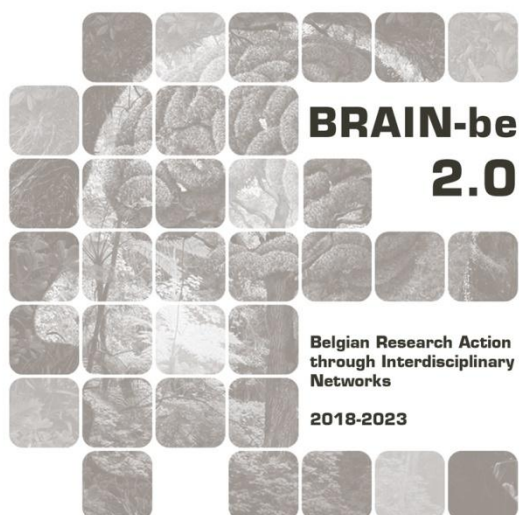


## CAHN

### Congo-Arab Heritage in Historical Narratives

Noemie Arazi (MRAC) – Brent Geerts and Karel Van Nieuwenhuyse (KUL) – Zoe-Joy Vangansewinkel and Pierre Lierneux (WHI)

Pillar 2: Heritage science



NETWORK PROJECT

**CAHN**

**Congo-Arab Heritage in Historical Narratives**

Contract - B2/202/P2/CAHN

**FINAL REPORT**

**PROMOTORS:** Noemie Arazi (RMCA)  
Karel Van Nieuwenhuyse (KUL)  
Pierre Lierneux (WHI)

**AUTHORS:** Noemie Arazi (Royal Museum for Central Africa)  
Brent Geerts and Karel Van Nieuwenhuyse (KUL)  
Zoe-Joy Vangansewinkel and Pierre Lierneux (WHI)

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Published in 2025 by the Belgian Science Policy Office

WTCIII

Simon Bolivarlaan 30 bus 7

Boulevard Simon Bolivar 30 bte 7

B-1000 Brussels

Belgium

Tel: +32 (0)2 238 34 11

<http://www.belspo.be>

<http://www.belspo.be/brain-be>

Contact person: Georges Jamart

Tel: +32 (0)2 238 36 90

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Authors: Noemie Arazi (RMCA), Brent Geerts and Karel Van Nieuwenhuyse (KUL), Zoe-Joy Vangansewinkel and Pierre Lierneux (WHI), Title: Congo Arab Heritage in Historical Narratives, Final Report. Brussels: Belgian Science Policy Office 2025 – 64 p. (BRAIN-be 2.0 - (Belgian Research Action through Interdisciplinary Networks))

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## **ABSTRACT (English)**

**Context:** The Swahili and Arab populations inhabiting the East African littoral and its adjacent offshore islands constitute one of Africa's most significant civilizations. Their cosmopolitan urban culture is widely celebrated, with material culture that evidences enduring connectivity throughout the western Indian Ocean. Yet, their interactions with the interior regions of Central Africa remain comparatively underexplored, despite extensive trade networks that extended to and beyond the Great Lakes region. Dominant colonial-era historiographies have largely framed these communities within reductive paradigms, emphasizing their roles primarily in the ivory and slave trade. In response, Project CAHN endeavoured to articulate a multivocal and decolonial historiographical framework that critically re-examines Congo-Arab histories and material heritage, with particular emphasis on the collections acquired during the Congo Free State period up to around World War I, housed within the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) and the War Heritage Institute (WHI).

**Objectives:** As a multidisciplinary team from the RMCA, the KU Leuven and the WHI, we re-engaged with the collections in a fourfold approach through,

- Investigating provenance and object biographies from a transnational perspective,
- Designing and implementing innovative educational frameworks aimed at fostering critical engagement with Swahili-Arab histories and materialities,
- Conducting research and conservation of Swahili-Arab artifacts within the WHI collection, alongside their re-contextualization in the Historical Gallery, and
- Revising and updating collection inventories at the RMCA and WHI, and facilitating enhanced digital access

**Conclusions:** In relation to the research on provenance and object biographies, the integration of findings into the collections databases remains ongoing. As of 2024, the data that had already been processed were successfully incorporated into the educational intervention study.

