.] In the paintings the similarities between this costume and Dennett's is clear: the mesh 'sleeve' is visible in one view, just as it is in the Ashton photo, and both costumes have one mask divided into four quadrants with pairs of lines leading down from the eyes. One set of these lines is vertical and on the other side of the mask they are curved. Similar markings below the eyes on a large *nkisi* called Mangaaka or Mangaka have been interpreted by MacGaffey as 'the "tears" of those whom Mangaaka will strike'.⁵⁸

Both Dennett's and Greshoff's costumes also have sections on one mask in which the surface is covered by spotted patterns. Later research by Wyatt MacGaffey has indicated that these broken-up surfaces indicated 'mediating or transitional beings, partly in one world, partly in another.'⁵⁹ Dennett never remarked on the significance of dotted or speckled patterning but he did record that the colour red had a significance in rituals of transition such as when young women were sent to the 'painthouse' at

⁵⁷ See Willink, 2007, p. 172, and plate 50, on pp. 366-367.

⁵⁸ MacGaffey, Wyatt. *Astonishment and Power: The Eyes of Understanding*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1993, p. 44. MacGaffey's research also revealed that protective lines of red, white and black pigment were known as *makila*. Certain *banganga* associated with the *Nkisi Mbwenza* painted rings of white chalk around their eyes to assist in divination. These *mamoni* lines signified an ability to see what was invisible to others. MacGaffey, 1993, pp. 52-53.

⁵⁹ MacGaffey, 1993, p. 95. See also MacGaffey 2000, p. 28.

puberty.⁶⁰ He noted that they would be covered in red paste made from powder called *takula* which was mixed with palm oil or water.⁶¹ It remained on the body until the girls were ready to be married, and then it would be beaten off with sticks.⁶² The girl might be exempt from work during this time between childhood and marriage for ‘four or five months’.⁶³ Dennett observed that the ‘paint’ was also used for purification after childbirth or sickness.⁶⁴

The colour white was connected with death: people from the land of the dead were understood to be white.⁶⁵ White pigment was gathered from the ground, and Dennett noted that chalk was so important that it made up part of the tribute that was due to a king. He explained that a prince had to pay the king three ‘pieces of chalk’, along with the animal skins, mats and longs of cloth that were due to him in annual revenue.⁶⁶

Dennett noted how faces would be marked with these coloured pigments. He observed that when a child died, markings would be applied ‘round the eyes and about the body with red and white chalk’.⁶⁷ He also commented on the lines that Manilumeba applied to his face when his photograph was taken: ‘In the middle of his forehead, from his hair to his nose, ran a line in red chalk, flanked on each side by a white one; while from his ears to his eyes similar marks nearly completed his fetish toilet.’⁶⁸ The final markings

⁶⁰ Dennett, Richard Edward. *The Folklore of the Fjort*, London: The Folklore Society, 1898, p. 20.

⁶¹ Dennett, 1898, p. 20.

⁶² Dennett, 1898, p. 137. In *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind* Dennett wrote that the powder was mixed with water. Dennett 1906, p. 69.

⁶³ Dennett, 1906, p. 69.

⁶⁴ Dennett, 1898, p. 137.

⁶⁵ MacGaffey explained that the first Europeans were believed to be people who had died and come back from the land of the dead. MacGaffey, 2000, p. 28. He also explained that white was ‘the colour of *Mpemba*, the other world’. Red was ‘the colour of contact with it, as of sunset and sunrise. Corpses, as bodies in transition between the worlds were painted red’. MacGaffey, 1993, p. 88.

⁶⁶ Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘Laws and Customs of the Fjort or Bavili Family, Kingdom of Loango.’ *Journal of the African Society*, Vol. 1, no. 3, (1902(a)), pp. 268-269.

⁶⁷ Dennett, 1898, p. 22.

⁶⁸ Dennett 1906, p. 11.

were made with white chalk on either ear.⁶⁹ The same pattern of facial markings that Dennett described seeing on Maniluemba are seen on the *ndungu* masks, although black pigment replaces red on the mask, as the designs are applied to a red ground.

The Nganga.

As the discussion so far has shown, there was a close connection in the Kongo matrix of power between the *ndungu* and the chief. In this they were joined by the *nganga* and the *minkisi*. The *nganga*, like the *ndungu*, had made an early impression on Dennett. The *nganga*'s activity was described in detail in *Seven Years Among the Fjort* and also in the paper published in the Manchester Geographical Society in 1886.⁷⁰

The bearded mask that Dennett collected and gave to the RAMM can be matched with the one seen in 'Maloango Pongo Falls Sick'. The *nganga*'s mask in the illustration appears to have been modelled on the one in the RAMM collection: the same lines around the eyes and mouth are seen and the drapery which is shown covering the back of the *nganga*'s head has survived in the leather skin which is still attached to Dennett's mask.⁷¹ Dennett described the sick *Maloango*,

...stretched out on a mat, the scorching sun being allowed to play full on him and his wives kneeling at his head ... There sat the surgeon in his hideous mask, otherwise nude, with the exception of a band or fringe about his loins. The fringe was composed of countless pieces of cloth, about ten inches long, hidden among which, by occasional tinkling, one is made aware of the presence of a few tiny bells.⁷²

⁶⁹ Dennett 1906, p. 11.

⁷⁰ The text of the paper for Manchester (Dennett, 1886) appears to match the illustrations that were published in illustrations from his book (Dennett, 1887(a)) and these may have been combined as an illustrated lecture.

⁷¹ As the mask has never changed hands it survived the stripping away of such features as the animal hair beard and the leather skin which was fashionable under the twentieth century modernist art aesthetic.

⁷² Dennett 1887(a), p. 67.

Sound was an important part of the rituals. The name ‘*nganga*’ has been translated as ‘repeater’ and his utterances were an important part of his role.⁷³ Rhythmic movement was also integral to the divination process. The fringes on his clothes and equipment, such as the tasselled waistband and the fringed horn *minkisi* in the Dennett collection, would tremble with any action. The fluttering of fringes and feathers could be seen as evidence of spirit possession.⁷⁴

Dennett noted that *bilongo* or medicines were also ‘spluttered over’ the patient.⁷⁵

Bilongo is a word that is still in currency among the BaKongo although MacGaffey says that it is now applied to items such as ‘aspirin and prescription glasses’.⁷⁶ MacGaffey has explained the complex composition of *bilongo* in detail, whereby ingredients whose names sounded like the desired outcome of the *nkisi*’s action were selected for inclusion.⁷⁷ Objects that were associated metonymically with the intended result would also be included. However despite Dennett’s interest in language, he did not refer explicitly to any of these punning meanings in his own description of how *minkisi* were composed.⁷⁸

Dennett explained that the mixture of organic materials called *bilongo* could be ingested, but they were more commonly bound to the body in bundles and bracelets ‘distributed over certain parts of the patient’s body’.⁷⁹ He also understood that a whole range of “charms” or *malongos* were composed, whose efficacy depended on materials such as the earth from a grave and the blood of a fowl. A chicken was regularly used in

⁷³ Dennett, 1898, p. 147.

⁷⁴ MacGaffey, 1993, p. 76.

⁷⁵ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 71.

⁷⁶ MacGaffey, 2000, p. 84.

⁷⁷ See MacGaffey 1993, pp. 62- 67; MacGaffey, 2000, pp. 84-87.

⁷⁸ Dennett 1906, p. 93.

⁷⁹ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 71.

rituals. Dennett's drawing shows a placid bird pecking freely around the floor of the shimbec but his 1887 text explained that the chicken would be 'tethered by one foot, a prisoner' at the *nganga*'s feet'. It is quite likely that it would have flapped and shrieked, and thus contributed to the animation and drama of the performance.⁸⁰

In later writing Dennett explained that the bird was

... a sign of good faith and is supposed to die if the *nganga* in the presence of his fetish does not act fairly. It is killed and its blood used in certain medicines (*Ximenga*). They call it *Mafuka* the messenger among animals.⁸¹

Robert Farris Thompson has shown that ritual use of the white chicken was carried to the Caribbean through slavery and that its connection with life and death is reflected in the glass and china models of white chickens which are found on tombs and graves in South Carolina.⁸²

In Dennett's illustration the *nganga* is shown engaged in the process of divining the reason for the *Maloango*'s sudden sickness. The *nganga* holds a small box which he could use to identify which person, from a number of suspects, had caused the affliction. Dennett described the *nganga* as 'engrossed in his business of divination as he kept pulling the lid of the box off and putting it on again. At last the lid refused to be parted from the box as he muttered the name Thomas'.⁸³ The named person was then 'declared to be the *ndotchi* or wizard'.⁸⁴ *Ndotchi* is an example of another BaKongo word that receives no easy translation.⁸⁵ The words "sorcerer" or "witch" have are

⁸⁰ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 67.

⁸¹ Dennett, 1906, p. 156.

⁸² Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, New York: Vintage Books, 1984, pp. 134-135.

⁸³ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 68.

⁸⁴ Dennett, 1886, p. 284.

⁸⁵ In MacGaffey's texts this word is written *ndoki*.

sometimes been used as substitutes but such terms, like “witchcraft” carry medieval or fairy-tale connotations that are conceptually distant from the African meaning. Similarly “witch-doctor” and “medicine-man” fail to convey the complex institutional role that the *nganga* represented.⁸⁶

The attribution of the name *ndotchi* was a fluid one: it could, for example, be applied to an *nganga* who misused power. Power used for self-interest was fiercely judged in Kongo society and by using the occult power to improve his own conditions the *nganga* would be thought of as ‘virtually a criminal’.⁸⁷ Self-interest was anti-social and therefore outlawed, even though other uses of spiritual agency were considered legitimate.⁸⁸ It was acceptable to find ways to manipulate invisible powers, but a person who was accused of using *kindoki* for selfish purposes was considered to be ‘a witch’ or a person of ‘black arts’.⁸⁹

Dennett noticed that the *nganga* had a number of other ways by which to identify those engaged in witchcraft. A further method started with having ‘his assistant sweep the ground for the space of about three yards’.⁹⁰ Then, sitting on a mat the *nganga* would ‘describe a figure on the ground before him using his finger as his pencil, a figure being chequered like a chess-board. In each square he places stones or little pieces of stick’.⁹¹ He would then start ‘rubbing the palm of one hand against the palm of the other’

⁸⁵ MacGaffey, 2000, p. 56.

⁸⁶ Cassie Knight, writing of occult practices in the republic of Congo in 2007 uses the term ‘sorcerer’. Knight, Cassie. *Brazzaville Charms*, London: Francis Lincoln, 2007, p. 88.

⁸⁷ MacGaffey, 2000, p. 56. MacGaffey’s term *ndoki* is interchangeable with Dennett’s term *ndotchi* or *ndoxi*.

⁸⁸ MacGaffey, 2000, p. 56-7. See also MacGaffey, 2000, pp. 32-33: ‘To be a witch ... was simply to be the object of a successful accusation carried through in an institutionalised manner’.

⁸⁹ Dennett, 1905 (a), p. 382. Dennett’s informants told him that a witch had *ndongo*, a magical power in the stomach. Laman’s informants’ explained that *ndotchi* and *banganga* gained their power or *kundu* from an ‘internal witchcraft gland’. See MacGaffey, 2000, p. 28.

⁹⁰ Dennett 1887(a), p. 64.

⁹¹ Dennett 1887(a), p. 64.

changing the positions of the sticks while he considered the names of the suspects, until his palms refused to meet.⁹² By this means the name of the culprit was uncovered. A young boy could also be used in the divination process. Lying across some ‘wisps of straw’, explained Dennett, the boy could only be lifted by the straw ‘handles’ when the guilty person’s name was spoken.⁹³

Once a culprit had been identified an accusation was made. If the accused denied the crime, the *banganga* had a number of processes by which to test the claims to innocence. These tests gave rise to the more spectacular events that Dennett described in his first book. He illustrated one of the tests in the image ‘My Mother takes Cassia’.⁹⁴ [Fig. 45.] The *nganga*, wearing the mask and fringed waistband seen before, is shown administering the *cassia* or *casca*. In Dennett’s sketch the executioner is shown pointing to an *nkisi* in a similar way to that seen in Visser’s photograph, ‘*Exécution*’. [Fig. 44.] This suggests that it may have been a common and significant gesture in the administration of trials and punishment in which the figurative *nkisi* played an important part.⁹⁵

This substance of *casca* or *cassia* was made from the bark of the “Nkasa tree”, *Erythrophleum Guineensis*. It is believed that the bark sample in the Dennett Collection could come from this tree. [Fig. 48.] (9/1889/109.) *Casca* could cause severe poisoning which led to death, but if a dose of it induced the subject to vomit, they were proved to be innocent. Various other versions of this process of poison ordeal have been described

⁹² Dennett 1887(a), pp. 64-65. For further examples of African divination see Pemberton, John III, ed. *Insight and Artistry in African Divination*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000.

⁹³ Dennett 1887(a), p. 65.

⁹⁴ Dennett 1887(a), facing p. 80.

⁹⁵ As Dennett claimed he had been an eyewitness to the events that he sketched for *Seven Years Among the Fjort* this must have been intended to represent a gesture that he had seen in practice; the Visser photograph provides independent verification.

and there are a number of different explanations for this method of witch-identification. MacGaffey explains that in some poison ordeals the bad *kundu* in a witch was believed to be excreted out of the body, and this demonstrated their guilt. However in Cobden Phillips' and Dennett's accounts the absence of an emetic effect was enough evidence to prove the suspect was a witch, and an execution would follow.⁹⁶

There were other methods by which to try a witch or *ndotchi*. Dennett explained that a knife might also be used to test for someone's innocence. The *nganga*: 'having made it red hot, will pass it three times up and down the legs of all around him until one at last is burnt, and the blister thus raised marks the guilty.'⁹⁷ Though there are six knives in the Dennett collection it is not known if any were used in this way. [Fig. 49.] (9/1889/89 and 9/1889/93.)

Over time, Dennett developed further understanding about the role of the *banganga*. In 1904 he wrote a complex account of the many *banganga* in the service of the Mambona who 'held the reins of government in an inter-regnum'.⁹⁸ In this court the *nganga*'s name to *Nkanka* and Dennett noted that the *Nkanga Shisengo* was one who was likely to use a hot knife as his particular method of determining a witch. There were many alternative methods in use by these specialists: *Nkanga Mpusu* had the small basket on which the lid stayed when the culprit was named. *Nkanga Shiketembi* used the grass ropes and a boy. *Nkanga Ntali* had bundles of medicine wrapped in cloth and feathers which he would smell while shaking a rattle in the other hand.⁹⁹ Another

⁹⁶ Compare MacGaffey, Wyatt. *Religion and Society in Central Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, p.166, with Phillips, R. Cobden. 'The Social System of the Lower Congo.' *The Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, Vol. 3, (1887), p. 161.

⁹⁷ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 66.

⁹⁸ Dennett, Richard Edward. 'The Court of the Slave Mamboma.' *Journal of the Royal African Society* Vol. 3, no. 10, (1904(b)), p. 160.

⁹⁹ 'By smell he finds out the culprit'. Dennett 1904(b), p. 160.

Nkanga was *Suku* who rubbed his hands. When the palms turned back-to-back the culprit was identified. *Nkanga Lumbi* with *Nkanga Nyambi* wore a headdress of fowl and parrot. By looking into a mirror he was able to identify the next *Nkanga Vumba* or King.¹⁰⁰ In another text in 1905, Dennett described another *nganga* called *Nganga Mbumba Xicumbu* who buried pieces of iron and of wood, named *Xisongo* and *Xisika* and these which were then dug up for purposes of divination.¹⁰¹

The ‘General Nkisi.’

Closely aligned to the *nganga* was the figurative *nkisi*.¹⁰² In Dennett’s Ashton photograph three such figures are positioned on the top shelf. These are cognitively connected with the *ndungu* costume, the mask, the waistband, and the knife of the *nganga*, shown nearby.

Of the three figures on the higher shelf, only one is mentioned in Dennett’s writing, and this is the large male figure, which Dennett later called Ekawso.¹⁰³ As Chapter Three has shown, Dennett’s later work led him to identify a higher and a lower class of *nkisi* within the religion that he had called *Nkissism*. In his system, Ekawso belonged to the lower class which included the nail fetishes and ‘household gods’ or ‘fetishes’ and ‘charms’.¹⁰⁴ These, he explained, were ‘*Zincauci*’, the ‘fetishes’ of the lower form of the

¹⁰⁰ Dennett 1904(b), p. 160.

¹⁰¹ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 381.

¹⁰² In Dennett’s early terminology both the ‘family’ *nkisi* and the ‘general’ *nkisi* were figurative. The distinction he made was that the general *nkisi* was nailed, while the family one was not. Dennett, 1887(a), p. 50.

¹⁰³ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 385. The name Ekawso may relate to the name for an *nkisi* given in correspondence recorded in the Manchester Museum Archives. In the Accession Register from the Salford Museum, the curator recorded the comments about the ‘Fetish named “Mungarka”’ [sic] which were made by the collector, Arnold Ridyard. ‘When bringing two of the fetishes from shore sometime back, there was a body of men working on the road where my man and I had to pass. On seeing the fetishes one of them called out “Cawso; Coangi”, and they immediately stopped work and took off their caps until we had passed.’ Salford Museum Accession Register, *Manchester Museum Archives*.

¹⁰⁴ Dennett, (1902(a)), p. 283. As explained, the higher class were the ‘*Bakici baci*’ which Dennett called the ‘attributes of God on Earth’. Dennett had included the chief, or king, among these *Bakici baci* and he

religion.¹⁰⁵ They were activated by the *nganga* who was an agent of *Mudongo-ism*, and who, according to Dennett, brought the religion into disrepute.

Although Dennett had not formulated these ideas when the photograph was made, he had nevertheless recognised the value these objects held and the power they represented. He collected only two nailed *minkisi*, the dog and Ekawso. Positioned between them in the photograph is the large kneeling female, and behind them, the dominating costume of the *ndungu*.

Dennett had written about the nailed *minkisi* in his earliest book and an illustration was included. [Fig 32.] Describing the *nganga* and the sick *Maloango* he had described the practitioner, ‘sat before M’bialli Mundembi, the great and powerful *feteich*’.¹⁰⁶

Dennett’s illustrator failed to represent the nailed figure’s likeness but a better idea of the contemporary appearance of the *nkisi* can be found in another photograph taken by Robert Visser. This, like the picture of the ‘*Exécution*’, was circulated as a souvenir postcard. [Fig. 39.]

Dennett treated these nailed figures as a distinct class of *nkisi*. He described them as:

...one mass of nails, spear-points, knives, or bits of iron, each of which has some peculiar significance, known only to the *nganga*, who indeed must have a marvellous memory since he is supposed to know by whom each nail was driven into the *feteich* and for what purpose.¹⁰⁷

styled the king in Biblical terms as ‘the speaking I or the preacher.’ The ‘*bilongo*’ or medicines were also described as forces for good. Dennett, (1902(a)), p. 282.

¹⁰⁵ Dennett, (1902(a)), p. 282-283.

¹⁰⁶ Dennett 1887(a), p. 67. Dennett never collected so ‘great and powerful *feteich*’ as M’bialli Mundembi as far as we know, but he was instrumental in Mary Kingsley’s acquisition of the Pitt Rivers Museum’s famous Mavungu. Dennett’s connection with Kingsley is discussed in Chapter Five.

¹⁰⁷ Dennett 1887(a), p. 66. John Mack has also commented on the ‘intensely threatening’ consequences of the wrong nail being removed when a petitioner seeks to have an undertaking reversed. This highlights the importance of the *nganga* remembering each case individually from ‘a forest of metal’. Mack, John. *Museums of the Mind. Art and Memory in World Culture*, British Museum, 2003, p. 49.

He expressed the usual European prejudices against these ‘ugly figures, the nailed figures such as Mbialli Mundembi, Mangarka and hundreds of others into which nails are driven on payment of a certain sum’.¹⁰⁸

He explained the way these figures were used:

People pass before these fetishes ... calling on them to kill them if they do or have done such and such a thing. Others go to them and insist upon their killing so and so, who has done or is about to do them some frightful injury. And as they swear or make their demand a nail is driven into the fetish and the palaver is settled as far as they are concerned.¹⁰⁹

Dennett explained how, having paid his money, the petitioner considered his request to be ‘certain of accomplishment as the nail is being driven in.’¹¹⁰ He related how a well-known robber, Manchinchita, was confident that he would avoid capture because he ‘had knocked all *feteiches* [*sic*] against anyone who should dare to give him up.’¹¹¹

There were variations on the way the nail was deployed. The petitioner’s saliva might be added to it or another method was to use their hair:

The *nganga* receives the nail from the petitioner, and, having twisted it in his hair so that, in dragging the nail away he pulls out quantities of the suppliant’s hair, he makes him kiss it and then, finally addressing the *feteich*, repeats the request or oath and drives the nail well into the *feteich*.¹¹²

He also described the process of employing the *nganga* (who is called a doctor in this case) and the ‘fetish’. The client would ‘send the doctor six yards of dark-blue cloth and

¹⁰⁸ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 62.

¹⁰⁹ Dennett, 1906, p. 93.

¹¹⁰ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 62.

¹¹¹ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 97.

¹¹² Dennett, 1887(a), p. 69.

a gallon of rum' and for this, the *nganga* would 'bring the *feteich* down in a hammock, carried by two men, and have him placed carefully on his feet.'¹¹³ That the *nkisi* was carried in a hammock indicates its power and importance in the community.

The petitioner then tells his tale of woe, gesticulating most frantically as he describes the evil done him or the vengeance he wishes the *feteich* to take upon the evil-doer; or as he loudly abjures some evil habit in himself, such as drunkenness, or forswears some unclean food.¹¹⁴

A story Dennett told in *The Folklore of the Fjort* tells of how 'some natives laughed at two men who were carrying a hammock-pole as if a hammock was hanging from it'.¹¹⁵ The result of their mockery was that 'invisible hands' took them prisoner, because 'the men, you see, were carrying the fetish in his hammock, although both it and the hammock were invisible to the passers-by.'¹¹⁶

Dennett's most detailed account of a nailed *minkisi* was written about the *nkisi nkondi* that Mary Kingsley acquired after her visit to Cabinda. [Fig. 50.] He published *The Religion of the Fjort or Fiote: 'Mavungu'* in 1902.¹¹⁷ The large nailed figure was transferred to the Pitt Rivers Museum when Kingsley died in 1900. Dennett wrote that '[o]ne of the great charms of Mavungu was that when the *nganga* rubbed his hands, the figure became invisible to those that sought it.'¹¹⁸ This, he suggested, was convenient for the *nganga* as he could exact another payment to bring the *nkisi* back into view if the

¹¹³ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 68-69.

¹¹⁴ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 69.

¹¹⁵ Dennett, 1898, p. 97.

¹¹⁶ Dennett, 1898, p. 97.

¹¹⁷ Dennett noted that the figure would not have been bare below the waist as it is now, but was originally covered in 'native grass cloth or blue baft'. Dennett, 1902(b), p. 454. (Baft was bleached cotton long-cloth made with a heavy size.) MacGaffey has written that such immodest nakedness would have been shocking to the community who made these figures; the figure would only have been uncovered by the *nganga* for dramatic effect. MacGaffey, 1993, p. 84.

¹¹⁸ Dennett, 1902(b), p. 452.

petition was repealed. ‘One had to pay ever so much, therefore, to get at it once a nail had been driven into it.’¹¹⁹

In his account, Dennett related that Mavungu had come to Cabinda from Nganzi in Kacongo ‘sharing the honour of keeping that country under the domination of fear with his compeers Mbiali-Mundembi and Mangaka’[sic].¹²⁰ He proposed that these three *minkisi* were once connected with ideas of Maternity, Paternity and Reason, respectively.¹²¹ Dennett’s opinion was that ‘a long tale of misery hangs on every instrument hammered into [Mavungu] and the hundreds of those that have been withdrawn’.¹²²

In *Bavili Notes* in 1905, Dennett indicated that lives were sacrificed in the making of these *minkisi*.¹²³ He described how, to make one of these powerful *minkisi* a Muamba tree was selected and a ‘boy of great spirit’ or a ‘great and daring hunter’ was identified, without his knowing it, who would ‘become the presiding spirit of the fetish.’¹²⁴ His name would be called out in the forest as the tree was felled by the *nganga*. No-one else’s name should be spoken on the way to fell the tree. A chicken’s blood would be ‘mingled with the blood that they say comes from the tree.’¹²⁵ The named person was reputed to die within ten days. His life force or *nkulu* now inhabited the figure and this *nkulu* would take care of the petitions that were brought before it. In this instance therefore, the *nkisi* was inhabited by a spirit of a known person. If an *nkisi* was taken by

¹¹⁹ Dennett, 1902(b), p. 453.

¹²⁰ Dennett, 1902(b), p. 452. Dennett added: ‘I am told that Mangaka was also transported to Europe and may be found in the Manchester Museum.’

¹²¹ Dennett, 1902(b), p. 453.

¹²² Dennett, 1902(b), p. 453.

¹²³ Material from *Bavili Notes* also appears in *At the Back of the Black Man’s Mind* and so a version of this description may also be found in Dennett 1906, p. 93.

¹²⁴ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 383. See also Kavuna’s account of a similar selection process in MacGaffey, 2000, p. 112.

¹²⁵ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 384.

force, or damaged, the *nkulu* would return to the *nganga* and the spirit would then persist in ‘afflicting’ the owner until a new figure was made for it to inhabit.¹²⁶ When its figure was renewed it could then be petitioned with a nail to injure the enemy who had stolen the first figure.¹²⁷

In other instances, Dennett explained, the power or ‘*kulu*’ [*sic*] in an *nkisi* was free to leave its container: ‘Many figures are sold to Europeans that are simply figures. A fetish that is sold has had its *kulu* withdrawn. The only genuine fetishes owned by strangers are those taken by force, but even in this case the *kulu* comes back to the *nganga* or owner’.¹²⁸

However this is an explanation that might be expected from a European with a vested interest in collecting. Some museum authorities nevertheless consider that *minkisi* may still be ‘charged’ with the power that was contained in the *bilongo*. Mary Kingsley apparently believed that her Mavungu was ‘the only fetish in England ... to have its power still on it’ (held in the band around its neck).¹²⁹ MacGaffey has argued that *bilongo* was only rendered active through the agency of the *nganga* and that it would be inert without the complex set of relationships and ritual activity surrounding its use.¹³⁰ Moreover, Laman’s informants indicated that some spirits take the initiative in having a

¹²⁶ Dennett, 1906, p. 86.

¹²⁷ Dennett, 1906, pp. 86-87.

¹²⁸ Dennett, 1906, pp. 86-87.

¹²⁹ The editor of Dennett’s paper on Mavungu also commented that the band was made ‘chiefly or wholly formed of coagulated human blood’. Editor’s note on Dennett, 1902(b) p. 454. Comments were made about an odour emanating from Mavungu when the *nkisi* was kept in Kingsley’s apartment before 1900, when it moved to the Pitt Rivers Museum. See Gwynn, Stephen. *The Life of Mary Kingsley*, (1932), London: Macmillan, 1933, p. 191.

¹³⁰ Wyatt MacGaffey, personal communication, October 2008.

material ‘container’ made for them, and this would support Dennett’s notion that the spirit would also have the freedom to leave that container should it wish to do so.¹³¹

Private collectors were not the only foreigners to take possession of *minkisi*. Because nailed figures were so highly regarded by the indigenous community, and exerted such a strong influence over how people behaved, Dennett noticed that they became ‘the bitter enemies of European Governments’.¹³² By the end of the nineteenth century, he observed that these governments seemed ‘to take a delight in clearing the country of them.’¹³³ Dennett explained the proliferation of *minkisi*. Every district wanted to have its own *nkisi* and each area envied those ‘foreign districts’ whose *minkisi* were famous for their ‘slaying powers’ and which performed as ‘deterrents.’¹³⁴ This was how Loango had inherited the powerful hunting *minkisi* or *minkondi* from the district of Kacongo to the south. These were ‘Mangarka, Mabialli Mundembi, Ekawso, Selo Xingululu, Mani Mavungu, Fulula, Xiela, [and] Mbwaka’.¹³⁵ Ekawso was therefore an important *nkisi* for Dennett to have obtained for his collection. [Fig. 35.] (9/1889/62.) Dennett was able to provide the names of fourteen more ‘nail-fetishes,’ or what he called *minkisi* ‘*Mbowu*’. Of these, Mvumvu Xioxilo and Lu Siemu were each described as ‘a figure of a dog’; the remainder represented men, and Lenga lenga was differentiated as a ‘man with a knife’.¹³⁶

¹³¹ MacGaffey, 1993, pp. 49-50.

¹³² Dennett, 1905(a), p. 384.

¹³³ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 384.

¹³⁴ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 385.

¹³⁵ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 385. MacGaffey has understood these *nkondi* to be *minkisi* ‘of the above’. See MacGaffey, 1993, p. 69. They were identified with the sky, with thunder and lightning, and with aggressive masculinity. The *minkisi* ‘of the below’ were connected with water, with women and with reproduction. These were often coloured white. MacGaffey, 1993, p. 71; See also MacGaffey 2000, p.104; pp. 80-81; p. 85.

¹³⁶ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 385. For the full list see Dennett, 1905(a) pp. 385-386. Several of the *minkisi* he describes have identifications with footnotes attached; for *Mangarka*, Dennett directs the reader to the Manchester Museum and to the article in ‘*Man*, no. 59, 1905, pp. 102-103’. For ‘*Mani mavungu*’ he writes ‘see Afr. Soc. Journal, July 1903’; and for Ekawso, ‘see *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, and specimens in Exeter Museum’.

The two nailed figures in the Dennett Collection are the Ekawso figure, and a zoomorphic figure sometimes described as a leopard but more likely to be a dog. [Fig. 35, Fig. 33.] (9/1889/57.) The dog was of course a hunting animal with outstanding sense of smell. Its power to detect invisible trails was associated with the supernatural power of *nkondi* to hunt down witches.¹³⁷ Because the dog was partially domesticated it could be at home in both the forest and the village and it was therefore connected with both the world of the dead and the world of the living. The spotted pattern on the larger of the RAMM's zoomorphic *minkisi* could therefore be a reflection of this liminality, evidence of its access to both the spirit world, and to the world of men.¹³⁸ Its dual identity might explain why, as Dennett recorded, it was a bad omen if the dog, 'Mbwa or Mbwulu' crossed one's path at the start of a journey'.¹³⁹ A second dog *nkisi* in the collection is not nailed, but like the other one it carries hollow canes which could be filled with gunpowder. [Fig. 34.] (9/1889/61.) These potentially explosive devices are believed to represent another way to frighten off witches.¹⁴⁰

Dennett's nailed human figure, Ekawso is in disrepair now, but a photo from 1905 shows him wearing a fuller feather headdress. This *nkisi* is not generally on display in the museum but in 1905 it was considered significant enough for the Folklore Society to request its photograph to be included with Dennett's article in their journal.¹⁴¹ There are many nail holes in Ekawso. This may indicate that the *nkisi* had been effective and that the *nganga* had been paid to remove the nails. Alternatively the *nkisi* could have been ineffectual or uncooperative, and consequently abandoned.

¹³⁷ MacGaffey, 1993, p. 43.

¹³⁸ MacGaffey, 1993, p. 95. See also MacGaffey 2000, p. 28.

¹³⁹ Dennett, 1906, p. 138.

¹⁴⁰ MacGaffey, 1993, p. 72.

¹⁴¹ Dennett, 1905(a), facing p. 385.

The ‘Family Nkisi’.

Although nailed *minkisi* were distinctive, Dennett appreciated that there were other kinds.¹⁴² The nailed *nkisi* formed his second class of *nkisi*: his first was what he called the ‘family fetish’.¹⁴³ He explained that this kind of “fetish” would occupy a special clearing in the trees, where an important family would build it a *shimbec* or hut. Dennett gave the example of Maloango Pongo’s family who had such a clearing, for the family fetish.¹⁴⁴ He explained that until some traders stole her, a female figure named *Pinda* was kept there.¹⁴⁵ After 1905 Dennett also called these “family fetishes” by the name ‘*mpumbu*’.¹⁴⁶

It is possible that Dennett’s kneeling female figure with figures on her shoulders was one of these “family fetishes”. [Fig. 36.] (9/1889/53.) This figure has links to many of the ideas of the *nkisi* ‘of the below’.¹⁴⁷ Areas of white pigment connect with ideas of water and the world of the dead the sea; the snakes that run down her back are also associated with water in African iconography.¹⁴⁸ The baby suggests her fecundity, an idea which is frequently connected with serpents, whiteness, and water in Kongo thought.¹⁴⁹

The serpents on the Dennett carving combine the serpent imagery of the African-Atlantic water deity figure, *Mami Wata*, with the kneeling pose and the *bilongo*

¹⁴² Dennett, 1887(a), p. 50.

¹⁴³ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 50. Only the male head of the family could enter the hut (p. 51).

¹⁴⁴ Dennett, 1887(a) p. 57.

¹⁴⁵ This throwaway allusion to traders stealing a carving sheds some light on the collusions which rid the region of its *minkisi* over the decades when Dennett was in the Congo.

¹⁴⁶ See Dennett, 1905(a), pp. 377-378.

¹⁴⁷ See MacGaffey, 1993, p.69.

¹⁴⁸ Drewal, Henry John. ‘Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and Its Diasporas.’ *African Arts* Vol. 41, no. 2, (2008), pp. 60-83.

¹⁴⁹ See MacGaffey, 2000, p. 71; Drewal 2008.

container often seen in female *minkisi*. Henry John Drewal's recent research on water deities in African and African-Atlantic cultures has shown how the snake reveals 'a constellation of ideas about ancient water spirits'.¹⁵⁰ *Mami Wata*, 'at once beautiful, productive, seductive and potentially deadly', is believed to have her roots in the pantheon of water spirits already known in Africa, but with features springing also from Europe and Asia.¹⁵¹ Drewal has demonstrated how, after 1890, a striking lithograph from Germany, which depicted a long-haired female draped with writhing snakes, was influential in extending the imagery of *Mami Wata* along the West Coast of Africa.¹⁵²

[Fig. 51.]

Robert Visser also collected an extraordinary female figure draped with snakes.¹⁵³

[Fig. 52.] The serpent imagery trailing down the woman's back in a "V" shape is clearly related to that on the Dennett *nkisi*. Instead of kneeling, this figure is standing. She has a mirrored circular container on her belly and possibly she demonstrates her power of maternity with her breast. As a new king was elected from the mother's line, these figures may hold ideas of matrilineal authority, represented by the raised breast and the baby.¹⁵⁴ Dennett had noted that the *Mambona*, who was in power before a new king was crowned, was associated with a python, *Mboma*.¹⁵⁵ But many questions remain unresolved. Who are the men on the shoulders of the female and what is their relationship with the snakes? Why are the bodies of the men painted white? How does the distinctive rosette surrounding the circular container on the figure's belly contribute to her power? This mirrored pack distinguishes the snake carving from *Phemba*

¹⁵⁰ Drewal, 2008, p. 64.

¹⁵¹ Drewal, 2008, p. 60.

¹⁵² The chromolithograph showed an Asian snake charmer called Maladamatjute whose image was circulated on circus flyers in Europe and the United States after 1880. A poster was made of her which Drewal explains, was popular in West Africa. Drewal, 2008, pp. 70-71.

¹⁵³ Illustration found in Adler and Stelzig, 2002, p. 39, fig 3(a) and (b) [Private collection].

¹⁵⁴ Dennett, 1904(b), p. 159.

¹⁵⁵ Dennett indicated that the word for 'python' was equated with 'fear' in Dennett, 1904(b), p. 159.

maternity figures which do not carry the containers of *bilongo* which are associated with *minkisi*.¹⁵⁶ Moreover *Phemba* figures are commonly cross-legged while the female *minkisi* are carved in a kneeling position. Dennett's texts frustratingly fail to explain any of these iconographic details.

He did, however, discuss the significance of snakes at some length. Snakes had multiple layers of meaning in Kongo cosmology. Six snakes were discussed in the context of the omens, as Dennett explained how their colours were connected with those of the rainbow, and, through these, with the six senses.¹⁵⁷ The rainbow, he explained, was identified with the python. There were two kinds of rainbow: *Xama Luavi* which grew out of the snake *Nlimba* and the 'evil *Xama Ngonzola*' which grew from *Nkula Ntieti*.¹⁵⁸ The evil snake caused flooding, damaging villages and plantations. It could be driven away by the 'beneficent' *Xami Luavi*.¹⁵⁹

One snake, the rainbow serpent, was connected with the River Congo itself. *Chamma* was 'a huge snake that enters rivers at their source and swells them up, and carried everything before it, grass, trees, at times whole villages on their way to the sea'.¹⁶⁰ Europeans arriving by sea at the Congo coast had long noticed the debris that would be seen spilling out into the sea as the mouth of the great river drew nearer. A change in the colour of the water from blue to brown would also be remarked on. In the fifteenth century the Portuguese explorer Diego Cão and his crew had observed this

¹⁵⁶ MacGaffey catalogue notes in Verswijver, Gustaaf, ed. *Masterpieces from Central Africa: Tervuren Museum*, Munich: Prestel, 1996, p. 146, figure 15.

¹⁵⁷ Dennett, 1906, pp. 139-143. Dennett lists the names of different snakes, and describes their associations with the colours of the rainbow and with 'the nerves in connection with the senses in perception'.

¹⁵⁸ Dennett, 1906, p. 142.

¹⁵⁹ Dennett, 1906, p. 142.

¹⁶⁰ Dennett, 1898, p. 6.

phenomenon.¹⁶¹ It was an indication that they were approaching an extraordinary river's mouth. Stanley had noted that this occurred 'while yet a day's steaming from our destination' at Banana.¹⁶²

Another serpent was linked with the geography of Loango. *Xama Ngonzola* was said to rise from a deep valley of 'great beauty' between Buali and Loango.¹⁶³ This is probably the Diosso Gorge. Dennett recognised a sacred tree at this site.¹⁶⁴ He knew these sites of supernatural importance were threatened by the dominant colonial powers and felt grateful to have seen them before they were destroyed: 'In a few years all traces of these trees and places may be lost so that we have been fortunate in visiting them while they still remain intact.'¹⁶⁵

The 'Gilly-Gilly'

Dennett's third class of *nkisi* was known locally as the '*kiss-a-kiss*' or '*gilly-gilly*' and there are several examples in his collection. This was the small *nkisi* that he said was carried by 'every native'.¹⁶⁶ It would hang from a shoulder or in a sling, and was generally:

...a small wooden figure, with a large box for a stomach, which is filled with the correct medicines; this figure is almost always embedded in some skin or other, to which is attached a thick fringe, composed of many ends of different pieces of cloth, which in their turn serve to wrap *malongos* in.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶¹ Friedman, 1991, p. 18.

¹⁶² Stanley, Henry M. *The Congo and the Founding of Its Free State: A Story of Work and Exploration*, 2 vols., London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1885, Vol. 1, p. 61.

¹⁶³ Dennett, 1906, p. 12.

¹⁶⁴ Dennett wrote that this valley was known as '*Bulu Nzimbu Xikoko* (the valley of the fly and the mosquito hand in hand)' and it was here that another sacred tree was found, called '*numbu*'. Dennett, 1906, p. 12.

¹⁶⁵ Dennett, 1906, p. 12.

¹⁶⁶ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 70.

¹⁶⁷ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 70.

An excellent example of a figure wrapped in skin is seen in the Ashton photograph on the third shelf down. [Fig. 53.] (9/1889/39.) Above this are three male figures that are not wrapped in any way. One is seated, cross-legged while the others stand.

[Fig 54 - Fig. 56.] (9/1889/64, 9/1889/98, 9/1889/60.) Among them is a larger kneeling female figure. [Fig. 57.](9/1889/54.) A second similar female, wearing a string of beads around her neck, has been accessioned as part of the collection although she is not seen in the photograph. [Fig 58.] (9/1889/63.)

All of these figures have, or have vestiges of, containers for what Dennett called *malongos* (medicines). Dennett wrote that a man would venture out only after he had donned his ‘*kiss-a-kiss* or *gilly gilly*, every string of which is charged with some charm to preserve him against being shot, poisoned, burned or drowned, or overpowered by some evil spirit.’¹⁶⁸ The containers in Dennett’s collection are extremely interesting. On one female the mirrored glass that was used to seal the *bilongo* in a cavity on the belly has deteriorated, and this means the inner material of cowrie shells, bones and seed pods can be seen. [Fig. 57.] On the other hand the bundle concealed between her kneeling legs is still tightly-wrapped and its contents are still invisible. Another tiny bundle is tied to her forearm; below this she carries a tobacco pipe.

The smaller carving of a female has no surviving bundles or containers of *bilongo*. [Fig. 58.] There appears to be a sealed cavity in her belly, and this has been confirmed by x-ray photographs.¹⁶⁹ The two females share a strong stylistic similarity and all these *minkisi* can be compared with those in other collections, particularly those at Leiden,

¹⁶⁸ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 233.

¹⁶⁹ See Cadbury, Tabitha and Daly, Cathy. ‘X-pect the Unexpected: X-Radiographic Investigations of Power Bundles from Central Africa.’ *The Conservator*, Vol. 30, (2007), pp. 39-47.

Rotterdam and Berlin. Research by Enzo Bassani in 1977 identified a number of larger male carvings whose characteristics were so similar that he was able to propose a ‘Chiloango River School’ of *minkisi* production.¹⁷⁰ He based his argument on seven large nailed *minkisi minkondi* from Cabinda, which shared close stylistic qualities. However, many of the smaller carvings, like Dennett’s *gilly-gillies*, also exhibit strong “family likenesses”. The carver’s hand can be traced not only in the figures’ facial features but also in the details of the hands, feet, body scarification patterns and hairstyles.

After being carved, figures such as these would be passed on to the *nganga* who would attach the essential *bilongo*. This compound was often placed on the belly (which was the site of occult power, or *ndongo*), or on the head, where the *nkulu* could enter or leave the body.¹⁷¹ On one *nkisi* there is a mound of material hidden on its head, out of sight behind a cloth band, and stuck with feathers. [Fig. 55.] There are also tubes projecting from the headband at the cardinal points, possibly intended to incorporate gunpowder, with its explosive power, in the *nkisi*’s repertoire. On the smaller standing male figure, [Fig. 56] the equivalent mound of *bilongo* is absent and the rim that would have supported this material is now easily mistaken for the rim of a European-style hat. This figure is also missing the bundle of *bilongo* around the neck and has no fabric garment tied around the waist.

One male *Nkisi* [Fig. 55] has extra power implicit in its brightly whitened eyes and mouth.¹⁷² The material used here is probably kaolin, the chalk substance known as

¹⁷⁰ Bassani, Ezio. ‘Kongo Nail Fetishes from the Chiloango River Area.’ *African Arts*, Vol. 10, no. 3, (1977), pp. 36-40.

¹⁷¹ Dennett, 1905(a), pp. 391-392.

¹⁷² Mack, John. *The Art of Small Things*, London: British Museum, 2007, p. 121.

mpemba, which was connected with the grave and the world of the dead. The other small standing male figure's mouth is closed while the female figures both show their teeth.

Of all the male figures, only the cross-legged *nkisi* has no feathered headdress. His headwear is carved with a geometrical pattern that suggests those seen on the *mpu*, which was worn by people of status. A space at the front of this head covering may previously have had a mirror attached. The figure holds his hand to his chin. Dennett does not describe the meaning of this particular posture, although he remarked on other conventions. For example he described the way an old man greeted a 'Son of the King': the old man 'approached him respectfully, clapped his hands quietly together, laid them across his breast, and then stretched one out to grasp the now extended hand of his prince, then clapped them together again very quietly'.¹⁷³ He also noted a gesture made by BaVili 'princes' after the rains had brought flooding to their villages. They 'raised their hands to their breasts and then lifting them up on high let them drop again to their sides (the sign of the rainbow)'.¹⁷⁴ When conducting trade and settling a transaction the seller, according to Dennett, 'lifts his hands to his arm-pits, and then throws them out towards the buyer, and breathes or blows over the thing sold. This is called *Ku Vana Mula*, to give the breath, and is equivalent to saying "God bless thee"'.¹⁷⁵ The male figure, *Ekawso*, stands with hands on hips in the pose MacGaffey has identified as '*vonganana*'.¹⁷⁶ It is a pose seen in the aggressive *nkondi* such as *Mangaka*.¹⁷⁷ Different poses and gestures were recognised in use according to social conventions. The

¹⁷³ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 55.

¹⁷⁴ Dennett, 1906, p. 142.

¹⁷⁵ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 272. See also Falgayrettes-Leveau, Christiane, ed. *Le Geste Kôngo*, Paris: Dapper, 2002, for further interpretations of poses and gestures in Kongo sculpture.

¹⁷⁶ MacGaffey, 1993, p. 44.

¹⁷⁷ For example the same pose is held by the *Mangaka* from Chiloango shown in MacGaffey, 1993, p. 43.

kneeling pose is commonly seen in female *nkisi* and all Dennett's female pieces adopt this position of respect. It was also shown in many of his illustrations in *Seven Years Among the Fjort*.¹⁷⁸

Patterns like those on the females' bodies were mentioned by Dennett when he was discussing BaVili means of communication in *At the back of the Black Man's Mind*.¹⁷⁹ The diamond and "eternal knot" patterns on these carvings represent markings which were made on skin through cicatrisation. They are similar to the geometric patterns seen on the *mpu*. [Fig. 59.] (9/1889/82.) Dennett described what he called the 'tribal marks of the people between Luango and Brazzaville' and showed a diagram of what he called the 'tattooed' and 'keloid' patterns that he had seen on the bodies of the BaVili.

[Fig. 60.] A link may be made with the snake theme discussed earlier, as Robert Farris Thompson has identified certain Kongo patterns as a 'python motif' and a pattern of this kind may be seen on the back of the cross legged figure.¹⁸⁰ [Fig. 54.] Thompson writes that pythons 'refer to longevity and serious matters of life and death'.¹⁸¹

The Non-figurative Nkisi, or 'Malongo'.

Dennett made a distinction between the *gilly-gilly* which was a figurative *nkisi* and his fourth class of *nkisi* which was not. However they shared most attributes. For example, Dennett explained that the *gilly-gilly* was an extension of its owner. It might be used to indicate a person's claim on something. 'He will often leave it hanging over some of his

¹⁷⁸ See, for example 'Manimacosso Arrives at the Bush' in Dennett, 1887(a), facing p. 136; and 'Maloango Pongo Falls Sick', Dennett, 1887(a), facing p. 56. Dennett described seeing the sick Maloango Pongo before he died, 'stretched out on a mat... and his wives kneeling at his head...' Dennett, 1887(a), p. 67.

¹⁷⁹ Blier explains that the position of these markings indicated the female's reproductive status and how many children she had carried. Marks above the breasts were intended 'to promote conception.' Blier, 1998, p. 222.

¹⁸⁰ Dennett, 1906, p. 76; Thompson, Robert Farris, and Joseph Cornet. *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds*. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1981, p. 42.

¹⁸¹ Thompson, 1981, p. 65.

possessions which, for some reason he has been obliged to leave, or by way of appropriating a certain spot to himself, much in the same way our M. P.'s leave their hats on the seats which they wish to secure in the House.'¹⁸² But non-figurative charms could be used in the same way: 'any place, either in the hills or along the banks of rivers (near fishing places), or near wells, can be reserved by anyone, by placing shells, strips of cloth, or other charms there'.¹⁸³

These bundles were also called '*malongos*, or medicines, and charms' and Dennett recognised that they were 'closely connected with the *gilly-gilly*.'¹⁸⁴ The *malongos* included composite objects which were made from *bilongo* held in some kind of container such as a shell, pot or bundle of cloth.¹⁸⁵ They might be made to be worn on the body as a headband or necklace, or as a bracelet, waistband or anklet. A necklace *malongo* of this type can just be seen in the photograph of Maniluemba.¹⁸⁶ In the RAMM collection there several examples of what Dennett called '*malongos*'. Most are seen on the third and the fourth shelf down in the Ashton Photograph. They take the form of shells, pots, bundles and horns and there are two baskets which may also have been used in this way.¹⁸⁷

Shells.

The two *malongo* shells are positioned on the same shelf as the wrapped *nkisi* figure.

Both are stuffed with solid material or *bilongo* but on one there is an extra pack of

¹⁸² Dennett, 1887(a), p. 70.

¹⁸³ Dennett, 1898, p. 6.

¹⁸⁴ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 71.

¹⁸⁵ A further collection of 'charms' of this kind from 'French Congo', which is now kept in the Pitt Rivers Museum, has been connected with Dennett in the course of this research and will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

¹⁸⁶ Dennett, 1906, p. 11.

¹⁸⁷ MacGaffey explains that nowadays bottles of correction fluid might be made used as containers to make 'charms to help schoolboys pass examinations' MacGaffey, 2000, p. 79.

bilongo on the surface [Fig. 61, Fig. 62.] (9/1889/67.) This holds in place a display of Guinea Fowl feathers whose dappled surface once again suggests liminality; the transition between two worlds. The second shell *nkisi* has strings attached to it, which are knotted and tied with sticks, bones and further shells. [Fig. 63.] (9/1889/81.) These are seen dangling over the edge of the shelf. Red pigment has been applied, carrying further connotations of transition. The shells would also be associated with the land of the dead by their contiguity with water and by their white colour.