Two principal categories of object translocation were identified, each corresponding to distinct historical and contextual frameworks. The first category comprises war trophies—objects acquired through military interventions and punitive expeditions. In the context of the CAHN, this primarily pertains to the so-called "Arab Campaign" (1892–1894). The second category encompasses colonial transactions, which occurred during the first decade of the Belgian Congo era. This grouping involves less clearly defined modes of acquisition but emphasizes the "collectors'" affiliation with the colonial system, which was deeply fraught by unequal power relations and structural violence. However, occurrences of voluntary exchanges and transactions cannot be excluded for the second group.

A particularly noteworthy outcome of this research has been the meaningful engagement with communities in countries of origin. These collaborative interactions have underscored the critical role of provenance research as a preliminary, yet essential, step in processes concerning the potential restitution of cultural heritage objects currently held in the collections of the RMCA and the AfricaMuseum's partner institution, the WHI. This issue assumes particular urgency in the context of Maniema Province, a region within the Democratic Republic of the Congo that—unlike several other Congolese provinces—does not currently benefit from the presence of a national museum infrastructure. The absence of such institutions further highlights the ethical and practical imperatives of provenance research and its implications for heritage management and postcolonial accountability.

Over the duration of the project, ten presentations were delivered, and one article is currently in press for inclusion in a RMCA catalogue. Additionally, two further articles are in preparation and are scheduled for submission to international peer-reviewed journals by the end of July 2025.

A systematic literature review was conducted to explore teaching processes in the context of history museum education. Based on the analysis of 45 publications, this research resulted in a first scientific article published in an international peer-reviewed journal and informed the design of two empirical studies, as well as the subsequent design of a professional learning community (PLC). The educational component of the project aimed not only at scientific outcomes but also at societal and educational impact. Specifically, it contributed to the development of an online course for museum educators on designing effective teaching strategies to foster historical and postcolonial thinking. The development of the online course is still ongoing.

At the WHI, conservation treatments were undertaken by the institution's in-house conservators and technical staff, augmented by three external specialists—respectively in wood, paper, and leather/textiles—engaged on fixed-term contracts. All paper and wooden artefacts across the exhibition cases have been treated, as have the majority of metal objects and items containing textiles. Certain interventions nevertheless remain outstanding; for instance, the panoplies are scheduled for further treatment by textile conservator Peter De Groof. Although substantial progress has been made in reconfiguring the display cases, the project is not yet complete. Work on contextualizing the collections is ongoing and will include the installation of interpretative background panels within the cases and the integration of interactive touch-screens.

### **Keywords**

Collections, Belgium, colonization, Congo-Arab, heritage, provenance research, educational approaches

## **ABSTRACT (DUTCH)**

**Context:** De Swahili- en Arabische bevolkingsgroepen die het Oost-Afrikaanse kustgebied en de aangrenzende eilanden bewonen, vormen een van de belangrijkste beschavingen van Afrika. Hun kosmopolitische stedelijke cultuur wordt breed erkend en bewonderd, met een materiële cultuur die blijk geeft van blijvende verbondenheid in het westelijk deel van de Indische Oceaan. Toch blijven hun interacties met de binnenlanden van Centraal-Afrika relatief onderbelicht, ondanks uitgebreide handelsnetwerken die zich uitstrekten tot aan en voorbij het Grote Merengebied. Dominante historiografieën uit het koloniale tijdperk hebben deze gemeenschappen grotendeels binnen reductieve paradigma's geplaatst, waarbij de nadruk lag op hun rol in de ivoor- en slavenhandel.

Als reactie daarop trachtte Project CAHN een meerstemmig en dekoloniaal historiografisch kader te ontwikkelen dat Congo-Arabische geschiedenissen en materieel erfgoed kritisch herbekijkt, met bijzondere aandacht voor de collecties die werden verworven tijdens de periode van de Onafhankelijke Congostaat tot ongeveer de Eerste Wereldoorlog, en die zijn ondergebracht in het Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika (KMMA) en het War Heritage Institute (WHI).

**Doelstellingen:** Als multidisciplinair team van het KMMA, de KU Leuven en het WHI gingen we op hernieuwde wijze met de collecties aan de slag via een viervoudige aanpak:

- Het onderzoeken van de herkomst en objectbiografieën vanuit een transnationaal perspectief,
- het ontwerpen en implementeren van innovatieve onderwijsmodellen die kritische reflectie over Swahili-Arabische geschiedenissen en materialiteit bevorderen,
- Het uitvoeren van onderzoek en conservering van Swahili-Arabische artefacten binnen de WHI-collectie, en hun her-contextualisering in de Historische Zaal,
- Het herzien en actualiseren van collectieregisters bij het KMMA en WHI, en het bevorderen van verbeterde digitale toegang.

**Conclusies:** Met betrekking tot het onderzoek naar herkomst en objectbiografieën is de integratie van bevindingen in de collectiedatabanken nog aan de gang. Vanaf 2024 zijn de reeds verwerkte gegevens succesvol opgenomen in het educatieve interventieonderzoek.

Er werden twee hoofdtypen van objectverplaatsing geïdentificeerd, elk met hun eigen historische en contextuele achtergrond. De eerste categorie omvat oorlogstroféeën – objecten verworven via militaire interventies en strafexpedities. In de context van CAHN verwijst dit voornamelijk naar de zogenaamde “Arabische campagne” (1892–1894). De tweede categorie betreft koloniale transacties, die plaatsvonden tijdens het eerste decennium van het Belgisch-Congo tijdperk. Deze groep kent minder duidelijk omschreven verwervingswijzen, maar benadrukt de band van de “verzamelaars” met het koloniale systeem, dat werd gekenmerkt door ongelijke machtsverhoudingen en structureel geweld. Vrijwillige uitwisselingen of transacties kunnen echter niet worden uitgesloten binnen deze tweede categorie.

Een bijzonder opmerkelijk resultaat van dit onderzoek is de betekenisvolle betrokkenheid van gemeenschappen in de landen van herkomst. Deze samenwerkingen onderstrepen het cruciale belang van herkomstonderzoek als een eerste, maar essentiële stap in processen rond de mogelijke teruggave van cultureel erfgoed dat momenteel deel uitmaakt van de collecties van het KMMA en het War Heritage Institute, partnerinstelling van het AfricaMuseum. Deze kwestie is bijzonder urgent in de provincie Maniema, een regio in de Democratische Republiek Congo die -in tegenstelling tot

verschillende andere Congolese provincies - niet beschikt over een nationale museuminfrastructuur. Het ontbreken van dergelijke instellingen benadrukt des te meer de ethische en praktische noodzaak van herkomstonderzoek, en de implicaties ervan voor erfgoedbeheer en postkoloniale verantwoordelijkheid.

Tijdens het project werden tien presentaties gegeven, en één artikel is momenteel in druk voor opname in een catalogus van het KMMA. Twee andere artikels zijn in voorbereiding en worden tegen eind juli 2025 ter publicatie ingediend bij internationale peer-reviewed tijdschriften.

Er werd een systematisch literatuuronderzoek uitgevoerd naar instructiemethoden binnen historische museumeducatie. Op basis van de analyse van 45 publicaties resulteerde dit onderzoek in een eerste wetenschappelijk artikel dat werd gepubliceerd in een internationaal peer-reviewed tijdschrift, en inspireerde het ontwerp van twee empirische studies, evenals het daaropvolgende ontwerp en uitrol van een professionele leergemeenschap (PLG). Het educatieve luik van het project richtte zich niet enkel op wetenschappelijke output, maar ook op maatschappelijke en educatieve impact. Concreet droeg het bij aan de ontwikkeling van een online cursus voor museumeducatoren over het ontwerpen van effectieve lesstrategieën die historisch en postkoloniaal denken bevorderen. De ontwikkeling van deze online cursus is nog in volle gang.

Bij het WHI werden conservatiebehandelingen uitgevoerd door de eigen conservatoren en technische staf, aangevuld met drie externe specialisten - respectievelijk in hout, papier en leder en textiel - die op tijdelijke contracten werden aangesteld. Alle papieren en houten artefacten in de vitrines zijn behandeld, evenals het merendeel van de metalen objecten en stukken met textiel. Bepaalde ingrepen zijn echter nog niet voltooid; zo zijn er verdere behandelingen gepland voor de panoplies door textielconservator Peter De Groof.