Dennett was aware that shells had special significance and he noted their presence in the sacred groves.¹⁸⁸ He also recorded that cockle shells were important when a king was to be buried.¹⁸⁹ These would be thrown at the bearers of a deceased king when his body was brought from his capital at Buali, to be buried at Xienji.¹⁹⁰ He drew attention to the location of the burial place as it was within sight of the sea near the *Mambona*'s town of Lubu.¹⁹¹

Dennett also recounted a tale which relates something of the shell's multiple metonymic operation. An *nkisi* called *Lifuma* had been forced inland from Cabinda by the arrival of Portuguese colonialists. On his departure, the *nkisi* collected some shells and pebbles to take with him, and 'a pint-mug filled with salt water'.¹⁹² These were placed on the holy

¹⁸⁸ Dennett, 1906, p. 157.

¹⁸⁹ Thompson has recorded how as recently as the 1960's, cockle shells were still being used in Carolina to mark the graves of African American soldiers who died at Vietnam (Thompson, 1984, p. 135, and photograph on p. 137). Thompson also points to an interesting continuation of the theme of death, whiteness and water in the way that modern grave monuments in Congo and Haiti have been made in 'gleaming white bathroom tile'. Thompson 1984, p. 138.

¹⁹⁰ Dennett, 1906, p. 9. This burial ground was identified at the time by two large Baobab trees.

¹⁹¹ Dennett, 1906, p. 9.

¹⁹² Dennett, 1898, pp. 94-95.

ground in his new location behind the coastline, as a continuing ‘sign of his ownership of the beach’.¹⁹³

MacGaffey has shown that shells were also conceptually connected with fertility and pregnancy, and that coiled shells were associated with the womb.¹⁹⁴ The name for a spiral, he explains, is *nzinga* which makes a punning connection with *luzinga*, ‘long life’. Spiral shells were therefore also used on graves.¹⁹⁵ These associations of the watery world, the world of the feminine, and both the creation and the end of life, may well have been intended when the little shells were placed in the cavity on the female *gilly gilly* in the Dennett collection [Fig. 57.]

Shells also appear on another *nkisi* which is seen in the Ashton photograph on shelf below this female figure. Positioned between the bellows and the musical instrument, the *nkisi* is made from a small pot, stuffed with *bilongo* and with string tied round the rim onto which small shells have been fixed. [Fig. 64, Fig. 65.] (9/1889/56.) According to MacGaffey, ‘[c]lay cooking pots were among the most common containers for *minkisi*; one term describing the preparation of medicines is that they were “cooked”’.¹⁹⁶ Thompson has shown that the form reappears, stuffed with compounds of ‘medicines’, in the equipment used in the Santeria religion of Cuba and in Vodun in Haiti.¹⁹⁷ Although apparently humble, this *nkisi* is therefore connected with one of the most ubiquitous ‘charms’ or ‘*prenda*’ in the new world.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ Dennett, 1898, pp. 94-95.

¹⁹⁴ MacGaffey, 1993, p. 71, p. 67, p. 89.

¹⁹⁵ MacGaffey, 1993, p. 89.

¹⁹⁶ MacGaffey, 1993, p.67. MacGaffey notes that ‘clay pots are often the focus of ritual attention’.
MacGaffey, 1993, p. 68.

¹⁹⁷ The fascinating subject of Kongo components in *Santeria* are discussed in Chapter Two of Thompson, 1984. See also Hubner, Irene and Welling, Wouter, eds. *Roots and More: The Journey of the Spirits*, Berg en Dal: *Afrika Museum* 2009.

¹⁹⁸ Thompson, 1984, p. 121.

Baskets.

A basket could also be filled with *bilongo* and used as an *nkisi*. Dennett described one known as *Ximbuka*:

Ximbuka (the first *Nkici* [*sic*] brought by the west wind) has the form of a round native basket made of the *Mfumbu* leaves and is used as the depository for the household remedies. Its guardian does not throw kernels at it, but he shakes a small gourd (filled with seeds that rattle) at it as he requests it to cure one of the family or to slay an enemy of the petitioner.¹⁹⁹

It is possible that the Dennett Collection baskets were used in this way. Their lids are constructed in tiered form which has been connected by Schildkrout *et al* with the pyramidal forms known from Kongo kings' graves.²⁰⁰ [Fig. 66.] (9/1889/87.) However, Dennett made no reference to this shape, nor to the spiral which has elsewhere been shown to be loaded with meaning in Kongo thought.²⁰¹

Bilongo, or protective material, could be used without a container. Dennett explained that a bundle of medicines tied into a knot of grass growing by the road into a village was understood to protect the inhabitants from malicious visitors. This *nkisi* was called 'nteuo.'²⁰² A more visible guardian of the village was made by hanging feathers and grasses from a string hanging between two stakes of *nkala* wood placed either side of

¹⁹⁹ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 378.

²⁰⁰ Schildkrout, Enid, Dale Rosengarten and Theodore Rosengarten, 'Grass Roots: African origins of an American Art.' *African Art*, Vol. 42, no. 2, (2009), pp. 44-55.

²⁰¹ MacGaffey has explored the concept of the spiral universe in *Religion and Society in Central Africa* (MacGaffey, 1986). In Dennett's collection the form has been seen in the large snail shell *minkisi*; it also occurs also on the handle of the 'broom'. [Fig. 81] However MacGaffey has argued that a spiral shape such as that used on Loango carved ivory tusks may simply be explained by the technical process by which the object was made. The spiral patterns on carved ivories are therefore a result of the technical constraints imposed when carving on a tusk, and are not a response to the concept of the 'spiral universe' (MacGaffey, personal communication, October 2009). The same could therefore be true of the broom handle.

²⁰² Dennett, 1898, p. 17.

the path.²⁰³ This was the ‘gate of charms’ which Dennett had illustrated in his picture of *Maloango Pongo Falls Sick in Seven Years Among the Fjort*.²⁰⁴ By 1905 Dennett knew the ‘gate of charms’ by the indigenous name of *mabili*.²⁰⁵ [Fig. 67.]

Pots.

A village could also be protected by a pot if it had the *bilongo* inside that gave it the power to explode. Dennett explained that:

...every town has some *Nkissi* [*sic*] other to guard it. One will often notice an earthenware pot (*nduda*) half-full of sand, containing two eggs, placed upon a stand. It is said that these eggs will explode with a fearful report, if anyone bent on evil enters the town.²⁰⁶

All these different types of *minkisi* depended on the power of *bilongo* to be effective, and only the different *banganga* had the specialist knowledge required to compose this material. A picture from the Eliot Elisofon Photo Archive shows a BaVili *nganga* with *bilongo* spread out on a cloth in front of him, from which he would select the appropriate materials for the different *malongos* [Fig. 68].²⁰⁷

Nganga's Rattle.

Two pieces in the Dennett collection were probably created for the *nganga's* own use. One is made from a horn which is surrounded by an abundance of torn fabric strips which make a thick fringe around it. Small rattling seeds pods have been attached to the fabric, and red pigment and geometric designs have been added to the surface of the

²⁰³ See Dennett, 1905(a), p. 378; and see photograph of ‘*Mabili*,’ facing p. 378.

²⁰⁴ Dennett, 1898, p. 18.

²⁰⁵ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 378.

²⁰⁶ Dennett, 1898, p. 18.

²⁰⁷ This image dates from the time when Dennett was still living in Loango, in around 1900. See Geary, 2002, p. 38.

horn. The imagery on the fabric strips seem to have been selected to show powerful agents: a bearded man in a turban is seen holding a horse on a piece of *toile de joie*; another strip of cloth shows an African man pointing a rifle. [Fig 69, Fig. 70.]

(9/1889/40.) A dog is also shown on a European-manufactured cloth and all these images are printed in the significant colour of red. Another non-figurative *nkisi* that was probably made for an *nganga* was composed with a bell, a chain and a mirror. [Fig. 71.]

(9/1889/110.) It has two red bundles tied to the handle from which the bell hangs. The bundles and bell are covered in the significant red ‘*takula*’ pigment and the largest is sealed with a mirror.²⁰⁸ With movement this piece would combine the sound of the bell with the tinkling of the chain and a possible flash of light from the mirror.

Dennett explained that coloured chinks were frequently used with mirrors to fix *bilongo* to trees. He explained that in each village a tree was usually planted in the clearing of the ‘family fetish’ in which the ‘medicines’ were placed.²⁰⁹ Holes were made in it. ‘Each hole is then covered by a piece of looking glass, which is kept in its place by a rim of clay, which again is splattered over by with a red and white earth or chalk, moistened in the mouth of the prince.’²¹⁰ Red and white pigment is also commonly seen on the packs of *bilongo* on figurative *minkisi*, sometimes marking the cardinal points on a mirror.

²⁰⁸ Dennett, 1898, p. 20.

²⁰⁹ Dennett, 1898, p. 3.

²¹⁰ Dennett, 1898, p. 3. MacGaffey argues that the function was not hampered if the mirror was obscured. (MacGaffey, 2000, p. 207). Thompson has shown how the use of reflective materials transferred to the Southern States of the USA in the form of bottle trees (Thompson, 1984, pp. 142-145). Bottles were upturned onto branches to lure bad spirits into them at night. In the daytime the spirits were destroyed by sunlight. This practice was still flourishing in the Caribbean in the 1980’s. Thompson 1984, p. 145.

Dennett observed that it was *xina*, or forbidden, ‘to throw the light reflected from a mirror on a person.’²¹¹ He connected this *xina* or taboo with the fear the BaVili showed toward the camera: ‘When one wanders about a native village with a camera and points it at people with the intention of taking their photographs, they invariably at first run away.’²¹² Perhaps the flash of light, momentarily observed when a camera shutter opened and closed, would be likened to the light of a mirror being briefly thrown onto a person.²¹³

Spirits, Death and Ndotchi.

Dennett explained that there was an important element that could be introduced to the mixture of natural materials that comprised *bilongo*. A person’s spirit, or *nkulu*, was added to certain “charms”. This sort of mixture might be sealed in a box, but it was frequently placed in an antelope horn. There are two horns shown in the Ashton photo which are now missing from the collection in the RAMM. The horn projecting from a pot, seen near the bottom of the display, has not been found and another, seen on the ground in the photo, is also missing.

Dennett described how the ‘spirit’ of a person could be installed in a horn in his discussion of death and burial in *Folklore of the Fjort*:

This is done by the *Nganga* picking up some of the earth from the grave of the deceased, and, after mixing it with some other medicine, placing it in either the horn of the antelope (*lekorla*) or else a little tin box (*nkobbi*). Then seating himself upon a mat within a circle drawn in chalk on the ground, he shakes a little rattle

²¹¹ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 375.

²¹² Although MacGaffey has expressed scepticism about this idea that people feared their spirit might be stolen by photography (personal communication October 2009), Dennett certainly upholds this notion in his *Bavili Notes*, Dennett, 1905(a), p. 376.

²¹³ A reflection might be found in beetle wings, pools of water, or on mirrors, and all of these were understood to allow or deny access to invisible powers. Thompson, 1984.

(*nquanga*) at the patient and goes through some kind of incantation, until the patient trembles and cries out with the voice of the deceased...²¹⁴

Dennett remarked in 1905 that he had been ‘very much touched the other day’ when he witnessed a man picking up the ‘sacred earth from the grave of his now buried sister’, his wife carefully wrapping it in his waistband in order to take it to the *nganga*, so that his sister’s *nkulu* might be ‘placed in the head of some living relation, and her guiding voice be once more heard by those who loved her’.²¹⁵

Dennett described the *nkulu*, or *Bakulu*, as the ‘voice or soul of the dead.’²¹⁶ ‘The *Bakulu* ... prefer to dwell in the heads of some of their near relations’ but failing this ‘they are said to hover about the outer division, or verandah, of the houses of their relations’ where ‘they mourn with their relations when in trouble and long to help them’.²¹⁷ Dennett added the poignant comment that ‘they say that if every one of the Bavili [*sic*] were destroyed to-morrow, these *Bakulu* would hover about in the grass around their town forever and ever.’²¹⁸

In *Bavili Notes* Dennett explained that another spirit was transferred into a family member when the ‘family fetishes’ were made.²¹⁹ A male and a female figure were carved to be the family’s spiritual guides.²²⁰ One person had to become the ‘the spokesman’ of the figure.²²¹ Dennett wrote that his cook was *Nguli Bwanga* of the

²¹⁴ Dennett, 1898, p. 115.

²¹⁵ Dennett, 1905(a), pp. 375-376.

²¹⁶ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 374.

²¹⁷ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 374.

²¹⁸ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 374. Dennett identified three different kinds of *nkulu* in *Bavili Notes* and six in *At the Back of the Black Man’s Mind*. Compare Dennett, 1905(a), pp. 374-375 with Dennett, 1906, p. 83.

²¹⁹ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 377.

²²⁰ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 377.

²²¹ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 377.

family's *mpumbu*.²²² The identity of the spirit that was engaged in this process is not named but it was created by the *nganga* making a 'decoction or infusion of ... herbs'.²²³ This was poured into the eyes of the spokesperson who would 'shake violently' and try to 'run away'.²²⁴ The *nganga* would then 'charge' the two *mpumbu* with 'the proper medicines'.²²⁵ The spokesperson was then known as 'Nguli Bwanga' and had the power to provoke the 'family fetishes' or *mpumbu* into action by throwing palm-kernels at them.²²⁶ If a petition was received by the *mpumbu*, the *Nguli Bwanga* would rub the faces of the *mpumbu* on the ground, or, as Dennett phrased it, 'cause the *Mpumbu* to kiss mother-earth'.²²⁷

An interesting photograph in the same article shows a family consultation with *Mpumbu* following a death.²²⁸ [Fig. 26.] Two carved figures can just be seen in front of a group of men who are seated in cross-legged position around them. One woman kneels alongside the well-dressed men. In a letter to E. Sidney Hartland in 1897 Dennett recorded that he had taken a photograph of a funeral when the father of his 'steward' had died; this picture is probably the record of the event he referred to.²²⁹ Inside the *shimbec* is a coffin which is the one that can also be seen in a photograph that was published in *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*.²³⁰ [Fig 25.] The coffin is surrounded by imported items such as a clock, a hurricane lamp, china jugs with basins and porcelain figures.

There are also framed photographs of Europeans; one at the front is seen in ceremonial

²²² 'My cook Makawso was *Nguli Bwanga* of the *Mpumbu*'. Dennett, 1905(a), p. 377, footnote 1. His 'cook's father 'was the subject of Dennett's first paper for the Folklore Society's journal, and described his death and burial rites. See Dennett, Richard Edward. 'Death and Burial of the Fjort.' *Folklore*, Vol. 8, no. 2, (1897), pp. 132-137.

²²³ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 377.

²²⁴ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 377.

²²⁵ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 377.

²²⁶ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 377.

²²⁷ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 378.

²²⁸ Dennett, 1905(a), facing p. 377.

²²⁹ Letter from Richard Dennett to E. S. Hartland, from Loango, S.W. Coast Africa, 11 October 1897, *E. S. Hartland Archive*, National Library of Wales, ref. 16894B.

²³⁰ Dennett, 1906, facing p. 102.

military dress while at the back of the hut a scene like a mounted parade can just be discerned. The deceased had clearly been a wealthy member of the community who had embraced certain aspects of western culture. He had access to images from western illustrated publications and the objects on the coffin also include a gin bottle and a crucifix. If the deceased was indeed Dennett's steward, some these objects may have been acquired through his employer.

It appears that Dennett was not unwelcome at events such as this because he was later invited to make a second photograph when his linguist Francisco died.²³¹ [Fig 27.] The latter funeral was a less elaborate affair and the "shimbec" in which the body was kept, smoked and wrapped before burial is photographed with no expensive western goods on display. In his search for "true *nkissists*" Dennett was particularly interested in those BaVili practices which had not been combined with Christian ones so this second funeral may have satisfied him more than the first. He emphasised in a letter to Hartland that he was anxious to have the photograph preserved.²³²

As Chapter Three has shown, Dennett began over time to understand different names for ghosts, souls or spirits in the BaVili cosmology. He discovered that these were often connected with the witches or *ndotchi*.²³³ '*Xidundu* is a shadow', he explained, 'said to sleep in the body of its owner' but which could be stolen by an '*ndoxi*, or dealer in black arts'.²³⁴ If someone had a fit or a coma it was said that his *xidundu* had been taken by an

²³¹ Letter from Dennett to Hartland, October 1897.

²³² Letter from Dennett to Hartland, October 1897.

²³³ As explained earlier, Dennett used "X" interchangeably with "tch" so *Ndotchi* and *Ndoxi* are equivalent terms.

²³⁴ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 372.

ndoxi. So precious was the shadow to a person that when Dennett first lived in Loango 'it was considered a crime ... to trample on or even cross the shadow of another.'²³⁵

Another term Dennett introduced in his later work was '*ximbindi*', a 'revenant' which might hover around the home of the deceased person for up to three weeks, before removing to the forest.²³⁶ *Bimbindi* [plural] were 'the spirits of the good who have departed this life, live in the woods and are generally regarded as the enemies of mankind'.²³⁷ Some *ndoxi* could take control of *bimbindi* and use them to hurt others; it was also believed that these 'spirits' could be sold 'to the white man who (they believe) makes his cloth beneath the blue sea far away.'²³⁸

An *ndoxi* might even command a leopard or crocodile to attack a person so that their *ximbindi* could be trapped. The ill-wisher who could perpetrate such black magic was said to have '*ndongo* in his stomach'.²³⁹ Dennett explained that '*muntu a ndongo*' was another expression for a man of 'black arts' or a 'wizard', and the origins of the *badungu* and *ndungu* discussed earlier are no doubt connected with this idea of *ndongo*.²⁴⁰ Such a person was said to access his power over the crocodile and leopard by paying the *nganga* to give him a medicine which was then rubbed into the eyes. This allowed the *muntu a ndongo* to 'see' and thereby to control the animal.²⁴¹ Dennett related several events that he had witnessed where leopards had attacked a family so selectively that these occult practices had been suspected.²⁴² Only one spirit could not be misused by the *ndoxi*, according to Dennett's sources. The '*xilunzi* or *ndunzi*' was

²³⁵ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 372.

²³⁶ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 373.

²³⁷ Dennett, 1898, p. 11.

²³⁸ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 373.

²³⁹ Dennett, 1905(a), pp. 391-392.

²⁴⁰ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 375 and p. 392.

²⁴¹ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 382 and p. 393.

²⁴² Dennett, 1905(a), pp. 393-395.

‘the intelligence’, and this spirit died with a person. The *ximbindi* however, had no *ndunzi* and were ‘simply a tool in the hands of the ndoxi’.²⁴³

Body Adornment, Body Armoury

Against the background of such lively spiritual activity it is not surprising to find that protective body adornment and clothing held an important place in BaKongo society. The remaining discussion in this chapter will concentrate on the items in the Dennett collection which served the multiple purposes of protecting against invisible powers and of communicating leadership or status. Maniluemba’s photograph will again be used to support this exploration of the objects and their interpretation in their original context.

The Mpu.

Dennett had remarked on the chalk patterns on Maniluemba’s face when he visited the chief in 1898. These denoted his position and also provided protection. His crown, or *mpu*, had the same function. It defended his head from dangerous spirits at the same time as designating status. Dennett identified how a ‘hat’ was one of the signs of office for the *Maloango*, and of his courtiers, the *Mambona*, the *Mankaka*, and the *Kongo Zovo*.²⁴⁴ As Chapter Three showed, the *Maloango*-elect was never ‘crowned’ as king. If the ‘coronation’ had taken place, Dennett explained that the hats would have been removed from all other princes, and then reinstated, in a show of the *Maloango*’s authority.²⁴⁵ There are five *mpu* in the RAMM collection; two may be seen draped over

²⁴³ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 374.

²⁴⁴ Dennett, 1902(a), pp. 279-280.

²⁴⁵ Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘King Maluango’s Court.’ *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 3, no. 10, (1904), p. 157.

the shelves in the Ashton photograph and a third has been placed on top of a pyramidal basket.²⁴⁶ [Fig 72.]

Those people who were associated with divination or ceremonial rituals might also wear birds' feathers in their headwear.²⁴⁷ The red tail feathers of the grey parrot were highly valued and were worn by an official Dennett called the 'Mpuku Nyambi'.²⁴⁸ This was the person who had responsibility for divining the identity of the new *Maloango*. 'He holds a mirror with *bilongo* ... attached to the back of it in one hand, in the other he carries a small bundle of medicines out of which the feathers of the fowl protrude.'²⁴⁹ Bright orange parrot feathers also adorn the small male *minkisi* in Dennett's collection.

The Pipe

The significance of the pipe has also been noted in the photographs of Maniluemba. Dennett had three pipes and a ball of tobacco in his collection.²⁵⁰ [Fig. 73- Fig. 75.] (9/1889/70; 9/1889/71; 9/1889/72; 9/1889/73.) His accounts show that tobacco and smoking were important components in any visit to local dignitaries.²⁵¹ Dennett described how he had his tobacco tin emptied by the queen and her friends when he was

²⁴⁶ For more on the techniques, and history of these hats see Arnoldi, Mary Jo and Kreamer, Christine Mullen, eds. *Crowning Achievements: African Arts of Dressing the Head*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995, pp. 42-43.

²⁴⁷ See MacGaffey, 1993, p. 38 for a feathered *Nganga's* hat or crown. Different hats are also worn by the *banganga* in the pictures on Dennett's tusks, now in the Pitt Rivers Museum. [Figs. 98-100.] These hats can be compared with examples of headwear in the same Folklore Society Congo Collection, see Chapter Five.

²⁴⁸ Dennett, 1906, p. 30.

²⁴⁹ Dennett, 1906, p. 30.

²⁵⁰ Dennett wrote later that he thought one of the pipes in Exeter was 'ornamented with a picture of a palm tree' (Dennett, 1906, p. 133, footnote 1) but this has not been substantiated by inspecting the pipes in the RAMM.

²⁵¹ To buy a finger's length of tobacco, known as *xitini*, cost thirty-six 'Bilabu' or beads in 1906. Dennett, 1906, p. 62.

attending the coronation of the Kaongo King, *Neamlau*.²⁵² One of the kneeling female *minkisi* figures in his collection carries a pipe whose shape is like the one in Maniluemba's hands. She kneels and presents the pipe in a way that would suggest that smoking tobacco was associated with important social and ritual processes.

The Bracelet.

Dennett also commented on the 'heavy marriage bracelet' that Maniluemba wore.²⁵³ He explained that a husband and wife would both wear heavy copper bracelets if they were married according to *Lembe* rites.²⁵⁴ This was both a means of communicating marital status but also an indication of the spiritual protection that the couple were under.²⁵⁵ In the Ashton photograph an iron bracelet, decorated with three faces, can be seen on the netted cape.²⁵⁶ [Fig. 77.] (9/1889/65.) Dennett referred to bracelets that the *nganga* would give his clients. These could be made of iron or copper, and according to Dennett, ivory was reserved for princesses.²⁵⁷ 'Xibuto Xilongo' was a bracelet that the 'Nganga Xibutu' supplied for a man's protection, and when he took a wife she would wear a bracelet of the same sort.²⁵⁸ So while a bracelet could express a person's status, these items were also protective items bought from the *nganga* and so they may also be thought of belonging to the armoury of "charms".²⁵⁹

²⁵² Dennett, 1906, p. 16, p. 23. Neamlau, was 'chief of the Bacilongo ... in the Kingdom of KaKongo near to Banana', in January 1891. Mary Kingsley's travel accounts also give lively picture of how she relied on tobacco to facilitate her journeys through West Africa. See Kingsley, Mary. *Travels in West Africa*, London: Macmillan, 1897(b).

²⁵³ Dennett, 1906, p. 11.

²⁵⁴ Dennett, 1898, p. 20.

²⁵⁵ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 382.

²⁵⁶ The significance of the three faces raised on the surface of the RAMM bracelet is not known.

²⁵⁷ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 382.

²⁵⁸ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 382.

²⁵⁹ Bracelets were also used in the 'marriage bundle' presented by a man to his bride's family. Dennett, 1898, p. 20. This bracelet was used as surety and had to be returned if the wife was later deemed 'worthless' or if the husband ill-treated her. Dennett explained that the value of the bundle was adjusted according to the merit of the girl.

The Cat Skin.

Another significant item of dress is seen in the photographs of Maniluemba. Dennett called the cat skin an *nkanda ndéci* and he explained that it was worn, ‘in the place of the proverbial fig-leaf, like a sporran’.²⁶⁰ He explained that when ‘princes’ visited the sacred groves or *bibila* they would wear animal skins in this way.²⁶¹ The skins were worn, over a skirt-like cloth wrap, with the animal’s head prominent and the tail hanging down. The wild cat-skin was known as ‘*nkanda ndéci*’ and the otter-skin, *xingoli xinyundu*.²⁶² Both were symbolically connected with procreation.²⁶³

Although Dennett did not include an *nkanda ndéci* in his collection there are two cat skins in the Ashton photograph.²⁶⁴ The cat family were highly regarded in Kongo culture with the leopard held above all.²⁶⁵ Dennett observed that the *Maloango* was known as ‘Prince of the Custom of the Leopard’, and the leopard was ‘the only animal having the title of *Fumu*’ meaning king, or chief.²⁶⁶ The ruler was given the power to kill at his investiture, and his authority connected him with this, the most highly regarded animal.²⁶⁷ The skin of the leopard was used in protective *minkisi* as Dennett explained: ‘its skin is a charm against smallpox, and the *Mankaka*’s (captain, executioner) hat of office is also made of it.’²⁶⁸ That the executioner’s role was combined with the supernatural potency of this animal is a conjunction that was surely not lost on his

²⁶⁰ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 404.

²⁶¹ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 404.

²⁶² Dennett, 1905(a), p. 404, footnote 1.

²⁶³ Dennett warned ‘when you take them off don’t pull them downwards ... otherwise you will have no children.’ Dennett 1905(a) p. 404, footnote 1.

²⁶⁴ These were subsequently destroyed, no date was recorded.

²⁶⁵ In Dennett’s collection of folktales the wild cat *Nenpetro* is one of the key characters. The wild cat had many disputes with *Nsassi*, who was the antelope or gazelle. Dennett, 1898, p. 35-38 and p. 85. The otter is not discussed in these stories.

²⁶⁶ Dennett, 1906, p. 24, p. 144.

²⁶⁷ A chief could invoke *minkisi* in this way and, significantly, he could arouse the leopard by this action. Any leopard-like behaviour such as scratching the ground might attract other leopards. MacGaffey, 1993, pp. 93- 95.

²⁶⁸ Dennett, 1905(a), p. 391.

citizens when President Mobutu adopted the leopard skin hat for his official headwear.²⁶⁹

The imagery of the leopard recurs in other items in the Dennett collection. There is a carved box which has a leopard on its lid and a handle for a staff which is also carved in the cat's image. [Fig. 78, Fig. 79.] (9/1889/68, 9/1889/55.) It can barely be seen on the shelf below the spotted *nkisi nkondi* in the Ashton photograph. Dennett described the complex rituals that originally accompanied the killing of a leopard. The body was taken to the king, and meanwhile all normal business came to a halt because looting was permitted in any village that a leopard's body was carried through.²⁷⁰ The killer of the animal had to explain killing 'this man' to the king.²⁷¹ He would only be rewarded when all twenty-seven whiskers had been paid for, in pieces of cloth, and when the teeth, claws and skin had been prepared for the king's use.²⁷² Leopard's teeth often appeared in necklaces and "charms" and on headwear, often located at the cardinal points. Other parts of the leopard were used in forms of tribute (taxes) and in petitions.²⁷³ Dennett also recorded that leopard skins 'used to be sent from Loango to Ngoio, so that [the king] might send *Mbunzi* with rain to water his plantations'.²⁷⁴

By the time Dennett left Loango these traditions were diminishing. He recalled seeing a woman crying when she watched a leopard's body being taken past his house to Loango

²⁶⁹ According to Mary Jo Arnoldi the shape of Mobutu's cap is 'probably derived from a French/Belgian military cap "bonnet de police" that has been used since the Napoleonic Wars.' Arnoldi, Mary Jo, 'Introduction' in Arnoldi, Mary Jo and Kreamer, Christine Mullen, eds. *Crowning Achievements: African Arts of Dressing the Head*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995, p. 17.

²⁷⁰ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 180.

²⁷¹ Dennett, 1898, p. 80.

²⁷² Dennett, 1898, pp. 80-81.

²⁷³ Dennett, 1902(a), p. 268.

²⁷⁴ Dennett, 1898, p. 10.

for sale. Her name was *Ngo*, meaning leopard, he reported, and she mourned that ‘the brutes would not have treated my namesake in this rough way in the olden days’.²⁷⁵

The Cape, and Conclusion

Mirroring the cat skin in the Ashton Photograph is the draped form of a netted cape. [Fig. 80.] (9/1889/59.) Dennett explained that the people ‘gather cotton, and spin a coarse kind of thread, with which they make *chinkutui*, armbags and netted capes for their princes’.²⁷⁶ However no other comment is made on this article which carried so much prestige in history. Illustrations of these capes exist in seventeenth-century European representations of important Kongo dignitaries, as Farris Thompson has shown.²⁷⁷ A similar item of clothing is recognisable in a carved relief of a Kongo dignitary who visited Rome in 1608.²⁷⁸ But the cape in Dennett’s collection receives no further description in his texts. The bellows and crucibles which are also present in the photograph, and in the RAMM, are not described either, although the use of bellows is implicit in the metal bracelet and the knives that have been discussed above.²⁷⁹ These, and the objects such as the wooden paddle and a stringed musical instrument in the collection, suggest that Dennett had chosen to gather artefacts that represented a full range of BaKongo social activity, and not just those which can be clearly associated with what he called *Nkissism*.

Nevertheless it seems that every item in the collection can be read in conjunction with the hidden world of spiritual activity. Even sweeping the floor with a broom like the one

²⁷⁵ Dennett, 1906, pp. 144-145.

²⁷⁶ Dennett, 1898, p. 19.

²⁷⁷ Thompson, 1981, p. 105.

²⁷⁸ See image of ‘Ne Vunda in mesh netting cape’ in Thompson, 1981, p. 105.

²⁷⁹ The smaller mask and the paddle also received no commentary in Dennett’s writing.

in Dennett's collection would be understood as a 'ritual gesture for ridding a place of undesirable spirits'.²⁸⁰ [Fig. 81.] (9/1889/74.) The whole collection could be viewed as a representation of the way that the BaKongo used material things to control or modify invisible powers in society. The *ndungu* was responsible for detecting people whose illicit behaviour was a threat to the community. The *nganga* would identify those who were using witchcraft to harm others. Judgement and punishment were authorised by the chief or king who, like the leopard, had the power to take life.

As well as objects connected with these agencies, Dennett included handmade *minkisi*, in the form of carvings, bundles, shells, pots and baskets, which were charged with grave-earth, shells, bones, pigment and even gunpowder. These contributed to an arsenal that could be employed against malevolent forces. Body adornment, seen in a bracelet, a cap, a cat-skin or a cape, complemented this armoury, operating both as a declaration of status, and as a source of spiritual protection.

Dennett made this collection within seven years of his arrival in Africa when he held a typical European suspicion about the activity of the *ndungu* or the *nganga*, or the use of *nkassa*. Nevertheless he studied the place of all these institutions in BaKongo society, and the observations he recorded in his publications have allowed us to clarify our understanding of the objects in his collection. This knowledge has been enriched by the information gathered from his drawings and photographs.

²⁸⁰ MacGaffey, 1986, p. 51. Dennett mentioned that the floor was swept before the *nganga* performed a ritual. Dennett, 1887(a), p. 64. MacGaffey has also shown how 'whisks' or '*mpiya*' made of grasses were used as divining tools and for personal protection. According to the information given to Laman, the *mpiya* could help the user to identify medicinal plants or to dodge bullets and allow its bearer to 'look good'. MacGaffey, 1993, p. 54.

Although he did not write in detail on specific objects it has been possible to excavate information about most of the objects in the collection from Dennett's many works. This has been supplemented by commentary and imagery from other contemporary observers. Taken together, these documents have allowed Dennett's objects to be contextualised and better understood. However, as the Ashton photograph shows, these significant artefacts had been uprooted from their original context and taken to Europe by 1887. In the next chapter, the conditions that surrounded the process of collection and removal will be assessed, and both Dennett, and the collection, will be examined in their European setting.

Chapter Five. Dennett and Museum Collecting.

In the previous chapters Richard Dennett and the BaKongo artefacts he collected have been considered in the context in which the collection was made, that is, in the coastal region of Loango and Cabinda and in the lower reaches of the River Congo. In this chapter it is necessary to widen the focus of the study and allow some of the countries of northern Europe to come into view as well. The chapter will explore the events that led to Dennett's collection being removed to the alien context of the museum in Exeter, and will consider the way such collections were received in other European institutions at the time. It will also trace the progress of the collector himself, in both the African and the European contexts, and examine the reception of his ethnographic work among the increasingly professionalised circles of anthropologists in Britain.

To do this the study will first consider the activity of Dennett and his peers who were collecting "ethnographic material" in the pre-colonial and early-colonial era in the Lower Congo and on the coast. It will then consider the way different European museums interpreted these collections. The Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM), as the institution which came to house the Dennett collection, will be included in this discussion. The third section will address the role Dennett played as an amateur ethnologist and consider the influential circles he entered because of this role. Through his ethnographic studies, he developed close relationships with Mary Kingsley and E. Sidney Hartland of the Folklore Society. These relationships brought him into the orbit of significant scholars and academics such as Alfred Cort Haddon, who were engaged in shaping the academic discipline of anthropology. Dennett's history therefore also sheds light on the processes which accompanied the birth of the professional discipline. By following his experiences it is possible to see how collections were interpreted - and

misinterpreted - when they first arrived in museums; and how the Victorian commentary on non-western cultures arose from diverse research fields such as folklore, natural history, mythology, natural religion, and psychology, and included physical anthropology. Dennett's collection became a contribution to what Sturtevant later defined as the 'museum age of anthropology', but his involvement with ethnography, trade, collecting, colonialism, and scholarship in Britain, can allow many other facets of the emerging discipline to be evaluated.¹

Other Collectors in the Congo.

When Dennett left for Africa in 1879 he was employed by the Hatton and Cookson Company which had been establishing factories on the Angola coast, the Lower Congo River and on the Loango coast since 1857.² Other companies were also represented at these locations, and foremost among these was the Dutch *Nieuwe Afrikaansche Handelsvereeniging (NAHV)*.³ The Dutch and the British traders worked closely together and although they were competitors in trade, they relied on one another for company.⁴ Before the arrival of African International Association and Congo Free State

¹ According to George Stocking, Sturtevant's 'museum age' of anthropology was dated as approximately 1840-90. (See Sturtevant, W.C. 'Does Anthropology Need Museums?' *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington*, Vol. 82, (1969), p. 623. However Stocking found Sturtevant's 'designation ... anachronistic' and argued that the more characteristic setting for anthropology in the early years was the 'Ethnological Society' rather than the museum. Stocking, George. 'Museums and Material Culture' in Stocking, George, W. Jnr., ed. *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1985, p. 7. In this chapter the number of different people involved in the processes contributing to the discipline of anthropology will also undermine too clear-cut a definition of the location of anthropological research in the nineteenth century.

² Morel, E. D. 'The Position of British Merchants in the French Congo.' *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 2, no. 5, (1902), p. 39.

³ This organisation had had been established as the *Afrikaansche Handelsvereeniging*, (AHV) in 1863; it was revived after bankruptcy as the *Nieuwe Afrikaansche Handelsvereeniging (NAHV)* in 1879. Willink, Robert Joost. *Stages in Civilisation: Dutch Museums in Quest of West Central African Collections (1856-1889)*, Leiden: CNWS, 2007, p. 18.

⁴ Dennett, Richard Edward. *Seven Years among the Fjort: Being an English Trader's Experiences in the Congo District*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887(a), p. 135.

officials, Dennett described his ‘society’ as ‘entirely composed of traders’ although he added that there were also ‘an odd missionary or traveller, and one or two doctors.’⁵

Within this ‘society’, news was shared and ideas were aired, and passing travellers were discussed. As Chapter Four indicated, a particularly significant party had visited the factories on the Loango Coast in 1873. The German Expedition to the Loango Coast, led by Adolf Bastian, had been helped by the Dutch “house” to build a research station at Chinchonso where ethnographic studies had been made and Kongo material culture collected.⁶ The German expedition collected great numbers of objects which were taken back to Berlin. They were to be shown in the Royal Museum for Ethnology when it was opened in 1886. A number of *minkisi* can be seen in a photograph in Bastian’s two-volume book about the trip, *Die deutsche Expedition an der Loango-Küste*.⁷ [Fig. 40.]

Bastian had expressed the urgency of this project in 1881. He wrote passionately about the ‘waning of native societies’ even though he recognised that it was contact such as his own that was threatening those very peoples’ survival.⁸

It is burning all around us ... and nobody moves a hand. The autopsies of the periodically repeated voyages between 1850 and 1880 have convinced me forcefully of the terrible and relentless deterioration ... Treasures of documentation of the sacred temples of mankind’s history irrevocably lost - lost forever.⁹

⁵ Dennett, 1887(a), p. 135.

⁶ Willink, 2007, p. 131.

⁷ Bastian, Adolf. *Die deutsche Expedition an der Loango-Küste*, Jena: Hermann Costenoble, 1875. The image is labelled ‘Fetishfiguren von der Loango-Küste.’ It may be seen in Willink, 2007, p. 333.

⁸ Bastian, Adolf. *Der Völkergedanke im Aufbau einer Wissenschaft vom Menschen und seine Bedrückung auf ethnologische Sammlungen* [Folk Ideas as Building Blocks for a Science of Man and their Grounding in Ethnological Collections], Berlin: Dümmler, 1881, p. 172- 181, quoted in Köpping, Klaus-Peter. *Adolf Bastian and the Psychic Unity of Mankind: The Foundations of Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Germany*, Munster: Verlag, 2005, p. 114.

⁹ Bastian, 1881, p. 180, quoted in Köpping, 2005, p. 107.

Although he saw non-western peoples as ‘primitive’, Bastian believed that they shared the same ‘tight core of ideas’ or ‘psychological kernels’ as other ‘civilised’ peoples.¹⁰ He argued that these ‘elementary ideas’ could be traced in folk ideas, and were common to all humanity.¹¹ Instead of isolating the ‘primitive races’ from more ‘developed’ ones, Bastian saw these non-western societies as a repository of evidence of the ‘psychic unity of mankind.’¹² In this he was proposing an approach to “the other” which had more resonance with Dennett’s later ideas than it did with those of other curators who followed him.¹³

Following this German expedition, museums in Holland began to show an interest in the material culture of Central Africa. Joost Willink has shown how the agents of the Dutch houses on the Congo coast were encouraged to make similar collections to Bastian’s. Prior to this period, ethnographic objects from the Congo had been classified as ‘curiosities’ in Holland and housed as such in the Colonial Museum in Haarlem or in the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities in The Hague.¹⁴ Then, as anthropologists began to interpret the material culture as the evidence of vanishing of primitive societies whose conditions and characteristics could shed light on the origins of their own, they demanded a more concerted effort to gather this vital “evidence”.

Dutch museums were keen to salvage specimens from Africa in order to study these peoples who seemed to them to represent a less-evolved humanity, now threatened with extinction. Dutch traders in the Congo were well-placed to assist with this challenge.

¹⁰ Bastian, Adolf. *Der Mensch in der Geschichte. Zur Begründung einer Psychologischen Weltanschauung* [‘Man in History: The Foundations of a Psychological World View’], (1860), Osnabrück: Verlag, 1968, pp. 9-10, quoted in Köpping, 2005, p. 57.

¹¹ Köpping, 2005, p. 44.

¹² Köpping, 2005, p. 31.

¹³ Köpping, 2005, p. 71.

¹⁴ Willink, 2007, p. 19.

Curators such as Lindor Serrurier, who was the head of the Royal Ethnography Museum in Leiden (REM) from 1882, began to co-ordinate with representatives of the *NAHV*.¹⁵ He made contact with various traders, among whom was Anton Greshoff. Greshoff was one of Serrurier's most valuable recruits. He supplied Serrurier with many objects for the ethnographic museum and wrote regular letters about these his collections. As traders were able to move further inland after the Free State was established, Greshoff gathered 'a steady flow of objects' for the museum.¹⁶ He also supplied Serrurier with the names of other *NAHV* agents, from Quilo in the north, to Benguella in the south, who could be enrolled to assist in collecting. These men could be enlisted to collect specific material if the curator had identified that certain objects were missing from his collections.¹⁷

Serrurier's was not the only Dutch museum seeking ethnographic material from this area at the time. Other research institutions competing with the REM were the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities and the Colonial Museum, the Rotterdam Zoological Society and the Amsterdam Royal Zoological Society known (because of its extended title, 'Nature is the Teacher of Arts') as '*Artis*'.¹⁸ Between them these museums acquired several thousand objects from the Congo.¹⁹

In 'the early collecting period', which Willink has identified as the period before 1885, African cultural material was quite readily available to the traders.²⁰ However, after 1885 the Dutch records show a reduction in the number of objects being collected. This was no doubt a result of the disruption the African International Association had

¹⁵ Willink, 2007, p. 157. The REM is also known as the *Rijksmuseum Voor Volkenkunde*.

¹⁶ Willink, 2007, p. 167.

¹⁷ Willink, 2007, p. 170.

¹⁸ Willink, 2007, p. 19.

¹⁹ Willink, 2007, p. 1.

²⁰ Willink, 2007, p. 19.

brought to the community, which interrupted the production and use of domestic and religious items and interfered with the relationships that traders had established. Also, the increased number of Europeans in the area possibly meant that the demand for objects as souvenirs and curios had outgrown the supply. On top of this, some artefacts were also being destroyed or confiscated by missionaries and government agents.²¹

Greshoff and Dennett were both able to begin their collections in the period prior to 1885. Indeed as Chapter Four indicated, Dennett's collection was photographed in its complete state in England before 1887 when it appeared in his first book.²² In 1887 Greshoff noted the great rarity of a piece he had managed to acquire which was remarkably similar to Dennett's *ndungu* masked costume. Greshoff wrote to Serrurier in 1887 that 'through the mediation of one of my friends I have [obtained] a feather cloth in Massabe, of the kind worn on festive occasions by doctors in these regions ... it is an expensive but beautiful and rare item that should please you very much'.²³ A beautiful illustration of Greshoff's headdress was made to accompany an article that Serrurier wrote about it in 1888.²⁴ [Fig. 47] Greshoff also collected 'bows arrows and spears from the upper Congo' and 'extremely rare and still virtually unknown' items from 'the Kassai' [*sic*] in 1886.²⁵

As well as sharing an interest in ethnographic collecting, Dennett and Greshoff also shared an antipathy to the Congo Free State. Greshoff, like Dennett, was 'a political

²¹ See Vanhee, Hein. 'Agents of Order and Disorder: Kongo Minkisi' in Arnaut, Karel, ed. *Revisions: New Perspectives on the African Collections at the Horniman Museum*, London and Coimbra: Horniman Museum and University of Coimbra, 2000, pp. 89-106, on the activity of missionaries and their impact on material culture in this area.

²² Dennett, 1887(a), facing p. 48.

²³ Letter from Anton Greshoff to Lindor Serrurier, from Kinshasa, 17 December, 1887, quoted in Willink, 2007, p. 172. Dennett's equivalent costume and the role of the masked figure in BaKongo society is illustrated and discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis.

²⁴ Willink, 2007, p. 366.

²⁵ Letter from Anton Greshoff to Lindor Serrurier, from Stanley Pool, 14 February 1886; and letter from Anton Greshoff to Lindor Serrurier, from Kinshasa, quoted in Willink, 2007, pp. 171-172.

animal' and he was regarded as 'the Dutch louse in the Belgian King Leopold's pelt'.²⁶ Dennett, as we have seen, was equally irritating, with his handwritten newspaper and his persistent correspondence to the Geographical Societies in Britain and to the national press.²⁷ Greshoff 'loosed an impassioned propaganda, not only in Holland but also in France, Germany and England' against the State.²⁸ Like Dennett, he had a reputation as a trouble-maker and, to quote Willink, he 'was not the most popular foreigner in the Congo'.²⁹

On the other hand, as collectors, Dennett and Greshoff experienced very different responses. Greshoff was awarded a silver medal by the King of Holland in 1886 for his efforts on behalf of the REM.³⁰ No similar recognition was forthcoming for Dennett; indeed it appears that he gained little acknowledgment for his collection at the RAMM, or elsewhere. By contrast, many *NAHV* agents were rewarded with medals and diplomas for their contributions to museums.³¹ Dennett and British collectors apparently received little or no encouragement or reward for their collecting work at the time. This disparity in the two nations' attitudes to museum collecting had already been criticised in Britain. Colonel Lane Fox (later Pitt Rivers) knew the Dutch collections well.³² The Siebold Museum in Leiden had been especially useful to him in planning his own methodology and he bemoaned the lack of commitment shown by British museums

²⁶ Willink, 2007, pp. 169-170. Willink also cites René Cornet's account of Holland's 'ferocious campaign' against the Free State, on p. 170, footnote 215. See Cornet, René. *La Bataille du Rail. La Construction du Chemin de Fer de Matadi au Stanley Pool*, Brussels: Cuypers, 1947 (no page given).

²⁷ See Chapter Two.

²⁸ Willink, 2007, p. 170, footnote 215, citing Cornet, 1947.

²⁹ Willink, 2007, p. 170.

³⁰ Willink, 2007, p. 173.

³¹ Greshoff in Willink p. 171, p. 175.

³² Augustus Henry Lane Fox became Pitt Rivers in 1880, see Chapman, William Ryan. 'Arranging Ethnology: A. H. L. F. Pitt Rivers and the Typological Tradition' in Stocking, George W. Jnr., ed. *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, p. 15.

regarding ethnographic material, describing the British Museum's collections as being in a primitive stage of development.³³

German ethnographic museums were also more committed to collecting than their British counterparts were. An example of the disparity between the nations' approaches may be seen through Dennett's contemporary, Robert Visser who used his years in the Congo to collect objects from the Loango coast and Cabinda for German museums. Visser was a German employee of the Dutch *NAHV*, and his photographs, which were sometimes made into postcards, have been mentioned in earlier chapters. He was a plantation manager and a trader, growing the first crops of coffee and cocoa in the area with stereotypical efficiency.³⁴ He worked at the station at Cayo in what became French Congo, from 1882 to 1889 and he operated in the same professional circles as Dennett, as he was based in the region of Chiloango and Landana from 1882 to 1886.³⁵

Visser was a prolific collector. He supplied the museums of Dusseldorf, Frankfurt, Leipzig and Berlin with "specimens" from the Congo.³⁶ He also collected some six hundred objects for the Berlin Ethnographic Museum, of which several hundred were *minkisi*.³⁷ His 'comprehensive knowledge of the subject of 'fetishes' was still admired thirty years later, when it was compared favourably to Dennett's by the art scholar Eckhart Von Sydow.³⁸ Where Dennett had provided few objects and much general

³³ Chapman, 1985, pp. 23-24.

³⁴ Visser documented his plantation work photographically and also wrote a small book about his life in Africa. Adler, Katrin and Stelzig, Christine. 'Robert Visser and his photographs from the Loango Coast.' *African Arts*, Vol. 35, no. 4, (2002), p. 43.

³⁵ Dennett explained that he was in Chiloango in 1882 and went to Banana in 1886. See Letter from Richard Dennett to E. D. Morel, from the Royal Societies Club, St James Street, London, 23 December 1914, London School of Economics, *E. D. Morel Archive*, ref. F8/38.

³⁶ Adler and Stelzig, 2002.

³⁷ Adler and Stelzig, 2002, p. 42.

³⁸ Sydow, Eckart von. *Handbuch der Westafrikanischen Plastik*, Berlin: Reimer und Vohsen, 1930, quoted in Adler and Stelzig, 2002.

written interpretation of BaKongo culture, Visser had collected many objects and carefully recorded their specific histories.

Like the Dutch collectors, Visser was rewarded for his collections. He was awarded an order of distinction by both Berlin and Leipzig museums for supplying objects and valuable accompanying information about them.³⁹ Karen Adler and Christine Stelzig have argued that ‘flattered by the connection with “scholarship”, Visser always attempted to comply with the museum’s expectations by including indigenous designations and descriptions of the function of the objects he supplied.’⁴⁰ Adler and Stelzig have translated one of his descriptions:

No. 19: Pumbo, the very old and most feared fetish of the Bavilli. This fetish was known to have murdered over 200 persons, whereupon it was vindicated by the French Government but through which the authorities became involved in a bloody conflict themselves. The accessories, basket, staff and knife are used in enforcing the sentence. Unlike others this fetish is aggravated by throwing palm kernels at its head and then the head is rubbed on the ground.⁴¹

The parallel between this written label and Dennett’s account of the ‘family fetishes’ (described in Chapter Four) which he called ‘*Mpumbu*’ will be clear.⁴² But in Britain there are very few descriptions of *minkisi* that are as detailed as Visser’s from this period. There are some letters written by collectors in the Manchester and Liverpool archives which also contain accounts like this, and some notes like Visser’s have been found on scraps of paper in the Folklore Society’s French Congo Collection, which will be discussed below. However very few specific comments can be found attached to BaKongo collections in the manner that Visser supplied. Dennett’s publications and his letters therefore compensate in part for the lack of information on the function of objects

³⁹ See Adler and Stelzig, p. 42.