Ondanks aanzienlijke vooruitgang in het herinrichten van de tentoonstellingskasten, is het project nog niet afgerond. De contextualisering van de collecties is nog gaande en zal ook de installatie van interpretatieve achtergrondpanelen in de vitrines en de integratie van interactieve aanraakschermen omvatten.

### **Trefwoorden**

Collecties, België, kolonisatie, Congo-Arabisch, erfgoed, herkomstonderzoek, instructie



## **RÉSUMÉ (FRENCH)**

**Contexte :** Les populations Arabo-Swahilies qui habitent le littoral de l'Afrique de l'Est et les îles adjacentes au large constituent l'une des civilisations les plus importantes d'Afrique. Leur culture urbaine cosmopolite est largement reconnue, avec une culture matérielle qui témoigne d'une connectivité ancienne dans tout l'océan Indien occidental. Pourtant, leurs interactions avec les régions de l'intérieur de l'Afrique centrale restent relativement peu explorées, malgré les vastes réseaux commerciaux qui s'étendaient jusqu'à la région des Grands Lacs et au-delà. Les récits officiels de l'époque coloniale ont largement représentés ces communautés dans des paradigmes réducteurs, soulignant leurs rôles principalement dans le commerce de l'ivoire et des esclaves. En réponse, le projet CAHN s'est efforcé d'articuler un cadre historiographique multivocal et décolonial qui réexamine de manière critique l'histoire et le patrimoine matériel Congo-Arabe, en mettant particulièrement l'accent sur les collections acquises pendant l'État Indépendant du Congo jusqu'aux environs de la Première Guerre mondiale, conservées au sein du Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale (MRAC) et au War Heritage Institute (WHI).

**Objectifs :** En tant qu'équipe multidisciplinaire du MRAC, de la KU Leuven et du WHI, nous avons réexaminé les collections dans le cadre d'une approche à quatre volets:

- l'étude de la provenance et des biographies d'objets dans une perspective transnationale,
- la conception et la mise en œuvre de cadres éducatifs novateurs visant à favoriser un engagement critique à l'égard de l'histoire et des matérialités Arabo-Swahilie,
- la recherche et la conservation d'objets Arabo-Swahilie dans les collections du WHI, ainsi que leur recontextualisation dans la galerie historique du Musée de l'Armée, et
- la révision et la mise à jour des inventaires des collections du MRAC et du WHI, et l'amélioration de l'accès numérique.

**Conclusions :** En ce qui concerne la recherche sur la provenance et les biographies d'objets, l'intégration des résultats dans les bases de données des collections se poursuit. En 2024, les données déjà traitées ont été intégrées avec succès dans l'étude d'intervention éducative.

Deux catégories principales de translocation d'objets ont été identifiées, chacune correspondant à des cadres historiques et contextuels distincts. La première catégorie comprend les trophées de guerre, c'est-à-dire les objets acquis lors d'interventions militaires et d'expéditions punitives. Dans le contexte du projet, il s'agit principalement de la Campagne dite "Arabe" (1892-1894). La deuxième catégorie comprend les transactions coloniales, qui ont eu lieu pendant la première décennie de l'ère du Congo belge. Ce groupe implique des modes d'acquisition moins clairement définis mais souligne l'appartenance des « collectionneurs » au système colonial, profondément marqué par des rapports de force inégaux et une violence structurelle. Toutefois, on ne peut exclure pour ce deuxième groupe des occurrences d'échanges et de transactions volontaires.

Un résultat particulièrement remarquable de cette recherche a été l'engagement significatif avec les communautés dans les pays d'origine. Ces interactions collaboratives ont souligné le rôle critique de la recherche de provenance en tant qu'étape préliminaire, mais essentielle, dans les processus concernant la restitution potentielle d'objets du patrimoine culturel actuellement conservés dans les collections du MRAC et de l'institution partenaire de l'AfricaMuseum, le WHI. Cette question revêt une urgence particulière dans le contexte de la province du Maniema, une région de la République

démocratique du Congo qui, contrairement à plusieurs autres provinces congolaises, ne bénéficie pas actuellement de la présence d'une infrastructure muséale nationale. L'absence de telles institutions met en évidence les impératifs éthiques et pratiques de la recherche de provenance et ses implications pour la gestion du patrimoine et la responsabilité postcoloniale.