⁴⁰ Adler and Stelzig, p. 42.

⁴¹ Adler and Stelzig, p. 42.

⁴² Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘Bavili Notes.’ *Folklore*, Vol. 16, no. 4, (1905(a)), p. 377.

in the archives of British museums. Though he had no involvement with a major museum in the way that the Dutch and German collectors had, Dennett's record provides an important resource with which one can approach the poorly documented collections in Britain.

By rewarding their collectors, continental museums ensured they received a continuing supply of artefacts from the Congo. Thousands of objects of cultural significance were consequently taken from the BaKongo to European museums. However, in Britain the largest collection was made well after 1885, that is, in the period following the early phase of collecting. Among many other items a number of *minkisi* were collected by Arnold Ridyard for northern museums after he began work in 1893 as an engineer on the Elder Dempster shipping line, which ran from Liverpool to Angola. These trips down the West African coast took about four months, and the ships would stop *en route* at different points to deliver and collect goods, mail, and passengers.⁴³ At each stop Ridyard would cultivate useful contacts until he had built up a network of European agents along the coast to supply him with material for the museums of Liverpool, Salford, and Manchester University.⁴⁴ His collections included animals and fish as well as West African material culture. By 1900 his donations were so numerous that the West African displays had crowded the galleries in the Liverpool Museum.⁴⁵

⁴³ Cobden Phillips recorded in 1887 from Banana that 'no less than five lines of steamers make calls at these ports outwards and homewards at intervals of a month or less; private steamers and many sailing vessels are often in port; and nine or ten coasting steamers of joint tonnage of some two thousand tons are constantly plying in the district'. Phillips, R. Cobden. 'The Social System of the Lower Congo.' *The Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, Vol. 3, (1887), p. 157.

⁴⁴ Manchester University Museum was formerly known as Owen College.

⁴⁵ Tythacott, Louise. 'From the Fetish to the Specimen: The Ridyard African Collection at the Liverpool Museum 1895-1916', in Shelton, Anthony, ed. *Collectors: Expressions of Self and Other*, London and Coimbra: Horniman Museum and University of Coimbra, 2001, p. 162.

Ridyard would also barter personally for the goods. Louise Tythacott has shown how he would gather African material in exchange for second-hand objects from Liverpool such as umbrellas.⁴⁶ He gained the reputation of being ‘an eccentric man who was trusted by the natives’.⁴⁷ Over a working life of thirty years, Ridyard was not paid for his collections although he did receive gratitude from those connected with the Liverpool and Manchester museums. A memorandum in the Liverpool archives suggests that his wife might have had a more comfortable life had he taken some remuneration for the objects before he retired.⁴⁸

The Liverpool Museum accession book lists the names of twenty-six people who supplied Ridyard in 1899. Only two names out of the twenty-six were shown to be operating in the Congo Free State.⁴⁹ Conditions for the traders there had become so difficult that Hatton and Cookson and the *NAHV* had withdrawn their factories in 1893 and moved to the French and Portuguese territories.⁵⁰ Some of the agents in Ridyard’s list corresponded with him about the artefacts they had been able to buy and their letters supply important information about the origins, meanings and use of their BaKongo collections.⁵¹ For example a letter from O. Sanders accompanied a small ‘fetish’ with the following information:

⁴⁶ Tythacott, 2001, p. 165.

⁴⁷ Letter from Captain A. E. Webster to Charles Hunt, 1971. *Liverpool Museum Archives*, quoted in Tythacott, 2001, pp.165-166.

⁴⁸ Ridyard’s grandson wrote; ‘Clearly history and the Nation has gained’ [*sic*] but added that ‘my Grandmother was virtually a pauper when he died’. Roberts, T. ‘Memorandum on some remembrances of my Grandfather, Arnold Ridyard, (1853-1924).’ 10 February 1981. *Liverpool Museum Archives*.

⁴⁹ A handwritten list on the index page of the Liverpool Museum Stock book for 1898 lists only Mr Mackay and J. H. Greenhalgh who were both agents in Boma. Greenhalgh is noted as working for Hatton and Cookson.

⁵⁰ Schmidt, A. M. and Westerdijk, P. *The Cutting Edge. West Central African 19th Century Throwing Knives in the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden*, Leiden: National Museum of Ethnology, 2006, p. 16.

⁵¹ It is probable that Dennett had provided equivalent documentation with his collection to the RAMM, but nothing has been found.

I herewith send you the small fetish I promised you. The name is *Mbungu Mdilu Mdilu* which means something like man-eater. It is a private fetish in contradistinction to the family-fetishes as there are in every town. The owners of course used it to make money out of its occult properties. It was obtained in a *palaver* made by the Government representative at Lualli, a place about twenty miles distant from the coast ... It is said to have killed several people, amongst whom a woman educated by the missionaries which was also the reason to make the above-mentioned *palaver* and to force the natives to hand over their fetish to the government.⁵²

Another agent warned Ridyard that the ‘Fetishes from Landana’ that he had collected were dangerous to handle, ‘I suppose because of the “medicine” with which they are covered’.⁵³ J. A. Hart, the engine driver for Hatton and Cookson at Chiloango sent Ridyard some ‘*ju-jus*’, again explaining that ‘they are very costly’.⁵⁴ All these suppliers wished Ridyard to pass on their collections to the Liverpool Museum. Ridyard encouraged the curators of these museums to write personally to thank the agents who made the collections, so that they might keep the supply of objects flowing.⁵⁵

The names in the Liverpool list include several Hatton and Cookson representatives, but Dennett’s name is not among them. He was, however, known to several of those listed, and he was mentioned in some of the correspondence between these agents and Ridyard. Dennett was already well-known in Cabinda for his ethnographic work. He had started his concentrated study of the BaVili, with the help of the Maloango-elect as an informant, at about the time that Ridyard began working on the West African line. In 1898, U. Shawcross wrote to Ridyard, referring to Dennett’s reputation, when he

⁵² Letter from O. Sanders to Mr. Ridyard, from Chiloango, 14 January 1898. Liverpool Museum Stockbook 1899, p. 134, re. accession number 9.3.99.23. *Liverpool Museum Archives*.

⁵³ Note from A. M. Harbourne to Mr. Ridyard, from S. S. Niger, Elder Dempster and Co., (no date), Liverpool Museum Stockbook 1899, p. 49, re. accession numbers 20.8.97.7-9. *Liverpool Museum Archives*.

⁵⁴ Letter from J. A. Hart, to ‘the Chief Engineer’ from Chiloango, 4 May 1899, Liverpool Museum Stockbook 1899, p. 140, re. accession numbers 26.6.99.44. *Liverpool Museum Archives*.

⁵⁵ Letter from Arnold Ridyard, to Mr Hoyle [Owen College], from S. S. Niger, 30 November 1898; and Letter from Arnold Ridyard, to Mr. Hoyle, from Rock Ferry, 1 March 1899. *Manchester Museum Archives*.

suggested that Dennett would be able to give Ridyard some information about a valuable large *nkisi nkondi* that Shawcross had managed to acquire.

Mr. Dennett will very likely be on board [with] you in Loango as he wishes to take a photo of “*Mungarka*” for reproduction in his new book. He is a great student of folk-lore amongst these natives and [I] am sure he will be only too pleased to give you some reliable information about it.⁵⁶

Shawcross had in fact collected two *minkisi* for the Manchester collections. Writing from Landana in June 1898 he joked with Ridyard about the *nkisi Kozo*, who, ‘when he chooses to be disagreeable, enables the offender to shuffle off this mortal coil with the aid of a lingering throat sickness.’⁵⁷ About the *nkisi ‘Mungarka’* Shawcross wrote: ‘Should his satanic majesty choose to deliver a verdict of guilty, the culprit blots himself out of the census return permanently without even the necessity of calling a doctor. Cheerful sort of chap ain’t he?’⁵⁸ [Fig. 82, Fig. 83.] Shawcross ended his letter with the usual comment about the scarcity of such ethnographic objects: ‘These fetishes are like the Spanish Fleet, i.e. becoming very rare.’⁵⁹

As five Dutch museums alone had acquired over three thousand objects by 1890 this last comment is not surprising.⁶⁰ Moreover by the time Shawcross wrote this letter the BaKongo had been struggling under the three competing claims of Portugal, France and

⁵⁶ Letter from U. Shawcross, to Mr. Ridyard, from Chiloango, Landana, 9 June 1898. Liverpool Museum Stockbook 1899, p. 111, re accession number 9.8.98.43. *Liverpool Museum Archives*. As Shawcross had a sarcastic sense of humour this allusion may suggest that Dennett had won a reputation as an expert and maybe as a bit of a bore as well. No record has been found of the photograph that Dennett apparently wanted to make of ‘*Mungarka*’. Dennett’s next book did have a large *nkisi nkondi* as a frontispiece, but his choice was the figure of Mavungu from the Pitt Rivers Museum, which had been collected by Mary Kingsley. See Dennett, Richard Edward. *At the Back of the Black Man’s Mind*, London: Macmillan, 1906, frontispiece.

⁵⁷ Letter from Shawcross, to Mr Ridyard, June 1898.

⁵⁸ Letter from Shawcross to Ridyard, June 1898.

⁵⁹ Letter from Shawcross to Ridyard, June 1898.

⁶⁰ Willink argues that by the time of the Berlin Conference the early collecting period was over. (Willink, 2007, p. 19.) When Leopold II took hold of his vast possessions, he demanded that collections be made for the Royal Museum at Tervuren, which was built in 1897. As the Free State was now occupied by a network of missionaries, road and rail managers, traders and colonial administrators, ever more material was taken from Congo to supply the king and his museum.

the Congo Free State for fifteen years. Their way of life had been disrupted and relationships with Europeans soured. European authorities and missionaries had also tried to control the use of *minkisi* by confiscation or burning.⁶¹ Arthur Clare wrote to Ridyard in 1904. 'It may be of interest to know that owing to the great abuses of the fetish priests, the [Portuguese] Government determined to destroy the fetishes some six years ago', adding that 'notwithstanding the destruction, fetishism is just as it was then.'⁶²

These were very different conditions from those experienced by Bastian, or even by Dennett and the *NAHV* traders in their early years on the Congo coast. On top of these problems, King Leopold II had been urging administrators, missionaries, engineers and *cessionnaires* in the Congo Free State to collect ethnographic material since 1884. He was amassing a vast collection of artefacts and natural resources to be shown at his new museum at Tervuren, which was built in 1897.⁶³ The impact on the material culture of the Congo was considerable.

In Britain the dominant collecting museums for Lower Congo artefacts at the time were in Manchester and Liverpool. London's British Museum did not play an active part in collecting from the Congo until after 1900. Bitter comparisons were regularly made between the British and foreign collections. Critics were still complaining about the paucity of collections and the conditions in the British Museum two decades after Pitt

⁶¹ Vanhee, 2000, p. 91.

⁶² Letter from Arthur Clare to Ben Mullen, at Peel Park, 21 April 1904. *Manchester University Museum Archives*. Currently I am considering the possibility that Arthur Clare is the second author of Dennett's obituary (1921) as who is named only as 'A. C.' Documents in the Manchester Museum archives show that Arthur Clare lived in Chiloango and Landana in the same years as Dennett. Clare supplied two *minkisi* for Peel Park and provided the interpretation of these two significant pieces, *Mangaka* and *Kozo* (Manchester University Museum Accession Numbers: *Mangaka*: 0.9321/1. *Kozo*: 0.9321/2). These *minkisi* were the subject of a paper by the curator at Peel Park, Salford, Ben Mullen. See Mullen, Ben H. 'Fetishes from Landana, South-West Africa.' *Man*, Vol. 5, (1905), pp. 102-104.

⁶³ Willink, 2007, p. 19-20.

Rivers had raised his concerns about its undeveloped state. In 1898 Ormonde Maddock Dalton wrote a report on ethnographic museums in Germany and despaired at how the British Museum was being outstripped by the Berlin Royal Ethnographic Museum ‘in almost every section’.⁶⁴ In 1901 when Charles Hercules Read made his presidential Address to the Anthropological Institute, the disparity was continuing to cause concern. He referred to the observations made by Dr. Von Luschen, Director of the Berlin museum, who had criticised the poor British attitude to the material culture of their empire, and pointed out that ‘the Ethnographical Museum in Berlin is now seven times as extensive as the collection in the British Museum’.⁶⁵

The British anthropologist Northcote Thomas added his voice to the complaints in 1906. He bemoaned Britain’s apathetic attitude to collecting African material.⁶⁶ He was appalled by British ethnographic collections when compared with those in Germany. The idea that English anthropologists would have to go to Germany ‘to study the remains of what used to be our subject races’ struck him as an appalling result of English ‘supineness’.⁶⁷

Curators and Collectors.

In order to examine the causes of this disparity between the collections in continental and British museums it is necessary to consider the way the objects from the Congo

⁶⁴ Dalton, O. M. *Report on Ethnographic Museums in Germany*, London: HMSO, 1898, p. 7.

⁶⁵ Read, Charles Hercules. ‘Presidential Address, delivered at the Anniversary Meeting of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 4th February, 1901.’ *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 31, (1901), p. 16.

⁶⁶ Thomas, Northcote Whitridge. ‘Editor’s Preface’ in Werner, Alice. *The Natives of British Central Africa*, London: Archibald and Co., 1906.

⁶⁷ Thomas 1906, p. vi. Thomas argued that ‘[t]he past, once lost, can never be recovered’ and this oft-repeated fear was perhaps the driving force behind the enormous collection of sound recordings and photographs that he made when working in Nigeria after 1908. These recordings are now in the British Library and the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

were perceived and interpreted in the museums themselves. Continental museum curators clearly had a great appetite for material from the cultures of Central Africa. Willink has shown how Serrurier was anxious to fill any lacunae in his collections at the REM Leiden.⁶⁸ This suggests that he was attempting to create a systematised collection to illustrate a rational argument. Like Pitt Rivers in England, he imagined that a paradigm of ‘progress’ could be mapped onto objects from ‘primitive’ societies.⁶⁹ Artefacts were seen as elements that could be pieced together to show a logical narrative about mankind’s development. No longer could such items be presented as random curiosities in museums; instead a scientific model was imposed so that they could be used to show the ‘Order of Things’.⁷⁰ For Serrurier, this order identified man’s place in an evolutionary progression, and objects from ‘savage societies’ were used to illustrate earlier stages in humankind’s development. Supported by studies of physical anthropology, Serrurier argued that humanity was made from a hierarchy of different races, each with accompanying moral traits and characteristics, and that Africans occupied a low position on this evolutionary ladder.⁷¹

Serrurier’s position is an example of the thinking that was common across Europe, which incorporated adaptations of Darwin’s theories of evolution. Anthropologists argued over whether mankind had arisen from one stock or from many, but a general agreement was found over the low position of the “negro” in an evolutionary scale. They proved their case with biological “evidence” such as the size, shape and characteristics of human skulls, combined with and with travellers’ accounts of the “morals and customs” of distant peoples. As Chapter Three showed, the British Association for the Advancement of Science’s handbooks, *Notes and Queries on*

⁶⁸ Willink, 2007, p. 158.

⁶⁹ Willink, 2007, p. 158.

⁷⁰ Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*, (1970), London: Routledge, 2002.

⁷¹ Willink, 2007, p. 288.

Anthropology, (published from 1874 onwards) were one means by which British anthropologists rallied expatriates to gather data about “primitive” societies.⁷²

A desire to make a science of the study of man had been expressed in Theodore Waitz’s *Introduction to Anthropology* in 1863 which the Anthropological Society of London had translated into English in the year of their foundation. Such translations were seen by the society as ‘an important means by which ... to encourage a *de facto* Science of Man’.⁷³ In France the Society of Anthropology had been formed in 1859, with Paul Broca a ‘moving spirit’.⁷⁴ Broca invented instruments to be used in craniology, in order to compare measurements and apply a scientific method. He, and his colleague Paul Topinard, used this data to classify humans into three groups, according to skull shape and hair type.⁷⁵ This aspect of anthropology has been discredited of course, but it was pervasive at the time. The model upheld by anthropologists was based on western notions of development and evidenced in supposed racial markers of “difference”. Museums, as the institutional home of anthropology at the time, were caught up in the processes of representing, and therefore reinforcing, this paradigm.

British museums were implicated just as much as their European counterparts were.

Tythacott has shown how the classification of displays in the Mayer museum in Liverpool, where many of Ridyard’s collections were sent, exemplified the evolutionary

⁷² British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS). *Notes and Queries on Anthropology for the Use of Travellers and Residents in Foreign Lands*, London: Stanford, 1874, and later editions. See also Chapter Three.

⁷³ See ‘Editors Preface’ to Waitz, Theodore. *Introduction to Anthropology. Anthropology of Primitive Peoples*, London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1863, p. xiii. This preface was written by J. F. Collingwood, the Honorary Secretary of the Anthropological Society of London, who explained that this translation of Waitz’s research was the first work in the English language which could be recommended as a text-book for travellers and for students in general. Before this, Prichard’s had been the best work of ‘general utility’ (p. xv) but all works before Waitz were now deemed ‘unsatisfactory’ due to their origins in the ‘infancy’ of the ‘Science of Man’ (p. xiv).

⁷⁴ Haddon, A. C. *History of Anthropology*, London: Watts, 1910, p. 37.

⁷⁵ See Haddon, 1910, p. 93.

schema. Henry Ogg Forbes was the museum director who chose this methodology. Forbes joined the museum in 1894 and in 1895 he re-arranged the ethnographic collections at Liverpool along racial divisions.⁷⁶ He also lectured on issues such as *The Pedigree and the Races of Mankind*.⁷⁷ Forbes applied three divisions in his arrangement of the Liverpool Museum's ethnographic displays. Thus the 'Melanian' black-skinned races, which were perceived as the least developed, were placed 'below' the yellow-skinned 'Mongolian' races on the imaginary ladder. The white-skinned 'Caucasians' were thought to be above them all.⁷⁸ These divisions were also used when the ethnography galleries were completely reworked after 1901 when it was proposed that the Caucasian section was 'the first that the visitor would have encountered on entry into the main hall' while the 'Melanian' collections were located in the basement.⁷⁹

Similar systems were explored by Alfred Cort Haddon who developed a system of dividing mankind along racial lines, which he explained in *The Study of Man*.⁸⁰ He drew on the theories of Augustus Henry Keane who was credited by Haddon to be the first theorist to find a synthesis between the generalisations of earlier anthropological researchers (such as Prichard, Latham, Waitz, Müller, and Topinard) and the ideas that Darwin had presented in *The Origin of Species* in 1859.⁸¹ Keane's *Ethnology* was published in 1896, with *Man, Past and Present* following in 1899.⁸² In *Ethnology*, Keane assessed all the archaeological, physical, linguistic and geographic evidence that had been produced and made his arguments. He took a monogenist position and

⁷⁶ Tythacott, 2001, p. 161.

⁷⁷ *Annual Report for the Free Public Museum of the City of Liverpool, 1896*, p. 28, cited in Tythacott, 2001, p. 161.

⁷⁸ Tythacott, 2001, p. 162.

⁷⁹ Coombes, Annie. *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, pp.140- 141.

⁸⁰ Haddon, A. C., *The Study of Man*, London: John Murray, 1898.

⁸¹ Haddon, 1910, p. 108. Compare with Keane, 1895: vii.

⁸² Keane, A. H. *Ethnology* (1896), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916; Keane, A. H. *Man Past and Present*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899.

proposed that the *Hominidae* fell into four main divisions, *Homo Aethiopicus*, *Homo Mongolicus*, *Homo Americanus* and *Homo Causcasicus*.⁸³

The Albert Memorial Museum.

Similar classificatory currents to those in Liverpool were also felt in the Exeter Albert Memorial Museum (AMM) under the curatorship of James Dallas. Dallas was in post when Dennett's collection arrived between 1887 and 1889. He was a fellow of the Linnean Society, and might therefore be expected to impose scientific classification to the collections. Dallas had also applied his classificatory practice to humankind, as he explained in a paper for the Anthropological Institute published in 1886. Like Keane, who published his second edition of *Ethnology* in the same year, Dallas set out his ideas about the groups that humans could be divided into in his paper, *On the Primary Divisions and Geographical Distribution of Mankind*.⁸⁴ Dallas differed from Keane by identifying three, not four classes, which he called *Leucochroi*, *Mesochroi*, and *Aethochroi*.⁸⁵

However, like Keane, Dallas used such determinants as 'wooly hair' and 'bracycephalic' and 'dolicephalic' skulls to distinguish the separate 'races'.⁸⁶ Dallas also used Broca's 'nasal index' to support his theories.⁸⁷ These methods allowed Dallas to identify three groups which he had named *Leptorrhines*, 'the white races';

⁸³ Keane, 1895, p. xxiii.

⁸⁴ Dallas, James. 'On the Primary Divisions and Geographical Distribution of Mankind.' *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 15, (1886), pp. 304-330.

⁸⁵ Dallas, 1886, p. 305. Dallas' terms *Leuchchroi*, *Mesochroi*, and *Aethochroi* are equivalent to the groups that Forbes would simplify as Caucasian, Mongolian, and Melanian.

⁸⁶ Dallas, 1886, p. 309

⁸⁷ The index was 'regarded as indicating a transition between man and the apes' and was calculated from the 'proportion of the breadth to the length of the anterior nasal orifice'. Dallas, 1886, p. 311. According to Broca, three groups could be defined by this index which had been Dallas explained that 'Mr Broca regarded the nasal index as one of the safest racial tests'.

Mesorrhines, ‘the Mongols and Americans’; and *Platyrrhines*, ‘the black races’.⁸⁸

Moral and mental traits were believed to accompany these physical traits.

While Dallas exposed his discriminatory theories in this paper there is no evidence of how his ideas were applied to collections in the museum. His treatment of the Dennett collection is unfortunately not recorded. Indeed Dallas’ history at the museum appears to have been inglorious; his membership of the Linnean Society was cancelled in 1898 for non-payment of fees, and a much later comment on his contribution to the museum read: ‘His connection with us was not altogether happy and the development of the Museum was not maintained’.⁸⁹ All that is recorded about Dallas’s reception of Dennett’s material is the comment that appeared in the Museum Committee’s Annual Report for 1890. This described the objects as a ‘valuable and interesting series of Ethnological specimens from Cacongo’.⁹⁰ This terminology betrays his bias towards the classificatory processes of Natural History, a methodology Dennett may not have agreed with.

Dennett had collected the objects at the same time as writing his first book, and this publication may help in assessing his intentions for the collection. *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, published in 1887, was a rather disjointed record of multiple impressions and opinions. The collection probably represents the same mixture of messages. Dennett conveyed his curiosity, cynicism and even distaste with certain aspects of African life in

⁸⁸ Dallas, 1886, p. 311. By this standard, what Dallas had called Dennett’s ‘most valuable and interesting series of ethnological specimens’ were artefacts representative of the ‘*Platyrrhine*’ group. The furthest from ‘the apes’ were, inevitably, the *Leptorrhines*.

⁸⁹ Linnean Society Council Minutes for the 30 June 1898, mention that his wife had applied to the Royal Society relief fund in order to cover her husband’s arrears, but this proved unsuccessful. It is not clear why his wife made the claim rather than Dallas himself. Dallas was removed from the membership lists after this date. (Email information from Ben Sherwood, Linnean Society, 10 March 2011.)

⁹⁰ Twentieth Annual Report of the Committee of the Devon and Exeter Albert Memorial Museum, 1890, p. 4. *Westcountry Studies Archive*.

Seven Years Among the Fjort, but he also revealed his fascination, admiration and enchantment at others. The book served as a channel for Dennett to share his growing knowledge of the system he had named *Nkissism*. Perhaps the collection was intended to perform the same way. The collection might therefore be read as a both a celebration of himself and of the BaKongo. These aspirations were, apparently, not fulfilled by Dallas' reception.

Because there is so little recorded information about the interpretation of Dennett's collection when it first arrived at the AMM it will be useful to consider the earlier reception of African material in the museum in the years leading up to 1889. The Museum had opened in 1868 after five years of planning and fundraising by the educated "gentlemen" of Exeter who wished to establish a worthy educational memorial to the late Prince Consort.⁹¹ Albert had died in 1861, and, following his enthusiastic patronage of the arts and education, a museum was considered an appropriate way to memorialise him.

The Dean of Exeter, Dr. Ellicott, explained how morality was implicit in the educational goals behind the museum's inception, explaining at a meeting in 1862 that 'natural science leads to natural religion, and natural religion leads to revealed religion, and that thus they form one golden chain, leading us to God.'⁹² Natural history collections were therefore valued for their potential for producing spiritual revelation. Such collections were well represented in the museum. The first curator, William Stewart D'Urban, had

⁹¹ Donisthorpe, George T. *An Account of the Origin and Progress of the Devon and Exeter Albert Memorial Museum*, Exeter: Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 1868, p. 8.

⁹² Donisthorpe, 1868, p. 10.

donated his own natural history collections to the museum in 1868.⁹³ D'Urban's task was to catalogue and present the collections so methodically that Exeter was not viewed as just another provincial museum with a mass of 'curiosities' but became a place to 'worship the Muses' and to undertake scientific study.⁹⁴ Within this paradigm of godly order and scientific method, ethnographic objects were classified as 'Specimens Representative of the Progress of Man'.⁹⁵ In 1868 there were 2,023 rocks, 1,640 birds and 1,121 fossils in the collection which considerably outnumbered the three hundred and ninety-nine objects which represented Man's Progress.⁹⁶ Many of the ethnographic objects had been donated by the members of the Devon and Exeter Institution, founded in 1813, who had indeed thought of them at the time as curiosities.⁹⁷

Objects from Africa had been sparse before Dennett made his collection. The largest donation prior to 1889 had been given by Reverend Henry Townsend after his missionary work in Abeokuta in 1868.⁹⁸ Since 1836 Townsend had worked with Africans in Sierra Leone who had been liberated from slave ships and who wanted to return to their Yoruba home.⁹⁹ Townsend accompanied them and started a mission in Abeokuta where he stayed until 1867. His collections were made in the course of these experiences.¹⁰⁰

⁹³ D'Urban was born in 1836. Childhood Diphtheria treated with hot tar in the ear had left him 'totally deaf'. His grandfather was General Benjamin D'Urban, who became Governor of Cape Colony South Africa in 1842 and gave his name to the district of Durban.

⁹⁴ Donisthorpe, 1868, p. 18.

⁹⁵ Donisthorpe, 1868, p. 29.

⁹⁶ Donisthorpe, 1868, pp. 28-29.

⁹⁷ Donisthorpe, 1868, p. 6.

⁹⁸ Albert Memorial Museum Accession Register, 1863-1873, *RAMM Archive*.

⁹⁹ Levell, Nicky. 'Discontinuous Histories: The Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter and Its African Collection, 1868-1996' in Shelton, Anthony, ed. *Collectors: Expressions of Self and Other*, London: Horniman Museum, 2001(a), p. 186.

¹⁰⁰ Levell, 2001, p. 188.

In 1872 and 1874 the museum acquired two objects which celebrated two British explorers in Africa: a pamphlet of 'Dr Livingstone's dispatches' and a bust of John Hanning Speke.¹⁰¹ After this a war club from Nubia and some arm ornaments from Fernando Po were accessioned in 1873. Twenty arrows from East Africa arrived in 1875.¹⁰²

In 1877, the museum sent out an appeal to 'the Clergy, Gentry and other persons thought likely to assist' for 'specimens of local antiquities' for the museum.¹⁰³ All the departments of the museum saw their collections increase the following year. A group of African objects were donated by Percy Nightingale who had fought in South Africa's Xhosa Wars, 1877-78.¹⁰⁴ Commander Nightingale collected weapons, pipes and jewellery in South Africa as well as making a collection of natural history specimens which he donated to the museum.¹⁰⁵ In 1881 he donated further items from South Africa including insects, fossils, and ochre used for body decoration.¹⁰⁶

These then, were the sorts of African objects that the museum had been collecting and displaying since it had opened in 1868. Little is known about the interpretation that was attached to the objects when they were first displayed. Labels were evidently in place in 1875, as it was explained in the Annual Report that 'the labelling of specimens has been assiduously attended to', and that objects were arranged according to a geographical rationale.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Albert Memorial Museum Accession Register, 1873-1901, *RAMM Archive*.

¹⁰² Albert Memorial Museum Accession Register, 1873-1901, *RAMM Archive*.

¹⁰³ Seventh Annual Report of the Committee of the Devon and Exeter Albert Memorial Museum, 1877, p. 11. *Westcountry Studies Archive*.

¹⁰⁴ Ninth Annual Report of the Committee of the Devon and Exeter Albert Memorial Museum, 1877, p. 6. *Westcountry Studies Archive*.

¹⁰⁵ Albert Memorial Museum Accession Register, 1873-1901, *RAMM Archive*. The register shows that Nightingale donated further items in 1881.

¹⁰⁶ Albert Memorial Museum Accession Register, 1873-1901, *RAMM Archive*.

¹⁰⁷ Seventh Annual Report of the Albert Memorial Museum, 1877, p. 10.

Between its opening and the arrival of Dennett's collection the ethnographic displays had undergone many changes. Initially the whole museum was accommodated in one room of the original building which served as a public reading room, a school of art and science and a library. [Fig. 84.] In 1874 an additional museum room had been created for the ethnographic collections, with a paintings gallery above it. [Fig. 85.] D'Urban had made a point of visiting the museums of Truro, Penzance, London, Salisbury and Liverpool in that year 'to determine their collections and specimens'.¹⁰⁸

With the influx of new accessions after 1880 the museum had become overcrowded and funds were raised for another museum extension.¹⁰⁹ A new reference library was opened with a lecture room above it, in 1884, and plans were made for a new 'Ethnological Room'.¹¹⁰ This was the point at which D'Urban had to retire and James Dallas became the new curator of the Albert Memorial Museum. As the conference convened in Berlin in November 1884 to try to resolve the competing claims on the Congo, a new era was also beginning in the museum in Exeter.

In the Annual Report of the Committee of the Devon and Exeter Albert Memorial Museum in 1890, Dallas reported that Dennett's collection had 'been temporarily placed in a case in the upper gallery for want of space in the Ethnological Room'.¹¹¹ The 'upper gallery' referred to here was probably the gallery of Natural History (which was now named after D'Urban). So while we cannot tell much about the way in which the

¹⁰⁸ Fourth Annual Report of the Committee of the Albert Memorial Museum, 1874, p. 8. *Westcountry Studies Archive*.

¹⁰⁹ Tenth Annual Report of the Committee of the Albert Memorial Museum, 1880, p. 3. *Westcountry Studies Archive*.

¹¹⁰ Fourteenth Annual Report of the Committee of the Albert Memorial Museum, 1884. *Westcountry Studies Archive*.

¹¹¹ Twentieth Annual Report of the Albert Memorial Museum, p. 6. The collection was accessioned on September 26, 1889. See Albert Memorial Museum Accession Register, 1863-1873, *RAMM Archive*.

collection was displayed at this point, it was significant enough to be described as ‘valuable and interesting’ and, despite pressure of space, to be put on view immediately after it was accessioned.¹¹²

Dennett may have been encouraged to make a collection for the museum in Exeter by his father. Reverend Richard Dennett was Vicar at St. Michael’s Church Alphington at the time the Albert Memorial Museum had requested ‘the Clergy, Gentry, and other persons thought likely to assist’ to provide ‘specimens’ for the museum.¹¹³ It is very likely that the Reverend Dennett was receptive to this appeal, as he was supportive of the museum. He made a donation to the fund for extensions to the building in 1884 and was interested in material culture.¹¹⁴ He was engaged in restoration work at St. Michael’s Church and went on to restore another church interior at his next parish, St. John’s, Ashton, after 1881.¹¹⁵ It is possible that his son visited the museum while staying with the family before leaving for Africa.

Reverend Dennett was in post as the Rector of St John’s Church, Ashton after 1883. It was here that his son’s collection was photographed. As the image was published in 1887 the collection must have been in Devon before then. However some questions must be asked about where the collection was between the time it was photographed in 1886 or 1887, and the time it was accessioned in the museum in September 1889. It is possible that it was kept in Ashton, but perhaps the AMM had received the collection before 1889 and Dallas did not manage to catalogue it until 1889. However, as it

¹¹² Twentieth Annual Report of the Albert Memorial Museum, p. 4.

¹¹³ Seventh Annual Report, of the Albert Memorial Museum, p. 11.

¹¹⁴ List of subscribers to the Albert Memorial Museum Extension Fund. *Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post*, 24 December 1884. *Devon Record Office*.

¹¹⁵ Restoration of Ashton Church *Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post*, 7 November 1883. *Devon Record Office*.

appears that Dennett was in Britain again in 1889, he may not have donated the collection to the AMM until that year.¹¹⁶

It is not easy to know if the Dennett Collection was given any greater prominence in the new gallery when the upstairs ‘Ethnological Room’ was opened, six years later.¹¹⁷

[Fig. 86.] We have no written records about the new displays and only two photographs by which to judge the display of the ethnographic collections under Dallas’ tenure.

[Fig. 87, Fig. 88.] One photograph gives prominence to two Egyptian mummies and a Samurai costume. Some shields and spears are lined up along the wall. In the other photograph a stand bearing some kind of “specimens” can be seen, but it is not clear what these objects are. The mummies are visible again in his photo. No African material can be clearly seen, and any textual information is minimal. Indeed Dallas’ successor, Frederick Rowley, noted that the objects upon the wall screens in the gallery were unlabelled when he arrived.¹¹⁸

In 1899 a museum guide was published, to which Dallas contributed. In *The Albert Memorial College, Museum and Library: A Brief Description*, the reader was told that the ‘Ethnological Collection’ was ‘of exceptional excellence for the provinces’ but no African material was mentioned; the guide, however, pronounced that ‘the Polynesian and the Burmese specimens are of exceptional merit.’¹¹⁹ It is therefore not possible to

¹¹⁶ It appears that Dennett read his paper on ‘The Fjort: The Manners and Customs of the Native Congo People.’ to the Manchester Geographical Society himself, on 11 October 1889. The collection was accessioned in September of that year. See introductory note on Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘The Fjort: The Manners and Customs of the Native Congo People.’ *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, Vol. 6, no. 1-3, (1890), p. 26.

¹¹⁷ The new rooms were opened by the Duke of Devonshire, Chancellor of Cambridge University in 1895; and the collections were installed in 1899. Clayden, A. W., Dallas, J., and Shorto, G. R. *The Albert Memorial College, Museum and Library: A Brief Description*, Exeter: Council of Exeter, 1899, p. 13.

¹¹⁸ Rowley, F. R. ‘Report to the Chairman and Members of the Museum Committee, 7 February 1902.’ *RAMM Archive*.

¹¹⁹ Clayden, A.W., Dallas, J. and Shorto, G. R. *The Albert Memorial College, Museum and Library: A Brief Description*, Exeter: Council of Exeter, 1899, pp. 27-28. The Polynesian Collections included pieces

know how the museum received and presented Dennett's collection of *minkisi*, *ndungu*, pots, skins, baskets and clothing from the Congo at this time. Although Shawcross had commented that these items were 'like the Spanish Fleet' in his letter to Ridyard in 1898, we cannot know if Dallas was conscious of the rarity of Dennett's collection in whether he understood the significance of the objects to the people who had made them.

After this period Dennett did not make any further donations to the Exeter museum. His attitude towards collecting appears to have changed. Possibly his collection had been a young man's response to the visual force of unfamiliar and "exotic" BaKongo objects, which he had felt compelled to collect and introduce to a British audience. Having witnessed the conflicts that were caused by the competition over these increasingly rare items, perhaps his enthusiasm waned. Dennett certainly complained about how 'European Governments' were treating *minkisi* as their 'bitter enemies', and using 'brute force' to 'clear the country of them'.¹²⁰ Perhaps over twenty years in the Congo, he witnessed so much destruction during the scramble for land, labour, rubber, ivory and material culture that his taste for museum collecting diminished. However it is also possible that the scarcity of Kongo artefacts had driven prices beyond his modest reach.

Nevertheless it is also possible to conjecture that Dennett was uncomfortable about the de-contextualisation of his material in a museum. Whenever he had mentioned similar objects in his texts, Dennett's description was always embedded in a social context. He discussed the objects' meaning in relation to the activity that they were connected with in the community. In the museum, on the other hand, such ethnographic material was

which were given to the Devon and Exeter Institution in 1813 by Francis Bond who had been on William Bligh's second Pacific voyage on HMS Providence, in 1791. See Pole, Len. 'Relocating Each Other: Discontinuities at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, 1863-1999', in Shelton, Anthony, ed. *Collectors: Individuals and Institutions*, London and Coimbra: Horniman Museum and University of Coimbra, 2001, pp. 348-350.

¹²⁰ Dennett, 1906, p. 94.

presented removed from its *milieu*, like insect specimens pinned to a board. Dennett may have realised that the museum could not convey the multiplicity of meaning that he knew his objects held. Outside the physical, living environment perhaps he felt their value was limited: commenting on another collection of *minkisi* in a European museum in 1906, he wrote that that they were ‘doing no good there, you may be sure, but certainly no harm’.¹²¹

The RAMM after 1902.

As Dennett left Loango in 1902 to begin a new career in Nigeria, another curator was appointed to the RAMM. Frederick Rowley’s arrival in 1902 also coincided with the British Government’s Educational Act. By the turn of the century, museums across Britain had become conscious of the need to arrange the collections according to new pedagogical principles.¹²² Displays were now expected to serve a clear didactic purpose, and collections needed to be accessible to schoolchildren and the working classes, as well as to the bourgeois and privileged.

At a talk given at the Exeter Athenaeum in November 1903, it was recorded that Rowley explained how museums needed to change:

After an amusing reference to present day ‘curiosity shops’, Mr Rowley alluded to the comparative uselessness of overcrowded cases, pointing out the necessity of exercising greater care in the selection and preparation of specimens, and providing fuller information by means of labels.¹²³

In his paper for the Devon and Exeter Architectural Society Rowley referred to the differing histories of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, the Woodwardian at

¹²¹ Dennett, 1906, p. 95.

¹²² See Tythacott, 2001, p. 174.

¹²³ Rowley, F. R. ‘Natural History Museums.’ Talk given to the Devon and Exeter Architectural Society at the Athenaeum, Exeter, on 20 Nov 1903, p. 28. *RAMM Archive*.

Cambridge and the Hunterian at the Royal College of Surgeons. He also mentioned the merits of the Natural History Museum at South Kensington and the British Museum. He emphasised that it was important for regional museums to represent the natural history of their own locality in their collections and he praised the methods of presentation that he had seen in the Field Museum in Chicago.

He was particularly concerned that museum cases should not be over-full; that objects were arranged ‘artistically’ and labelled well.¹²⁴ His ideas were applied to all the collections at the RAMM. Rowley brought a new emphasis on clarity in the displays and introduced more educational labels. He introduced Saturday morning lectures and later ran a weekly article in the local paper about the collections. He visited local natural history groups to encourage their research and collecting. He was clearly a hard-working, clear-headed and effective curator who was appreciated after the “lost years” under Dallas.¹²⁵

Rowley was impressed by the pedagogical initiatives he saw Haddon introducing at the Horniman Museum and he expressed his intention to follow some of these at the RAMM, in a report to the Museum Committee in 1904.¹²⁶ Similar educational currents were felt in the Liverpool museum after 1900. Indeed Tythacott has shown that the new educational impetus led to changes in Liverpool’s collecting policies.¹²⁷ After selecting his own objects for the museum for seven years, Ridyard was given instructions on what he should look for on his visits to West Africa, after 1900. Instead of ‘unpredictable, eclectic curios’ he was asked to gather specific items to fill gaps in the museum’s

¹²⁴ Rowley, 1903, p. 28.

¹²⁵ Rowley’s achievements were praised in the *Express and Echo*, after he had successfully arranged the Museum Association Conference at Exeter in 1925. *Express and Echo*, 11 July 1925. *RAMM Archive*.

¹²⁶ Curator’s Report to the Chairman and Members of the Museum Committee, 4 January 1904. *RAMM Archive*.

¹²⁷ Tythacott, 2001, p. 173.

educational displays.¹²⁸ Ridyard's later years were spent searching out objects such as a blacksmith's outfit, a weaving loom and other 'utilitarian specimens of daily African life'.¹²⁹

In Exeter, Rowley arranged the ethnographic objects according to function, within a broadly geographical format.¹³⁰ In 1904 he rearranged the Ethnological Room and invented special sloping stands so that he could make space for archaeological exhibits alongside the ethnographic displays.¹³¹ As Len Pole has argued, this methodology, which connected contemporary African artefacts with archaeological evidence of what was called 'Man's earliest handiwork', was framed by persistent ideas of cultural evolution.¹³² Just like Forbes in Liverpool, and Haddon at the Horniman, Rowley had accepted a conceptual model in which less technologically advanced societies were understood to be less evolved, and were classified accordingly, by race.¹³³

Three photographs of Rowley's new ethnographic displays survive from this period. [Figs. 89-91.] Although it is difficult to read the writing in these photographs, it is possible to see the mixture of geographical and typological identification labels on the walls and display cases. For example, the wall captions identify 'Australia' or 'Polynesia', while the label at the top of one sloping glass case reads: 'Weapons,

¹²⁸ Tythacott, 2001, p. 175.

¹²⁹ Tythacott, 2001, p. 175.

¹³⁰ We can calculate that the presentation of the ethnography gallery, as recorded in photographs in the RAMM archive, was arranged after 1904 (when the sloping screens were introduced) but before 1913. This is because a painting of the new arrangement was made by Philip Henry de la Garde, who died in 1913. [Fig. 93.] De La Garde was a former Fellow of the Entomological Society of London who had been in the Navy and retired to Devon in 1905. He lived in Teignmouth and Braunton before moving to Exeter in 1911, and stayed with Rowley until 1913. *RAMM Natural History Archive*.

¹³¹ Curators Report, 1904. *Westcountry Studies Archive*.

¹³² Pole, 2001, p. 351. Pole cites Rowley's Museum Guide, *What to see in the Exeter Museum*, (no date). *RAMM Archive*.

¹³³ Paintings of racial types may be seen in the photograph taken shortly after Rowley had rearranged the ethnographic and archaeological displays. [Fig. 90.]

Utensils, Beadwork &c. from E. Africa' and identifies the donor: 'lent by W.C. Fraser Esq'.

There is no detailed record of the way that Rowley arranged and explained the pieces in the Dennett collection. It is likely that some of the objects would have been displayed according to their geographical provenance. However the collection may have been broken up, as the *ndungu* costume and some of the carved *minkisi* needed more space than the smaller pieces which were probably attached to the wall, as seen in the gallery photographs. Some indication of the way the objects were used in context may have been provided, but these photographs suggest that the interpretative material was limited. In the case containing 'Weapons, Utensils, Beadwork etc.' the African material does not appear to have received the assiduous labelling that the archaeological specimens in nearby cases had been given. Because of his areas of expertise, Dennett's Kongo collection was probably harder for Rowley to annotate than the geological and archaeological specimens in his care.

After his rearrangement of the gallery in 1904, Rowley appears to have been satisfied with the presentation of ethnography at the RAMM, because the collections remained largely unchanged for several decades. Twenty years later, a museum postcard of the Department of Archaeology and Ethnography shows the displays under exactly the same arrangement as they had been given by Rowley in 1904.¹³⁴ [Fig. 92.] Perhaps as a natural historian he felt that once the specimens had been arranged according to an equivalent of the correct *genera* and *species* that no further adjustment was necessary.

¹³⁴ Postcard in *RAMM Archive*.

The only further indication of how Dennett's collection was presented at this time is in a watercolour painting which was painted by a friend of Rowley's, Philip Henry De la Garde. This painting was made between 1904 and 1913 and it allows a little more insight into the presentation of the African material in the museum at the beginning of the twentieth century. [Fig. 93.] De la Garde was staying with Rowley between 1911 and 1913, the year in which he died. He was a former Fellow of the Entomological Society of London who had been in the Navy and had retired to Devon in 1905.¹³⁵ His painting shows a view of the Ethnology Room where it connected to the picture gallery. Some of Dennett's smaller pieces appear to be represented in the painting, arranged in a box on the wall. [Fig 94, Fig. 95.] The crucible, a spoon and possibly the horn bundle may be distinguished, but the feathered *nkisi* figure which is loosely brushed in, is probably one that had been presented to the museum by Mr Dunn in 1868.¹³⁶ [Fig. 96.] It is impossible to identify any other pieces that can be named as Dennett's with any certainty. It seems likely that any further pieces from the collection would have been arranged in a similar way, grouped according to a geographical arrangement and ordered by similarity of size and function. A small panel of text appears to be fixed on the jamb of the archway, but there is minimal labelling shown in the painting. No labels from these displays have been found in the museum archives.

If any handbooks or guides to the collection were published at the time, they have not been preserved. Indeed before 1931, when Rowley invited James Withers-Gill to make a survey of the African collections, these collections were very rarely mentioned in museum publications or lectures.¹³⁷ Items from the ethnographic collection did not

¹³⁵ Biographical notes, Henry de la Garde. *RAMM Natural History Archive*.

¹³⁶ RAMM Accession number E 1395, donated 1868. No further information about Mr Dunn's *nkisi* has been found.

¹³⁷ James Withers-Gill was invited to identify objects in the African collections. The *Western Times* newspaper for August 15 1931 reported that Mr Withers Gill, 'whose arrangement of the African gallery

feature often in Rowley's regular newspaper columns in the Exeter Express and Echo, and when they were discussed, they were used to illustrate the "primitive" stages in man's existence and emphasised weaponry and superstitions.¹³⁸

Compared to other museums around 1900, the RAMM's African collections do not seem to have been given a great deal of exposure or interpretation. Ridyard's weighty contribution raised the profile of West Africa in Liverpool; and the sack of Benin City led to a surge of interest in "Benin Bronzes" at the Horniman, the Pitt Rivers, and the British Museum; but the RAMM seems to have done little with its African collections at this time.¹³⁹ This is not surprising given the curator's enthusiasm for his own specialism in Natural History. With no expertise in anthropology and very little time as a single-handed curator, his attention was inevitably drawn away from the ethnographic collections. Anthony Shelton explains that an anthropologist such as Haddon would take steps at the Horniman Museum, to 'augment the collection' by identifying and 'filling in gaps', but Rowley was clearly not compelled to provide by an equivalent 'master narrative' at the RAMM.¹⁴⁰ Once his ethnographic collections were established and arranged as "specimens" alongside the archaeological ones, with the implications of

in Liverpool is such a marked success', had been asked to help the RAMM to examine and classify their African Exhibits. Withers Gill's interpretation of the origins of the Liverpool collections had been apocalyptic: 'Thunder is louder, lightening more vivid, rain more torrential, tempests fiercer than with us; beasts of prey and poisonous snakes are always in evidence; poisonous insects abound'. Withers-Gill, J. *Handbook and Guide to the African Collections of Liverpool Museum*, Liverpool: Liverpool Museum, 1931, p.13, quoted in Shelton, Anthony. 'Museum Ethnography: An Imperial Science' in Hallam, Elizabeth and Street, Brian, eds. *Cultural Encounters*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 183. Withers-Gill's attitude towards Africans had been formed in the nineteenth century and this is apparent in his notes on the African collections at the RAMM. He referred, for example, to the 'pagan African' who regards himself as 'demon-bound' and who resorts to the services of the 'Medicine Man'. *Notes by J. Withers Gill on the Collection of African Weapons, Fetishes, Masks, etc in the Collection of the RAMM Exeter*. Unpublished typewritten notes, August 1931, *RAMM Ethnography Archive*.

¹³⁸ Cuttings from Rowley's column, *Something to be Seen in the Exeter Museum*, which were published in the *Express and Echo* from 1932 to 1934, may be found in the RAMM archive.

¹³⁹ RAMM's 'Benin Head' did not arrive until 1916, presented by Ralph Locke, who had taken it 'from a ju-ju house' himself in 1897. RAMM Accession Book, 5 November 1915. *RAMM Archive*.

¹⁴⁰ Shelton, 2000, p. 171. Shelton has shown how Haddon, like Tylor and Balfour at Oxford, had a view of anthropology that 'incorporated primate evolution, archaeology, linguistics, folklore and ethnography'. (Shelton, 2000, p. 171). Such research areas were familiar for the professional anthropologist but perhaps less so for a general curator like Rowley.

parallels between “primitive man” and “prehistoric man”, the material on display apparently became fixed and frozen in time.

Dennett’s Other Collections

So far this research has only mentioned in passing a collector who became a significant part of Dennett’s life. Mary Henrietta Kingsley arrived unexpectedly in Cabinda in 1893 while Dennett was working at the Hatton and Cookson station there. She was making her first journey along the west coast of Africa. From Loanda she had been coming north to the Congo coast and she disembarked at Cabinda.¹⁴¹ She would travel on to Gabon two weeks later. Dennett made a meticulous handwritten account of her visit and described how she was hastily given the rooms Stanley had used in 1877 to stay in.¹⁴² Kingsley declared that she had come to collect ‘fetish and fish’, as she had found it necessary to provide a plausible reason for a white woman to be travelling in Africa alone.¹⁴³ As a naturalist her travels could be explained as a scientific project. Her fascination with what she called ‘fetish’ was something she had picked up from her father, and it developed over this first trip to mainland Africa.¹⁴⁴

Kingsley was no doubt delighted to find an authority on BaKongo religion in this unexpected setting. She saw great value in Dennett’s folktale collection and she would read his notes in the evenings over coffee when they would discuss these stories and

¹⁴¹ See Frank, Katherine. *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987.

¹⁴² Dennett, Richard Edward. *Miss Kingsley’s Visit to Cabinda, 1893, by R. E. Dennett, African Trader*, p. 3. Undated manuscript, Highgate Literary and Scientific Institute, London, *Kingsley Collection*.

¹⁴³ See Birkett, Dea. *Mary Kingsley: Imperial Adventuress*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992, pp. 25-26. Kingsley’s fascination with these two subjects apparently mirrored her father’s zeal for the same matters and it could be suggested that her travels in Africa were an attempt to match or to complete her father’s work in this area. She made sure that his memoirs were published as ‘*Notes on Sport and Travel*’ before she left for South Africa in 1900. See Kingsley, G. H. *Notes on Sport and Travel*, London: Macmillan, 1900.

¹⁴⁴ By ‘fetish’ Kingsley meant African cosmology. For a description of Kingsley’s father’s library, and his letters, and accounts of his experiences as he travelled the globe, see Frank, 1987, and Kingsley, 1900.

‘folklore’.¹⁴⁵ ‘All that I know that is true regarding West African facts, I owe to the traders’ she later wrote in *Travels in West Africa*, and she particularly praised Dennett’s ‘rich funds of ... knowledge of native life and idea’.¹⁴⁶

Dennett was equally inspired by Kingsley. He had rarely met with such an intelligent interest in the philosophy that lay behind the African way of life. Most Europeans were quick to reject African religious behaviour as superstition and idol-worship. Moreover Kingsley also understood how important it was for colonising powers to study this “native” philosophy if they were to make a success of governing in Africa. Dennett and Kingsley could both see how detrimental the colonisers’ lack of understanding was, and both believed that the ‘study of the natives’ was a serious, pressing concern for the good of the African and of the European.¹⁴⁷

In 1897 Kingsley explained to the Folklore Society that she felt sure that

careful and unprejudiced study of African beliefs and customs would lead to a true knowledge of the Africans, whom we have now to deal with in thousands; and there might be hope that by this true knowledge, hundreds of lives, both black and white, would be saved and a sound base established from which the African could advance to an improved culture-condition.¹⁴⁸

This opinion was also shared by others. C. H. Read had already suggested in 1892 that the information provided by *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* might help governments avoid some of the ‘disagreements arising from ignorance of cherished prejudices and beliefs’.¹⁴⁹ His advice was not taken up. In 1899 E. Sidney Hartland was

¹⁴⁵ *Miss Kingsley’s Visit to Cabinda*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁴⁶ Kingsley, Mary. *Travels in West Africa*, London: Macmillan, 1897(b), pp. 7-8.

¹⁴⁷ See Toulmin Smith, Lucy. ‘Obituary.’ *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 30, (1900), p. 8.

¹⁴⁸ Kingsley, Mary. ‘The Fetish View of the Human Soul.’ *Folklore*, Vol. 8, no. 2, (1897(a)), p. 138.

¹⁴⁹ C. H. Read in Royal Anthropological Institute of Great, Britain and Ireland, *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, Second Edition, London, 1892, p. 88, cited in Urry, James. “Notes and Queries on

also to bemoan the way that agencies of the British Empire had failed to recognise the value of ‘the eccentric study of savage life’:¹⁵⁰

When we consider however not merely the vast extent but the almost infinite diversity of races in all stages of culture, over which we rule ... how important then becomes the effort to grasp the significance of their customs and beliefs, their prejudices and ideals!¹⁵¹

Hartland considered it a ‘disgrace to our Government’ that there was still ‘no public institution to which a young man who is going out, either as a Government official in one of our numerous dependencies, or as a missionary, can go to be instructed in Anthropology’.¹⁵² In 1901 Read found himself re-iterating his request for ‘the more definite recognition of Anthropology in our teaching centres’ so that officers of both private companies and colonial governments might ‘receive valuable information for the conduct of their affairs with natives’.¹⁵³ Haddon proposed that such courses should be run at Cambridge.¹⁵⁴

In the Congo Dennett had felt isolated in his opinions about the need for his research to be recognised and utilised by European governments. He was therefore keenly aware of the unusual ally he had found in Kingsley. For her part, Kingsley saw in Dennett a unique spokesman who had the authority to present the commercial arguments for good ethnographic research. ‘The position of the trader towards the native is such as to make his information and observations particularly valuable to the ethnologist’ she was to

Anthropology” and the Development of Field Methods in British Anthropology, 1870-1920.’ *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, (1972), p. 49.

¹⁵⁰ Hartland, Edwin Sidney. *Folklore: What Is It? And What Is the Good of It?*, London: David Nutt, 1899, p. 24.

¹⁵¹ Hartland, 1899, p. 24.

¹⁵² Hartland, 1899, p. 31.

¹⁵³ Read, 1901, p. 15.

¹⁵⁴ Quiggin, A. H., and Fegan, E. S. ‘Alfred Cort Haddon, 1855-1940.’ *Man*, Vol. 40, (1940), p. 99.

write.¹⁵⁵ ‘The trader is not intent on altering the native culture to a European one; but he is intent on understanding the thing as it stands, so that he may keep at peace with the natives himself and induce them to keep at peace with each other.’¹⁵⁶ This practical knowledge, combined with his personal passion for the religious or philosophical ideas behind the African way of life, made Dennett a valuable new contact.

During her stay at Cabinda Kingsley made day-time visits to see other Europeans. She was taken by Dennett to the ‘Sisters’ Missions’ and also to the family of the Portuguese Colonel Joachim de Chicorro.¹⁵⁷ Dennett described Chicorro as ‘a thoroughly courteous Nobleman’ who was ‘quite overworked ... in his endeavours to stay corruption and benefit the country he loved so well.’¹⁵⁸ Kingsley became friends with the de Chicorro family and it was through this friendship that she acquired her beloved *nkisi*, Mavungu.¹⁵⁹ [Fig. 50.]

Mavungu was transferred to the Pitt Rivers Museum after her death but for many years the figure dominated a corner of her apartment in London. The carving drew comment from her visitors who, having heard the rumours that the bundle of *bilongo* around the figure’s neck was composed largely of human blood, were moved to complain about ‘the odour’ emanating from the top of the stairs.¹⁶⁰ Her brother Charles was not as

¹⁵⁵ Dennett, Richard Edward. *The Folklore of the Fjort*, London: The Folklore Society, 1898, p. vii.

¹⁵⁶ Dennett, 1898, p. vii.

¹⁵⁷ *Miss Kingsley’s Visit to Cabinda*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁸ *Miss Kingsley’s Visit to Cabinda*, p. 17. Kingsley became friends with Donna Anna, Joachim de Chicorro’s wife, and with her sister, Donna Maria. They kept in touch and Dennett noted (*Miss Kingsley’s Visit to Cabinda* pp. 20-21) how Kingsley acknowledged them in her book *Travels in West Africa*. Kingsley, 1897(b), p.116.

¹⁵⁹ Pitt Rivers Museum accession number 1900.39.70.

¹⁶⁰ As mentioned in Chapter Four, the editor of the journal also referred to the coagulated blood (see editor’s note on Dennett, 1902(b), p. 454). Kingsley’s friend and fellow-writer, Stephen Gwynn recorded his memories of this apartment and commented that the ‘idol’ produced ‘an odour’ in the flat that Mary and her brother occupied. Gwynn, Stephen. *The Life of Mary Kingsley* (1932), London: Macmillan, 1933, p. 191. Even after thirty years Gwynn remembered Kingsley’s collections in terms of occult and sinister

attached as Mary was to the figure: he handed over his 'life interest' in the *nkisi*, and in the rest of Kingsley's collection, to the Pitt Rivers Museum, within three months of her death.¹⁶¹

Kingsley was impressed by Dennett's collection of folk-tales and she believed that she might find a publisher for them. On her return to England she approached the Folklore Society. By August 1894 she had an agreement that they would publish Dennett's stories.¹⁶² It was possibly in response to this news that Dennett commissioned two tusks to be carved by Loango craftsmen, as a gift for the Society in 1895.¹⁶³ [Fig. 97.]

One of the tusks was carved with a dedication reproducing his handwriting, which read: 'Presented to the Folk Lore Society by R. E. Dennett, Loango, Congo, 1895.'¹⁶⁴ The other is covered with the spiralling imagery that made these carvings such popular purchases for Europeans.

Dennett's decorated ivory carries carved representations of different *ngangas* carrying bells, a rattle and beating a drum. *Mamoni* lines may be seen on their faces and variations of *mpu* on their heads. One section of the tusk shows ivory porters and illustrates the dangers of the elephant hunt. [Figs. 98-100.] The spiralling narrative shows an African hunter, tossed by an elephant, and mourned by wailing women.

Despite this accident, porters continue to process around the tusk, bearing the ivory to

dangers: 'I was often cautioned against puncturing myself (or my bicycle) with a poisoned arrow'. Gwynn, 1933, p. 191.

¹⁶¹ The Pitt Rivers Museum accession register for the Kingsley collection explains that although Charles Kingsley inherited his sister's collection on her death, he surrendered his life interest in them in September 1900.

¹⁶² Letter from Mary Kingsley to Hatty Johnson, from Addison Road, 2 August 1894. National Library of South Africa, MSB 278. *Mary Kingsley Collection*. 7 a-d.

¹⁶³ The two ivories are numbered 1965.1.46 and 1965.1.47 in the Pitt Rivers Museum 'Folklore Society Collection'.

¹⁶⁴ A carved tusk showing a 'man standing beside a big box camera' who has been identified as Robert Visser is discussed by Owen Edwards in the *Smithsonian* journal. See Edwards, Owen. 'Incised Ivories, National Museum of African Art: Spirals of History.' *Smithsonian Departments*, Vol. 39, no. 1, April 2008, p. 38 and p.40.

the market. A European man is also shown in his suit and top hat, addressing an African woman.¹⁶⁵

Although this pair of tusks has been on show at the Pitt Rivers Museum in recent years, and was acknowledged as Dennett's gift, it is connected with a less well known collection in the museum which comprises of fifty-eight objects from the former 'French Congo'.¹⁶⁶ In the course of this research it has been determined that both Dennett and Kingsley were involved with this African collection which was given to the Folklore Society before 1900.¹⁶⁷ [Figs. 101- 104.]

The objects in the Folklore Society's Congo Collection, which were described mainly as 'charms' and 'amulets' in the accession books, were passed from the Folklore Society in London to the Cambridge University Museum in 1900, together with items from India, Mexico and North America.¹⁶⁸ They were intended to contribute to the 'nucleus' of a Museum of Folklore under Haddon.¹⁶⁹ No donors were listed in the paperwork that accompanied the 'French Congo' collection. However, correspondence at Cambridge reveals that Kingsley spent two afternoons in London with F. A. Milne, the Secretary of the Folklore Society, helping to identify the objects from 'French Congo'.¹⁷⁰ Kingsley's suggestions were apparently recorded by Milne on the scraps of paper that are now

¹⁶⁵ Loango carved ivories have been subject of recent doctoral research by Nichole Bridges. See Bridges, Nichole N. *Contact, Commentary, and Kongo Memory: Souvenir Ivories from Africa's Loango Coast, c. 1840-1910*. Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2009.

¹⁶⁶ These are numbered 1965.1.1, to 1965.1.47, in the Pitt Rivers Museum Object catalogue. The Folklore Society's numbers in the Cambridge University Museum accession register were D.1900.16 to D.1900.40 and D.1900.104 to D.1900. 113.

¹⁶⁷ I am grateful to Tabitha Cadbury for pointing out to me that these donor-unspecified items were in the Folklore Society collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

¹⁶⁸ 'Notes on the Folklore Society Collection.' Pitt Rivers Museum Object Catalogue, accession numbers 1965.1.1. to 1965.1.47.

¹⁶⁹ 'Notes on the Folklore Society Collection.' PRM Object Catalogue.

¹⁷⁰ Letter from F. A. Milne to A. C. Haddon, 10 April 1900. *University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology Archive*. Correspondence, 1900.

pasted into the Cambridge accession books.¹⁷¹ Her terminology is used (for example ‘*jujus*’ and ‘*Fiote*’) but the notes are not written in her handwriting.¹⁷² On the other hand, some other handwritten notes included in the register can be recognised as Dennett’s.¹⁷³ [Fig. 105, Fig. 106.]

These many annotations explain the way a “charm” might be used and they supply a local name. For example ‘*Luvalli*: Household fetish’; or ‘*S’eu*: to kill evil doers’.¹⁷⁴ The notes provide specific information on particular objects such as bundles and bells, baskets and bangles, information which Dennett was exploring in his research in Loango at the time, as reflected in his publications of 1902, 1905 and 1906.¹⁷⁵ This is therefore evidence which suggests that the Folklore Society’s French Congo collection is probably also another, hitherto unrecognised, “Dennett Collection”.

The possibility that Kingsley had collected the material, rather than Dennett, has been considered. She could have acquired the “fetishes” and “charms” when she was in Cabinda in 1893 and she might have asked Dennett to provide notes about them at the time. However Kingsley’s connection with the Folklore Society developed after she had made the voyage in which she met Dennett. It seems more likely therefore that that the

¹⁷¹ The details leading to these conclusions were the subject of a paper I presented to the Museum Ethnographers Group at the Annual Conference at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, as ‘*Hidden Charms: Writing, On, Around and About a Congo Collection*’ on 14 April 2011.

¹⁷² The word *Fiote* was Kingsley’s preferred way of spelling what Dennett presented as *Fjort* or *Fiort*. For Kingsley’s description of the origin of the term ‘*ju-ju*’ see Kingsley, 1897(b) p.139. ‘*Ju-ju*’ was not a term that Dennett used.

¹⁷³ The handwriting matches Dennett’s signed letters to E. Sidney Hartland, and the annotations use Dennett’s characteristic orthography for BaVili words. For example, Dennett insisted on using ‘X’ for the ‘tchi’ sound in BaVili words. See letter from Richard Dennett to E. Sidney Hartland, from Loango, 11 October 1897, National Library of Wales, *E. S. Hartland Archive*, 16894B.

¹⁷⁴ See ‘Notes on the Folklore Society Collection’, PRM Object Catalogue.

¹⁷⁵ Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘Laws and Customs of the Fjort or Bavili Family, Kingdom of Loango.’ *Journal of the African Society* Vol. 1, no. 3, (1902), pp. 259-287; Dennett, 1905; Dennett, 1906. Dennett’s notes in the Cambridge Accession Book offer specific information on the obscure objects in the collection such as bundles and bells, baskets and bangles, which match the themes he was exploring in his research in Loango at the time. Dennett had, for example, identified how and why bells were worn by dogs; how hats indicated leaders and why bracelets were worn for protection in pregnancy and for marriage rites. See Dennett, 1902.

items were collected in response to Folklore Society's appeals for examples of folklore, made around 1895.

Requests had been voiced for contributions when the Museum of Folklore had been proposed. The *Prospectus and List of Publications* of the Folklore Society of 1898 also appealed for help with collections for the proposed museum.¹⁷⁶ As Dennett had clearly commissioned the ivory carvings for the Society in 1895, he might well have begun to gather the French Congo collection for the Folklore Society at the same time. Milne had approached other collectors in the early 1890s for permission to send folklore collections to Cambridge, and perhaps Dennett was encouraged to make a collection for the proposed folklore museum himself, after the publication of *The Folklore of the Fjort* was agreed in 1894.¹⁷⁷ In this case, Dennett might have supplied the group of Congo "fetishes" and "specimens of folklore" at the same as he presented the ivories, in 1895. These objects were all accessioned together in 1900, indicating that the *minkisi* and the tusks may have been sent together by Dennett as a contribution to the Folklore Society's collection and in recognition for their interest in his work.

However the French Congo Collection did not see the 'light of day' again, once it had been catalogued.¹⁷⁸ Some of the objects from the Folklore Society collection were put on display (notably the Starr collection from Mexico) but much was left in storage.¹⁷⁹ In fact it was only in 1964 that the Secretary of the Folklore Society, A. W. Smith, wrote

¹⁷⁶ *Prospectus and List of Publications*, London: Folklore Society, 1898, p. 5. Contributions to both the Library of Folklore and the Collection at Cambridge were invited.

¹⁷⁷ A letter from Freddy Fawcett to F. A. Milne, dated 1894 reads 'I do not mind in the least the things being sent up to Cambridge' indicating that Milne had asked for Fawcett's approval to send his collection of Indian objects to join the Folklore Collection at Cambridge. Letter from F. Fawcett to F. A. Milne, 10 May 1894, *University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology Archive*, WO6/1/16.

¹⁷⁸ Letter from A. W. Smith to Dr. G. Bushnell, 30 October 1964, *University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology Archive*, Correspondence, 1964.

¹⁷⁹ Letter from Geoffrey Bushnell to A. W. Smith, 3 November 1964, *University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology Archive*, Correspondence, 1964.

to the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (CUMAA) with the proposal that these overseas objects be sent to the Pitt Rivers Museum where Barbara Blackwood had agreed they could be housed.¹⁸⁰

Although the collection of objects given to the Folklore Society may have disappeared into obscurity, Dennett's collections of stories followed a different trajectory. Kingsley made contact with Hartland who was Chairman of the Folklore Society's Publishing Committee and offered to edit the stories on Dennett's behalf.¹⁸¹ She and Hartland became a close friends and she joined began to join him at meetings of the Society in London.¹⁸² On one occasion she read her paper on *The Fetish View of the Human Soul* and displayed a collection of Fang objects which she had collected when travelling on the Ogoué River.¹⁸³ These artefacts included 'a basket for catching human souls', 'a horn which, if carried by a Man renders him invisible to elephants' and 'a sacrificial knife with a blade in the shape of a hornbill'.¹⁸⁴

Dennett's 'Folktales' had arrived in London as miscellaneous manuscripts. Kingsley and Hartland edited these for a year, and Kingsley wrote an introduction in which she

¹⁸⁰ See correspondence between A. W. Smith, (Folklore Society) Geoffrey Bushnell, (CUMAA) and Beatrice Blackwood, (Pitt Rivers Museum) in the archives of the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

¹⁸¹ Letter From Mary Kingsley to E. S. Hartland, from Addison Road, 30 December 1896, National Library of Wales, *E. Sidney Hartland Archive*, 6819B. Kingsley explained in this letter that she had left Dennett's manuscripts with Mr Nuti of the Folklore Society while she was away on her second visit to Africa. She departed again for West Africa in December 1894, and was abroad until November 1895. She spent much of 1896 lecturing and networking with the politicians, businessmen and anthropologists and it was only after her finished manuscript for *Travels in West Africa* had been sent to her family's publisher, Macmillan, at the end of 1896, that she turned again to Dennett's 'stories'. For a thorough analysis of Kingsley's political activities at this time see Birkett, 1992.

¹⁸² Letter from Mary Kingsley to E. S. Hartland, from Addison Road, 5 January 1897. National Library of Wales, *E. Sidney Hartland Archive*, 6819B; Letter from Mary Kingsley to E. S. Hartland, from Addison Road, 16 March 1897. National Library of Wales, *E. Sidney Hartland Archive*, 6819B.

¹⁸³ Kingsley, 1897(a).

¹⁸⁴ 'Minutes of meeting, Tuesday March 16th 1897.' *Folklore*, Vol. 8, no. 2, (1897), p. 131.

explained her respect for Dennett as a comparative ethnologist.¹⁸⁵ However the private correspondence between herself and Hartland reveals a different narrative. Kingsley began to find this task difficult and irksome. She found some of Dennett's ideas unacceptable and became frustrated at his insistence on applying his theological models to BaVili culture. While staying with Dennett in Cabinda, Kingsley had been able to tolerate Dennett's idiosyncratic views and his expressions of faith. She described her African evenings with Dennett to Stephen Gwynn:

[D]id I ever tell you how when I was away with him and he was quite down on his uppers, he used to say in the evening as we sat in the murky little room, illuminated by a wick floating in oil ... "Now let us have a little talk with God"? It was not praying, it was conversation with the deity, respectful but familiar, and now and then extremely critical.¹⁸⁶

At the time, as Kingsley told Gwynn, she 'never was able to think it queer of Dennett', but later his religious leanings proved troublesome. She later confessed to Hartland that 'I am not at one with him in my deductions and I am afraid of his thinking' and she felt that '[s]ome of Mr Dennett's deductions are difficult to march to Coventry with ... and he never got Noah's Ark out of his mind.'¹⁸⁷

Kingsley explained to Gwynn that Dennett reminded her of a character in Robert Louis Stevenson's recently published story, *The Ebb-Tide*.¹⁸⁸ This character, Attwater, was a zealous Christian man, who was single-handedly managing a group of "natives" on a desert island to produce tropical goods for export.¹⁸⁹ He was eager for religious conversions that were accompanied by hard work. Attwater believed that '[a] man has

¹⁸⁵ Kingsley, Mary. 'Introduction' in Dennett, *The Folklore of the Fjort*, London: The Folklore Society, 1898, pp. i- xxxi.

¹⁸⁶ Gwynn, 1933, p. 49.

¹⁸⁷ Gwynn, 1933, p. 49 and Letter from Kingsley to Hartland, 5 Jan. 1897.

¹⁸⁸ Stevenson, R. L. *The Ebb-Tide: A Trio and a Quartette*, London: Heinemann, 1894.

¹⁸⁹ Kingsley remembered the character as 'Attwood'; in the publication Stevenson named him as 'Attwater'.

to stand up in God's sight and work up to his weight' before thinking of salvation, and he had a robust idea of religion, saying 'religion is a savage thing, like the universe it illuminates, savage, cold, and bare, but infinitely strong'.¹⁹⁰ Attwater loved nothing more than a 'true penitent' and when strangers were washed up on his island he put pressure on them to 'Come, come to the mercy seat!'¹⁹¹ He emanated discipline and order, class-consciousness and religious zeal.

Kingsley clearly saw some parallel with Dennett's religious ardour but she told Gwynn that Attwater 'is not Dennett's photograph because Dennett is a dreamer'.¹⁹² Dennett, she suggested, was prone to imaginative but unrealistic hopes, and held a gentler and less rigid interpretation of salvation. Despite Dennett's distortions of the African supernatural system that she called "fetish", Kingsley had wanted to support him. She felt his knowledge had been drawn on unfairly by other traders. 'Mr Dennett has been so ill-used by the other traders who have sucked his brains out and never mentioned his name'.¹⁹³ Kingsley described Dennett as 'a poor man working hard in a wicked climate' and she was sure his ethnographic research was worthy of publication.¹⁹⁴

Dennett was certainly encouraged by Kingsley's interventions on his behalf. He was grateful to her for introducing him to Hartland. He wrote Hartland a long letter of appreciation in March 1897. In this he explained how much he felt the lack of scholarly support in his research:

¹⁹⁰ Stevenson, 1894, p. 150.

¹⁹¹ Stevenson, 1894, p. 232, p. 155.

¹⁹² Gwynn, 1933, p. 49. (The date of Kingsley's original letter to Gwynn not given.)

¹⁹³ Letter from Mary Kingsley to E. S. Hartland, from Addison Road, 4 January 1897. National Library of Wales, *E. Sidney Hartland Archive*, 6819B.

¹⁹⁴ Letter from Mary Kingsley to E. S. Hartland, from Addison Road, 3 May 1897. National Library of Wales, *E. Sidney Hartland Archive*, 6819B.

What I felt I needed was ... someone who had the time to spare to sympathise with me in the difficulties and to guide me in the study of the people. I write and pop the letter in the post; the letter is acknowledged and there I remain, wondering if I have added anything of interest to the world's knowledge.¹⁹⁵

However Kingsley and Hartland were both uncomfortable about including Dennett's personal interpretations when presenting his knowledge of BaVili 'folklore'. This was a problem for Dennett. While he agreed with Hartland that the 'observed facts' should be kept separate from his own interpretations, he also believed that his theories were 'well founded'.¹⁹⁶ He explained that that he was not a Folklorist looking to record mankind's earliest ideas in the forms of magic and superstition: 'I did not begin my work as a Folklorist but as a searcher after Truth and an honest Negrophile' he explained; 'all that I collected was more that I should know Fiote [the Fjort] and myself better than that I should accumulate Folklore'.¹⁹⁷ Since Dennett felt he was 'now getting near to the philosophy contained in Fiote's language and actions', he was unwilling to detach his own interpretations from his data.¹⁹⁸

In this Dennett was running counter to Harry Hamilton Johnston's dictum of 1889 that:

It is the duty of every civilised traveller in countries newly opened up to research to collect facts, pure unvarnished facts, for the information of those leading minds of the age, who by dint of great experience, can ably generalise from the details contributed from diverse sources.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Letter from Richard Dennett to E. S. Hartland, from Loango, 10 March 1897. National Library of Wales, *E. S. Hartland Archive*, 16894B.

¹⁹⁶ Letter from Dennett to Hartland, 10 March 1897.

¹⁹⁷ Letter from Dennett to Hartland, 10 March 1897. (Dennett normally used the spelling Fjort; he probably used Fiote in this context in deference to Kingsley who preferred this way of spelling it.)

¹⁹⁸ Letter from Dennett to Hartland, 10 March 1897.

¹⁹⁹ Royal Geographical Society. *Hints to Travellers*, London: Clowes, 1889, p. 398. Johnston's remark is cited in Urry, 1972, p. 45.

Dennett freely acknowledged that he had not approached his anthropological research with scientific objectivity, but as a philosophical ‘searcher’.²⁰⁰ He believed that, after a seventeen-year long search, he had begun to uncover evidence in BaVili thought which represented ‘an age of high culture and mythological tendencies’. This proved to him their connection with ‘the primitive race mentioned in Genesis’.²⁰¹

Despite Hartland’s kindness and support, Dennett was not ready to abandon the theories he had so carefully constructed about the depths of BaVili philosophy.²⁰² Dennett held fast to his position believing that ‘all this is very beautiful and Fiote will someday be grateful to me for having dived through his fetishism and declared *Nkici-ism*, [sic] even if all the philosophers and learned men in Europe refuse today to acknowledged all the great work I have been fortunate enough to have thrown in my way’.²⁰³

Kingsley disagreed with Dennett’s attempts to align what he saw as the “higher” aspects of this philosophy with western moral values. She told the secretary of the Folklore Society that ‘[m]y point of view and Mr Dennett’s is different. I regard him as sentimental about Fjorts, he regards me as shocking materialist’.²⁰⁴ Indeed she once expressed her frustration at Dennett to Hartland saying: ‘there are moments when I think Allah could have made a greater fool but being merciful etc., he has not’.²⁰⁵ A sign of how far her values departed from Dennett’s was provided when she suggested to Hartland that Dennett’s book could be dedicated to Henry Morton Stanley, in order to

²⁰⁰ Letter from Dennett to Hartland, 10 March 1897.

²⁰¹ Letter from Dennett to Hartland, 10 March 1897.

²⁰² Letter from Richard Dennett to Mary Kingsley, from Loango, 6 July 1897. National Library of Wales, *E. Sidney Hartland Archive*, 6819B.

²⁰³ Letter from Dennett to Kingsley, 6 July 1897.

²⁰⁴ Letter from Mary Kinglsey to F. A. Milne, from Addison Road, 29 August, 1897, National Library of Wales, *E. Sidney Hartland Archive*, 6819B. Kingsley pointed out that they differed in thinking about the spiritual past of the ‘Fiort’ and their ‘relationship to Adam’, and she belittled what she saw as Dennett’s ‘reminiscences of the ark and so on’.

²⁰⁵ Letter from Mary Kingsley to E. S. Hartland, from Addison Road, 1 January 1898. National Library of Wales, *E. Sidney Hartland Archive*, 6819B.

ensure greater sales. ‘You will think I am a mercenary soul’ she confessed ‘but I catch it from associating with Liverpool and Antwerp men’.²⁰⁶ The divergence in their thinking was never resolved, but Dennett’s admiration for ‘Miss Kingsley’ remained constant, and even in his last months of life his letters were about her inspiration.²⁰⁷

Widening Circles.

Despite her difference in outlook, Mary Kingsley’s influence on Dennett was lasting. Not only did he spend the rest of his life reflecting on their shared ideas about the African people and the best methods of European government in Africa, but through Kingsley, Dennett was introduced to new circles of influence in Britain. Kingsley’s studious approach to “fetish and fish” had led her to make contact with highly-respected specialists. In 1894 she had appealed to E. B. Tylor in Oxford, and to the ichthyologist, Albert Charles Günther at the British Museum, for advice about her travels and collections.²⁰⁸

Following the success of her book *Travels in West Africa*, Kingsley made the acquaintance of many further eminent people; writers, politicians, business-men and colonial officers, with whom she engaged in debates over trade, taxes and colonial policy. In 1897, she also met E. D. Morel who was then still a little-known reporter. She supported him by finding publishers for his articles and by introducing him to her

²⁰⁶ Letter from Mary Kingsley to E. S. Hartland, from Addison Road, 4 July 1898. National Library of Wales, *E. Sidney Hartland Archive*, 6819B.

²⁰⁷ In January 1921 Dennett asked Macmillan to publish ‘*The Soul in Sound*’ and in April, to publish ‘*Self and Universal Order*’ which, he said, ‘really sums up the task Mary Kingsley gave me to do’. Letter from Richard Dennett to George Macmillan, from St. Albans Villas, Highgate, 23 April 1921. University of Reading Special Collections, *Macmillan Archive*, 87/75. One of these last texts has been traced: *The Soul in Sound* manuscript now can be found at the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, *Dennett MSS*.

²⁰⁸ Frank, 1987, p. 227, p. 95.

friends in politics.²⁰⁹ An acquaintance with whom she locked horns was Flora Shaw, later Lady Lugard, who was at that time Colonial Editor of *The Times*.²¹⁰ Kingsley's personal friendship with Alice Stopford Green introduced her to further circles of influence at Stopford Green's salons.²¹¹ Stopford Green was later to be instrumental in arranging the formation the African Society to encourage academic study and improve governmental policies in Africa.²¹² When Kingsley died from enteric fever in a Boer prisoner-of-war hospital in South Africa in 1900, Stopford Green saw to it that

...friends of a very different life and condition, who would otherwise never have met, have been drawn together by a common remembrance ... and, fulfilling the wish that for the last three years of her life was nearest her heart, have founded in her memory the African Society.²¹³

Dennett became a member of the African Society and it allowed him to develop his ideas in the company of some significant Africanists. He was able to publish many articles on a range of subject matter connected with Africa in the society's journal. These publications included ethnographic research as well as his interpretations of

²⁰⁹ Frank, 1987, p. 262.

²¹⁰ Frank, 1987, pp. 232-233; p.263. Dennett later quoted Shaw in the beginning of his book, *At the back of the Black Man's Mind*. The quotation read: 'It may happen that we shall have to revise entirely our view of the Black races, and regard those who now exist, as the decadent representatives of an almost forgotten era rather than as the embryonic possibility of an era yet to come'. See Dennett, 1906, facing p. 1. The source of Shaw's quotation is not given.

²¹¹ Alice Stopford Green would entertain guests such as Winston Churchill, Florence Nightingale, Roger Casement and Henry James. See Frank, 1987, p. 235. She was also apparently the last person to visit Roger Casement in prison. Birkett, 1992, p. xx.

²¹² Birkett, 1992, pp. 129-130

²¹³ Stopford Green, Alice. 'Mary Kingsley.' *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 1, no. 1, (1901), p. 2. Kingsley had responded to an appeal for nurses to go to help in the war against the Boers in 1899. She had arrived in Cape Town in March 1900. Stopford Green indicated that Kingsley hoped to make a very full collection of the fishes of the Orange River' while she was there. Stopford Green, 1901, p. 5. In April Kingsley was sent to nurse in the Palace Barracks in Simonstown, but contracted typhoid and succumbed to the disease by June. Birkett, 1992, pp. 160-163. The Anthropological Institute also acknowledged Kingsley's passing. In the President's address of 1901, C. H. Read noted Kingsley's skills and successes and said that a fund in her memory would be used partly to support 'the collection of native history tradition and religious or superstition ideas' and that a contribution would also go to the Liverpool Hospital for Tropical Diseases. See Read, Charles Hercules. 'Presidential Address. Delivered at the Anniversary Meeting of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 4th February, 1901.' *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 31, (1901), p. 19.

African languages, but they also covered issues such as ‘Land Laws in the Western Province of Southern Nigeria and Agricultural Progress in Nigeria’.²¹⁴

Dennett could now share ideas with influential friends and acquaintances of Kingsley. He was in the milieu of such eminent people as John Holt, Stephen Gwynn, Claude MacDonald, George MacMillan and the society’s founder, Stopford Green.²¹⁵ He also met powerful politicians, geographers and academics. Dennett’s old firm (and Holt’s competitors) Hatton and Cookson were represented by E. H. Cookson, while Alfred Jones of the Elder Dempster line and the Bank of West Africa, was also a member of influence.²¹⁶

Through the *Journal of the African Society*, Dennett had an opportunity to disseminate his knowledge of indigenous customs and social organisation in Africa, to an audience that counted A. C. Haddon, W. H. R. Rivers, Henry Balfour and J. G. Frazer among its members.²¹⁷ The linguist Alice Werner was also active in the society and although she and others often received his work with scepticism, Dennett was able to voice his sometimes controversial ideas through the mouthpiece of the *Journal of the African Society* for the rest of his life.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘Notes on the Land Laws in the Western Province of Southern Nigeria.’ *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 9, no. 34, (1910), pp. 129-145; Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘Agricultural Progress in Nigeria.’ *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 18, no. 72, (1919), pp. 266-289.

²¹⁵ Fage, J. D. ‘When the African Society Was Founded, Who Were the Africanists?’ *African Affairs*, Vol. 94, no. 376, (1995), pp. 369-381.

²¹⁶ Fage, 1995, p. 376. An indication of some of the people Dennett made connections with after 1903 can be found in the photograph album whose back inside cover served as a record of visitors to ‘Cherry Croft’, the Morel’s home in 1914. Dennett’s name appears next to that of William A. Cadbury’s and above Alice Stopford Green’s. John Holt made the first entry in the list. See Morel, Edmund Dene. Photograph album recording Morel’s visit to Nigeria as a Special Correspondent for *The Times*, 1911, London School of Economics, *E. D. Morel Archive*, ref. Morel F1/8/11.

²¹⁷ Haddon and Rivers were also Fellows of the Royal Society; Frazer was a fellow of the Royal Society and the British Academy. (Fage, 1995, p. 377).

²¹⁸ When Dennett left the colonial service to retire to London in 1918 he was able to keep up with influential Africanists such as Werner and Johnston at the dinners and lectures at the African Society. In 1921 Johnston contributed to Dennett’s obituary and recalled his astonishment at finding a trader in the

Dennett also passed on his ideas through the Folklore Society. During the collaboration in which Kingsley, Dennett and Hartland produced *The Folklore of the Fjort*, Dennett had begun to publish in the society's journal, *Folklore*. Some of his most useful writing on the material and spiritual culture of the BaVili was published as *Bavili Notes in Folklore* in 1905.²¹⁹ By attending meetings of the society when he was back on leave Dennett could disseminate his ideas and meet with other interested students of non-western cultures.²²⁰ Through the society's Folklore Collection at Cambridge, Dennett was also connected with Haddon who served twice as the President of the Folklore Society.

Dennett's friendship with Hartland bore further fruit when Hartland proposed Dennett's name for election to the Anthropological Institute in 1904.²²¹ This placed Dennett in the institution at the forefront of anthropological discussion and research. The Institute allowed Dennett to be kept aware of developments arising in anthropology. For example, what became known as 'the most progressive and profitable movement in the whole history of British Anthropology' had been undertaken by the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Straits in 1898-1899.²²² Haddon's Expedition

distant outpost of Cabinda who had already, after only two years in Africa, 'put together some remarkable vocabularies of Loango dialects'. Johnston also remembered two other aspects of Dennett which were to permeate all aspects of his life and work: his 'advanced views on the policy of the European toward the African' and 'his intelligent appreciation of the Bantu family'. 'A. C.' and Harry Hamilton Johnston. 'Obituary for R. E. Dennett.' *Journal of the Royal African Society* Vol. 20, no. 80 (1921), pp. 307-308.

²¹⁹ See Dennett, 1905(a).

²²⁰ He was present, for example, when the missionary John Weeks presented his collection of 'fetish figures' to the Folklore Society and gave a paper on 'The Congo Medicine Man and his Black and White Magic' in 1910. See Dorson, Richard M. *The British Folklorists*, (1968), London: Routledge, 1999, p. 367; and Weeks, John H. 'The Congo Medicine-Man and his Black and White Magic.' *Folklore*, Vol. 21, no. 4, (1910), pp. 447-471.

²²¹ Permission was granted to add the word 'Royal' to the *Anthropological Institute's* name in 1907 and it was hoped that through the 'practical application' and 'imperial function' of anthropology' the subject would be better understood than it had been in the past. 'Anthropological Institute: Augmentation of Title.' *Man*, Vol. 7, (1907), p. 112.

²²² Keith, Arthur. 'Presidential Address. On Certain Factors Concerned in the Evolution of Human Races.' *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 46, (1916), p. 25.

had introduced a new approach to ethnographic and scientific research. Instead of the amateur ethnologist working alone and attempting to cover a range of subjects, this project had employed six men to collect information in their own specialist field.²²³ The increasing professionalisation of the discipline would have been noted by the amateur ethnographer, Dennett.

Dennett's election to the Anthropological Institute was seconded by T. A. Joyce who referred to Dennett in 1908 as 'my friend R. E. Dennett, well known as an authority on West African ethnology and folklore.'²²⁴ Joyce may also have been the person who introduced Dennett to the anthropologist, Northcote Thomas, who helped with Dennett's book *At the Back of the Black man's Mind* in 1906. Thomas was working with Joyce at the British Museum in 1904 because Thomas, Joyce and C. H. Read were collaborating with Emil Torday over a new methodology for collecting for the museum from the Congo Free State.²²⁵ As an employee of the Kasai Company, Torday was in a good position to gather objects and information from communities around the Kwilu river basin in the southern region of the Congo State. Joyce and Thomas worked with Torday to formulate strategies for comprehensive collection of data which would include objects, photographs, and sketches. Torday was also equipped to gather sound recordings using a phonograph.²²⁶

²²³ 'Dr Haddon was responsible for the physical measurements and observations; he also recorded the manners and customs, legends, and other geographical data, as well continuing his previous studies on the decorative art of British New Guinea: Dr. W. H. R. Rivers organised the researches on experimental psychology, he himself taking all the observations on vision; Dr. C. S. Myres experimented on smell, hearing and reaction time; Dr. W. McDougall ... made observations in tactile sensibility ... Mr. S. H. Ray devoted himself to linguistics; and Dr. Seligman chiefly studies local pathology, native medicine, and collected some of the animals and plants that are utilised by the natives.' See 'The Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Strait and Sarawak.' *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 14, no. 3, (1899), pp. 302-306.

²²⁴ Joyce, T. A. 'Note on the Relation of the Bronze Heads to the Carved Tusks, Benin City.' *Man*, Vol. 8, (1908), p. 2.

²²⁵ Mack, John. *Emil Torday and the Art of the Congo, 1900-1909*, London: British Museum, 1990.

²²⁶ Mack, 1990, p. 29-31.

Thomas assisted with the design of the questionnaire to be used by Torday and other expatriates in the field. It was based on the earlier questions in *Notes and Queries in Anthropology*.²²⁷ At the same time Thomas helped Dennett to edit his book.²²⁸ Thomas probably introduced Dennett to such ideas as telepathic hypnotism and crystal gazing.²²⁹ Dennett was certainly aware of such ideas, because he later made reference to ‘mental telepathy’ being widely accepted in 1913.²³⁰ Haddon described these subjects as ‘psychical research’ and included them in the ‘Comparative Psychology’ chapter of his *History of Anthropology*.²³¹ He agreed that they were ‘universally recognised as furnishing fields for scientific study’.²³² Indeed, Haddon cited Andrew Lang in this regard, who had gone as far as to argue that the discipline of anthropology would not be complete if these subjects remained neglected.²³³

A few years after Dennett went to Nigeria, Thomas was also employed there. He became an official Government Anthropologist for the Nigerian Colonial Office in 1908.²³⁴ Like Torday he used questionnaires, photography and wax cylinders to record

²²⁷ Mack, 1990, p. 29.

²²⁸ Dennett thanked him for ‘his patience in wading through the manuscript’ of *At the Back of the Black Man’s Mind* and for ‘removing irrelevant matter’ (Dennett, 1906, p. vii.). Dennett joked that ‘his readers will probably join him’ in thanking the anthropologist for reducing the size of the volume. However Alice Werner’s review of this book in 1907 suggested that the editing had probably caused some ‘want of connection’ in the text. Werner, A. ‘Anthropology and Administration.’ *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 6, no. 23, (1907), p. 282.

²²⁹ Regarding his less mainstream ideas see: Thomas, Northcote Whitridge. *Crystal Gazing, Its History and Practice: With a Discussion of the Evidence for Telepathic Scrying*. London: Moring, 1905 and Thomas, Northcote Whitridge. *Thought Transference: A Critical and Historical Review of the Evidence for Telepathy*, London: Moring, 1905. See also Kuklick, Henrika. *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885- 1945*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 200-201.

²³⁰ Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘A Common Basis of Religion, [sic] Part I: Or, the Order in Genesis One with the Order in the Categories in West Africa. *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 12, no. 47, (1913(a)), p. 256. Dennett noted that Europeans would not believe in such a thing as telepathy ‘until by infinite pains and study we have proved them to be true and worthy of belief’, but ‘the native of the West Coast of Africa is a natural philosopher’, who ‘could hear the voice of his mother a hundred miles away’. Dennett, 1913(a), p. 256.

²³¹ Haddon, 1910, p. 80.

²³² Haddon, 1910, p. 80.

²³³ Haddon, 1910, p. 80.

²³⁴ Kuklick, 1991, p. 199.

the sounds and sights of African societies.²³⁵ However he was apparently single-minded about the subjects he studied, and soon fell out of favour with the colonial authorities. George Stocking has shown how Thomas did not co-operate with the government in Nigeria but ignored his job description and used government time to research the Edo and Ibo languages.²³⁶ The fact that Thomas ‘lived on vegetables’ and was ‘generally a rum person’ was enough to mark him out in the Colonial Office as a ‘recognised maniac’.²³⁷ Anthropology, as conducted by Thomas, was perceived as ‘going about and poking into the private affairs of the native communities’.²³⁸ Thomas’ situation was markedly different from that in which Dennett had begun his own studies, and it illustrates the transition that anthropological research had gone through, by the start of the twentieth century.

Summary.

This chapter has traced the networks that Dennett developed as a result of his activity as a collector in the Congo between 1879 and 1902, and has situated Dennett’s collecting within the practice of fellow traders, collecting for European museums. It has identified the parallels between his collections and those of Anton Greshoff who supplied the museums in Holland, and with Robert Visser who collected for Germany. The analysis has shown that museums in continental Europe gave significantly more recognition to their ethnographic collectors than museums in Britain did, and amassed large collections as a result.

²³⁵ There are a large number of sound recordings by Thomas in the British Library, while a collection of his photographs may be found in the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

²³⁶ Stocking, George. W. Jnr., ed. *After Tylor*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995, pp. 377-378. Thomas was transferred to Sierra Leone by Frederick Lugard in 1912 but continued to stimulate controversy by blaming the rise in aggressive ‘Leopard Societies’ there on pressures brought about by colonialism. See Stocking, 1995, p. 378.

²³⁷ Flood, J. E.W. ‘Minutes of 19 December 1930’, Colonial Office 583.176.X1005 (30), *Public Record Office*, quoted in Kuklick, 1991, p. 201.

²³⁸ Flood, in Kuklick, 1991, p. 201.

When Arnold Ridyard began his extensive collections for the Liverpool, Salford and Manchester museums, the commercial agents on the coast had already recognised Dennett's expertise in the field of ethnography, and his opinion was sought after and respected. At the same time, Dennett's knowledge of BaVili "folklore" was discovered by Mary Kingsley, and through her interest and support Dennett was able to publicise his ideas to a wider audience through the Folklore Society, and thereafter, through the African Society.

The chapter has also assessed the circumstances surrounding the collection itself during this period. The curators who interpreted Dennett's collection during his lifetime were both natural historians, and the ethnographic collections were arranged in line with the prevailing paradigms which connected notions of race with theories of evolution. These paradigms were also seen to be at work in the museums of Liverpool, and London (Horniman), while in Leiden, specimens of skulls and bones were used to supplement collections of material culture to support this thesis. In Exeter the classificatory model that had been established for ethnographic material remained in place for more than twenty years. Even when the African Collections were re-evaluated 1931, the consultant reiterated out-dated notions about the 'savage' life of the 'primitive' African.²³⁹

While Dennett appears to have made no further donations to the RAMM after 1889, his connection with the Folklore Society led to his involvement with a collection of "charms" from French Congo which was accessioned in Cambridge in 1900. These formerly had no donor specified, but the argument has been presented here for this

²³⁹ See also Pole, 2001, p. 358, concerning the 'grossly distorted efforts of Withers-Gill' with regard to the Dennett Collection.

being a second Dennett collection. Unlike the RAMM Dennett Collection, this collection was intended for a society with specialist interest, and it was destined for a museum which was associated with the early development of academic anthropology. Dennett's influence had therefore shifted from the regional museum and its eclectic collections, to the University Museum with an Anthropologist at the helm. His collecting, however, seems to have stopped at this point. Within a few years of leaving the Congo Dennett witnessed Emil Torday's collecting expeditions in the Congo, conducted in partnership with the British Museum; and Northcote Thomas' appointment as anthropologist for the British colonial government, in Nigeria. With the arrival of such trained and financially supported specialists in the field, Dennett turned his attention away from collecting material culture. He began to focus on languages, colonial policy and his new role as a forester: the trader's contribution to museum collections apparently ended with his departure from the Congo.

Chapter Six. *Invisible Powers.*

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect back on the findings from the previous five chapters and to consider how this research might find practical application in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM). The thesis set out to uncover some of the hidden histories connected with the Richard Dennett Collection and to consider the multiple interpretations or meanings that have been attached to this group of nineteenth-century BaKongo artefacts. The earlier chapters have engaged with these histories and interpretations through the documentation that dates from the time the collection was made. However, because this is a collaborative project concerned to examine current day practice as well as the original collecting context, this chapter will return to some of the issues that were raised in the introduction to the thesis and will examine some recent curatorial strategies to help to situate the research within a present-day practical domain.

From its inception this collaborative project was planned to include an exhibition which would present some aspects of the research to the public in a temporary display in the World Cultures gallery at the RAMM. This strategy was intended to provide an opportunity for the researcher to share the ideas arising from the study with a wider museum community. It would also to allow the student to gain experience in the museum itself. Through this practical collaboration the museum would learn more about one of its collections, while the researcher would learn practical curatorial skills in the museum.

It was not intended that the exhibition would be included in the assessed research since its opening would take place after submission of the thesis, as the RAMM was closed for re-development between 2007 and 2011. The proposal that follows is intended as a

stimulus for a deeper exploration of the discourses that accompany the presentation of African collections in western museums today.

In order to set the exhibition proposal in the context of contemporary museological practice this chapter will first look at recent developments in the representation of African collections in museums. The second part will then focus on the ways that the Dennett Collection research might be applied at the RAMM.

Curatorial Choices and the Post-Museum.

The impact of postmodern epistemologies on museums has been analysed by Eileen Hooper Greenhill, who has identified three main themes which characterise what she has called the ‘post-museum’.¹ These are: a shift from the museum as a site of authority to a site of mutuality; a change in thinking about the way that learning is constructed; and an application of analysis arising from material and visual cultural studies. A Foucauldian foundation to her ‘bricolage’ of theories means that the post-museum is envisioned as being politically aware, and alert to who has power over whom, by what means, and for what purposes.² Traditionally the museum was didactic in presentation and authoritative in stance; postmodern ideas have led institutions to view their own meta-narratives with scepticism. In the post-museum, curators inspect their own systems and methods of control, and change them for processes which are collegiate and where authority is shared. In these collaborations the museum recognises its own role as a learner.

¹ Hooper-Greenhill sets the trope of the ‘post-museum’ against trope of the ‘modernist museum’.
Hooper-Greenhill, Eileen. *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 8.

² Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. x

Constructivist learning theories inform Hooper Greenhill's idea of the post-museum and the audience is understood to be active in the construction of meaning.³ Learning occurs when new experiences extend what a person already knows.⁴ For museums this implies that multiple meanings will be constructed in the galleries, with no viewers creating the same understanding from the material.⁵ It is therefore impossible for a museum to predict the reception of an exhibition and the curator must accept the provisional nature of museum interpretation. Nevertheless, constructivist learning is influenced by the context in which the learning happens and a curator has some choice over this.

To show that interpretations are not fixed but are dependent on context, Susan Vogel mounted the *Art/Artifact* exhibition in New York.⁶ Vogel manipulated the gallery space to show African objects in a variety of different settings. One setting represented an 'curiosity room' c.1905; another showed a 'Natural History Museum' with a diorama which showed models of Africans in a painted rural environment; a third room showed 'Art Museum Displays' (according to Vogel, like those she had made 'for the Rockefeller Wing at the Metropolitan Museum in the early 1980s'); and a fourth showed African objects in a 'clean white room ... displayed for their formal qualities only'.⁷ The different displays elicited varying responses and showed that African objects did not carry one single meaning, but that multiple meanings could be generated according to context. The exhibition was not intended to deliver certainties but rather to raise questions. Although African Art was on show, all the contexts reflected a western

³ Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 116-118. See also Hein, George. *Learning in the Museum*, London: Routledge, 1998, p. 34.

⁴ Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 116-118; Hein, 1998, p. 67.

⁵ Hein, 1998, p. 35. Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 108-111.

⁶ Vogel, Susan, ed. *Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections*, New York: The Center for African Art, 1988(a).

⁷ Vogel, Susan. 'African Art: Western Eyes' in Vogel, Susan, ed. *Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections*, New York: The Center for African Art, 1988(b), pp. 198-199.

worldview, and Vogel explained that the exhibition really examined ‘Americans rather than Africans’.⁸

Vogel’s exhibition drew attention to the ways that African artefacts were presented as “Fine Art”. This was an interpretation of African material that Boris Wastiau chose to challenge in his exhibition *ExitCongoMuseum: A Century of Art with/Without Papers*, at the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) in Belgium in 2000-2001.⁹ Like Vogel, Wastiau manipulated the museum context. He arranged the lighting of the exhibition and he positioned the African objects in the cases so that the display was deliberately ‘unsettling’ for those connoisseurs who visited the museum with expectations about how Congo “masterpieces” should be displayed.¹⁰ Wastiau used period photographs, documents, and subversive labelling of objects to force the audience to engage more consciously with the collection.¹¹ He chose to focus on some *Tabwa* carvings which had been part of a collection that had toured world-wide under the label of *Masterpieces from Central Africa or Hidden Treasures of the Tervuren Collection* between 1996 and 1998.¹² Wastiau wanted to ‘delaminate’ these pieces,

⁸ Vogel, Susan. ‘Always True to the Object, in Our Fashion’ in Karp, Ivan and Lavine, Steven, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1991, p. 193.

⁹ Wastiau’s exhibition, *ExitCongoMuseum. A Century of Art with/without Papers*, took place at the Royal Museum for Central Africa at Tervuren, Belgium, from 24 November 2000 to 24 June 2001. Boris Wastiau wrote about it in ‘The Scourge of Chief Kansabala: The Ritual Life of Two Congolese Masterpieces at the Royal Museum for Central Africa (1884-2001)’ in Bouquet, Mary and Porto, Nuno, eds. *Science, Magic and Religion. The Ritual Process of Museum Magic*, Oxford: Berghahn, 2005, pp. 95-115. See also Wastiau, Boris. *ExitCongoMuseum, An Essay on the Social Life of the Masterpieces of the Tervuren Museum*, Tervuren: Royal Museum for Central Africa, 2000.

¹⁰ Wastiau, 2005, p. 100. Wastiau explains that he borrows the term ‘unsettling the meaning’ from Anthony Shelton, who uses it in ‘Unsettling the Meaning: Critical Museology, Art, and Anthropological Discourse’ in Bouquet, Mary and Porto, Nuno, eds. *Academic Anthropology and the Museum: Back to the Future*, Oxford: Berghahn, 2001, pp. 142-161.

¹¹ Wastiau, 2005, p. 110.

¹² *Tabwa* live in the south-east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The exhibition, *Masterpieces from Central Africa or Hidden Treasures of the Tervuren Collection* was staged to commemorate the centenary of the founding of the RMCA in 1897. It travelled between 1996 and 1998 in Ottawa, Washington DC, San Francisco, Chicago, and many other venues across North America and Europe. In *ExitCongo* Wastiau exposed five layers of meaning from the *Tabwa* carvings, showing their first life as ritual objects within the *Tabwa* community, then as a trophies carried by Lt. Storms of the Africa International Association to his home near Brussels in 1885. After this the carvings were taken into the Tervuren museum, seen as

identifying the many meanings that had been applied to them since they left the Congo Free State in the hands of a colonial soldier in 1885.¹³ A succession of displays forced the objects to be seen as ‘trophies’, ‘fetishes’, ‘collectibles’ and ‘samples’ depending upon the surrounding material.¹⁴ Wastiau also drew attention to the political inequity of this period, exposing the museum’s connection with the often heavy-handed methods of appropriation and control that were exercised by both the government and the missionary regimes in the Free State and later in the Belgian Colony.

Another case where a curator deliberately manipulated the context in which African artefacts were set was the re-arrangement of the African Collections by Anthony Shelton at the Horniman Museum.¹⁵ Shelton and his co-curators stage-managed the setting in which the collections were shown in order to deliberately ‘convey a sense of alienation’.¹⁶ Shelton argued that this was an ‘essential’ way to acknowledge that the objects were ‘displaced, far removed from the conditions of their useage’ and to register that ‘masks without costumes’, ‘figures without shrines’ and ‘shrines without sacrifices’ could never be used to satisfy the totalising ‘survey’ that museums have attempted to achieve in the past.¹⁷ Raw, unfinished western building materials were used to set a stage for the objects and to reinforce the message that the objects had been irredeemably distanced from the conditions in which they were formerly used.¹⁸

national trophies until sensitivities changed in the 1950’s when they began to be seen as art and indeed as art ‘masterpieces’. See Wastiau, 2000 and 2005.

¹³ Wastiau, 2005, p. 97.

¹⁴ Wastiau, 2005, p. 111.

¹⁵ Shelton, Anthony. ‘Curating African Worlds’, in Peers, Laura and Brown, Alison, eds. *Museums and Source Communities*, London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 181-193.

¹⁶ Shelton, 2003, p. 187.

¹⁷ Shelton, 2003, p. 188.

¹⁸ Shelton, 2003, p. 188.

In all these examples, the curators acted as key agents, and did not see their roles to be acting as channels for factual information. In each case, choices were made about the contextualisation of collections which were based on an understanding of the viewer as an active agent in the construction of meaning. Taking an experimental approach and accepting an unknown outcome, these curators endowed exhibitions with a sense of theatre.

These curatorial activities were also collaborative. Wastiau co-curated *ExitCongo* with an artist, Toma Luntumbue,¹⁹ *African Worlds* involved a team of advisors, including partners in Africa, and contributions were also invited from the local London community.²⁰ This complex collaboration led Shelton to compare the curator's role to that of a 'producer/director', who moves between professionals and non-professionals, sources funding, shapes interpretations, and consults with designers, in order to bring a production into a coherent whole.²¹

A network of advisors was also created when the African collections at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington D. C. were re-interpreted, from 1993 to 1999.²² Mary-Jo Arnoldi has described how the process of exhibition consultation took six years and many different publics and specialists were consulted, both in the U.S.A and in Africa.²³ So inclusive and open was the consultation that the team numbered a hundred and twenty people at the start of the project.²⁴ The curatorial team eventually created a gallery space to reflect the variety of living African and African American

¹⁹ The contemporary art was curated by Toma Luntumbue. Wastiau, 2005, p. 98.

²⁰ Shelton, 2003, p. 186.

²¹ Shelton, 2003, p. 181.

²² Arnoldi, Mary Jo. 'African Voices: A Dynamic Collaboration between the Museum and Its Communities' in Yoshida, Kenji ed. *Representing African Art and Cultures*, Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2005, pp. 79-92.

²³ Mary-Jo Arnoldi, personal communication, 29 October 2008.

²⁴ Arnoldi, pers. comm., October 2008.

communities and which endeavoured to these communities a voice.²⁵ The displays are full of imagery, sound, and opinion, carried through photographs, objects, maps, recordings and interpretive panels.²⁶ As with Shelton's experience, the curator had to produce a cohesive visual and textual product by weaving together complex interactions between multiple agencies, at the same time as maintaining a regard for the communicative potential of the objects themselves.²⁷ Arnoldi explained that many complicated overlapping interests had to be satisfied in this team approach.²⁸

While the examples of Wastiau, Shelton, and Arnoldi invoke the idea of the curator as a co-ordinator, directing film, theatre, or art productions, Mary Nooter Roberts has also highlighted the need for a curator of African collections to be a translator.²⁹ Nooter Roberts argues that African artefacts are 'windows on to universes of thought' but because these 'universes' belong to an unfamiliar culture, the specialist skills of translation must be engaged to open them.³⁰ Nooter Roberts' exhibitions are an attempt to bridge the difference between the meanings that the objects once held for their original owners and the 'many-layered discourses they foster for their non-African audiences.'³¹ This is not an easy task, and direct translations, as earlier chapters have shown, are not readily found.³² Sometimes substitutions must be made by the translator, and these call for expertise in both languages. Nooter Roberts describes this as the ability to work 'in both directions at once' and she has experimented with ways to

²⁵ Arnoldi, pers. comm., October 2008.

²⁶ See website for the National Museum of Natural History, *African Voices*, accessed September 2008. <<http://www.mnh.si.edu/africanvoices/>>.

²⁷ Shelton, 2003, p.188 and p.181.

²⁸ Arnoldi, pers. comm., October 2008.

²⁹ See Nooter Roberts, Mary. 'Exhibiting Episteme: Exhibitions as Objects of Knowledge' in Yoshida, Kenji and Mack, John, eds. *Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Africa: Crisis or Renaissance?*, Woodbridge: James Currey, 2008, pp. 170-186.

³⁰ Nooter Roberts, 2008, p. 170. See also Wyatt MacGaffey's discussion of 'translation' and the need for ambiguity in MacGaffey, Wyatt. *Kongo Political Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, pp. 43-60.

³¹ Nooter Roberts, 2008, p. 171.

³² See discussion in Chapter Four.

explore the epistemologies of both the museum and the African source community, in her exhibitions such as *Secrecy: African Art that Reveals and Conceals* and *Memory: Luba Art and the Making of History* at the Museum for African Art, New York.³³

Nooter Roberts explains that ‘the exhibition becomes an ‘*active space for epistemological performance*’ [Nooter Roberts’ italics].³⁴

In another challenge to the traditional status of curatorship, Wastiau has recently taken up the mantle of the artist in his exhibition *Medusa: The African Sculpture of Enchantment*, at the Ethnographic Museum in Geneva, in 2008.³⁵ Curators have worked with contemporary artists as contributors or co-curators in ethnography exhibitions for some time, and artists like Fred Wilson are increasingly invited to make artistic interventions in museums.³⁶ However the idea of the ethnographic curator acting as artist is less common. His exhibition of sculpture and masks was created like an artwork and had enchantment at its heart. Wastiau has identified a parallel between making an exhibition and making an African ritual object, which he frames in Alfred Gell’s anthropological theory of art.³⁷ This explains the attraction and the power of art to be caused by the skilled and judicious use of the ‘technology of enchantment’.³⁸

Exhibitions, argues Wastiau, ‘function like rituals and can be analysed in the same terms as African sculptures’.³⁹ The curator acts on the audience through his or her use of

³³ Nooter Roberts, 2008, p. 172. *Secrecy: African Art that Reveals and Conceals* ran from February to August 1993 at the new premises of the Museum for African Art in Soho, New York. *Memory: Luba Art and the Making of History* also took place the Museum for African Art, New York between February and September 1996.

³⁴ Nooter Roberts, 2008, p. 172.

³⁵ *Medusa: the African Sculpture of Enchantment* ran at the Ethnographic Museum in Geneva between November 2008 and December 2009.

³⁶ For examples see Putnam, James. *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium*, (2001), London: Thames and Hudson, 2009.

³⁷ Wastiau, Boris. *Medusa: The African Sculpture of Enchantment*, Milan: Five Continents 2008, p. 11.

³⁸ See Gell, Alfred. ‘The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology’ in Coote, Jeremy and Shelton, Anthony, eds. *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1992, pp. 40-63. See also Gell, Alfred. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1998.

³⁹ Wastiau, 2008, p. 225.

technological skills just as the makers of the artworks had done in African society.⁴⁰

The curator could thus be likened to the *nganga* ‘who uses sculptures of *realia* and *naturalia* for his creations and juggles with metaphors and metonymy’.⁴¹ The curator, the artist, and the *nganga* are all operating a kind of “magic”.

A playful, ironic approach was taken at the *Tropenmuseum* in Amsterdam when the museum wanted to acknowledge the Dutch nation’s colonial history. Life-size models of human ‘archetypes’ in large display cases were displayed alongside the collections from the ‘Netherlands East Indies’.⁴² The waxwork-like figures are found “bottled” in glass cylinders in the gallery: a khaki-clad officer standing amongst tropical vegetation; an elegant female sitting in a domestic setting; and a seated gentleman wearing tropical whites and holding a pith helmet. [Fig.107.] The *Tropenmuseum*’s willingness to be self-analytical was also shown in the symposium it held in 2009 to consider the impact of the recently refurbished galleries and to debate the role of the ethnographic museum in a post-colonial age. Delegates at the symposium, ‘*Tropenmuseum for a Change!*’, were asked to reflect on the redisplays and to debate the future purpose of the museum.⁴³ Frank responses were forthcoming. For example, Okui Enwezor wondered if the very concept of an ethnographic museum should not be considered obsolete in a post-colonial world; and George Abungu felt that the displays in the African gallery had tried unsuccessfully to ‘move way from displaying the exotic’ and had introduced

⁴⁰ Wastiau explored the idea of the face of the Gorgon, which could freeze a victim who turned his gaze toward it. He compared this with Gell’s theory of artworks which had the power to enchant and trap an audience who looked at them. See Wastiau, 2008, p.16. Wastiau also played with the parallels between Medusa’s disembodied head and the African masks severed from their ‘bodies’ in museums. Wastiau, 2008, p. 21.

⁴¹ Wastiau, 2008, p. 230.

⁴² See Dartel, Daan van, ed. *Tropenmuseum for a Change! Present between Past and Future: A Symposium Report*, Amsterdam: *Tropenmuseum*, 2009, p. 48, plate 14: ‘Colonial theatre of historical archetypes. Netherlands East Indies.’

⁴³ Dartel, 2009, p. 1. The Museum’s major departments had been re-furbished between 1996 and 2008 under Susan Legêne.

‘contemporary chaos’ instead.⁴⁴ He felt these new displays of modern urban Africa did not successfully connect with ‘the ceremonial world’.⁴⁵

By its openness to dialogue and debate, and its willingness to listen and to adapt, the *Tropenmuseum* has proved its credentials as a post-museum. However Belgium’s colonial museum, the Royal Museum for Central Africa continues to be a target for bitter criticism.⁴⁶ The museum owes much of its vast collection to the period when Leopold II specifically requested that evidence of the wealth of his new possession should be brought back to be displayed in Tervuren. Although Guido Gryseels presented *Memory of the Congo* in the RMCA in 2005 to try to address the history of the colonial period, any intended transparency in the museum is undermined by the triumphalism of the original architecture and by the gilded sculptures by Arsène Matton which represent Belgium bringing ‘Civilisation’, ‘Security’, and ‘Prosperity’ to the Congo.⁴⁷ The sculptures by Herbert Ward, which have been described as the ‘erotic somatisation of Africa’ by Barbara Saunders, also compromise any attempts to deal openly with Belgium’s history in the former colony.⁴⁸

Wastiau’s *ExitCongo* exhibition was deliberately provocative about colonial history, but a less polemic approach to colonialism in the Congo was taken by Espen Waehle in his touring exhibition of 2005-2007. This has been translated in English as *Traces of Africa*.⁴⁹ The exhibition examined the colonial project in Belgian Congo through the

⁴⁴ Dartel, 2009, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁵ Dartel, 2009, p. 25.

⁴⁶ See in particular Saunders, Barbara. ‘Congo Vision’ in Bouquet, Mary and Porto, Nuno, eds. *Science, Magic and Religion: The Ritual Process of Museum Magic*, Oxford: Berghahn, 2005, pp. 75-94.

⁴⁷ Sculptures by Arsène Matton (1873-1953). A fourth gilded statue in the Tervuren Rotunda represents *Slavery* with an archetypal “Arab” as the slave dealer.

⁴⁸ Saunders, 2005, p. 75.

⁴⁹ *Traces of Africa* was known by various names as it toured Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. The exhibition catalogue was called ‘Kongospor: Norden i Kongo- Kongo i Norden’. When I saw it in Gothenburg in 2008, the exhibition was called ‘*Kongospår*’. See also associated publication: Tygesen,

activity of Scandinavians on the waterways and in the mission stations of the colony. Waehle's exhibition drew attention to the cross-currents of cultural influences under colonialism. *Traces of Africa* aimed to show 'Nordic Countries in the Congo and the Congo in Nordic Countries'.⁵⁰ European magazines, posters and products showed the influence of Congolese culture on Scandinavian fashion, music and interior design produced in the colonial period, while films, photos and artefacts showed the impact of the Europeans in the Congo. The abundant contextualising material included silent films of colonial and missionary life as well as photographs of steamships, contemporary books, comics, and rubber and ivory products. [Fig 108.] The silent imagery of the old missionary and government cine-films was countered by a colourful video and accompanying soundtrack which showed every-day scenes from a present-day Kinshasa street corner. [Fig. 109.]

This exhibition was frank about the imbalance of power during the colonial period but it also drew attention to the two-way relationships that developed between Scandinavia and the Congo during this era. Congo artefacts were surrounded by a mass of supplementary information which examined the mutual influence of the African and Scandinavian communities. Maps and illustrated timelines drew attention to historical events, woven in with Congo history, thus reducing the opportunities to situate the collections or their makers in an 'ethnographic present'.⁵¹ BaKongo ritual objects were

Peter and Waehle, Espen. *Kongospor: Norden i Kongo- Kongo i Norden*, Stockholm: Etnografiska Museet, 2007.

⁵⁰ See <<http://congo.natmus.dk/congospor-traces.htm>> for an outline of the project and related publications in English.

⁵¹ According to John Picton the ethnographic present 'denies both history and contemporary reality' to Africa 'while encouraging the invention of a "traditional" Africa that privileges certain social, ritual and visual practices at the expense of others'. Picton, John. 'In Vogue, or the Flavour of the Month: The New Way to Wear Black' in Oguibe, Olu and Enwezor, Okwui, eds. *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace*, London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 1999, p. 118. These ideas were also raised in his essay, 'Technology, Tradition and Lurex: The Art of Textiles in Africa', in Picton, John, ed. *The Art of African Textiles: Technology, Tradition, and Lurex*, London: Lund Humphries 1992, pp. 9-30. See also James Clifford who refers to 'ethnographic presents' in his discussion of the

displayed in alcoves on shelves in the exhibition as if they were seen in the informal environment of the homes of colonial agents.

Curators in the post-museum are not only anxious to address the history of colonisation through displays and debates; some also wish to assist source communities to attempt to decolonise the museum itself.⁵² The Pitt Rivers Museum has been particularly active in this sort of work, through its Relational Museum project.⁵³ This project recognises the importance of donor communities in the network of relationships which form ‘the mutually constitutive history of people and objects’ in the museum.⁵⁴ It uses strategies to resist the stereotype of ‘“us” studying “them”’.⁵⁵ Without engaging in such dialogue and co-operation with originating societies, a museum can appear to perpetuate a colonial stance of assumed superiority and ownership.

Shelton has noted that some collaborative processes with originating communities have been particularly successful in museums outside the British Isles. First Nation peoples in the Americas have been well-organised and influential while source communities in New Zealand, Oceania and Australia have also had success in gaining inclusion in curatorial consultations.⁵⁶ Small British museums cannot necessarily support projects which involve visits to source communities in other countries but many are forging

‘art-culture system’ in *The Predicament of Culture* in 1988. See Clifford, James. *The Predicament of Culture*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 228.

⁵² For examples, see Peers, Laura and Brown, Alison eds. *Museums and Source Communities*, London: Routledge, 2003.

⁵³ Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM) website for The Relational Museum, accessed 20/04/2011.

<<http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/RelationalMuseum.html>>

⁵⁴ PRM RelationalMuseum.

⁵⁵ PRM RelationalMuseum.

⁵⁶ Shelton, 2003, p. 184. The case studies in Peers and Brown’s book involved communities from British Columbia, Australia and Melanesia, India, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Alaska, Egypt, Alberta and the Torres Straits. Among these the only African example was Shelton’s ‘Curating African Worlds’ initiative, based in London, at the Horniman Museum.

successful partnerships abroad through the internet and are connecting with interest groups in modern urban communities at home.

While curators in the west have been exploring their responsibilities concerning museum artefacts, African museums have also been raising further questions about the identity of a museum itself, what constitutes a museum curator, and what makes a museum artefact. Four examples will serve to illustrate just a few of the issues that have been raised.

When a museum was opened at the Manhyia Palace Museum in Kumasi, Ghana in 1995 it was not possible to agree on what cultural objects could be put on display in the proposed display area for Asante artefacts. According to Enid Schildkrout many of these objects were ‘surrounded by history and by special proscriptions that enacted this history in performance contexts.’⁵⁷ Schildkrout has explained that these objects carried valuable and sacred memories for the Asante.⁵⁸ Therefore they could not be taken from the treasury, where they were kept under the care of designated palace officials, to be placed under the care of a secular curator, in the setting of a museum. Schildkrout described how, on the day before the building was ready for its official opening, there were no still Asante objects in the glass cases prepared for them.⁵⁹ Only on the morning of the ceremony did objects appear for the display; and in the evening they were promptly removed. Following the opening, replicas were made to be installed in the cases.⁶⁰ This solution satisfied the visitors and the guardians of the official regalia but it

⁵⁷ Schildkrout, Enid. ‘Royal Treasury, Historic House, or Just a Museum? Transforming Manhyia Palace, Ghana, into a Site of Cultural Tourism.’ *Museum Anthropology*, Vol. 22, no. 3, 1999, p. 22.

⁵⁸ Schildkrout, 1999, p. 22-23.

⁵⁹ Schildkrout, 1999, p. 23.

⁶⁰ Schildkrout, 1999, p. 25. The Manhyia Palace Museum was opened in August 1995. Schildkrout returned to the museum in 1997. Malcolm McLeod has also discussed these events and questioned the relevance of western models of the museum in Africa in McLeod, Malcolm. ‘Museums without

might puzzle a western audience, whose ideas about the value of museum exhibits are bound up with constructs of authenticity. The example of Kumasi Palace Museum highlights some of the continuing difficulties that are encountered in defining what an African museum is for, and what constitutes a museum object, or a curator. These are concerns that face museums worldwide, and are not restricted solely to those in Africa.

While the decision at the Manhayi Palace Museum was to display objects that were physical simulacra of missing museum pieces, the Gabon Ministry of Arts, Culture and Education presented virtual ones. The Virtual Museum of Gabon has been created to allow indigenous 'arts and traditions' to be visually and virtually "repatriated" through the medium of the worldwide web.⁶¹ In an online, state-of-the-art museum, the art treasures of Gabon are now available to a mass audience. The collections are introduced to the viewer by an "avatar" guide, who speaks English or French, to order. The displays include objects which had once been sold to artists, dealers or collectors in the west, but which are now reassembled in imaginary museum galleries. In this electronic form they can be examined by anyone who has access to the internet, guided by the authoritative voice of the state, through the virtual guide.⁶² The name on the virtual museum is the *Pavilion des Arts et Traditions, Musée du Gabon*. Entering the website is like entering the forests world of the James Cameron's film *Avatar* of 2009: the viewer passes through thick jungle, accompanied by animal and bird sounds, drumming and singing. The path leads deeper into the tropical forest crossing a river over a hanging bridge, and leading eventually to the modern museum.

Collections: Museum Philosophy in West Africa', in Knell, Simon ed. *Museums and the Future of Collecting*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999, pp. 22-29.

⁶¹ <http://gabon.novacomvipi.net/386_1285/edited_pages/XML_Directory/> accessed May 2009.

⁶² The museum, opened in 2006, is produced by the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Education of Gabon with *Gabon Telecom, Libertis* and *Total Gabon*.

A complete contrast is found in the District Six Museum in South Africa, where objects are very real, and very urban. The exhibits are also unlikely to be known to global art experts. Instead they resonate with personal meaning and deeply felt memories. Unlike Gabon's example, this museum was created in resistance to the state, by a local community who desired to preserve the memory of a once-lively neighbourhood, destroyed under apartheid. Material such as street signs, photographs, 'Whites Only' signs, and maps from the bull-dozed District Six area of Cape Town were gathered up and have been re-presented to the community, by independent individuals determined to preserve the memory of the society that was forcibly dispersed by the government.⁶³ The objects are not internationally famous art-works like those in the virtual museum, and they are presented to the visitor by a far-from-virtual guide, a living member of the community with personal memories of the district to share.

Another contrast to the Virtual Museum is found in the *Maloango* Museum in the Republic of Congo. This museum has no expensive technologies to draw on to return Congo's missing objects, such as those in the Dennett Collection, but it nevertheless aims to protect objects of cultural significance, and to preserve and present the indigenous cultural heritage of the republic for the community.⁶⁴ The museum houses its collections in what was, after 1952, the *Maloango*'s palace in Diosso, north of Pointe Noire on the Loango Coast.⁶⁵ [Fig. 110.] Like many small museums in Africa, it receives little financial support. The museum's collections include domestic furniture, agricultural tools, weapons, clothing, traditional forms of currency, musical instruments

⁶³ Museum visited in April 2002. See also <<http://www.districtsix.co.za>> accessed 31 July 2011.

⁶⁴ See <<http://www.congopage.com/Le-Musee-regional-Ma-Loango-de-Diosso>> accessed 22 April 2011.

⁶⁵ *Histoire de Loango Historique*, La Cours Royale, 2008, p. 8, on the website of the Loango Kingdom at <http://www.royaumeloango.org/images/stories/Historique_Loango.pdf>, accessed 13 September 2011. Recent reports indicate that the government is now investing more in tourism and the museum is one of the popular tourist sites. See <<http://www.globserver.com/en/press/congo-brazzaville-developing-its-tourism-industry>>, accessed 24 July 2011. The web presence of the museum has increased significantly in the course of this research.

and ‘objets de culte traditionnels’.⁶⁶ These include a number of carved figures and masks which are hung on the walls or placed on open shelves. Display boards present the history of the region and of the king, Moe Poaty III, who was the occupant of the palace after it was built in 1952 until he died in 1975.⁶⁷ The Palace was then turned into a museum which opened in 1982.⁶⁸ Photographs and archives also document the history of the colonial presence in the region and a number of panels portray the slavery from the Congo coast with text, maps and diagrams of slaving ships. Regularly visited by school and college students, the museum plays an important part in keeping the history and heritage of Loango alive for a new generation.

This brief review of a few African museums is not intended to represent the great diversity of museums and heritage of the continent. That would be too great a task for the present survey. When George Abungu and Lorna Abungu gave a talk on ‘The Challenges of Representation of Cultural Diversity and Heritage in Africa’ in 2007, they stressed the enormous variety of the continent before attempting to report on the place of museums within it.⁶⁹ The physical diversity of African land and townscapes, the range of the old and the young, the different architecture, religions, even the bio-diversity were important considerations which affected representation in museums.⁷⁰ In this discussion therefore, these few African museums cannot be representative of the continent, but have been used here to reinforce the observations that have been made

⁶⁶ This phrase is also the expression used by the curator of the museum, Joseph Kimfoko, who explained in personal communication that they are ‘*objets de culte traditionnel avec lesquels nous croyons à nos ancêtres*’ (email communication, 7 October 2009). Labels and objects on display may be seen on a video tour of the museum on <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xdo73t_pointe-noire-visite-du-musee-region_news> accessed September 2011

⁶⁷ *Histoire de Loango Historique*, p 3, p. 9.

⁶⁸ *Histoire de Loango Historique*, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Abungu, George and Abungu, Lorna. ‘The Challenges of Representation of Cultural Diversity and Heritage in Africa’, unpublished presentation, *ICOM General Conference*, Vienna, 2007.

⁷⁰ Abungu and Abungu reported that in 2007, 90% of the museums in Africa had been inherited from the colonial period, but that new developments were now arising from the local issues that closely affected specific African communities.

already, about the instability of the concept of the museum, and the fluidity of the way meaning, history or heritage are attached to objects.

John Mack has explained that African museums are increasingly ‘seeking to incorporate the “intangible” into their strategies and programmes’ and that expertise in the arenas of ‘both the tangible and the intangible’ is being developed.⁷¹ This challenges traditional western classification methods which attempt to fix meanings to objects, a methodology that has been shown to be flawed both in African and in western museum situations. All the examples above have shown that a variety of divergent museological approaches have been emerging in recent years, and that further new alternatives will follow, since each proposal is specific to its own surroundings and conditions.

If objects do not have fixed meanings, then the places in which they are made available to us cannot be bounded by definitions either. Instead, as Hooper Greenhill has explained,

Museums can be seen as cultural borderlands where a range of practices are possible, a language of possibilities is a potential, and where diverse groups and sub-groups, cultures and sub-cultures may push against and permeate the allegedly unproblematic and homogenous borders of dominant cultural practices.⁷²

In this way curators or ‘museum workers’ become ‘border crossers, by making different narratives available, by bridging between disciplines, by working the liminal spaces that modernist museum practices have produced.’⁷³

⁷¹ Mack, John. ‘Museums and Objects as Memory Sites’ in Yoshida, Kenji and Mack, John, eds. *Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Africa: Crisis or Renaissance?*, Woodbridge: James Currey, 2008, p. 23.

⁷² Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 140.

⁷³ Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 140.

In the examples discussed above, curators took on many different roles: Vogel, Wastiau and Shelton demonstrated the contingent nature of interpretation, self-consciously stage-managing their displays; Arnoldi played the part of a peacemaker; Roberts a translator; and Wastiau (in Geneva), a magician. In Waehle's *Traces of Congo* and in the *Tropenmuseum*'s displays and symposium, recognition of colonial history was explicit. Relationships with living communities and with source communities were fostered in many of these instances.

What emerges strongly from this assessment of the different potentialities of exhibitions using African collections is the multiplicity of meaning that these artefacts can engender. Museum objects like Dennett's are, to quote Shelton, 'not bearers of discrete meaning but... interlocutors of praxiological possibilities'.⁷⁴ To recognise that 'museum objects are performative tools that are endlessly connotative, rather than static linguistic denominations that are determinative and narrowly denotative' is to acknowledge the activity of the person interacting with the object, and the individual construction of meaning that is performed in the encounter in the museum.⁷⁵

The Temporary Exhibition: *Invisible Powers*.

The following exhibition proposal recognises that museum objects can inspire a proliferation of meaning. It acknowledges the fluid nature of constructed meaning and the potential for audiences to derive multiple interpretations from an exhibition. Further threads from the previous discussion of museum methodology will also be found running through the proposal. For example the exhibition includes self-reflexivity, as the display draws attention not only to the artefacts but also to the museum itself; it also

⁷⁴ Shelton, Anthony. 'Museum Ethnography: An Imperial Science' in Hallam, Elizabeth, and Street, Brian, eds., *Cultural Encounters*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 185.

⁷⁵ Shelton, 2000, p.185.

examines the colonial context and the two-way relationships that Dennett observed in operation when the collection was made; and it engages with the idea of “translation” by looking for equivalent concepts in the different cultures.

Processes of power were identified in each of the fields which have been examined in the thesis (colonialism; indigenous government; material culture; and the world of museums and collecting). In each of these areas, power took different forms according to the culturally specific institutions. The first power to be examined in the thesis was the power which surrounded the colonising nations who vied for territory and raw materials in the Congo basin in the last decades of the nineteenth century. This power, which was authorised far from Africa, in the political conference rooms of Europe, brought conflict to Africans and Europeans alike, and led to atrocities under the concession companies at the end of the century.

A second power in the narrative was that which was known by the BaKongo to control every element of their lives; it arose from the world of the ancestors, and was connected with kingship and indigenous forms of government. Though valid to the Africans this power was disregarded by the colonisers who overturned chiefly authority in order to promote western business interests across the Congo. This supernatural BaKongo power could be misused in witchcraft and manipulated through objects and costumes such as those in the Dennett Collection. Thus the study revealed how the supernatural world was combined with day-to-day government in the objects that Dennett collected.

The third power came into play when these artefacts were brought to Europe, and placed under the authority of curators, often guided by anthropologists, natural historians and folklorists. The museum powers appropriated and re-interpreted the

African's material and spiritual world according to foreign methodologies of classification and display, and curators imposed interpretations upon the objects that were constructed around western ideas of progress and evolution.⁷⁶

These powers have been identified in the exhibition, *Invisible Powers: Richard Dennett and the Congo* (hereafter *Invisible Powers*).⁷⁷ *Invisible Powers* recognises that many other display methods are possible and multiple different approaches might have been used when planning this temporary exhibition. However the plentiful contextual material which has been uncovered in the thesis has prompted an exhibition which draws attention the normally absent or hidden histories connected with Dennett, the collection, and the RAMM.⁷⁸

The Exhibition Content.

The sources used in this thesis allowed several closely inter-connected contexts to be analysed in detail. To some extent the same methodology is applied in the temporary exhibition. Dennett's own writings and imagery are accessed to make a case-study of a unique collector; his collection; and the specific conditions of cultural contact that brought about the collection. James Clifford has proposed that '[i]deally the history of its own collection and display should be a visible aspect of any exhibition' and in this case, such a methodology is possible.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ These different authorities have been gathered under the title of *Invisible Powers*; however the "invisible power" theme proliferates, and can be extended to include, for example the power the objects themselves appear to exert and the technological power employed by the unknown artists who made these potent objects.

⁷⁷ The exhibition was scheduled to open at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum at the end of 2011, and to run for six months.

⁷⁸ This methodology is applied in this case to the Dennett collection, but it could apply equally well to any of the World Cultures collections whose histories may be 'hidden' from immediate view in the gallery.

⁷⁹ Clifford, 1988, p. 229.

The exhibition will be mounted in an “L” shaped display case which is dedicated to temporary displays from the World Cultures collections, in the Americas gallery in the RAMM.⁸⁰ The longer of the two cases will show selected pieces from the collection, mounted on plinths at varying heights. Small text captions will accompany each object at the base of the case, in the “house style” of the World Cultures gallery.⁸¹ Because some pieces are on permanent display in the Central Africa section of the gallery, only a portion from the complete Dennett Collection will be shown in *Invisible Powers*. For example, from the two canine *minkisi*, one will be chosen. The other will be on show in the permanent display case. Some pieces that are normally kept in storage will be presented in *Invisible Powers*, such as the *nkasa* bark, the nailed *nkisi* Ekawso, the net cape, and the small “cauldron” *nkisi*. [Figs. 38, 42, 75, 60].

The selection will be chosen to reflect kingship and community, spiritual power, and cultures in contact. The large *ndungu* costume cannot be displayed because it will be shown in the *Masters of Chaos* exhibition at the *Musée Quai Branly* from March 2012, but its significance will be indicated by an enlarged version of the lantern slide photograph of the collection at Ashton.⁸² Two-dimensional imagery will be an important part of the display. It will be arranged on the back wall, again with short explanatory labels. Images connected with European trade and colonial powers in French and Portuguese Congo and the Free State will be presented in one section of the long case, while another area will show the photographs that represent BaKongo

⁸⁰ The longest dimension of the front face of the display case is 2700mm. The shorter face is 1690mm. The depth is 890 mm and the total height is 2300mm. The exhibition is planned to open when the RAMM opens in December 2011 after its four year re-development.

⁸¹ These and other design issues have been discussed in a preliminary meeting with the museum designer, and the curator, in June 2011.

⁸² This *ndungu* is being prepared to be shown in Nannette Snoep’s exhibition, *Masters of Chaos*, at the *Musée Quai Branly*, opening in March 2012.

indigenous powers. All the images in the case will be contemporary with the period in which Dennett made the collection so that everything in the display is coherently connected with the historically specific period of Dennett's years in the Congo.⁸³

The smaller of the two cases will show imagery associated with the objects after they were moved from Africa to the museum, when they became subject to museum and anthropological discourses. Dennett's Ashton photograph acts as a bridge between these two contexts as it depicts the objects in transition, neither in Africa nor yet in the museum.⁸⁴ It also illustrates how the collector acted as the link between these incongruous worlds and draws indirect attention to Dennett himself. Because it was taken at his father's rectory outside Exeter, this photograph can be also indicate the connection between the collector and the county of Devon, a history which will be outlined in an introductory panel on the wall adjacent to the display case where the only picture that we have of Dennett will be shown.⁸⁵ This photograph, which was taken with Morel and H. N. Thompson in Southern Nigeria, dates from 1911, and so it is not included in the display case whose focus is on the Congo years, but it will be used in an external panel which introduces Dennett himself.

The temporary exhibition is planned to respond to the concerns that were raised earlier in the thesis, where it was noted that issues of "othering" have been particularly problematic for museums presenting African objects. The primitivist paradigm was shown to be particularly persistent in exhibitions where material from non-western cultures was presented with little or no contextualisation. Absence of historical

⁸³ An image of the old rectory at Ashton before it was burned down will be shown in a panel about Dennett's life on the wall outside the display case.

⁸⁴ This is a significant image on many levels as it also shows all the objects displayed together in one place, which has not occurred since this time as far as we know.

⁸⁵ This photograph has been uncovered in the process of this research, thanks to the archives of the LSE.

information or any explanation of the objects' social function was interpreted as a denial of the source communities' complex histories and a negation of their sophisticated social organisation. By leaving such information out of ethnographic displays the makers of the objects have been made to appear distant in both space and time; their historical identity obscured, and the artistic and technological decisions that were taken over each piece became veiled. In *Invisible Powers* an attempt is made to resist the "gravitational pull" towards these primitivist readings by emphasising the contextual history of the Dennett collection.

The research has uncovered a wealth of contemporary images and text which can allow the collection to be connected to its historical and cultural context through the collector. Some of the images were created by Dennett himself; others by his contemporaries. For example Robert Visser's photographs were taken when Visser was working for the *NAHV* near the Hatton and Cookson factories where Dennett worked.⁸⁶ Some of the reproductions of Visser's photographs were made into postcards which carry postmarks and these reinforce the specificity of the period that is represented in the exhibition.⁸⁷ Dennett's own photograph of Maniluemba also shows his "charms" and a pipe and a hat in use, which are like those which will be mounted in the display.

The century-old photographs of the ethnographic galleries at Exeter can also focus attention on the fact that Dennett made and presented his collection in the Victorian

⁸⁶ Visser was employed by the *NAHV* from 1882 to 1904. See Adler and Stelzig 2002, p. 41. His photography is also mentioned in several of the earlier chapters of this thesis (see Chapters Two, Four and Five).

⁸⁷ A postcard showing an *nganga* with his *bilongo* spread out before him allows *minkisi* such as those in the Dennett collection to be seen amidst the paraphernalia of the practitioner. See Eliot Elisofon Photo Archive (EEPA) CF. 18-1. An image of a Loango ivory carver on a postcard (EEPA CF4-3) similarly locates an object with its maker and has particular relevance to Dennett who had a commemorative ivory tusk carved for the Folklore Society in 1895 (see Chapter Five). Attention could be drawn to the European behind the camera lens in these pictures, to remind the viewer that these photos represent cultures are in contact in the colonial Congo.

past. Dated newspaper articles and copies of original journals from the Folklore Society and the African Society c1900, can also provide historical markers to emphasise the specific period that is under scrutiny in this exhibition.⁸⁸ The intention in the exhibition is to root all the material in the exhibition firmly in the past, so that the museological and colonial paradigms it presents are clearly connected with Dennett's day, and not to our own.

However there is a danger that this historically specific, self-reflexive method may create an imbalance of power and represent a dominant Eurocentric position, because the technologies of photography and print were in the hands of the European in the Congo at the time. While this is recognised as an inevitable consequence of the imbalance of power in this period it can infuriate those who wish to see a balanced African history in our museums.⁸⁹ But even if we were to acknowledge these long-standing BaKongo civilisations by offering Olfert Dapper's 1668 drawings of the King of Loango, for example, the drawings and prints would nevertheless represent a Eurocentric gaze, having been made by Europeans, for Europeans, using western iconography.⁹⁰ The African history is still told from the foreigner's standpoint.

The power of the museum and the power of colonialism are key themes in the story of the Dennett Collection but they are subjects that must be presented with care because of the jarring racist paradigms that prevailed at the time. The exhibition must be considerate in how it presents material connected with these histories. As Chapter Two

⁸⁸ These old images may also provide a provocative contrast with the newly designed galleries in the re-developed museum.

⁸⁹ See Takezawa, Shoichiro. 'Ethnological Museums and the (Un)Making of History' in Yoshida, Kenji. 'Ethnographic Museums Today' in Yoshida, Kenji and Mack, John, eds. *Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Africa: Crisis or Renaissance?*, Woodbridge: Unisa, 2008, pp. 187-198.

⁹⁰ See plate 164 in Blier, Suzanne Preston. *Royal Arts of Africa: The Majesty of Form*, London: Laurence King, 1998, p. 207.

made clear, Dennett was only too aware of the upheaval that colonialism in the Congo had caused, but, as a white trader, he was part of the system. From this position he observed, documented and criticised the chaotic appropriation of land which took scant regard for local people, their existing customs and their social structures. This narrative is not easily shown in visual form; indeed showing any imagery of colonial activity in Africa raises the risk of appearing to endorse or to valorise the colonial enterprise, a misinterpretation that was applied to Jeanne Canizzo's exhibition, *Into the Heart of Africa* at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto in 1989-90.

Rather than presenting contemporary colonial portraits of Stanley, de Brazza or Tippu Tib, for example, *Invisible Powers* can use Dennett's own images and contemporary postcards, drawings, and photographs to show the colonial presence in Africa.⁹¹ His books and slides provide images of the factories, the processes of purchasing raw materials, or the production of palm oil. The captions for these images can explain that palm oil was one of the products which had caused European nations to argue so aggressively for possession land in the Congo.

Stanley's dependence on the white traders could be indicated by the simple line drawing in *Through the Dark Continent* which shows Stanley's quarters at Cabinda after his rescue by 'those in charge of the English factory'. [Fig. 13.] As these lodgings were also the rooms that Dennett later approved for Mary Kingsley's use in 1893, the image could serve a dual purpose by introducing Kingsley's connection with Dennett into the exhibition as well. The partnership between Dennett and Kingsley would be referred to

⁹¹ Stanley, Henry M. *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*, Vol. 2, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1878, p. 468.

again by displaying Dennett's book, *The Folklore of the Fjort*, where Kingsley is acknowledged on its illustrated front pages as the writer of the introduction.⁹²

Hatton and Cookson's trade in ivory can be indicated by reproductions of postcards from the period which show disturbingly large consignments of elephant tusks being carried to the markets. Had it been feasible to borrow the Pitt Rivers Museum's ivory tusks that Dennett presented to the Folklore Society for the exhibition, then close-up images of the elephant hunt which are shown on the tusks could have been enlarged as another way to show this trade, through the workmanship of an African ivory-carver.

Posters advertising palm oil soaps, billiard balls and pneumatic bicycle tyres could be presented on the walls outside the display cases to indicate how valuable these products had become within modern society by 1890. The products that made modern Europe clean and modern were gained by methods that had become savage and inhumane. The history of colonial injustices under King Leopold II will be referred to in the text, and the photograph showing Dennett with Morel will be used to introduce the campaign for Congo Reform. A comparison of two maps could indicate the spread of French power over the region in less than twenty years: Mager's map of 1884 [Fig. 3] which shows no internal national boundaries, might be compared with the map from Morel's article on *The Position of British Merchants in the Congo*, which shows the reach of the concession companies less than twenty years later.⁹³ [Fig. 16.]

⁹² Dennett, Richard Edward. *The Folklore of the Fjort*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887(a), frontispiece.

⁹³ This map shows the location of Hatton and Cookson stations and the territories claimed by the French Concession companies. Morel, E. D. 'The Position of British Merchants in the French Congo.' *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 2, no. 5, (1902), pp. 38-43, facing p. 38.

The emphasis on the collector's history in *Invisible Powers* is intended to suggest that similar colonial collecting histories may be found behind many of the items in the World Cultures collections. Objects are normally expected to "speak for themselves", or for their originating communities in ethnographic museums, but it is important to remember that they also speak for the collector and they reflect the reasons for the different cultures being in contact at all when the objects were acquired.

Invisible Powers will be conceptually connected to the large new gallery that the RAMM is dedicating to the theme of collectors when it re-opens, called the Finders Keepers? gallery. This draws attention to several of the museum's key donors and their collecting practices.⁹⁴ The two exhibitions can therefore work together to prompt further reflection on the processes by which objects of all kinds are turned into museum artefacts and how museological methodologies adapt over time.

The BaKongo collection is entangled in a web of cultural interactions, events and histories that have processed the artefacts into museum objects, but *Invisible Powers* will also attempt to interpret some aspects of the objects' own agency in their original context. As the earlier chapters have shown, the activity of spirits in BaKongo culture is difficult enough to convey in a western vocabulary; it is made even harder in an exhibition where written text must be kept to a minimum.⁹⁵ It will be necessary to attempt to describe the cosmology, which is so unfamiliar to westerners, that directs the

⁹⁴ Among the collectors represented are Sir J. Bowring; Rev Henry Townsend; and W.S.M. D'Urban who was the first curator at the museum. For more about these, and other collectors who contributed to the RAMM ethnographic collections See Pole, Len. 'Relocating Each Other: Discontinuities at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, 1863-1999' in Shelton, Anthony, ed. *Collectors: Individuals and Institutions*, London and Coimbra: Horniman Museum and University of Coimbra, 2001, pp. 343-363.

⁹⁵ MacGaffey has discussed the difficulty of explaining such complex ideas on minimal museum labels in MacGaffey, Wyatt. "'Magic, or as We Usually Say, Art': a Framework for Comparing European and African Art", in Schildkrout, Enid and Keim, Curtis, eds. *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 229-230.

objects in the Dennett collection. As Wyatt MacGaffey has pointed out, the western preference is to keep religion, economics and government firmly apart, but the opposite was true in the Congo, where chiefs and kings, ritual specialists and *minkisi* could have interchangeable identities in the and all could operate on the world in similar but invisible ways.⁹⁶ These ways included activities that we can only translate as “witchcraft”, and involved personalities we call “ghosts” or “spirits”. As the Kongo ruler was known to embody the same power as a witch or an *nkisi* this is a particularly difficult idea to translate. Indeed, the spiritual interaction within Kongo politics is so distant from our own that it could be seen as another of the “invisible powers” in this matrix. However by expanding our contextual knowledge we can encourage the points at which we can cognitively access these objects. It is thus hoped that an exhibition such as *Invisible Powers* can open up new avenues of understanding and add to our appreciation of the collection.

The captions and commentary accompanying the objects will draw attention to the active role that the collection played in Kongo society, drawing on Dennett’s insights. However it could be argued that an audience might deduce that *minkisi* were intended to “do” something, from their visual qualities alone. As Alfred Gell has explained, such an impression is produced by the skilful use of technology, so that objects like *minkisi* can exert an invisible power through their visual artistic and technological qualities. These objects are found to be fascinating, spell-binding, fearful or puzzling. They can cause a kind of astonishment that is likened to the effect of magic. Gell’s anthropological theory of art explains that this sort of enchantment is intentional. It arises from our becoming

⁹⁶ MacGaffey 2000, pp. 58-59.

cognitively ‘trapped’ by the skilfully used media.⁹⁷ The startling technological accomplishment contained in the pieces is so dazzling that we ‘abduct’ the activity of an agency beyond the object itself, and this is what is likened to magic.⁹⁸ Westerners have called this magic ‘genius’ and certainly we often apply the same vocabulary to successful art exhibitions and performances: we find them mesmerising, spell-binding, awe-inspiring, enchanting.⁹⁹ It is now commonplace for critics to acclaim a work of art or music by commenting that “it made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up”; a physiological response related to fear as much as to delight.

In BaKongo society such visually-invoked responses were harnessed by the *ngangas*, *ndotchis* and chiefs to induce fear, awe, and obedience in the audience. The visual impact of the already astonishing carvings, bundles, rattles, bells, whisks and masks would be multiplied by the many accompanying sounds, smells, tastes and textures. The rituals might incorporate invocations, drumming, chanting or singing; scents might arise from wood-smoke, bodies, *bilongo* or animal blood. Firelight, moonlight or sunlight reflected off mirrors might dazzle or confuse the eye; food and alcohol could stimulate the taste while numerous other sensations would be relayed through the sense of touch. The whole complex would work together to amaze, bewilder and reduce resistance to being controlled.¹⁰⁰ Despite our being outside this ritual complex when we view the Dennett Collection in a museum, the objects can still entrance us, and the exhibition will endeavour to allow the visual qualities of the objects to be received, despite the constraints of the exhibition display case.

⁹⁷ Gell, Alfred. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1998, p. 71, p. 86. See also MacGaffey, Wyatt. ‘Astonishment and Stickiness in Kongo Art.’ *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, Vol. 39, Spring, (2001), p. 141.

⁹⁸ Gell, 1998, p. 71-2. Macgaffey has reflected on how Westerners interpret this magic as the indefinable quality of art, in MacGaffey, 1998.

⁹⁹ Gell, Alfred. ‘The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology’ in Coote, Jeremy and Shelton, Anthony, eds., *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1992, pp. 51-52.

¹⁰⁰ Gell, Alfred, 1998, p. 71.

Although the visual power of the BaKongo objects is strong, a museum audience may not be prompted to give consideration to their other attributes because the artefacts behind the glass are stationary and may not be touched. The viewer may therefore have no reason to imagine the weight of the snail shell burdened with *bilongo*, or the stirring of its feathers with any slight movement so that the dappled pattern shimmers like the patterns on the sea-shore, or the dappled marks on a leopard. [Fig. 62]¹⁰¹ The *nganga*'s bundle [Fig. 69] bears a rattle hidden in its fringe of twisted strips of fabric, but the sound would never be heard in the stillness of the museum display case. Without touch, could the solidity, weight and impression of pent-up energy in the canine *nkisi* be fully appreciated, burdened with its cavity of *bilongo* and its canes of gunpowder? [Fig. 33.] In the motionless display, would the fluttering movement of the fringed skirt be imagined? [Fig. 38.] These subjective responses to physical encounters with just four pieces from the collection are used as a reminder that the gallery visitor is required to depend on a visual approach alone. The labels and the presentation must therefore present opportunities for the viewer to enhance their understanding and appreciation of the physical qualities of the objects.

There are also considerations to be made over the visibility of certain details: For example the male figure [Fig. 54] is also the only item in the collection which has been polished to a high shine on the back; while the female figures have cicatrisation patterns on their back which might not be visible without a reflective surface behind.¹⁰² [Fig. 59]

¹⁰¹ Seashore patterns can be associated with the land of the dead, beneath the water, while guinea fowl feathers have an optical equivalence with the patterns of the wild cat or leopard, patterns which MacGaffey explained as markers of liminality (see Chapter Four). In their flickering movement they may also indicate Gell's visual traps which bedazzle or bewilder, and indicate a supernatural presence.

¹⁰² John Mack has shown how rubbing a Kuba *Ndop* figure was a way to 'activate the object, to wake up and release its inherent powers', and this also caused the wood to shine. Mack, John. 'Fetish? Magic Figures in Central Africa' in Shelton, Anthony, ed. *Fetishism: Visualising Power and Desire*,

The snakes on the largest female figure [Fig 36] are obviously significant and also need to be visible. Ways to increase visibility for several other pieces displayed will also need to be considered.¹⁰³ The exquisite weaving used in the raffia-palm fibre crown or *mpu* is so refined that it needs to be seen at very close quarters. [Fig. 72.] The glass display case inhibits this, so some supplementary close-up photographs could be provided in laminated prints or on a slide show on a digital screen outside the display case. These could then focus on details like the patterns in this crown, which find echoes in those which are carved as the chevrons on the base of a figure [Fig. 55] and on the back of the cross-legged male. [Fig. 54.]

However, there is a possibility that, by exploring the supernatural agency that these Kongo pieces embody while at the same time as surrounding them with documentary material, the display may provoke a sense of discontinuity or disconnection. As John Mack has explained, objects like *minkisi* operate on two levels at once. Like heritage sites, they combine an objective documentary historic “truth” with another version simultaneously, one which is experienced by the individual, subjectively felt, and triggered in the memory.¹⁰⁴ This truth may seem at odds with the documentary version and this can create what Mack has described as an ‘oscillation’ between them.¹⁰⁵ Mack suggests that the challenge that museums everywhere are facing is to find ‘a reconciliation between the objects as museum specimens and as catalysts of narrative, between the museum as bank vault and as contemporary memory-site’.¹⁰⁶ He proposes

London: Lund Humphries, 1995, p. 63. It might be conjectured that the small *minkisi* could be rubbed and polished in a similar way, as they were not prompted into action by nailing. Mack identifies several other ‘parallel traditions’ between Kuba and Kongo carved figures in his essay.

¹⁰³ In the Liverpool World Museum a mirror has been placed behind the *nkisi* to aid visibility of such details.

¹⁰⁴ Mack argues that ‘[m]emory is a more potent perception of the past than history, for all that it may be caricatured as a less reliable instrument of factual knowledge’. Mack, 2008, p. 18.

¹⁰⁵ Mack, 2008, p. 18.

¹⁰⁶ Mack, 2008, p. 22.

an alternative definition of the museum as a ‘Theatre of Memory’, a term which draws the emphasis away from an institution which imposes fixed, approved interpretations, and moves towards a place where personal meaning-making occurs, stimulated by collections.¹⁰⁷

Evaluation.

The multiple meanings that individuals make from such encounters show that objects are endlessly versatile. Quoting Shelton, their meanings are ‘promiscuous, and transformative’.¹⁰⁸ They are ‘redolent with past meanings and associations’ which mean that they have a ‘sedimentary symbolic valency’ which ‘always guarantees an object’s potentiality ... to create unexpected or unintentional associations’.¹⁰⁹ Peter Bjerregard has discussed how this versatility means that an object’s identity or function in a museum cannot be fixed.¹¹⁰ He acknowledges that arguments will persist over whether ethnographic collections are ‘art to be revered, cultural documents to be preserved or property to be contested’, but above all, he argues ‘museum objects can be activated in everchanging constellations thus constantly moving the perspectives in the prism between museum, audiences and originator populations’.¹¹¹

The Richard Dennett collection is no exception to this definition. Researching the artefacts in the collection has revealed a kaleidoscopic range of insights. Some are about the museum; others about the creators of the collection; and others reveal the agency of

¹⁰⁷ Mack, 2008, p. 24.

¹⁰⁸ Shelton, 2000, p. 155.

¹⁰⁹ Shelton, 2000, p. 155.

¹¹⁰ Bjerregard, Peter. ‘Words from the Editor’, *Newsletter*, International Committee for Museums of Ethnography (ICME), no. 59, July 2010. <http://icme.icom.museum/index.php?id=90>. Accessed July 2010.

¹¹¹ Bjerregard, 2010.

the individual who brought them to Exeter. The interpretation is not static and many other avenues may be opened through the stimulus of the objects.

One of the strengths of the proposed exhibition methodology is that it allows an audience to explore a multiplicity of histories and meanings associated with the objects. The indigenous meaning of the artefacts is certainly examined, but the exhibition also draws attention to the cross-cultural relationships that were current when the collection was made. Furthermore, through Dennett's involvement with the cultures of collecting and museum anthropology, the exhibition allows the viewer to assess interpretations which were imposed by western methods of classification and display.

Dennett's involvement in these different fields facilitates this multivalent approach and it allows subjects to be brought to attention which are not usually examined in the museum. The collector's history and the moment of culture-contact which led to the collection being made, are usually "invisible" in the museum. The history of past museum practices are also hidden, despite being part of the objects' histories. By drawing attention to the collector and to the processes by which cultural artefacts were appropriated and redefined, the museum can allow alternative identities or biographies of the BaKongo objects to be considered. The artefacts are consequently seen not as uncomplicated pristine objects, innocently acquired from another people's world, but as hybrid objects which have been forever altered by their involvement with the collector's life. These displaced objects cannot really "represent" another people's culture, but by examining the conditions in which they were collected, such Victorian collections can reveal much about the collector's own.

While these results may be seen strengths in the display methodology, there are other issues of representation that this approach cannot satisfy. One is that, because the exhibition is rooted in the past, the proposal does not involve a living African voice. There are, however, many options which could be included to involve source communities in future work with this collection.¹¹² Laura Peers and Alison Brown have analysed some of the ways that museums have entered productive collaborations with source communities in recent years.¹¹³ For example the RAMM could operate as a ‘contact zone’, as the physical site where exchange could take place between representatives of museum and Congolese communities.¹¹⁴ A second possibility is ‘visual repatriation’ where Dennett’s photographs of the *Maloango* and of the collection could be shared with members of the BaVili community.¹¹⁵ Photographs of some *minkisi* have been sent to the *Maloango* Museum already and dialogue could be continued. A third option is to mount another exhibition, using cross-cultural collaboration.

Peers and Brown argue that these exhibitions should be two-way relationships where ‘both parties are held to be equal’.¹¹⁶ Groups may be included through multi-vocal contributions to exhibitions, or they may work with the museum curator as a facilitator, but with the community as ‘the final arbiters of content, text, and other key

¹¹² In discussion with the curator during the course of this Collaborative Doctoral Research it was agreed that such work would be make a valuable reciprocal post-doctoral project.

¹¹³ Peers and Brown, 2003.

¹¹⁴ In *Museums and Source Communities* Trudy Nicks explains that her use of the concept of the ‘contact zone’ is taken from James Clifford (see Clifford, James. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) following Mary Louise Pratt (Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London: Routledge, 2008). According to Nicks this concept ‘specifically addresses issues surrounding human relationships in colonial encounters’. She explains that, ‘[a]s originally defined by Pratt ... a contact zone represents “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with one another and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.”’ Nicks, Trudy. ‘Museums and Contact Work: Introduction’ in Peers, Laura, and Brown, Alison, eds., *Museums and Source Communities*, London: Routledge, 2003, p. 20.

¹¹⁵ Peers and Brown, 2003, p. i

¹¹⁶ Peers and Brown, 2003, p. 2.

components'.¹¹⁷ Another option would be see the museum in Loango itself as the “contact zone” and to allow the museum community there to take the lead about how to use the RAMM’s research and collection. The International Council for Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics calls for museums to ‘work closely with the communities from which their collections originate as well as those they serve’; this might be one way to meet this expectation.¹¹⁸

Critics may argue that, by including European history, the proposed exhibition does not privilege the BaKongo chief, *banganga* and *minkisi* in the display. However the strategy of including western history is used deliberately. The exhibition is not intended to participate in what Oguibe has described as ‘the ridiculous notion of the “intimate Outsider” speaking for the native’.¹¹⁹ The exhibition has used the histories revealed by Dennett’s life and commentary to suggest some of the indigenous meanings that the collection has carried; but it has also attempted to follow Oguibe’s suggestion to ‘exhibit modesty and admit relative handicap’ in these interpretations ‘since the peripheral location of the contemplator precludes complete understanding’.¹²⁰

Other observers might feel that the emphasis on history and context in *Invisible Powers* will obscure the aesthetic value of the objects. As earlier discussions in this thesis have shown, a purely aesthetic approach to the presentation of ethnographic collections has been a problematic display methodology and the method proposed here is intended to

¹¹⁷ Phillips, Ruth. ‘Community Collaboration in Exhibitions: Toward a Dialogic Paradigm’ in Peers and Brown, 2003, p. 163. Phillips used Stephen Greenblatt’s terms of ‘Resonance’ and ‘Wonder’ to observe that generally ‘multi vocal exhibits are ‘more successful at conveying historical and intercultural “resonance”’ while ‘community-based exhibits are usually more successful at creating the sense of “wonder”’. Phillips, 2003, p. 166. See also Greenblatt, Stephen. ‘Resonance and Wonder’ in Karp, Ivan and Lavine, Steven, eds. *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1991, pp. 42-56.

¹¹⁸ International Council for Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics for Museums 2004, p. 9. http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Codes/code2006_eng.pdf, accessed September 2011.

¹¹⁹ Oguibe, Olu. *The Culture Game*, (1993), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, p. 8.

¹²⁰ Oguibe, 2004, p. 9.

avoid the misleading oversimplifications which can arise when artefacts such as those in Dennett's collection are treated as "art". However this does not mean that the visual qualities of the objects are lost. As Shelton pointed out, the formal aesthetic and technical qualities of such works can still be appreciated in an exhibition which provides historical contextualisation.¹²¹ What *Invisible Powers* aims to bring to attention is what George Stocking has called the 'fourth dimension' in museum presentation which results from the objects coming 'out of the past'.¹²² In a museum the viewer must somehow 'cross a barrier of change in time' when contemplating these objects; this exhibition is designed to make this time-based aspect of the encounter more apparent.¹²³ The display also aims to acknowledge the fifth dimension in Stocking's analysis, which raises the question of the 'relations of "power"'.¹²⁴ The objects once belonged to other people, and power has been exerted to collect them and to reinterpret them in the museum. Thus the model proposed here is intended to allow all these dimensions of the past, the present and of power, to demand the visitor's attention and to engender enquiry.

A final criticism that might be made about *Invisible Powers* is one that applies to any museum in which an ethnography department is distinct from the rest of the museum. At the RAMM this disciplinary division was established early on in the museum's history and the later development of the World Cultures gallery in 1997 has reinforced the World Cultures collection's physical separation from the rest of the museum. This has the effect of dividing "other cultures" from the rest of the collections, which can be

¹²¹ Shelton, Anthony. 'The Recontextualisation of Culture in UK Museums.' *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 8, no. 5, (1992) p. 15. A dense, context-rich approach might not suit large permanent displays but this exhibition is planned as a temporary case-study.

¹²² Stocking, 1985, p. 4.

¹²³ Stocking, 1985, p. 5.

¹²⁴ Stocking, 1985, p. 5.

perceived as a perpetuation of the notion of ‘the west versus the rest’.¹²⁵ As Chapter Five demonstrated, “ethnographic artefacts” are only defined as such by those who come from outside the community that made them, and such definitions can be read as exclusive or neo-colonial terminology.¹²⁶ No doubt this is why Okwui Enwezor challenged the *Tropenmuseum* conference to consider whether, in a post-colonial world, the ethnography museum should exist at all.¹²⁷

In 2008 the RAMM used an alternative paradigm in the exhibition, *Beauty: the Eye of the Beholder?* which was a collaboration between two museums. Tony Eccles, curator of World Cultures at RAMM worked with curator David Mullins at the Museum in the Park in Stroud, Gloucestershire. They chose objects from both museums to stimulate juxtapositions which prompted reflection on what constitutes “beauty”, in art, craft, nature or design, from different cultures and periods.¹²⁸

Although no major changes will be made to the location of the majority of the World Cultures in the redevelopment, there will be some modifications to the paradigm in the new museum displays. Some of the World Cultures collections will be presented in new venues around the re-designed museum.¹²⁹ In the new Core Gallery for example, a two-storey glass case in the centre of the building will display a New Britain *Uvol* Dance Crest from Melanesia alongside spectacular items from other collections in the

¹²⁵Stuart Hall uses these terms in ‘The West and The Rest: Discourse and Power’ in Hall, Stuart and Gieben, Bram, eds. *Formations of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, pp. 278-279.

¹²⁶ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. ‘Objects of Ethnography’ in Karp, Ivan and Lavine, Steven, eds. *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1991, p. 387.

¹²⁷ Dartel, 2009, p. 24.

¹²⁸ I would like to thank Tony Eccles and David Mullins for involving me in this project.

¹²⁹ In the re-development, the RAMM has rejected disciplinary divisions for the permanent collections in favour of a chronological model of display. (Personal communication with museum managers, Camilla Hampshire and Julien Parsons, 28 July 2011.) However the ethnography department will remain distinct.

museum.¹³⁰ A contemporary painting of a wolf from the *Nuu-chah-nulth* people of the Northwest Coast of Canada will also be shown here.¹³¹ In the Finders Keepers? gallery more than seventy objects from World Cultures will be integrated with other pieces from different collections.¹³² This multi-disciplinary approach has the effect of levelling out the distinctions between ethnography and other collections.

Finders Keepers? puts the collector under the spotlight and draws attention to the past processes of the museum as a classificatory institution. It examines many different individuals and the motives behind their collecting. Surrounded by collectors who gathered insects, lace, birds and seaweeds, the people who brought ethnographic objects back from their travels abroad begin to look less exotic and their collections lose some of their “otherness”. They start to take up a comparable position to material from other parts of the museum. The gallery allows ethnographic objects to temporarily “slip their noose” and to function outside their usual disciplinary definition of “ethnography” in a revitalising way. By exploring the collector rather than the object, the museum has paradoxically granted more agency to the object itself. No longer a synecdoche for a whole culture, it can be seen as a created object to be imagined on its own terms.

Conclusion.

As this review of current criticism and practice has confirmed, there are multiple options available to curators of African collections. Studying the objects through

¹³⁰ Personal Communication with Tony Eccles, 25 June 2011. For the history of the *Uvol* crests see Pole, 2001, p. 360.

¹³¹ This allows connections to be made with the carved “totem” or “crest pole” in the World Cultures Americas gallery which was made by Tim Paul, a representative of the *Nuu-chah-nulth* community, in the gallery in 1997. For more about this project see Pole, 2001 p. 360.

¹³² A small sample from the curator’s list of objects to be included in this gallery includes the Amazonian trophy head (77/1919) which was mentioned by Rowley in the *Express and Echo*, 10 June 1933; a recently purchased Guatemalan *huipil*, (602/2005); a Yoruban wooden carving of a District Officer, (77/1957/2/3); a pair of Huron moccasins, (E740/1); a *musèle* knife from Gabon, (E564); a Japanese lacquer-ware box, (E1961); and an Inuit bone map (633/1902).

Dennett has allowed this proposed exhibition to explore and expose what Shelton has described as the ‘singularities of events and the creative interventions of individuals’.¹³³ The individuals who were active in the factories and companies of the colonial Congo, in the BaVili villages and court, or in the studies of curators, anthropologists and collectors, have all been brought into view through their connection with the Dennett and his collection. The same applies to the thesis as a whole: multiple meanings and hidden histories have been opened up by a study of the collector and his changing contexts. Many other objects in the World Cultures collection today have equivalent stories attached to them, arising from the contact of cultures and the processes of appropriation and classification that followed. Although there are still gaps in our knowledge about his interpretation of the collection, and even more about those of its creators, Dennett’s unique contribution has provided fertile material for this extensive examination of many histories and meanings which have been hidden in the past.

¹³³ Shelton, 2000, p. 155.

Chapter Seven. Conclusion.

This chapter will evaluate the contribution of the thesis as a whole and will also reflect on the methodology that was used to present the research in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, (RAMM) in a temporary exhibition.¹ In order to situate this research into the Richard Dennett Collection, it will be useful to reconsider the context in which the study arose. The research was undertaken as a collaborative project which was designed to combine academic research with practical experience. The goal was to uncover information that was useful to the museum and its audiences at the same time as contributing to the scholarship surrounding collections of this kind. From the outset, the RAMM was central to the research, and it will also be at the core of the final discussion. This chapter argues that it is crucial to study such individual cases and particular, specific histories, in order to avoid unhelpful abstractions or generalised critique when approaching the sensitive subjects of colonialism, anthropology and ethnographic collecting.

Before discussing these museological issues it will be helpful to revisit the framework of the thesis and to recapitulate the findings outlined in the previous chapters. The methodology adopted in this thesis allowed several overlapping histories to be explored through the recorded experiences and thoughts of the collector. This allowed the study to engage in a close examination of a number of different subjects: the colonial encounter; the indigenous community; the artefacts and their meanings; and the discourses which surrounded the collection of ethnographic material for nineteenth-century museums. The findings were then applied to the temporary exhibition, *Invisible*

¹ The exhibition, *Invisible Powers: Richard Dennett and the Congo* opened at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in December 2011, in the temporary display case in the World Cultures gallery. It is scheduled to run until September 2012.

Powers: Richard Dennett and the Congo (hereafter *Invisible Powers*), which was discussed in relation to recent ethnographic display methodologies.

The research focussed on a twenty-five year period from 1880 to 1905. Dennett was active in the Congo between 1880 and 1902 and the collection was made between 1880 and 1887. It was accessioned in Exeter in 1889 and the galleries in which the objects were installed were finalised in around 1904. Some of Dennett's ethnographic writing was published after he moved away from Loango, with some particularly important texts appearing in 1905 and 1906, and so the research has concentrated largely on the histories and interpretations that were manifested in these years. The study revealed that Dennett was involved in key events concerned with the early colonial appropriation of territory in the Congo. It also explored his participation in the equally acquisitive practices of collecting. As Dennett was fascinated with ethnography and was keen to disseminate his ideas, his interpretations were analysed to assess his contribution to folklore, anthropology and museum collections. These diverse but interrelated contexts were reconnected in the museum through the exhibition, *Invisible Powers*. Drawing on the research which is summarised below, the display evoked the interconnected worlds of collectors, museums, anthropologists and colonial powers, alongside the culturally significant nineteenth-century BaKongo artefacts.

Dennett and the Colonial Context.

The study began with an examination of the life of the collector in Africa, by drawing on contemporary opinion written by travellers and traders, published in newspapers, and latterly recorded by government officers. These showed that Dennett's encounter with colonialism was remarkable. His accounts included his personal experience of such key

personalities in the “scramble for Africa” as Stanley, De Brazza and Tippu Tib, and he was unafraid to criticise the activities of these nineteenth-century “celebrities”. An eye-witness to the Treaty of Chimfuma, Dennett wrote in protest at the dishonest methods which had been used to give the Portuguese control of Cabinda. He questioned De Brazza’s appropriation of land from the chief of the BaTeke. He was willing to express a view of Stanley that ran counter to the popular versions in the international press, and he did not shy from writing to the King of Belgium himself when Congo Free State officials began to enslave Africans, and to flout international trade agreements. He also stood out by defending the place of African women, and by fighting back when miscegenation was attacked. He respected African business acumen and he protested at the morally bankrupt European commercial practices which quickly turned the Congo Free State into the site of Kurtz’s ‘horror’.² He secretly assisted Colonel Williams in his investigative mission to the Free State and he was eventually exiled for his agitation. His political concerns also brought him into contact with the Congo reformers, E. D. Morel and Consul Roger Casement, and a firm friendship arose between these men.³

After his conflict with King Leopold II’s representatives in the Free State, Dennett was moved to the French Congo where he continued to work for Hatton and Cookson with characteristic commitment. He celebrated the promising signs which indicated that the French Government was making an effort to understand the indigenous organisation of African societies in their new colony, but he was disappointed when this initiative ended with the introduction of a concession system in 1899, which was modelled on that of the Congo Free State.⁴ Once again Dennett came into conflict with the

² Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness and Other Stories*, Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1999, p. 97.

³ When Morel was seeking a correspondent in West Africa he approached Casement for advice, who recommended Dennett. Letter from Roger Casement to E. D. Morel from Lisbon, 3 March 1909, London School of Economics *E. D. Morel Archive*, ref. F8/23.

⁴ Morel, E. D. *The Black Man’s Burden*, London: The National Labour Press, 1920, p. 128.

authorities. The Hatton and Cookson company was forced to cease trading in parts of French Congo, and Dennett was unexpectedly removed from the place he had intended to spend the rest of his life. Changing his role to become a colonial officer, in 1902, Dennett was appointed as the Assistant Conservator of Forests for Southern Nigeria. His future disputes were with his own government, and he energetically engaged in arguments over ‘native policy’ in British possessions.⁵

This history is not meant to glorify the collector, nor to hide the racism that he sometimes exhibited and which was so prevalent in Victorian society at the time. Dennett lived at a time when evolutionary models of progress and development were commonly used to allow westerners to define Africans as savages. But as this study has shown, Dennett wrestled with these suppositions and he was thereby propelled into extensive personal inquiry to seek an explanation for the sophisticated social and political organisation that he observed in BaKongo communities.

Indigenous Society.

The next chapter of the thesis outlined Dennett’s interpretation of the African society which surrounded him in the Congo. His early responses to the BaKongo and their way of life followed a stereotypical view of the African primitive that had been fostered in Victorian travel literature. Dennett included spectacular descriptions and depictions of “fetishistic” rituals in his early writing and talks. His initial stance was to emphasise the sensational, expressing cynicism toward the ritual specialists or *banganga*. However his

⁵ See, for example, his account of a ‘long talk’ he had with the High Commissioner, Frederick Lugard, referred to in a letter to E. D. Morel in 1912. Letter from Richard Dennett to E. D. Morel, from Olokmeji, Lagos, Nigeria, 15 December 1912, London School of Economics, *E. D. Morel Archive*, ref. F8/38. Although his career in Nigeria beyond the scope of this study, Dennett was clearly involved with decisions that were being made over policies in the colony.

ideas were modified when he began to study the organisation of BaKongo society and to inquire into the concepts behind their way of life. Dennett acknowledged that material culture held ‘secrets’ that could potentially unlock a hidden ‘philosophy’.⁶ He set himself the task of revealing this. By finding local people who would explain things to him, by attending rituals and ceremonies, and by observing daily events, Dennett built up an understanding of Kongo belief and traditions.⁷ He then compared this knowledge with what he had read about other religions.⁸

After he was forced to move to the French-held territory near Loango in 1892, Dennett was able to give more attention to his research and he concentrated on the sub-group of the BaKongo known as the BaVili. Learning about the complex and long-standing systems that already existed for marriage, families, taxation, cultivation, and justice from new informants, Dennett argued for these practices to be fostered and included within new colonial structures of government. Nevertheless he was perplexed by the dominance of “sorcery” and “witchcraft” in the BaKongo’s political system.

Increasingly he began to explain it by using a model that chimed with his own religious schema, and he interpreted what he called *Nkissism* in terms of higher and lower powers, operating under an almighty creator god.⁹

The nobler powers, he proposed, were found in the king and the sacred animals, rivers, trees, seasons and omens. The baser ones, he argued, were found in the *nganga* and the

⁶ Dennett, R. E. ‘Correspondence.’ *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, Vol. 3, nos. 1-6, (1887(b)), p. 120.

⁷ Dennett explained something of the difficulties he experienced when gathering his information, in *The Folklore of the Fjort*. He described sitting ‘out of sight, perhaps in a cramped position, from 7 p.m. until 4 a.m.’ to gather the words of the Song of the Burial of the Fjort Prince. He added that this discomfort was ‘no joke and not an aid to ones’ work’. Dennett, Richard Edward. *The Folklore of the Fjort*, London: The Folklore Society, 1898, p. 155.

⁸ Dennett, 1887(b), p. 121.

⁹ Dennett had used the term ‘*Nkissist*’ as early as 1886. See Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘The Congo: From a Trader’s Point of View.’ *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, Vol. 2, nos. 7-12, (1886), p. 286.

nailed “fetishes” or *minkisi*. Dennett believed that the new European powers in Africa had only to support the king or chief in the Congo, and the indigenous leader would be able to maintain law and order through the existing structures. The superstitious practices surrounding *minkisi* and poison ordeals could then be brought under control. Despite this pragmatic analysis, Dennett was also aware of many aspects of BaKongo cosmology whose meaning eluded him. Many of these mysteries were bound up in the objects that he collected.

Kongo Material Culture.

Dennett’s texts reveal that he began to understand that the invisible world of spirits interacted in every aspect of BaKongo life, and that the objects in the collection were physical expressions or vehicles for some of these ideas. The *ndungu* and the *nganga* costumes are exquisite examples of these. But Dennett also recognised the role that small “charms” played in everyday life, controlling spirits to protect the community. He brought these back in the form of the pots, shells, and mirrored bundles in the RAMM collection.¹⁰ Over time he also gained informed insights into how a person’s spirit, or *nkulu*, could be attached to, or installed in material objects such as an antelope horn, a cloth or a carved figure.¹¹

Chapter Four showed how Dennett began to understand the deeper significance of practices such as treating different surfaces with red, black or white pigments; or the ways used to compose *bilongo* or “medicine”. The supernatural agency of animals was also recognised, especially the link between the leader and the leopard which is

¹⁰ There are also significant “charms” in the Folklore Society’s Congo Collection, to which Dennett contributed (see Chapter Five).

¹¹ Dennett, Richard Edward. ‘Death and Burial of the Fjort.’ *Folklore*, Vol. 8, no. 2, (1897), p. 115.

acknowledged in the cat-skins, staff handle and a carved box-lid in the collection. He learned that any unexpected misfortune in BaVili life was traced back to “witchcraft”, to an *ndotchi* (or *ndoki*) who wished another’s harm. Such everyday dangers called for elaborate procedures to identify witches, through the services of the nailed *minkondi* or through various ordeals. In the RAMM collection these *minkondi* were represented by the dog *nkisi*, and the male figure, Ekawso. A piece of bark in the collection had probably been used in poison ordeals. Dennett’s selection therefore reveals many of aspects of the complex political and cosmological systems of the BaKongo.

Despite his initially stereotypical prejudices, and his limited understanding as a newly-arrived white man in Africa, Dennett’s collection seems to suggest he held an admiration for this material, which possibly arose from his unusual openness towards an unfamiliar worldview. Both his collection and his commentary indicate that, in his first decade in the Congo, Dennett began to discard some of his own preconceptions, and this allowed him to recognise value in what some other Europeans so easily dismissed.

Dennett, Museums and Collecting.

Dennett made his Exeter collection within a few years of arriving in Africa. Other agents were also collecting ethnographic material in the coastal factories around him at the time. Chapter Five revealed that these agents had very different relationships with the museums that they supplied. Some employees of the *Nieuwe Afrikaansche Handelsvereeniging (NAHV)* were rewarded for supplying Dutch museums in Leiden, Amsterdam and The Hague.¹² Robert Visser was honoured for supplying the museums

¹² See Chapter Five and Willink, Robert Joost. *Stages in Civilisation: Dutch Museums in Quest of West Central African Collections (1856-1889)*, Leiden: CNWS, 2007.

of Berlin, Frankfurt and Dusseldorf.¹³ However Dennett's recognition is not recorded, beyond a sentence in the Albert Memorial Museum's accession book about his 'valuable and interesting series of Ethnological specimens from Cacongo'.¹⁴ His single collection for Exeter was also modest by comparison with these other agents' acquisitions and, unlike his counterparts, no ongoing communication is recorded between the collector and the museum's curators. Nevertheless his collection represents rare material from the period identified by Joost Willink as the early phase of Kongo collecting.¹⁵ Before the 1890s Britain was not proactive in collecting from the Congo. It was only after 1893, when Arnold Ridyard became involved, that extensive collections were made for the museums in Liverpool and Manchester from the West Coast of Africa.

Due to overcrowding at the RAMM, the Dennett Collection was not exhibited in an ethnographic gallery until six years after it was accessioned. Initially the ethnographic collections at the Albert Memorial Museum were arranged by loosely geographical classification, as specimens 'illustrative of the Progress of Man'.¹⁶ Under the first curator, William D'Urban, they were also described as 'weapons and other objects illustrative of the Natural History of Man from all parts of the world'.¹⁷ James Dallas, the second curator, was concerned to distinguish and classify the races of 'Mankind' according to their physical traits, as he illustrated in his paper for the Anthropological

¹³ See Chapter Five and Adler, Katrin and Stelzig, Christine. 'Robert Visser and His Photographs from the Loango Coast.' *African Arts*, Vol. 35, no. 4, (2002), pp. 38-51, pp. 92-93.

¹⁴ Twentieth Annual Report of the Committee of the Devon and Exeter Albert Memorial Museum, 1890, p. 4. *Westcountry Studies Archive*.

¹⁵ Willink, 2007, p. 19.

¹⁶ Donisthorpe, George T. *An Account of the Origin and Progress of the Devon and Exeter Albert Memorial Museum*, Exeter: Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 1868, p. 29.

¹⁷ *History and Description of the Devon and Exeter Albert Memorial*, Exeter: James Townsend, 1877, p. 10.

Institute of 1886.¹⁸ Dallas was therefore less interested in the social function of ethnographic objects; instead the collections would be used to reinforce his racial classificatory paradigm.

Frederick Rowley became curator in 1902. He maintained a broadly geographical arrangement in the ethnography gallery and incorporated archaeological specimens alongside the displays which reinforced social evolutionary interpretations. These interpretations were maintained in his published material and lectures. Rowley provided some additional labels for the displays, but contextualisation remained minimal. Portraits of racial “types” were displayed high on the walls of the gallery, reinforcing the natural historian’s classificatory stance towards non-western societies. Rowley was an efficient and systematic curator who admired A. C. Haddon’s museum methodology and his desire for pedagogical clarity.¹⁹

While he was progressive regarding education, conservation and ecology, Rowley did not interpret the ethnological collections with the same surety. Little additional contextual material was made available to the public about these collections during his three decades in post. When eventually an “expert” was engaged to report on the African collections at the museum the consultant, James Withers-Gill used terminology from the turn of the century to describe the objects, writing of ‘fetishes’ and

¹⁸ Dallas, James. ‘On the Primary Divisions and Geographical Distribution of Mankind.’ *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 15, (1886), pp. 304-330.

¹⁹ Rowley’s rare references to ethnographic objects in his regular newspaper column tended to focus on primitive superstitions, evolution and weaponry. For example, writing about the necklace of the Tasmanian Truganini, he opined that it was to be regretted that no studies had been made of the ‘primitive and interesting people’ of Tasmania before they died out. Rowley, F. ‘Something to Be Seen in Exeter Museum.’ *Express and Echo*, 21 October 1933. On another occasion he referred to the ‘primitive’ head-hunters of the Amazon and their ‘many strange customs’. Rowley, *Express and Echo*, 10 June 1933. He also alluded to the ‘simple child of the African wild’ (Rowley, *Express and Echo*, 4 August 1934).

‘witchdoctors’ in his appraisal.²⁰ It seems that Dennett’s collection was not only physically fixed in the museum for thirty years but that it was conceptually frozen by the language and labelling used by the museum authorities as well.²¹

Because no records survive to illustrate Dennett’s interpretation of his collection at the RAMM, his contribution to the Folklore Society’s French Congo Collection provides a valuable insight into the way he understood specific objects. The Folklore Society showed a great deal more interest in contextualising ‘fetishes’ ‘amulets’ and charms’ than the Exeter curators had done, and Dennett combined forces with Mary Kingsley to interpret a collection of these for the Folklore Society which were housed in the Cambridge anthropology museum after 1900, and moved to the Pitt Rivers Museum in 1965.²² Through E. Sidney Hartland, the Chairman of the Publishing Committee of the Folklore Society, Dennett’s “folktales” were published as *The Folklore of the Fjort*, and with Hartland’s recommendation Dennett also gained an entry to the Anthropological Institute.²³ His correspondence with Hartland about *The Folklore of the Fjort* indicates that he saw himself not as a folklorist, seeking survivals of mankind’s primitive past in the daily life of the BaVili, but as a philosopher, a ‘searcher after Truth and an honest Negrophile’.²⁴

²⁰ *Notes by J. Withers Gill on the Collection of African Weapons, Fetishes, Masks, etc in the Collection of the RAMM Exeter.* Unpublished typewritten notes, August 1931, *RAMM Ethnography Archive*.

²¹ In 1960, African and Oceanic collections from the RAMM were discussed as ‘sculpture’ in the introductory essay for a catalogue produced to accompany a touring exhibition mounted by Michael Canney. See Canney, Michael R. L. *African and Oceanic Sculpture from the Collections of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum Exeter*, Exeter: South Western Arts Association, 1960, p. 6. In the catalogue itself the pieces were listed as ‘figures’ rather than sculpture, and an *nkisi* was called a ‘“Nail” Fetish’ [*sic*] (p. 9), but it was clear that Canney evaluated the objects as the work of artists (p.5).

²² ‘Notes on the Folklore Society Collection.’ Pitt Rivers Museum Object Catalogue, accession numbers 1965.1.1. to 1965.1.47.

²³ See Chapter Five. Hartland was one of Dennett’s sponsors for membership of the Royal Anthropological Institute; T. Atholl Joyce was the other. (Membership records supplied by Royal Anthropological Institute.)

²⁴ Letter from Richard Dennett to E. S. Hartland from Loango, 10 March 1897. *E. S. Hartland Archive*, National Library of Wales, ref. 16894B.

Dennett was able to promote his ideas over the coming years through the Folklore Society's meetings and publications. Thus it seems that it was not his collection for Exeter, so much as his studies of the language, stories and customs of the indigenous people of the Congo, that brought Dennett into circles of influence amongst anthropologists, linguists and museum scholars. The Folklore Society, the Anthropological Institute and the African Society all gave Dennett the opportunity to communicate his ideas about foreign governments in Africa, about trade relations, the composition of African societies and about his own constructions concerning the hidden meanings of Bantu languages. Collecting material culture had been relevant to Dennett when he first arrived in Africa, but in the later years it seems that it was politics and linguistics which absorbed his attention. His lengthy papers on BaVili vocabulary, Yoruba vowels or Bantu prefixes after 1900 provided precise details about the possible meanings of the structure of languages, and great attention was lavished on individual syllables and nuances of sound.²⁵ Ultimately it was by studying languages that Dennett believed he could find the route to understanding the universal concepts underlying African thought.

Invisible Powers.

The last chapter in the thesis showed how these multiple interrelated concepts could be addressed through the temporary exhibition, *Invisible Powers*. The aim of the display was to present the collection not as artefacts which could be isolated from their connection with western cultures of collecting, but as hybrid or adopted objects, forever

²⁵ See for example the following by Dennett: 'The Bavili Alphabet Restored.' *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 5, no. 17, (1905(b)), pp. 48-58; *Notes on West African Categories*, London: Macmillan, 1911; 'A Common Basis of Religion [sic]: Part I: Or, the Order in Genesis One with the Order in the Categories in West Africa.' *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 12, no. 47, (1913(a)), pp. 256-275; 'A Common Basis for Religion [sic]: Part II.' *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 13, no. 49, (1913(b)), pp. 33-44; *My Yoruba Alphabet*, London: Macmillan, 1916.

altered by being valued, appropriated, removed, interpreted and displayed by foreigners. Because Dennett's history revealed so much about Victorian ethnography, colonial politics, and western views of African cosmology, it was possible to draw attention to these multiple aspects of the collection's meanings through the exhibition. The proposal allowed an exploration on many levels which could potentially provide insights into indigenous meanings, colonial relationships and the history of museum interpretation and collecting.

Chapter Six situated the proposal for *Invisible Powers* within current museological methodology by identifying some of the characteristics of what Eileen Hooper Greenhill has called 'the post-museum'.²⁶ These were discussed and related to the temporary exhibition in the RAMM. For example the importance of constructivist learning theory was recognised, which understands that individuals create their own meaning from external stimuli, according to pre-existing schema and influenced by context. This meaning-making is provisional and fluid: the curator cannot present a fixed interpretation but understands that multiple meanings will be created in the museum.

Another trend seen in the post-museum was a shift away from an authoritarian position and a move toward mutuality with audiences and other institutions. This was particularly important where collections had been made under colonial conditions. The Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) in Belgium was a target for hostile criticism because it appeared to fail to reflect on its colonial past; the Dutch *Tropenmuseum*, by comparison, made a point of acknowledging its colonial history through self-reflexive strategies in the galleries and by hosting symposia for critical debate.

²⁶ Hooper-Greenhill, Eileen. *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 8.

Further expressions of mutuality were found in initiatives which involved the donor community in decisions concerning the representation of ethnographic collections. These were particularly successful in places like North America, New Zealand and Australia where First Nation source communities could lobby the museum directly; but other museums such as the Pitt Rivers Museum in Britain were also seen to be operating collaboratively with originating societies.

Curators working with large teams of advisors likened this process to the work of the director, who manages a complex production with contributions from different interest groups.²⁷ Some curators took the role of stage-management further so that the outcome itself was compared to a theatrical performance. Anthony Shelton, for example, chose to manipulate the lighting and the display cases to provoke a sense of alienation surrounding the displaced African objects. In another instance, Boris Wastiau stage-managed his displays in the RMCA to subvert the canonical interpretation of African artefacts as “masterpieces” by using unsettling lighting and unconventional mounts. In a later exhibition, Wastiau compared making an exhibition to making an artwork, and he used artistic and technical skills to provoke wonder and amazement in *Medusa: The African Sculpture of Enchantment*.²⁸ He likened this process to that of the *nganga* who combines different elements to conjure up mysteries and to stimulate astonishment using what Alfred Gell has termed the ‘technology of enchantment’.²⁹ Another curator, Mary Nooter Roberts, compared her work to an act of translation, identifying the need

²⁷ Mary Jo Arnoldi and Anthony Shelton were cited in this case; see Chapter Six.

²⁸ The exhibition, *Medusa: The African Sculpture of Enchantment*, took place at Geneva Ethnographic Museum from November 2008 to December 2009.

²⁹ Wastiau, Boris. *Medusa: The African Sculpture of Enchantment*, Milan: Five Continents 2008, p. 11.

to work in two directions at once, so that concepts in the “exhibited” culture find equivalents in the one which is “exhibiting”.³⁰

Further methodologies were identified when African curators exhibited their own collections. In Ghana, secular curators were not permitted to handle the artefacts in the Manhayi Palace Museum in Kumasi because these were potent pieces of material culture which were still used in court ceremonial and ritual events. In Gabon, where colonisation and western art markets had led to the removal of significant art works from the African continent, a virtual museum was created. This used state funding and advanced digital technology to “repatriate” absent artefacts. Situated in a “virtual rain forest”, the architecture of the *Musée Virtuel* was modelled on a modernist western art museum.

While the *Musée Virtuel* was created in cyberspace, other African museums were situated in culturally significant locations. The District Six Museum in South Africa arose in the place where a community had been disbanded under apartheid; while in Loango in the Republic of Congo, the former palace of King Moe Poaty III was made into the home of the *Musée Maloango*. Here texts, objects, and the building itself, could be curated and conserved in order to keep the cultural heritage of the BaVili alive.

Against these many examples of museum practice, a proposal was made for a small temporary exhibition to be held at the RAMM. The objects in the Dennett collection were understood, using Shelton’s words, to be ‘interlocutors of praxiological

³⁰ Nooter Roberts, Mary. ‘Exhibiting Episteme: Exhibitions as Objects of Knowledge’ in Yoshida, Kenji and Mack, John, eds. *Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Africa: Crisis or Renaissance?*, Woodbridge: James Currey, 2008, p. 172.

possibilities'.³¹ Their meanings were not confined to a single interpretation; instead multiple meanings were expected and welcomed. Nevertheless an act of translation was attempted to help audiences to engage with the collection. The concept of power was used to explore parallels between the African and the European cultures. This strategy unlocked some of the meanings held by the objects but it also drew attention to the circumstances in which the collection was made. It subjected the collector's culture to closer scrutiny by addressing the processes of power that occurred not only in colonial trading relationships, but also in western museums and anthropological institutions.

This methodology was intended to indicate that our western colonial past, and the museum's particular history, were involved in the making of the BaKongo collection. This also allowed the exhibition to counter a purely formalist interpretation of the objects. Museums have been accused of imposing inappropriate modernist aesthetic standards on another culture's artefacts when ethnographic exhibitions are not framed in terms of their indigenous meanings. In *Invisible Powers* there was an emphasis on the way the objects had been used in their original context. Moreover, the exhibition's contextualisation not only prevented the collection from being read as "primitive art", but it also drew attention to the otherwise hidden activities of the collecting culture.

This supplementary information does not negate the aesthetic quality of the objects in any way, but the self-reflexive methodology does allow the curator to insist that the objects' presence in the museum is a consequence of specific nineteenth-century western colonial and anthropological practices which deserve consideration. By emphasising this background the museum visitor is encouraged to acknowledge the

³¹ Shelton, Anthony. 'Museum Ethnography: An Imperial Science' in Hallam, Elizabeth, and Street, Brian, eds. *Cultural Encounters*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 185.

participation of Europeans in the making of many of the RAMM's collections, and to consider the museum discourses which influenced the way such collections were portrayed. By extension, the exhibition carries the potential to stimulate an audience to reflect on contemporary curatorial practice in museums, and also to consider the ongoing relationships between Congo and the west.

Recent discussions have acknowledged that extreme curatorial anxiety can be generated when presenting colonial histories in museums.³² On the one hand, exhibitions may be interpreted as endorsing colonial inequalities and racial exploitation; on the other, they may be seen as persistent incarnations of 'self hate'.³³ By focussing on a particular history, as this study has done, such criticism may be partially appeased. Extreme generalised accusations can be deflected by these specific accounts of the interactions between coloniser and colonised. Nevertheless the topic of colonialism, and the place of anthropology within it, continues to be met with a mixture of discomfort, hostility or shame. This embarrassment may deter the curator from tackling the representation of colonial relationships, but neglecting these histories may paradoxically result in the perpetuation of similar injustices in the present.

A similar wariness is felt about the representation of anthropology within museums because of the perceived collusion between colonialism, anthropology and museums, which has been identified in recent academic studies.³⁴ When Dennett donated his

³² For example this was a much-discussed theme at the recent symposium on *Museums, Photographs and the Colonial Past* held by PhotoClec (Photographs, Colonial Legacy and Museums in Contemporary European Culture) at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, 12 -13 January 2012.

³³ Wayne Modest described how this accusation was directed at the *Tropenmuseum* at the PhotoClec symposium in 2012. Modest, Wayne. 'Museums and the Emotional Afterlife or Colonial Photography', Keynote Address, PhotoClec Symposium, 13 January, 2012.

³⁴ See Chapter One, for the earlier discussion of works such as Coombes, Annie. *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994; and Bennett, Tony. *The Birth of the Museum*, London: Routledge, 1996.

collection in 1899, the Albert Memorial Museum was a successful and respected centre of learning, the Folklore Society was expanding and the Anthropological Institute was increasing in authority. Critics have pointed out how such authorities frequently misrepresented non-western cultures, presenting them as primitive societies, less evolved than western cultures.³⁵ However this study has shown how anthropology was not a homogenous discipline. Members of the scholarly societies and museums were far from consistent in their ideas and their practice. Dennett's history reveals how curators across Europe varied in their reception and presentation of BaKongo collections; and how ethnographers and anthropologists had frequent disputes. For example Dennett was seen to disagree vehemently with his editors over the way the Folklore Society should present his understanding of BaVili beliefs; while Northcote Thomas argued with his employers in Nigeria about his anthropological methodology. Indeed a close examination of the anthropologists and folklorists in Dennett's circle indicates that museum collecting and anthropology were not unified disciplines in the service of colonialism, but were more akin to currents which were varied and modified by the different individuals working within them. Thus it is necessary to study specific histories and individual narratives when dealing with the subject of early anthropology, just as it is advisable to examine colonial encounters on a case-by-case basis.

Another criticism that is sometimes directed at ethnographic museums argues that collections such as Dennett's in western collections should be interpreted by spokespersons from the source community. However, this is not always possible. Sometimes the communities in question no longer retain detailed knowledge of such objects' use. Furthermore, some present-day communities may associate the objects with pagan practices which have been rejected under a later belief system. Moreover,

³⁵ For example see Coombes, 1994.

the location of the western museum may be far from the originating community, in a country where their diaspora may not easily be found. Even if research is carried out in the country of origin, it cannot be assumed that representatives of the source community will know about, or be inclined to share insights with a stranger about such mysteries as the use of *minkisi* in their culture. Nevertheless, as the discussion in Chapter Six indicated, the internet does allow curators to communicate across continents and many western museums do endeavour to act a 'contact zone' where living communities can engage with objects created by their forebears.³⁶ Where physical interaction is not possible, visual repatriation may be an option, with photographs being sent to originating communities for discussion. If good communication and funding can be established, a museum which already serves the indigenous community, such as the Maloango Museum in Loango, could provide a base for collaborative work, thus allowing the western museum to work closely with its source communities as called for by the International Council for Museums.³⁷

Conclusion.

Despite our geographical and temporal distance from the context in which the Dennett Collection was made, this study has been able to use the writings, records, and imagery produced by Dennett and his contemporaries to extend our understanding of this valuable nineteenth-century BaKongo collection. By scrutinising these writings, and by comparing western interpretations with the earliest indigenous accounts which were recorded by Congolese writers and collated by Laman, it has been possible to add to our

³⁶ As explained in Chapter Six, the idea of the 'contact zone' in this context is taken from Nicks, Trudy. 'Museums and Contact Work: Introduction' in Peers, Laura and Brown, Alison eds. *Museums and Source Communities*. London: Routledge, 2003, p. 20.

³⁷ International Council for Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics for Museums 2004, p. 9.
<http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Codes/code2006_eng.pdf>

knowledge of the objects' meanings, and to explore new perspectives concerning the originating society and the role of material culture within it. While most other westerners dismissed the indigenous philosophy as "primitive fetishism", Dennett investigated the beliefs that were important to BaKongo society and showed an interest in their folktales, religion, and material culture which was remarkable in its intensity. He was also outspoken in his belief in free trade in Africa. These combined interests produced a rich body of material which this study has examined in detail in order to uncover many interconnected histories.

The thesis has argued that ethnographic collections in western museums represent an intercultural encounter which is often, for varying reasons, overlooked. By selecting one particular collection, it has been possible to analyse the interactions which led to the removal of the Dennett Collection from Africa and to its arrival in the museum in Exeter. The investigation revealed the political significance of the objects, and also uncovered an important account of a critical period in the colonisation of the Congo. At the same time, it demonstrated how academic institutions, societies, and museums were active in the production and dissemination of meaning surrounding ethnographic artefacts at the time.

Our knowledge of the Dennett Collection has thus been enhanced by the extensive research into these complex contexts. Furthermore, the research has also found practical application in the museum itself. The *Invisible Powers* exhibition has allowed the RAMM audience to examine the BaKongo objects more closely and to consider the circumstances in which the collection was originally created and interpreted. The display methodology followed the rationale of the thesis as a whole, by drawing attention to the intercultural exchange which led to the collection of these significant

artefacts. Consistent contextualisation has therefore been applied in both the thesis and in the display, so that the collaborative project has allowed the present-day museum community to reassess the Dennett Collection, and to explore and appreciate its multiple meanings, through a detailed examination of these previously hidden histories.

Figures.



Figure 1. Dennett Collection, (probably photographed in Ashton, Devon between 1880 and 1887).
Lantern slide, Royal Anthropological Institute, *R. E. Dennett Collection*.



Figure 2. Map of the Congo region showing the extent of the Kongo peoples; the present-day names of countries and capitals; and places of significance in Richard Dennett's history, as mentioned in the text. Reproduced courtesy of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM).

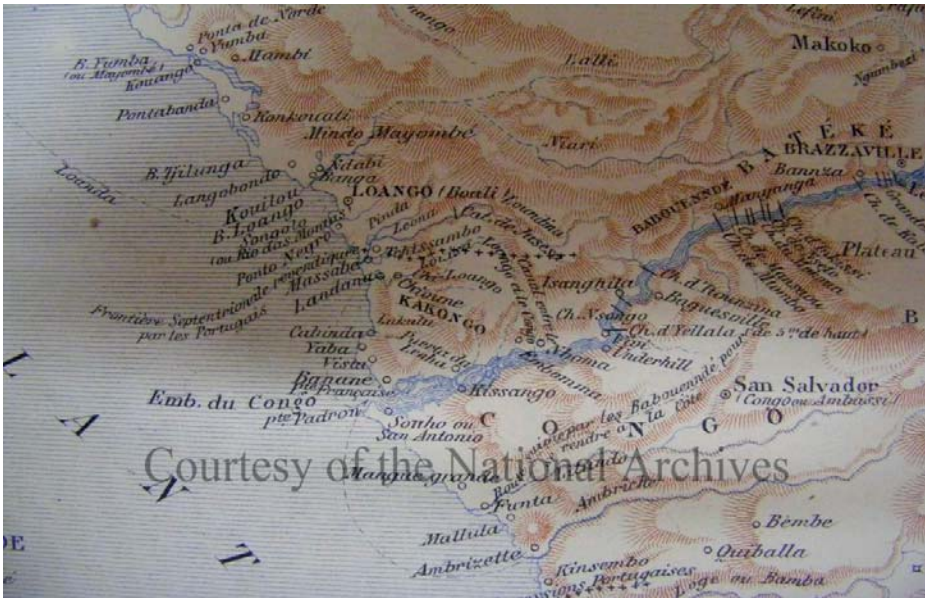


Figure 3. Detail of Map of Central Africa by Henri Mager, 1884, showing Loango Coast and Mouth of the River Congo. National Archives, ref. FO 925/58, reproduced courtesy of the National Archives.



Figure 4. 'Map of Trade Routes.' Richard Dennett. *Seven Years among the Fjort*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887, frontispiece.



Figure 5. Display from ‘Manchester Gallery’, Manchester Museum, 2010. Author’s photograph, reproduced courtesy of The Manchester Museum, University of Manchester.



KINSEMBO, SHOWING THE BAR AT THE MOUTH OF THE RIVER.
(From a photograph by Donald B. Fraser, Esq.)

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Figure 6. ‘Kinsembo, Showing the Bar at the Mouth of the River. (From a photograph by Donald B. Fraser, Esq.)’, Richard Dennett, *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887, facing p. 14.

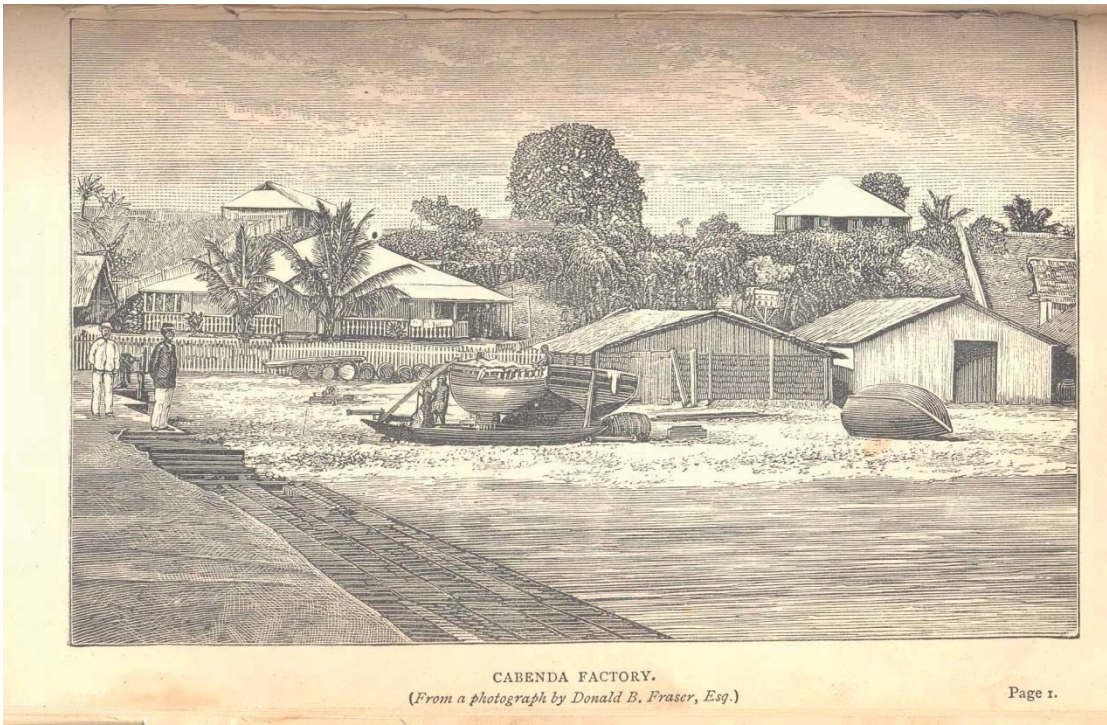


Figure 7. ‘Cabenda Factory. (From a photograph by Donald B. Fraser Esq.)’ Richard Dennett, *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887, facing p. 2.

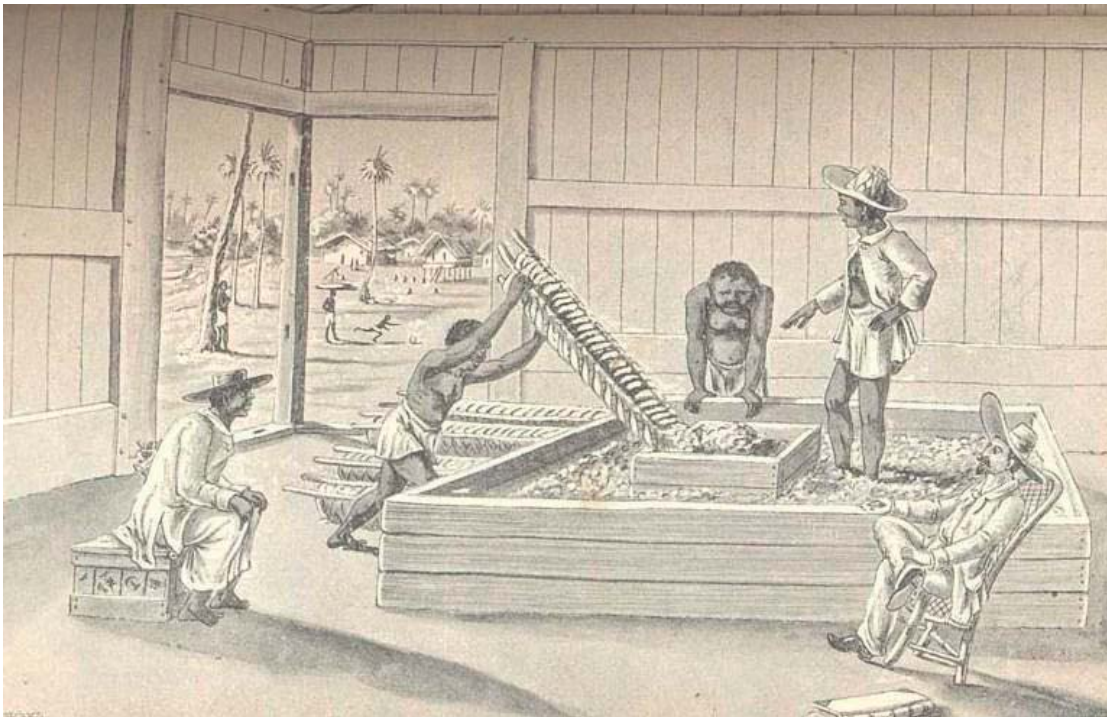


Figure 8. ‘Manimacosso measures his trade. (From a sketch by the Author).’ Richard Dennett, *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887, facing p. 176.



Figure 9. 'Manimacosso measures his palm oil. (From a sketch by the Author).' Richard Dennett, *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, 1887, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, facing p. 192.



Figure 10. 'Congo Français. No. 92 - Fabrication de l'huile de Palme chez les Bavis.' [*French Congo. No. 92 - Processing the Palm Oil in the Bavis Country.*] Photograph by J. Audema, c. 1905, postcard, collotype. Published by *Impreméries réunis de Nancy*, France. EEPA Postcard Collection, Audema 0092. *Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives*, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.

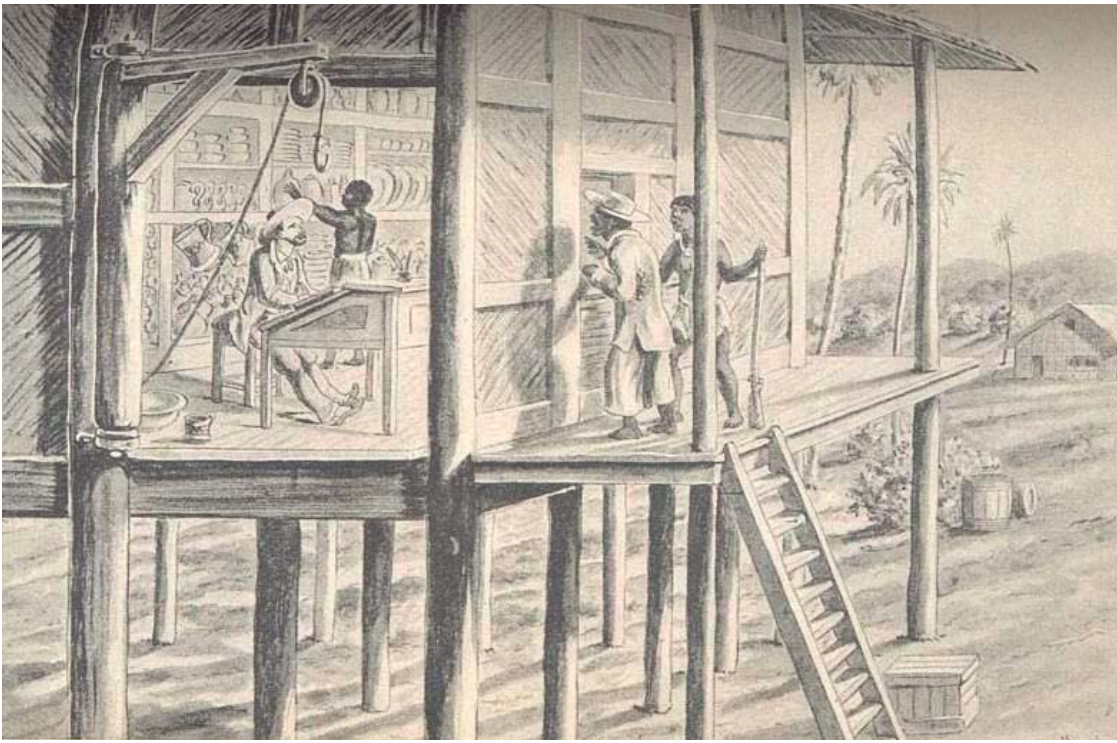
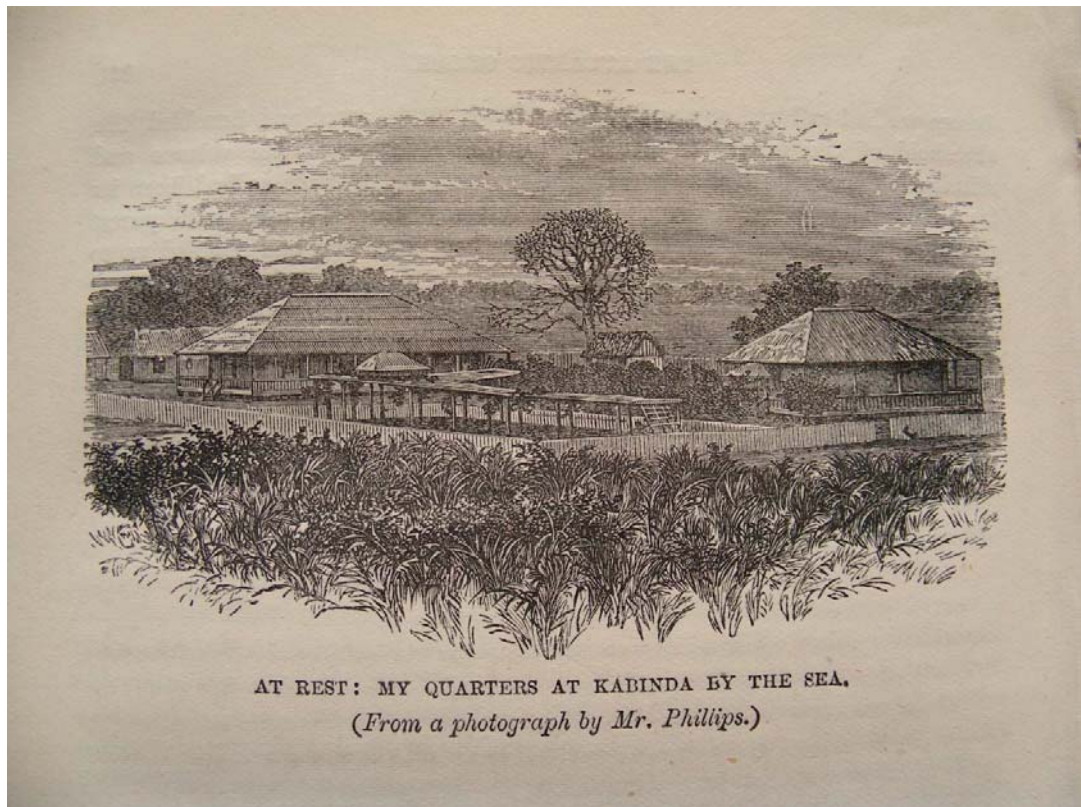


Figure 11. 'Manimacosso takes his pay. (From a sketch by the Author).' Richard Dennett, *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887, facing p. 216.



Figure 12. 'Group of Mr Stanley's Followers at Kabinda.' H. M. Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*, Vol. 2, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1878, facing p. 468.



AT REST: MY QUARTERS AT KABINDA BY THE SEA.
(From a photograph by Mr. Phillips.)

Figure 13. 'At rest: My Quarters at Kabinda by the Sea.' H. M. Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*, Vol. 2, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1878, p. 468.



Figure 14. Manchester Athenaeum, designed by Charles Barry, built 1824-1835. Author's photograph, 2010.



Figure 15. 'Maxim Automatic Gun.' H. M. Stanley, *In Darkest Africa, or the Quest, Rescue and Retreat of Emin Governor of Equatoria*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1890, p. 81.

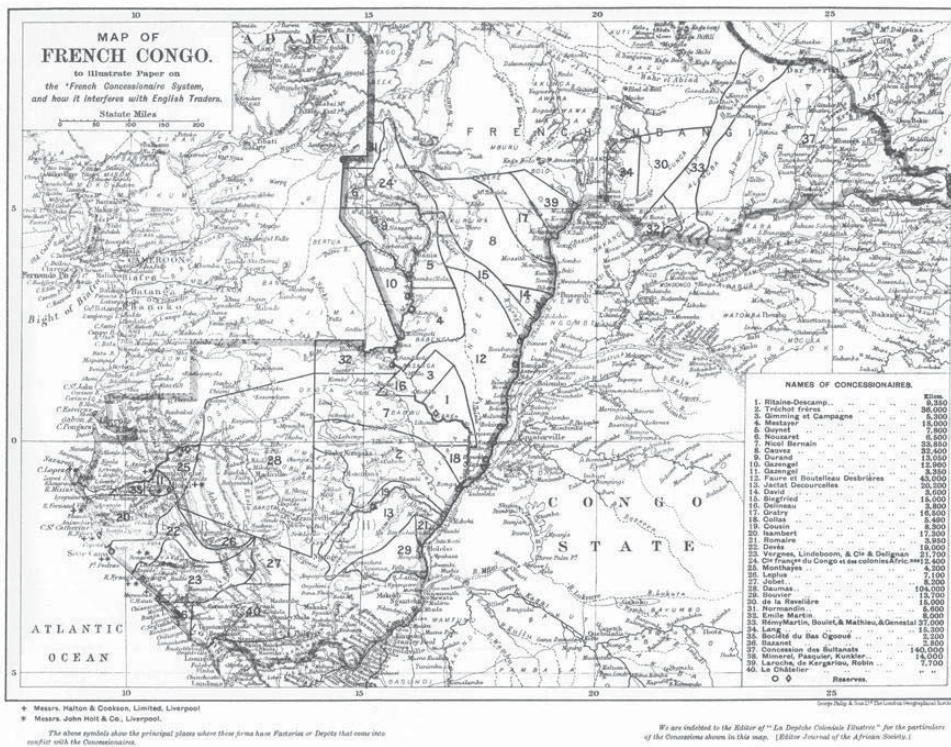


Figure 16. 'Map of French Congo to illustrate paper on the French concessionaire system and how it interferes with English traders.' E. D. Morel, 'The Position of British Merchants in the French Congo'. *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 2, no. 5, (1902), facing p. 38.



Figure 17. Mother and Child. Lantern slide, Royal Anthropological Institute, *R. E. Dennett Collection.*



Figure 18. Two Unnamed Women. Lantern slide, Royal Anthropological Institute, *R. E. Dennett Collection.*



Figure 19. Unnamed woman and toddler. Lantern slide, Royal Anthropological Institute, R. E. Dennett Collection.



Figure 20. Unnamed schoolgirls. Lantern slide, Royal Anthropological Institute, R. E. Dennett Collection.



Figure 21. 'At Olokemeji.' E. D. Morel's photographic record of his visit to Nigeria as Special Correspondent for *The Times*, 1911. Front Row: H. N. Thompson, E. D. Morel, Duebo, Richard Dennett. Back Row: Forest Guards from the Southern Nigerian Forestry Service. London School of Economics, ref. F1/8/11, *E. D. Morel Archive*, reproduced courtesy of the London School of Economics.



Figure 22. 'Map of African Literature.' William Winwoode-Read. *African Sketchbook*, Vol. 2. London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1873, back page.



BADOONGOO OR PEGASARIO.
(From a sketch by the Author.)

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Figure 23. 'Badoongoo or Pegasario. (From a sketch by the Author).' Richard Dennett, *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887, facing p. 10.



SURF, AND FISHING-NET, BASKET, AND CANOES.
(From a sketch by the Author.)

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Figure 24. 'Surf. (From a sketch by the Author).' Richard Dennett, *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887, facing p. 232.



Figure 25. 'The Coffin containing the body, on view just before burial.' Richard Dennett, *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, London: Macmillan, 1906, facing p. 102.



Figure 26. 'Consulting Mpumbu.' Richard Dennett, 'Bavili Notes.' *Folklore*, Vol. 16, no. 4, (1905), facing p. 377.

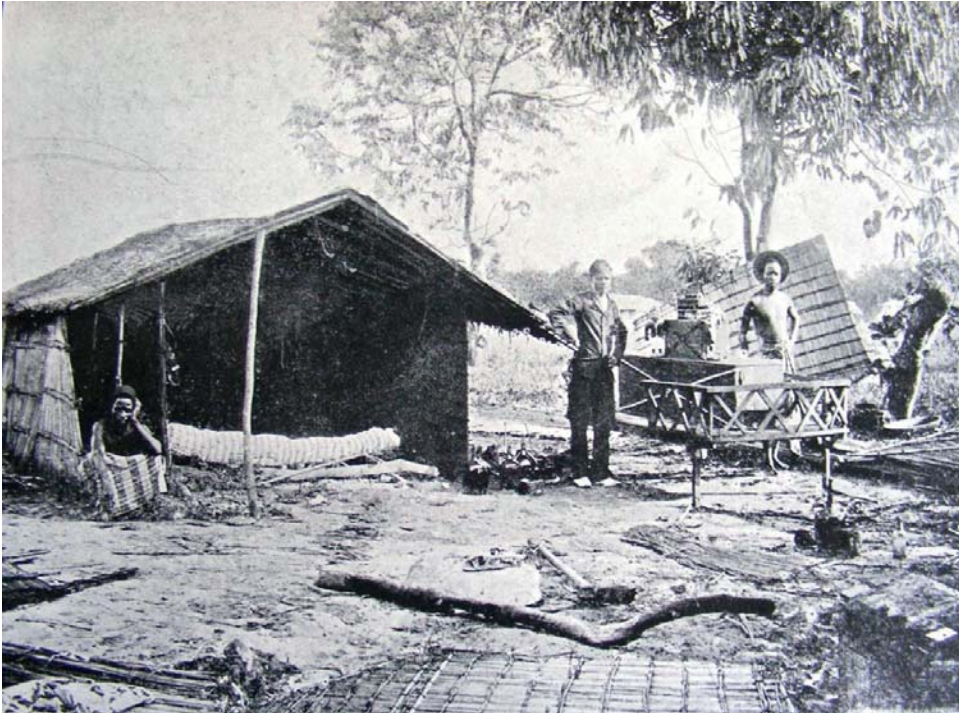


Figure 27. 'Prince Xicaia by the Funeral Car of his brother, Linguister Francisco.' Richard Dennett, *The Folklore of the Fjort*, London: The Folklore Society, 1898, facing p. 114.

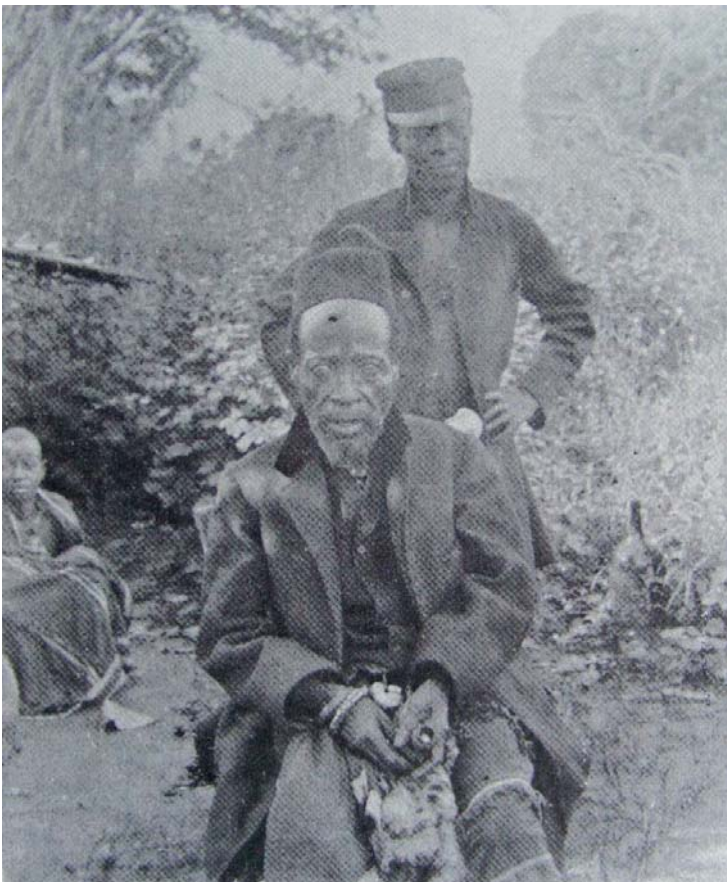


Figure 28. 'Maniluemba.' Richard Dennett, *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, London: Macmillan, 1906, facing p. 10.



Figure 29. 'Maniluemba.' Lantern slide, Royal Anthropological Institute, R. E. Dennett Collection.

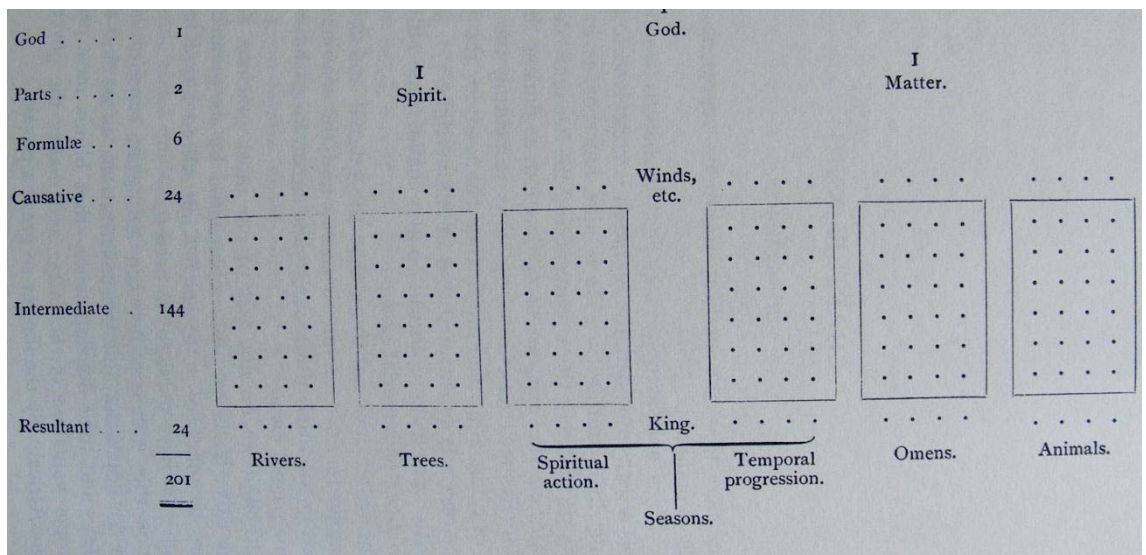


Figure 30. 'The Philosophy in Table Form.' Richard Dennett, *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, London: Macmillan, 1906, p. 237.

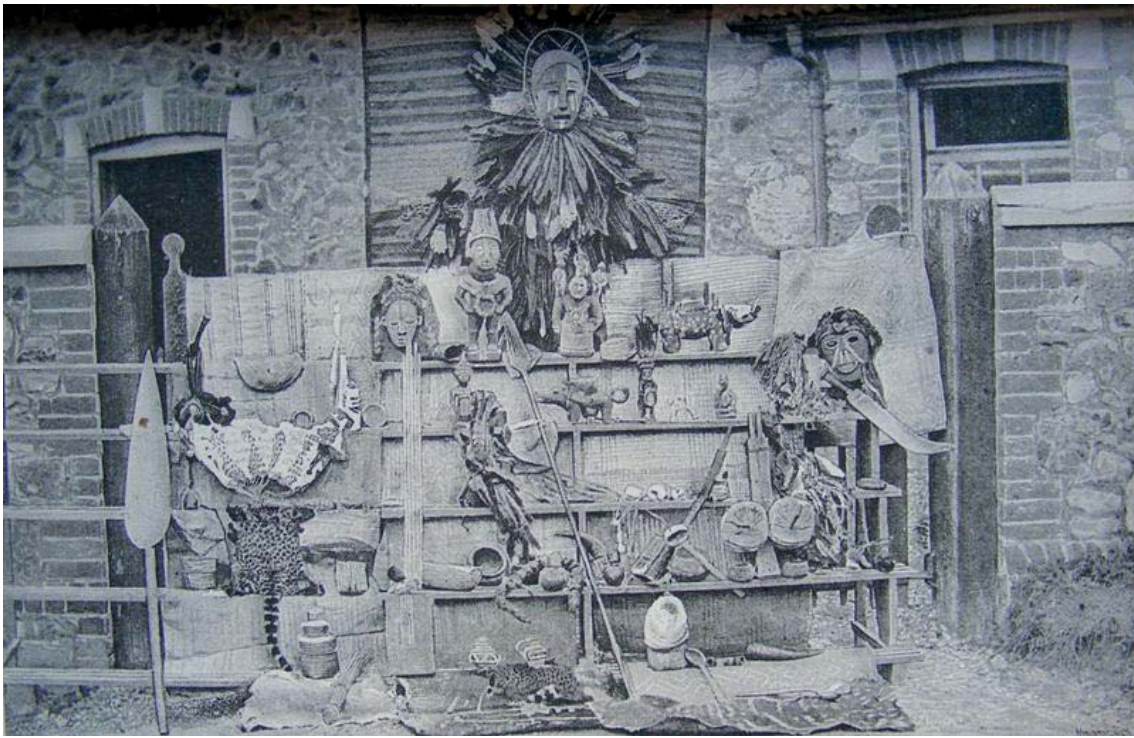


Figure 31. 'Feteiches and Curios. (From a Photograph taken by Dr. H. J. L. Bennett.)' Richard Dennett, *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887, facing p. 48.

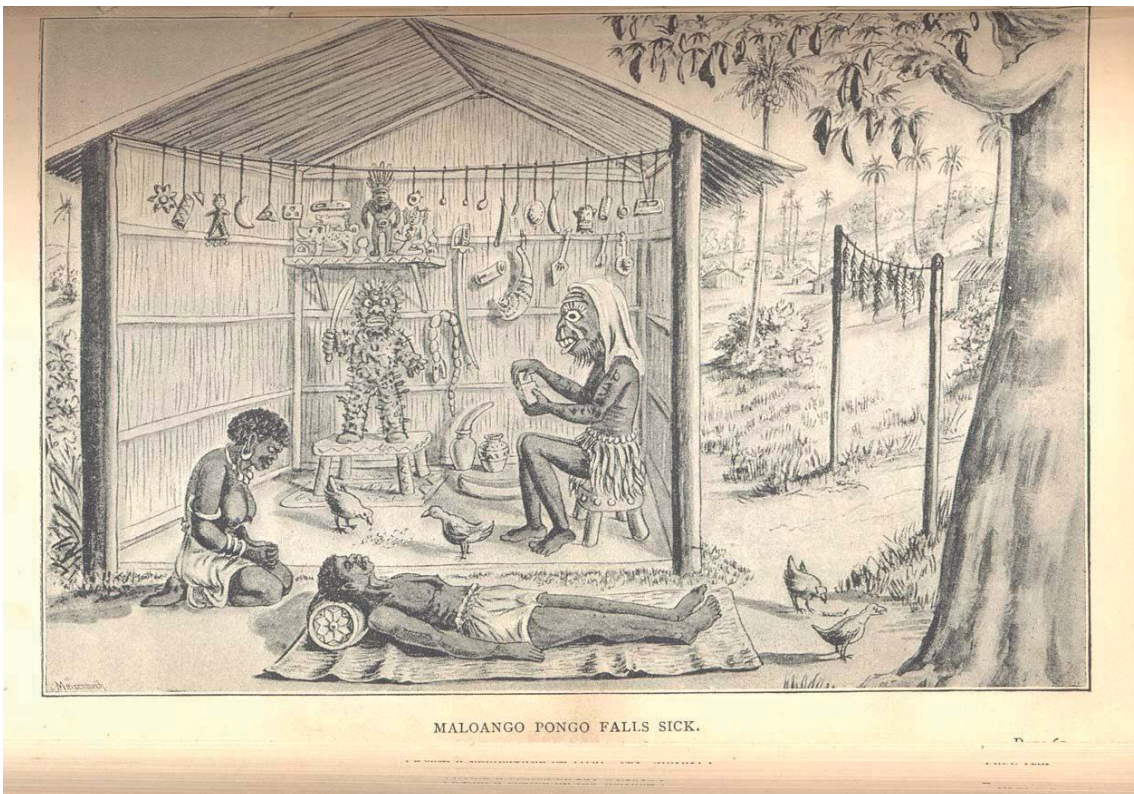


Figure 32. 'Maloango Pongo Falls Sick. (From a sketch by the Author.)' Richard Dennett, *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887, facing p. 56.



Figure 33. *Nkisi*. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/57. RAMM photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 34. *Nkisi*. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/61. RAMM photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 35. 'Nkisi Ekawso.' Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/62. RAMM photographs, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 36. *Nkisi*. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/53. RAMM photographs reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 37. *Nganga* Mask. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/46. RAMM record photographs, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 38. Fringed waistband with metal bell at centre. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/41. RAMM record photographs, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 39. 'Nkisi Mabyaala Ma Ndembe, Loango, French Congo.' [*Congo Français. Le grand Fétich Mabialla Mandembe.*] Photograph by Robert Visser, c. 1890-1905, postcard, collotype. Publisher unknown, c. 1905. EEPA postcard collection CF-03-02. *Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives*, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.

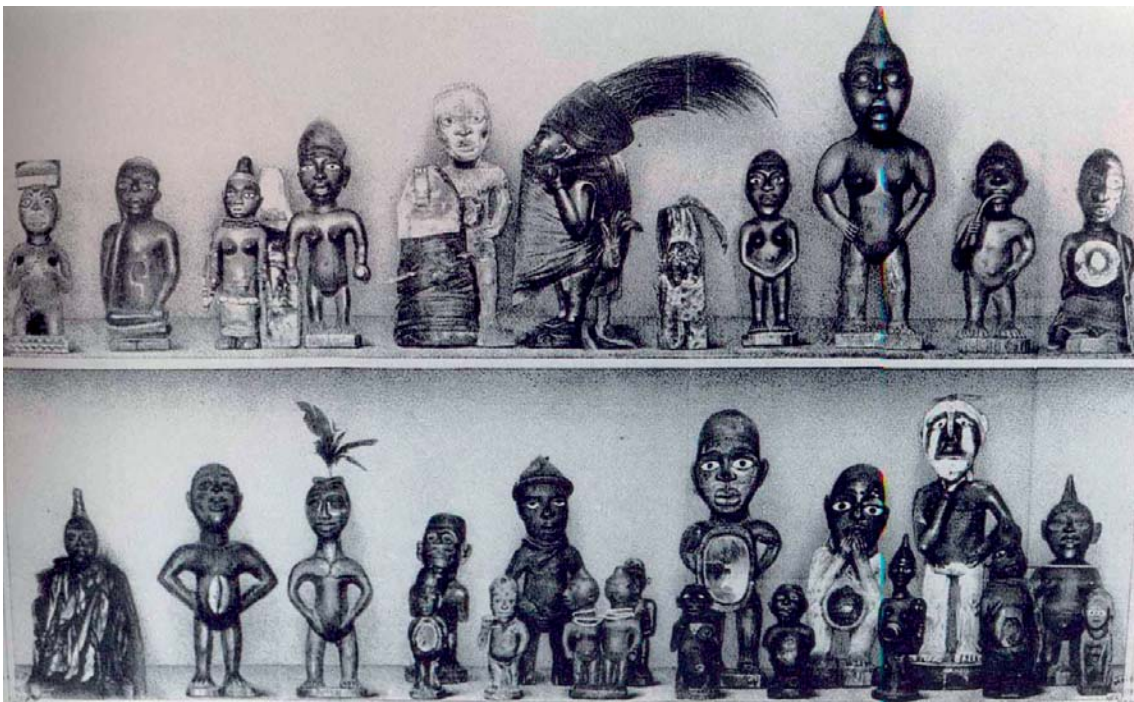


Figure 40. 'Fetichfiguren von der Loango-Küste.' Adolf Bastian, *Die deutsche Expedition an der Loango-Küste*, Jena: Hermann Costenoble, 1875, np.



Figure 41. *Ndungu* costume. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/43. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 42. *Ndungu* costume. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/43. Authors Photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 43. ‘*Croquemitaine s’amuse le 14 Juillet à Loango.*’ [‘Mischievous spirit amuses himself on the 14th of July (Bastille Day) in Loango, French Congo.’] Photographer unknown, c. 1910, postcard, collotype. Publisher unknown, c. 1925. EEPA Postcard Collection, CF 17-3. *Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives*, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.

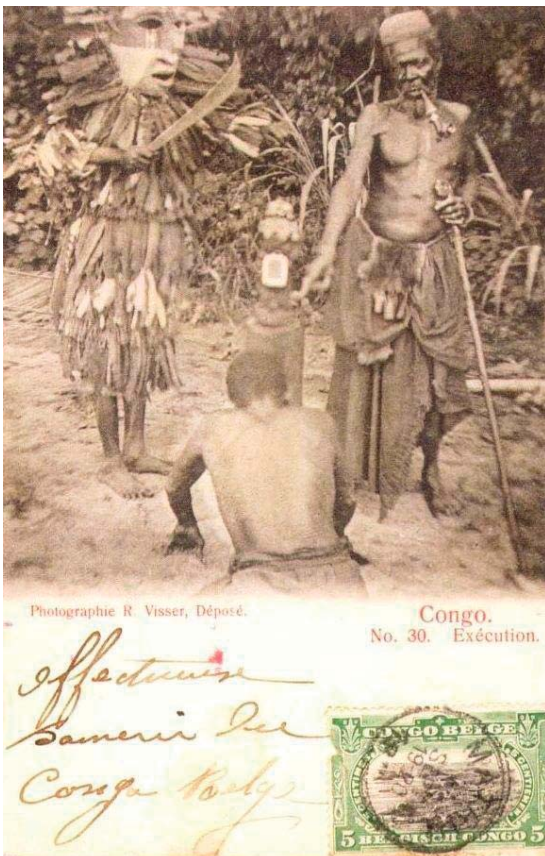


Figure 44. ‘*Congo. No. 30 - Exécution.*’ [‘Execution, French Congo.’] Photograph by Robert Visser, c. 1890 - 1900, postcard, collotype. Publisher unknown, c. 1905. Postmarked September 1920. EEPA Postcard Collection, CF 23-1. *Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives*, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.

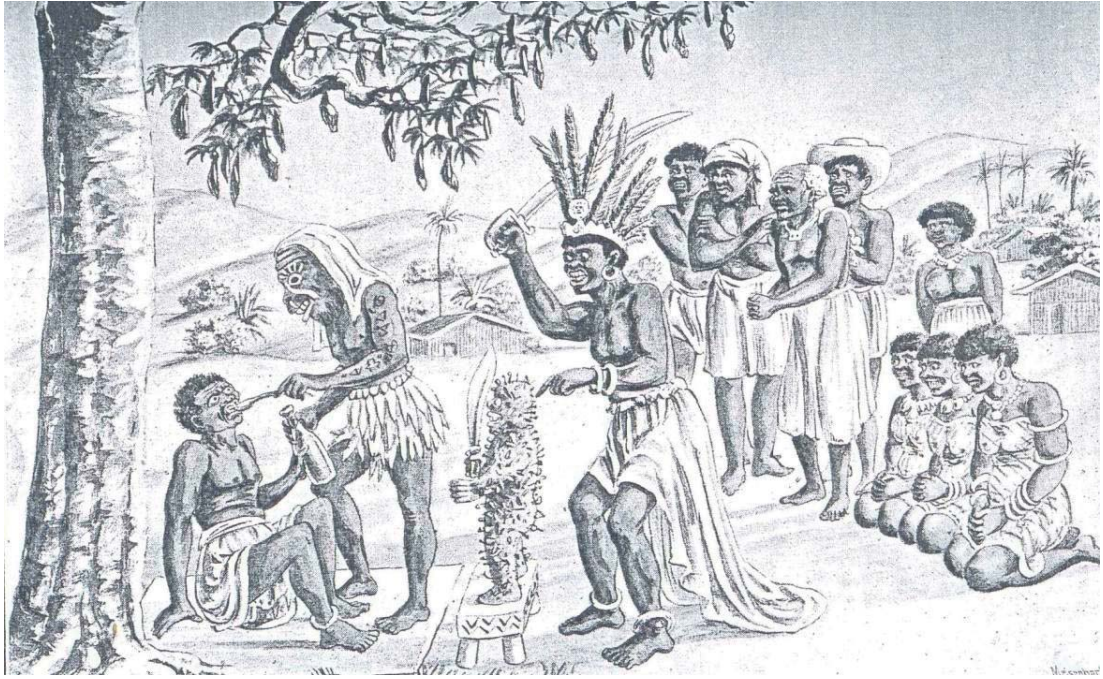


Figure 45. 'My Mother takes Cassia. From a Sketch by the Author.' Richard Dennett, *Seven Years Among the Fjort*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887, facing p. 80.



Figure 46. 'Worshipping Before Idols.' H. M. Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone: Travels, Adventures and Discoveries in Central Africa, Including Four Months' Residence with Dr. Livingstone*. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low and Searle, 1872, p. 128.



Figure 47. 'N'dunga Mask.' Lindor Serrurier, in Joost Willink, *Stages in Civilisation: Dutch Museums in Quest of West Central African Collections (1856-1889)*, Leiden: CNWS, 2007, plate 50. Photograph reproduced courtesy of Joost Willink.



Figure 48. Bark Sample, possibly 'Nkasa' wood. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/109. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 49. Two of Six Knives. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/89 and 9/1889/93. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 50. 'Mavungu, a Kabenda nail-fetish.' Richard Dennett, *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, 1906, frontispiece.



Figure 51. 'The Snake Charmer.' Adolph Friedlander Company, original 1880's, reprinted by the Shree Ram Calendar Company, Bombay, 1955, in Henry Drewal, 'Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and Its Diasporas.' *African Arts*, Vol. 41, no. 2, (2008), p. 67. Photograph reproduced courtesy of Henry Drewal.

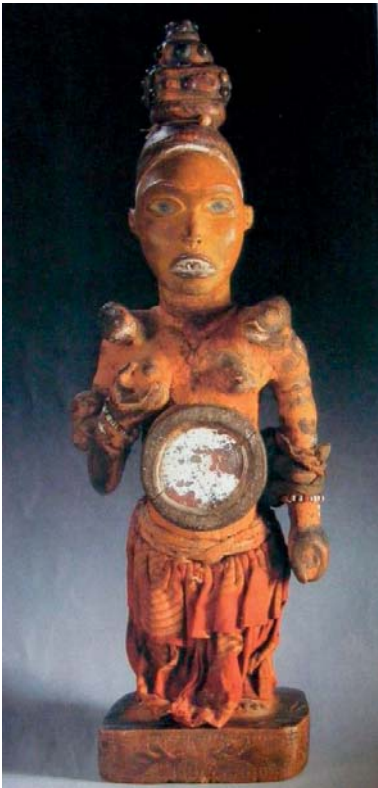


Figure 52. Female Figure collected by Robert Visser. Katrin Adler and Christine Stelzig, 'Robert Visser and his photographs from the Loango Coast.' *African Arts*, Vol. 35, no. 4, (2002), p. 39. Photograph reproduced courtesy of Christine Stelzig.



Figure 53. *Nkisi*. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/39. Author's photographs, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 54. *Nkisi*. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/64. RAMM photograph and author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 55. *Nkisi*. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/98. Author's photographs, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 56. *Nkisi*. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/60. Author's photographs, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 57. *Nkisi*. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/54. RAMM photograph and author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.

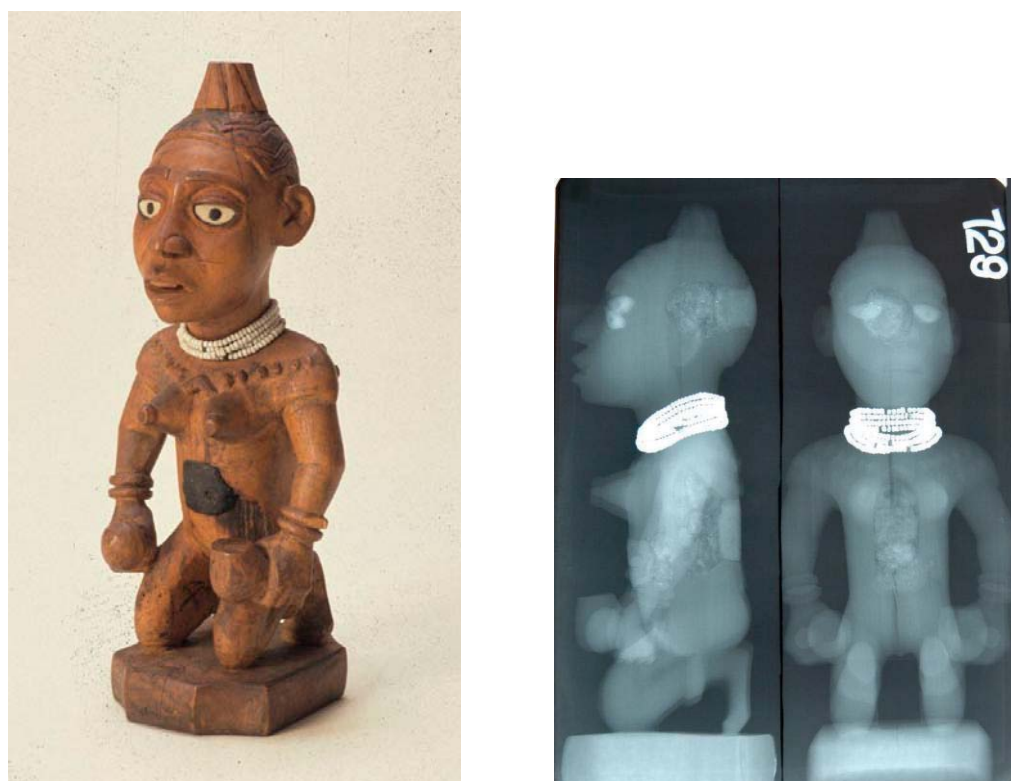


Figure 58. *Nkisi*. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/63, and x-ray of same. RAMM photographs, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 59. Detail of *Nkisi*. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/54. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.

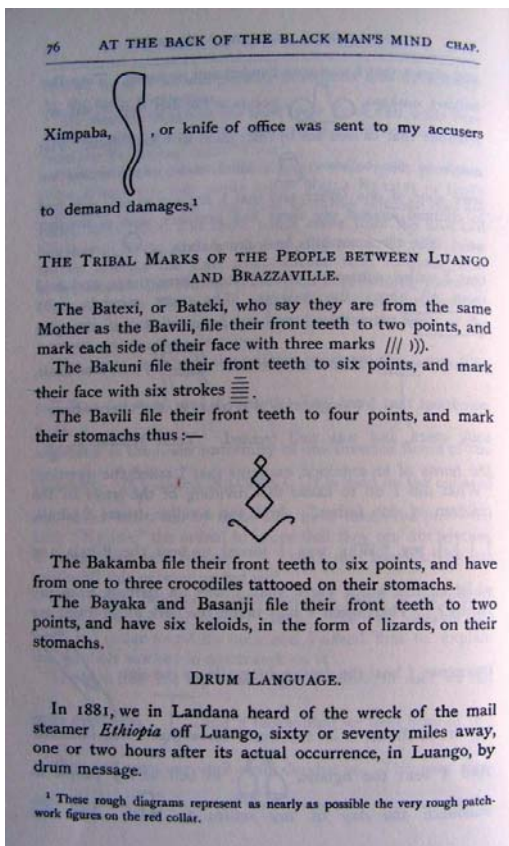


Figure 60. 'Measures, Signs and Symbols.' Richard Dennett, *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, London: Macmillan, 1906, p. 76.



Figure 61. *Nkisi*. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/67. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 62. Detail of Fig. 61, 9/1889/67. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 63. *Nkisi*. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/81. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 64. *Nkisi*. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/56. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 65. *Nkisi*. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Dennett Collection, 9/1889/56. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 66. Basket. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/87. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



MABILL.

See page 90.

Figure 67. 'Mabili.' Richard Dennett, *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, London: Macmillan, 1906, facing p. 91.

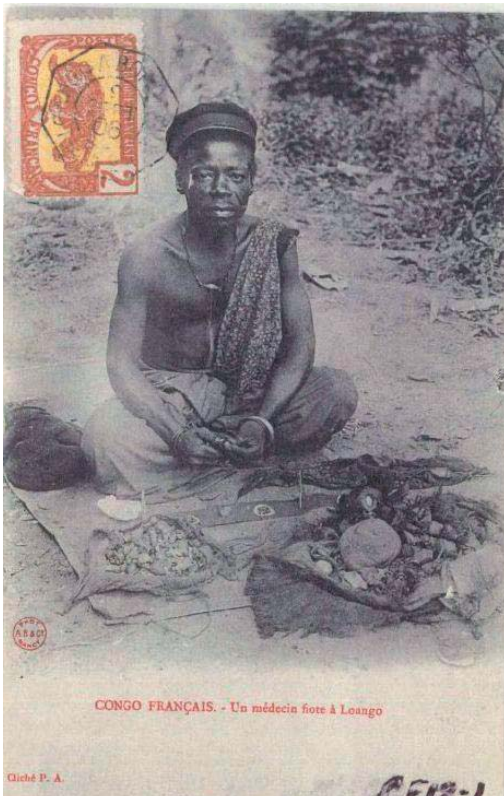


Figure 68. 'Congo Français. Un Médecin Fiote à Loango.' ['A Vili diviner in Loango, French Congo.'] Photograph by P. A., c. 1900, postcard, collotype. Publisher unknown, c. 1905. EEPA Postcard Collection, CF 18-1. *Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives*, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.



Figure 69. *Nkisi* (detail). Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/40. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 70. *Nkisi* (detail). Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/40. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 71. *Nkisi*. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/110. RAMM record photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 72. *Mpu*. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/82. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 73. Pipes. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/71, 9/1889/72. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 74. Pipe. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/70. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 75. Pipe, detail. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/70. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 76. Ball of tobacco. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/73. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 77. Bracelet. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/65. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 78. Leopard Box. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/68. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 79. Staff Handle. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/55. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 80. Kongo 'Cape'. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/59. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 81. Broom. Royal Albert Memorial Museum, *Dennett Collection*, 9/1889/ 74. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.

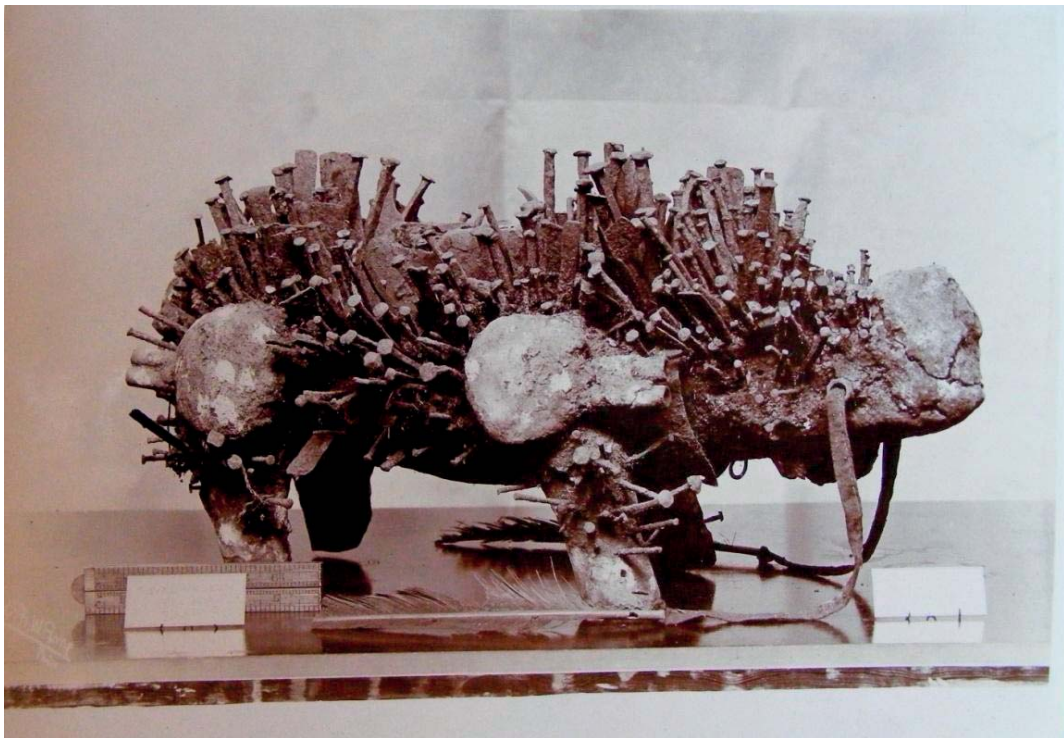
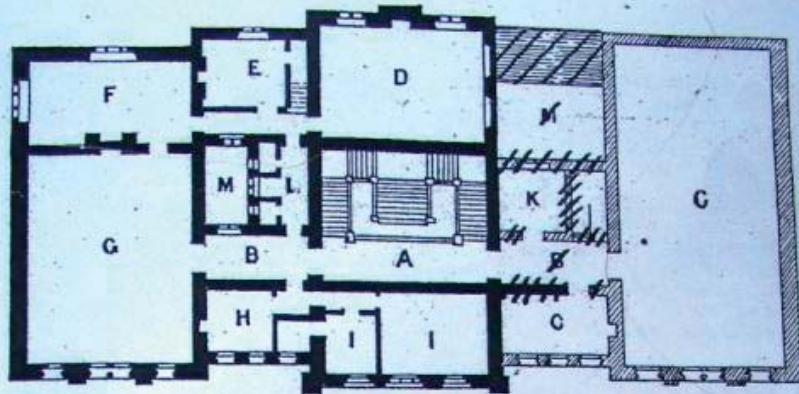


Figure 82. *Nkisi* 'Kozo'. Photograph used to illustrate Ben Mullen. 'Fetishes from Landana, South West Africa.' *Man*, Vol. 5, (1905), p. 104.



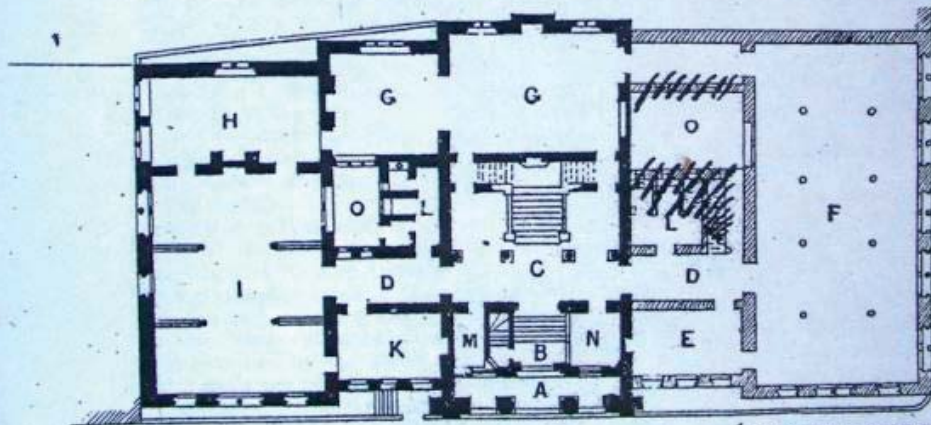
Figure 83. *Nkisi* 'Mangaka'[sic]. Photograph used to illustrate Ben Mullen. 'Fetishes from Landana, South West Africa.' *Man*, Vol. 5, (1905), p. 103.

Albert Memorial Museum.



UPPER PLAN

- | | | |
|------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| A Landing | E Master's Room | I.I. Ladies' Class Room & Cloak Room |
| B. Corridor | F Painting Room | K Gallery of engravings |
| C.C. Museum | G Elementary Class Room | L Lavatories |
| D Room for casts | H Attendant's Room | M Court |



GROUND PLAN

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| A Entrance & Arcade | E Curator's Room | I Reading Room |
| B Vestibule | F Museum | K Store Room |
| C Hall & Staircase | G.G. Class Rooms | L Lavatories &c |
| D.D. Corridors | H Attendant's Room | M Store Room |
| | N Porter's Room | O.P. Court |

UPPER PAUL STREET

QUEEN-STREET.

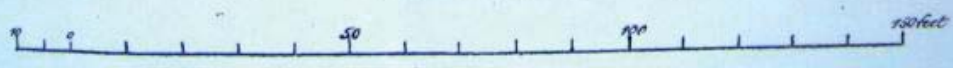


Figure 84. Plan of the Albert Memorial Museum, c. 1868, with corrections. George Donisthorpe, *An Account of the Origin and Progress of the Devon and Exeter Albert Memorial Museum*, 1868, facing p. 24. Royal Albert Memorial Museum Archive.

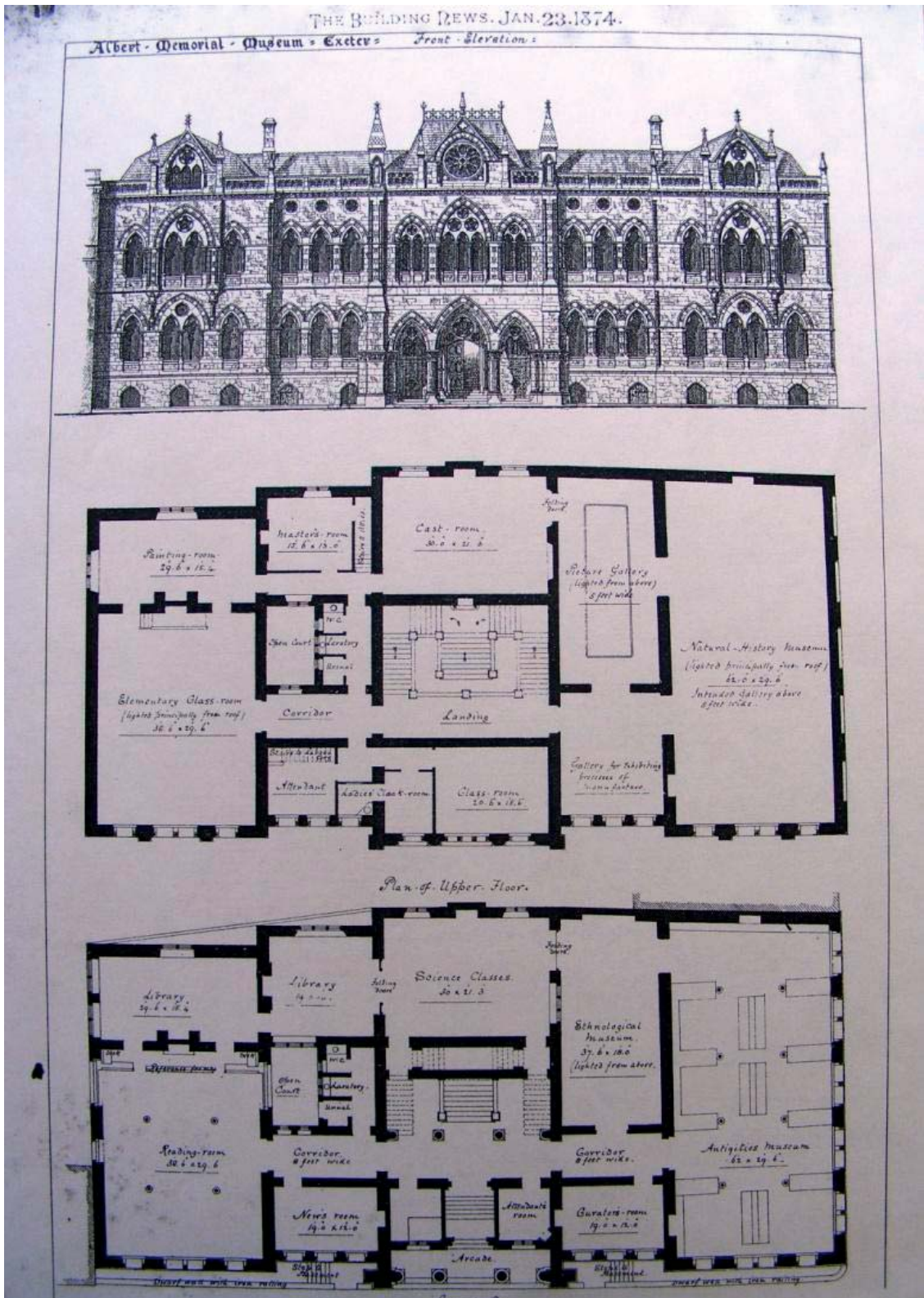
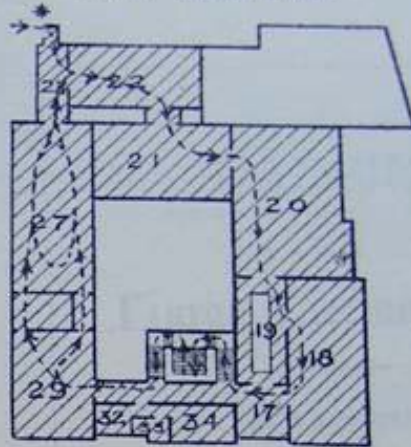


Figure 85. Plan and Elevation of the Albert Memorial Museum, c. 1874. *The Building News*, 1874, Royal Albert Memorial Museum Archive.

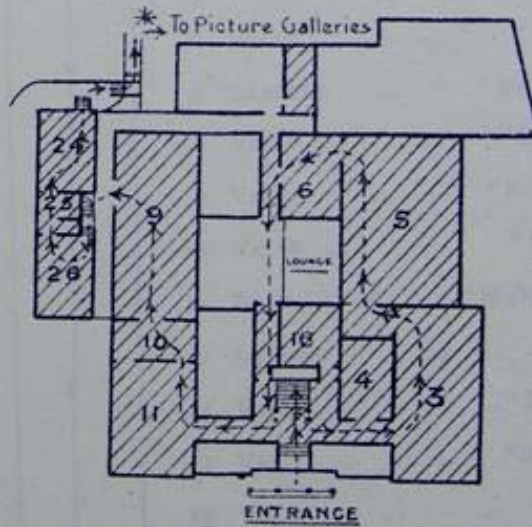
SKETCH PLAN OF MUSEUM.

No. 1. Upper Floor.



- 29 Reception Room.
- 27 Dancing Room.
- 23 Lobby.
- 22, 21 Picture Galleries.
- 20 Ethnological Room.
- 19 Picture Gallery.
- 18 D'Urban Gallery.
- 17 Coins, Plate & Curios.
- 32, 33, 34 Ladies' Cloak Rooms.

No. 2. Ground Floor.



- 16 Ladies' Cloak Room.
- 4 Gentlemen's Cloak Room.
- 3 Lower Museum.
- 5 Concert Room.
- 11, 10, 9 Refreshment Rooms.
- 26, 25, 24 Chemical Laboratory.

Figure 86. Plan of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum after 1899. Pamphlet for guests of the Royal Institute of Public Health Annual Congress attending a 'Conversazione' at the museum, August 1902. Royal Albert Memorial Museum Archive.



Figure 87. 'The Ethnological Museum' c. 1899. A. Clayden, James Dallas, and G. Shorto. *The Albert Memorial College, Museum and Library: A Brief Description*, 1899, p. 11. Royal Albert Memorial Museum Archive.

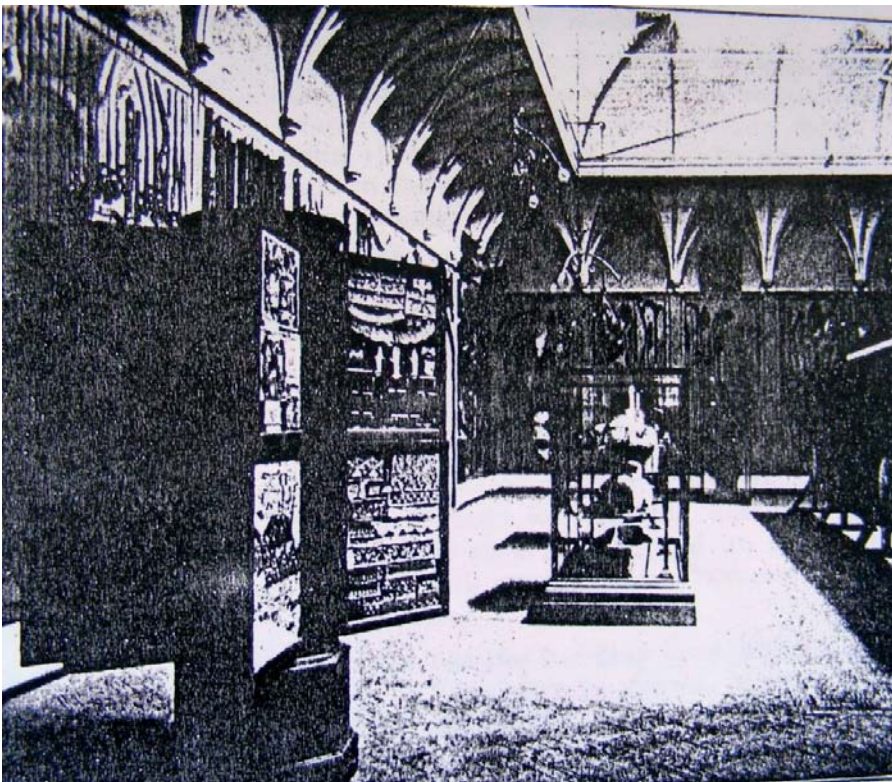


Figure 88. 'The Ethnological Museum' c. 1899. A. Clayden, James Dallas, and G. Shorto. *The Albert Memorial College, Museum and Library: A Brief Description*, 1899, p. 12. Royal Albert Memorial Museum Archive.



Figure 89. Rowley's upright display cases in the Ethnological Gallery, after 1904. *Royal Albert Memorial Museum Archive*, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 90. View of Rowley's upright cases in the Ethnological Gallery, after 1904. *Royal Albert Memorial Museum Archive*, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 91. Ethnological Gallery, after 1904. *Royal Albert Memorial Museum Archive*, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 92. 'Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter. Department of Archaeology and Ethnography.' Postcard, postmarked 1925. *Royal Albert Memorial Museum Archive*, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.

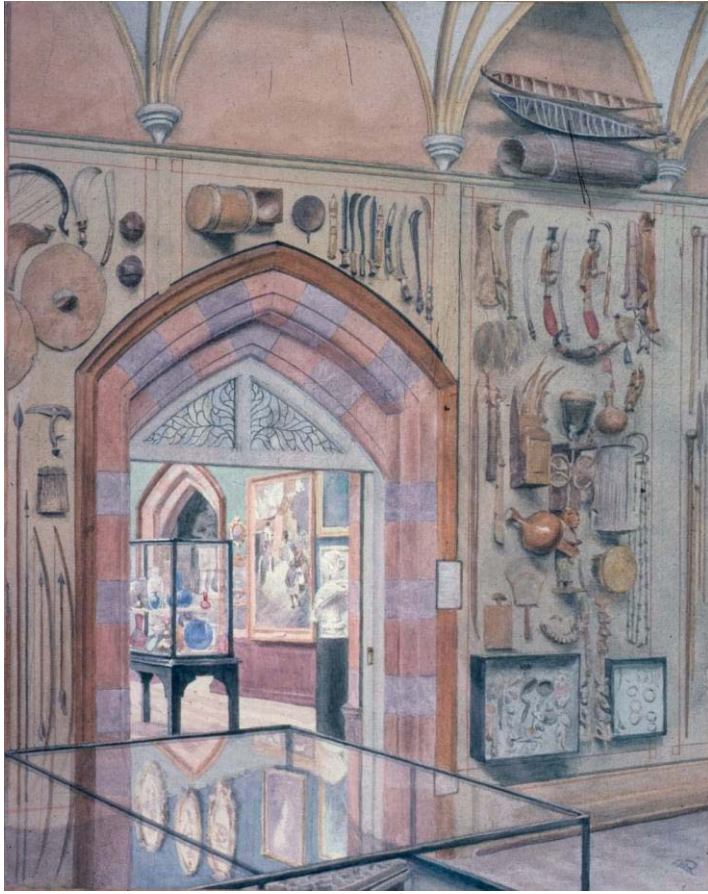


Figure 93. Watercolour painting of the Ethnological Gallery looking through to the Picture Gallery. Philip Henry de la Garde, between 1904-1911. *Royal Albert Memorial Museum Archive*. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.

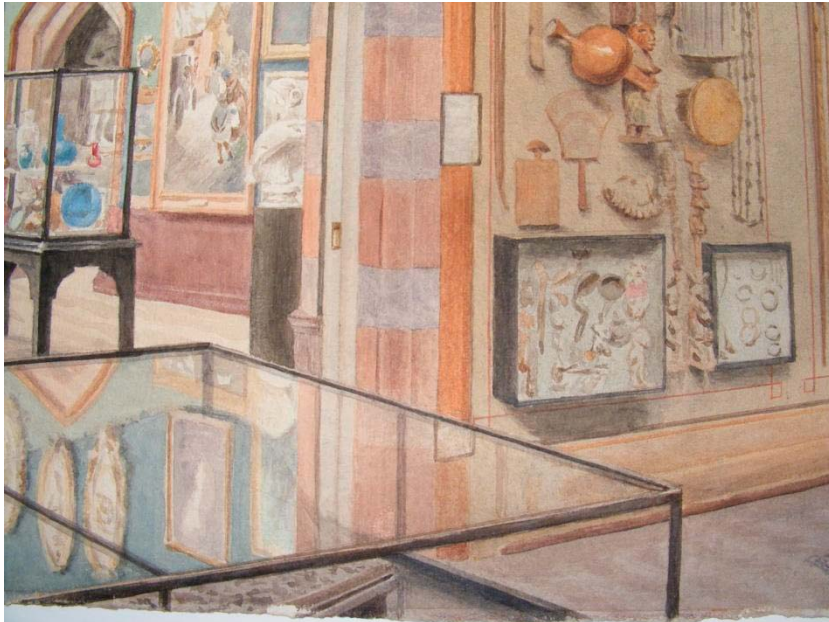


Figure 94. Detail of Fig. 93, showing African collections. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 95. Detail of Fig. 94 showing boxed *minkisi*. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 96. *Nkisi* donated to the Albert Memorial Museum in 1868 by Mr. Dunn, E1395. RAMM photograph, reproduced courtesy of the RAMM.



Figure 97. Two ivories from the Folklore Society ‘French Congo Collection’, c. 1895. One is carved with the message: ‘Presented to the Folk Lore Society by R. E. Dennett, Loango, Congo, 1895.’ Pitt Rivers Museum, accession numbers 1965.1.47 (top) and 1965.1.46. Folklore Society Collection, accession number D. 1900. 35a, and D. 1900. 35b. Author’s photograph, courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.



Figure 98. *Nganga*. Detail of Fig. 97, 1965.1.46. Author’s photograph, courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.



Figure 99. *Nganga*. Detail of Fig. 97, 1965.1.46. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.



Figure 100. *Ivory Porters*. Detail of Fig. 97, 1965.1.46. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.



Figure 101. 'Upper Congo. *Sika pichi xetu*. To prevent premature birth.' Pitt Rivers Museum, accession number 1965.1.8. 2. Folklore Society Collection, accession number D.1900.27.b. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.



Figure 102. 'Upper Congo. *Boatu lubungula*. Cure for eyes.' Pitt Rivers Museum, accession number 1965.1.3. Folklore Society Collection, accession number D.1900.22. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.



Figure 103. 'Upper Congo. *Nte'va Fetish*. To watch one's body.' Pitt Rivers Museum, accession number 1965.1.4. Folklore Society Collection, accession number D.1900.23. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.



Figure 104. 'Upper Congo. *Niam-bi*, early morning reviver.' Pitt Rivers Museum, accession number 1965.1.1. Folklore Society Collection, accession number D.1900.20. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum. University of Oxford.

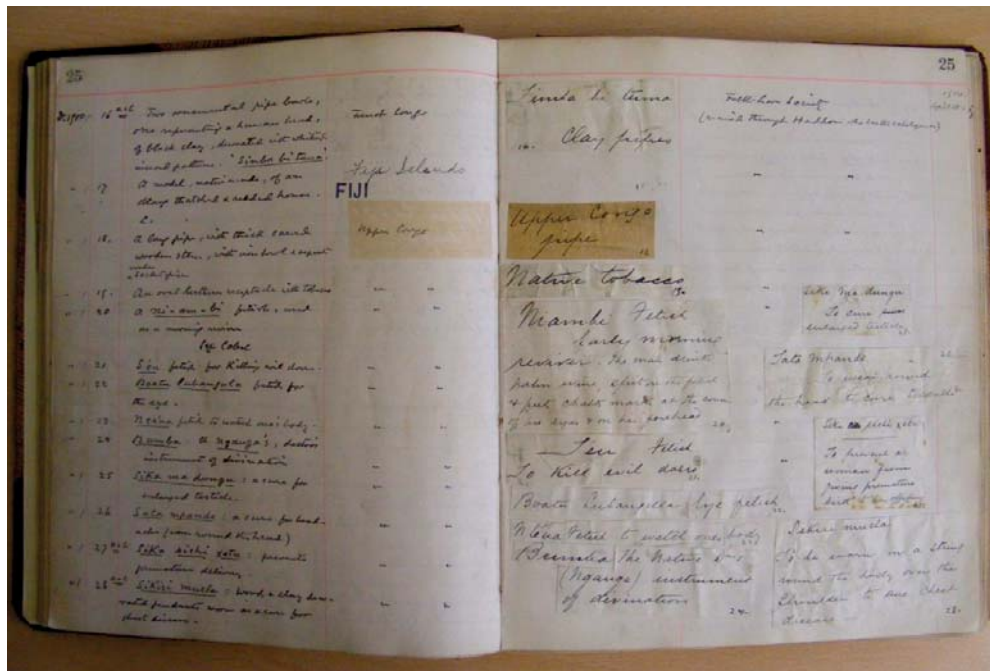


Figure 105. Register of Deposits for 1900, University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, showing items accessioned from the Folklore Society Collection on the left, and Richard Dennett's handwritten notes on the right. Author's photograph, reproduced with permission of the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

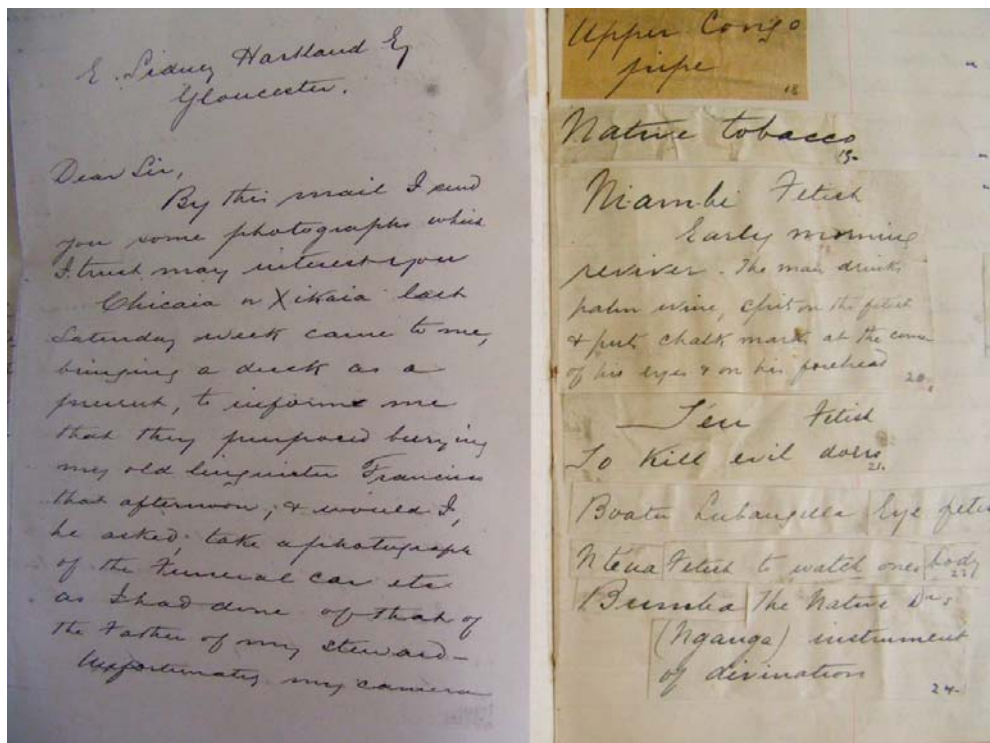


Figure 106. Left: Letter from Richard Dennett to E. Sidney Hartland from Loango, French Congo, 11 October 1897, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, E. S Hartland Archive, ref. 16894B, Author's photograph, reproduced by permission of Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru / The National Library of Wales. Right: Detail of Fig. 105, showing handwritten notes identified as Dennett's. Author's photograph, reproduced with permission of the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.



Figure 107. 'Colonial theatre of historical archetypes: Netherlands East Indies'. Daan Van Dartel, ed. *Tropenmuseum for a change! Present between past and future. A symposium report*, Amsterdam: Tropenmuseum, 2009, p. 48. Photograph reproduced with permission of KIT Tropenmuseum.



Figure 108. Rubber, ivory and colonial photographs from Congo. *Traces of Congo* exhibition, World Cultures Museum, Gothenburg, 2008. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the World Cultures Museum, Gothenburg.

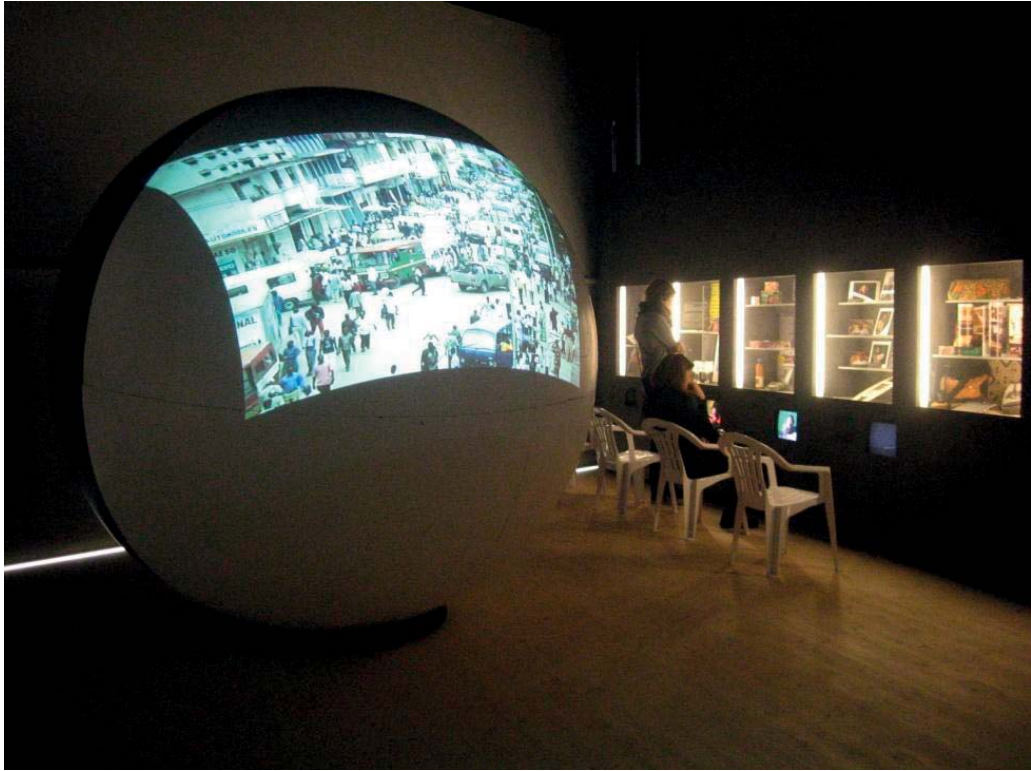


Figure 109. Video projection of a Kinshasa street and displays showing the influence of Congo on Scandinavian culture. *Traces of Congo* exhibition, World Cultures Museum, Gothenburg, 2008. Author's photograph, reproduced courtesy of the World Cultures Museum, Gothenburg.



Figure 110. 'Musée Ma-Loango', pointenoire.alive.com.

Appendix One.

Richard Edward Dennett (1857-1921).

A Brief Biography.

Richard Edward Dennett was born in Valparaiso, in Chile in 1857. His father, Reverend Richard Dennett (1828-1908) had married Eleanor Garforth (1829-1882) in 1854, and the pair travelled to Chile where Reverend Richard became the Consular Chaplain to the Anglican community in Valparaiso in 1855.¹ During Reverend Dennett's chaplaincy the Anglican Church of St Paul's was constructed.² Several children were born to the Dennetts in Valparaiso. Richard Edward was born in 1857, his sister Ada in 1859, followed by Constance in 1860. Frederick was born in 1863. After returning to England in 1869, when Richard Edward was sent to Marlborough School, the last of the five children, Mary, was born in Barningham, Suffolk in 1870.

After his five years of secondary schooling in Marlborough, Richard Edward joined a shipping company, Thomas Wilson and Sons in Hull, in 1875. His parents and the rest of the family now lived in Devon, where the Reverend Richard held a number of clerical positions at Ashreigny, Clyst St. Mary, and Alphington, near Exeter, before he was appointed to the church of St John the Baptist in Ashton. From 1882, the year in which Eleanor Dennett died, the family lived at the Rectory in Ashton. Reverend

¹ Every, E. F. *The Anglican Church in South America*, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1915, p. 87. Every noted that '[a] feature of the British Life on the coast is the group of four or five great commercial houses, doing both import and export business; these have their centre in Valparaiso and establish branches throughout the country, employing large numbers of Englishmen.' Every, 1915, p. 85-86. This commercial seafaring world may well have made its impression on the young Dennett, who followed a similar path in his own career.

² Every, 1915, p. 86.

Richard Dennett remained in Ashton until 1901 when he moved to London and was married to Jane Margaret Beatrice Ferguson (née Boote, 1857-1954).³

Richard Edward Dennett was employed by the trading company Hatton and Cookson in 1879 and he was sent as an assistant trader to the Angola coast. He progressed to work in their factories on the River Congo and on the Loango coast after 1880. Due to his political activity he was forced out of the Congo Free State in 1891 and worked in Portuguese Cabinda and French Congo instead until 1902, when French Concession companies in the region drove many of Hatton and Cookson's factories out of business. At this point Dennett moved to Nigeria where he was employed by the British Colonial Office, in the Forestry Service. He was stationed at Olokmeji, in Southern Nigeria, until his retirement to London, in 1918.

Dennett and two of his siblings worked outside Great Britain. His brother Frederick moved to America in 1885 and his sister Constance went to India, where she died in 1902.⁴ Ada and Mary remained in England. Mary married D'Arcy Bannerman in 1896 and latterly lived in London. Richard Edward used their address in Parliament Hill Mansions in Highgate, when visiting from Nigeria. He also appointed D'Arcy Bannerman to manage his estate.

³ Richard Edward dedicated his 1910 book *Nigerian Studies*, to Beatrice Dennett. After the Reverend Dennett's death in 1908, Beatrice accompanied her stepson, who was the same age as herself, to several meetings of the African Society. See for example, 'Dinners of the Society'. *Journal of the African Society*, Vol. 7, No. 28, July 1908, p. 432.

⁴ Richard Edward, Ada and their mother Eleanor Dennett are buried outside the church in Ashton. Eleanor died in 1882, Ada in 1908, and Richard Edward in 1921. The stone cross also serves as a memorial to Constance, who died in 1902 and was 'interred in Kodiakanal [*sic*], India', and to the Reverend Richard Dennett who died in 1908 and was 'interred in Brighton'. The deaths of Frederick and Mary are not recorded in Ashton.

No record has yet been found to confirm Mary Kingsley's suggestion that Richard Dennett had a daughter with an African partner, and no mention of a daughter was made in his will. Some of Dennett's papers were left to Ivy Viola Greene but Miss Greene's identity remains unclear at present.

Appendix Two.

Timeline.

Year	National and International Events	Richard Edward Dennett	Anthropology, Ethnography and Collecting	Royal Albert Memorial Museum
1857		Richard Dennett born in Chile.		
1858				
1859				
1860				
1861	Death of Prince Albert.			
1862	Last American slaving ships on Congo coast.			
1863				
1864				
1865				Foundation Stone laid.
1866				Museum opens. First curator is William D'Urban.
1867				
1868				Reverend Townsend donates Yoruba collections.
1869		Dennett to Marlborough school.		
1870				
1871			Edmund Tylor's <i>Primitive Culture</i> published.	
1872				
1873			German Expedition to the Loango coast.	
1874		Dennett leaves Marlborough.	A. C. Haddon attends Cambridge.	
1875		Dennett to Hull, Thomas Wilson and Sons.		
1876				

1877	H. M. Stanley arrives at Boma after crossing Africa.			Museum appeals for further donations.
1878	Stanley meets King Leopold II of Belgium.			
1879	Stanley returns to Congo in service of the AIA.	Dennett arrives in Ambrizette, working for Hatton and Cookson.		
1880		Dennett in Kinsembo.	Haddon becomes Chair of Zoology at Dublin.	
1881		Dennett in Chiloango. Stands surety for AIA.		
1882	De Brazza begins treaty-making in Congo.	H. H. Johnston meets Dennett in Cabinda.		New site bought for museum extension.
1883			Pitt Rivers collection moves to Oxford.	
1884			Tylor appointed Reader in Anthropology at Oxford.	James Dallas replaces D'Urban as curator.
1885	Berlin Conference. Gordon killed at Khartoum, Emin Pasha retreats.			
1886	Stanley road building at Vivi.	Dennett at meeting of Manchester Geographic Society.		
1887	Emin Pasha Relief Expedition.	Dennett publishes <i>Seven Years Among the Fjort</i> .		Dallas publishes <i>On the Primary Divisions... of Mankind</i> .
1888	John Dunlop develops vulcanised rubber.		Haddon's first trip to the Torres Straights.	

1889				Dennett's collection is accessioned.
1890	Colonel Williams in the Congo.			
1891	Colonel Williams dies in England.	Dennett writes MS newspaper, <i>The Congo Mirror</i> , and is forced to leave the Congo Free State.	Henry Balfour is appointed curator at Pitt Rivers Museum.	
1892		Dennett moves to Loango coast.		
1893		Dennett meets Mary Kingsley in Cabinda.	Arnold Ridyard starts collecting for Liverpool and Manchester.	
1894		Folklore Society agrees to publish Dennett's folktales.	Folklore Society actively collecting 'specimens'.	
1895		Dennett commissions Loango ivory carving for Folklore Society.	A. H. Keane publishes <i>Ethnology</i> .	New Ethnological Room opens on first floor.
1896				
1897	British raid on Benin City.	Dennett corresponds with Kingsley and E. S. Hartland about his book.	Horniman Museum purchases Benin artefacts.	
1898	Kitchener defeats Mahdists at Omdurman in Sudan.	Dennett meets Maniluemba. <i>Folklore of the Fjort</i> is published.	Haddon leads Torres Straights expedition.	
1899	Kipling publishes <i>The White Man's Burden</i> .	Dennett is mentioned in a letter from U. Shawcross to Ridyard.	Folklore Society Collection moved to Cambridge.	York wing opened. "Royal" is added to the museum's title.

1900	S. Nigeria becomes a British Protectorate with Frederick Lugard as High Commissioner.		Emil Torday in Congo. Death of Mary Kingsley. Foundation of the African Society.	
1901	Death of Queen Victoria.		Haddon acts as advisor to Horniman Museum.	
1902	Coronation of Edward VII.	Dennett moves to Nigeria. He writes <i>Miss Kingsley's Visit to Kabinda</i> and <i>Mavungu</i> .		Frederick Rowley replaces Dallas and rearranges Ethnological Room.
1903		Dennett corresponds with E. D. Morel over Congo reform.		
1904	Consul Roger Casement's report on the Congo is presented to British Parliament.	Dennett meets Morel.	Emil Torday works with T.A. Joyce and Northcote Thomas at the British Museum.	Rowley visits the Horniman Museum. Installs new display stands in Ethnological Room.
1905			Torday collecting in Congo (to 1906).	Henry de la Garde retires to Devon.
1906	Morel publishes <i>Red Rubber</i> .	Dennett publishes <i>At the Back of the Black Man's Mind</i> .		
1907			Royal title is given to the Anthropological Institute. Torday collecting in Congo (to 1909).	
1908	Congo Free State becomes Belgian Congo.		First Anthropology Diploma exam at Oxford.	

1909			Haddon appointed Reader in Ethnology at Cambridge.	
1910	Death of Edward VII. Coronation of George V.	Dennett publishes <i>Nigerian Studies</i> .	Revs. John Weeks and William H. Bentley provide Congo collections for Horniman Museum.	
1911		Dennett is photographed with Morel in Olokmeji, Nigeria.		
1912				
1913				
1914	Outbreak of World War I. N. and S. Nigeria are merged to form a British Colony, with Lugard as Governor.	Dennett remains in Nigeria until his retirement. (Dennett retired to London in 1918 and died in Highgate in 1921.)	An autonomous Anthropology Department exists at Oxford. Haddon ends his advisory role at Horniman Museum.	Rowley remains in post until his retirement in 1934. (James Withers-Gill assesses the African collections in 1931.)

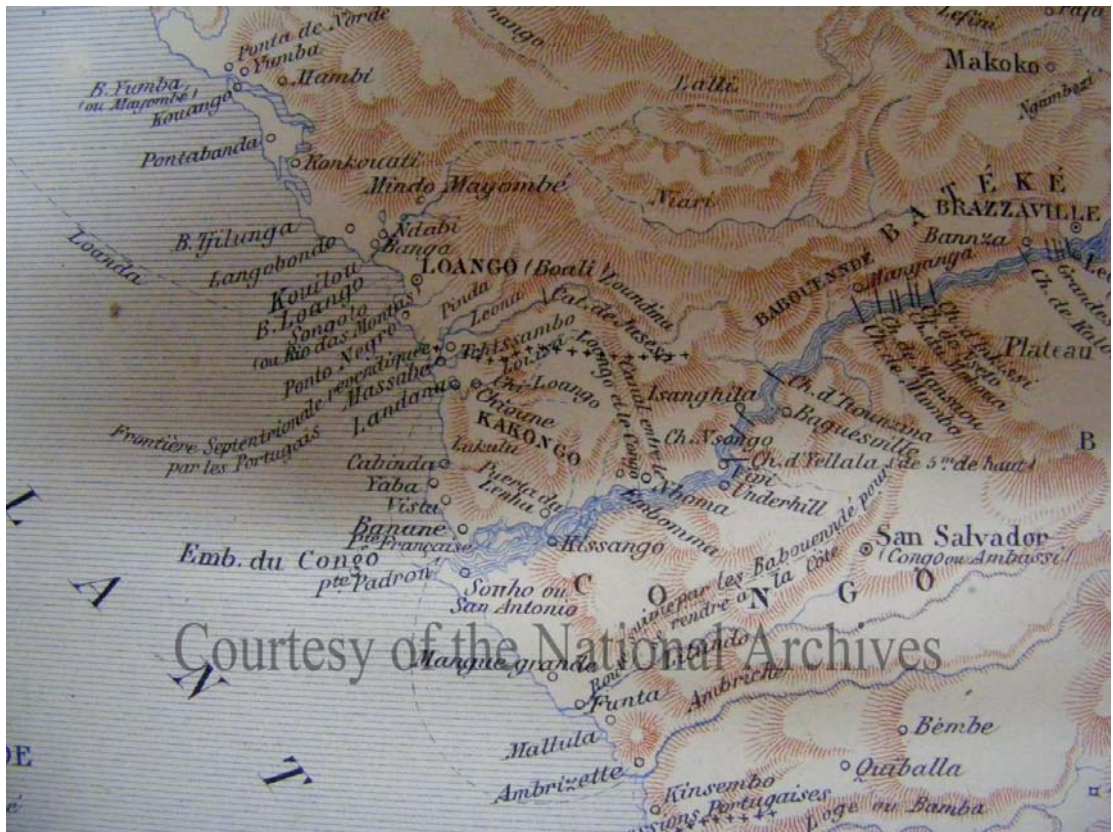
Appendix Three.
Enlarged Maps.



Map of the Congo region, showing the extent of the Kongo peoples; the present-day names of countries and capitals; and places of significance in Richard Dennett's history. Reproduced courtesy of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM).



Detail of 'Map of Trade Routes' showing places mentioned by Dennett.
 Richard Dennett, *Seven Years Among the Fjort: Being an English Trader's Experiences in the Congo District*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1887, frontispiece.



Detail of Map of Central Africa by Henri Mager, 1884, showing Loango coast and mouth of the River Congo. National Archives, ref. FO 925/58. Reproduced Courtesy of the National Archives.

Appendix Four.

Dennett Collection: List of Objects.

Accession Number.	Also known as:	Brief Description.	Figure Number in Thesis.
9/1889/39	89/9/39	Figurative <i>nkisi</i> in skin bundle.	Fig. 53.
9/1889/40	89/9/40	Horn-handled fringed-fabric <i>nkisi</i> .	Fig. 69, Fig. 70.
9/1889/41	89/9/41	Fringed waistband.	Fig. 38.
9/1889/42	89/9/42	Nkisi bundle [not seen].	
9/1889/43	89/9/43	Masked <i>ndungu</i> costume.	Fig. 1, Fig. 41, Fig. 42.
9/1889/44	89/9/44	Long tied <i>bilongo</i> bundle.	
9/1889/45	89/9/45	Long tied <i>bilongo</i> bundle.	
9/1889/46	89/9/46	<i>Nganga</i> mask.	Fig. 37.
9/1889/47	89/9/47	Mask, possibly Pende or Punu.	
9/1889/48	89/9/48	Skin sample [destroyed].	
9/1889/49	89/9/49	Skin sample [destroyed].	
9/1889/50	89/9/50	Skin sample [destroyed].	
9/1889/51	89/9/51	Two chairs [not seen].	
9/1889/52	89/9/52	Musical instrument.	
9/1889/53	89/9/53	Female figure with three snakes on back.	Fig. 36.
9/1889/54	89/9/54	Kneeling female <i>nkisi</i> figure with cracked container with clear glass on front.	Fig. 57.
9/1889/55	89/9/55	Carved wooden Staff top with leopard.	Fig. 79.
9/1889/56	89/9/56	Small ceramic pot <i>nkisi</i> with shells attached.	Fig. 64, Fig. 65.
9/1889/57	89/9/57	<i>Nkisi</i> - spotted dog with nails in shoulders.	Fig. 33.
9/1889/58	89/9/58	Knife and sheath.	
9/1889/59	89/9/59	'String' cape.	Fig. 80.
9/1889/60	89/9/60	Small male <i>nkisi</i> figure with parrot tail feathers.	Fig. 56.
9/1889/61	89/9/61	<i>Nkisi</i> - dog without spots and with circular tail.	Fig. 34.
9/1889/62	89/9/62	Large male figurative <i>nkisi</i> , 'Ekawso'.	Fig. 35.
9/1889/63	89/9/63	Kneeling female <i>nkisi</i> wearing white beads.	Fig. 58.

9/1889/64	89/9/64	Cross-legged male figure with one hand held up to mouth.	Fig. 54.
9/1889/65	89/9/65	Metal bracelet.	Fig. 77.
9/1889/66	89/9/66	Shell <i>nkisi</i> .	
9/1889/67	89/9/67	Shell <i>nkisi</i> with Guinea Fowl feathers and <i>bilongo</i> attached.	Fig. 61, Fig. 62.
9/1889/58	89/9/68	Wooden box with leopard carved on the lid.	Fig. 78.
9/1889/69	89/9/69	Long-necked clay pot.	
9/1889/70	89/9/70	Clay pipe with a face on the bowl.	Fig. 74, Fig 75.
9/1889/71	89/9/71	Clay pipe with cowrie shell design etched around the bowl.	Fig. 73.
9/1889/72	89/9/72	Clay pipe with a foot or a fist projecting from below the bowl.	Fig. 73.
9/1889/73	89/9/73	Ball of tobacco.	Fig 76.
9/1889/74	89/9/74	Broom.	Fig. 81.
9/1889/75	89/9/75	Tobacco.	
9/1889/76	89/9/76	Two pots [missing].	
9/1889/77	89/9/77	Clay pot, possibly crucible.	
9/1889/78	89/9/78	Clay pot, possibly crucible.	
9/1889/79	89/9/79	Clay pot decorated with incised patterns.	
9/1889/80	89/9/80	Clay pot decorated with incised patterns.	
9/1889/81	89/9/81	Shell <i>Nkisi</i> with strings attached and additional items tied at ends.	Fig 63.
9/1889/82	89/9/82	Cap/ <i>Mpu</i> .	Fig. 72.
9/1889/83	89/9/83	Cap/ <i>Mpu</i> .	
9/1889/84	89/9/84	Cap/ <i>Mpu</i> .	
9/1889/85	89/9/85	Cap/ <i>Mpu</i> .	
9/9/1889/86	89/9/86	Cap/ <i>Mpu</i> .	
9/1889/87	89/9/87	Two baskets with lids, forming three tiers.	Fig. 66. .
9/18989/88	89/9/88	Knife.	
9/1889/89	89/9/89	Knife and sheath.	Fig. 49.
9/1889/90	89/9/90	Knife.	
9/1889/91	89/9/91	Knife.	
9/1889/92	89/9/92	Knife.	
9/1889/93	89/9/93	Knife.	Fig. 49.
9/1889/94	89/9/94	Wooden spoon, carved with a knot in the handle.	
9/1889/95	89/9/95	Wooden fork, carved with	

		a knot in the handle	
9/1889/96	89/9/96	Wooden spoon, with large bowl.	
9/1889/97	89/9/97	Wooden spoon	
9/1889/98	89/9/98	Small male <i>nkisi</i> figure with brightly whitened eyes and mouth.	Fig. 55.
9/1889/99	89/9/99	Sheath for knife.	
9/1889/100	89/9/100	Sheath for knife.	
9/1889/101	89/9/101	Sheath for knife.	
9/1889/102	89/9/102	Small wooden slit-gong.	
9/1889/103	89/9/103	Bellows made of wood, animal skin, and iron.	
9/1889/104	89/9/104	Clay funnel for bellows.	
9/1889/105	89/9/105	Raffia fibre bag.	
9/1889/106	89/9/106	Small wooden double bell.	
9/1889/107	89/9/107	Bundle [not seen].	
9/1889/108	89/9/108	Large wooden ladle.	
9/1889/109	89/9/109	Wooden bark- <i>nkasa</i> ?	Fig. 48.
9/1889/110	89/9/110	<i>Nkisi</i> with red-coloured swelling topped with a mirror on the handle; and chain attached with metal bell at the end.	Fig. 71.
9/1889/111	89/9/111	Wooden 'paddle'.	
9/1889/112	89/9/112	Long metal tipped spear with brass studs on wooden handle.	
9/1889/113	89/9/113	Twine waistband.	

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