Pendant la durée du projet, dix présentations ont été faites et un article est actuellement sous presse pour inclusion dans un catalogue du MRAC. En outre, deux autres articles sont en préparation et devraient être soumis à des revues internationales à comité de lecture d'ici la fin du mois de juillet 2025.

Une analyse systématique de la littérature a été menée pour explorer les processus d'enseignement dans le contexte de l'éducation des musées d'histoire. Basée sur l'analyse de 45 publications, cette recherche a donné lieu à un premier article scientifique publié dans une revue internationale à comité de lecture et a servi de base à la conception de deux études empiriques, ainsi qu'à la conception ultérieure d'une communauté d'apprentissage professionnelle (CAP). La composante éducative du projet visait non seulement des résultats scientifiques, mais aussi un impact sociétal et éducatif. Plus précisément, il a contribué à l'élaboration d'un cours en ligne pour les éducateurs de musée sur la conception de stratégies d'enseignement efficaces pour favoriser la réflexion historique et postcoloniale. Le développement de ce cours en ligne est toujours en cours.

Au WHI, les traitements de conservation ont été entrepris par les conservateurs internes et le personnel technique de l'institution, complétés par trois spécialistes externes - respectivement dans les domaines du bois, du papier et du cuir/textiles - engagés sur la base de contrats à durée déterminée. Tous les objets en papier et en bois des vitrines d'exposition ont été traités, de même que la majorité des objets en métal et des objets contenant des textiles. Certaines interventions restent néanmoins en suspens ; par exemple, les panoplies doivent subir un traitement supplémentaire par le restaurateur de textiles Peter De Groof. Bien que des progrès substantiels aient été réalisés dans la reconfiguration des vitrines, le projet n'est pas encore achevé. Le travail de contextualisation des collections est en cours et comprendra l'installation de panneaux d'interprétation à l'intérieur des vitrines et l'intégration d'écrans tactiles interactifs.

**Mots clés :** Collections, Belgique, colonisation, Congo-Arabe, patrimoine, recherche de provenance, approches pédagogiques

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report brings together the results of four years of multidisciplinary work on the Swahili and Arab presence in Central Africa during the latter half of the 19th century—a period that would later intersect with the creation of the Congo Free State by King Leopold II of Belgium. These turbulent times coincided with the first universal exhibitions, where objects and natural resources appropriated from the colony were showcased against alluring backdrops, instilling new imaginaries within the Belgian public. Objects that migrated with the Swahili and Arab merchants into the Congo and locally produced objects constituted a significant addition to what became the collections of the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren and the Royal Army Museum in Brussels. Because of distinct research traditions shaped by colonial ideologies, Swahili and Arab cultural contributions in Central Africa were often dismissed as foreign and thus unworthy of scholarly attention. This resulted in limited scientific inquiry; colonial agents and researchers affiliated with the Museum of the Belgian Congo and the Army Museum primarily focused on promoting the narrative of the anti-slavery campaign and justifying colonial rule. Aside from the important contributions of Xavier Luffin in studying Swahili and Arab documents, this neglect has left a significant gap in our understanding of the collections from this period. To address this, three institutions—the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA), the War Heritage Institute (WHI), and KU Leuven (KUL)—have come together to investigate this complex and understudied chapter of both Congolese and Belgian history from diverse and complementary perspectives.

- The RMCA focused on provenance and object biography research from a transnational perspective by collaborating with source communities in the DRC and along the slave trade route in Tanzania.
- The KUL's main objective was to engage with the Swahili-Arab collections through the study and establishment of educational approaches, which entailed the integration of the collections into history teaching in museums as non-formal educational settings.
- The WHI undertook research and restoration on Swahili-Arab objects from its collection. Furthermore, it adapted the manner in which they are currently displayed in the Historical Gallery of the Museum of the Armed Forces.
- Updating the museum inventories on the Congo-Arab collections was a shared objective for both the RMCA and the WHI. In the case of the RMCA, this undertaking also involved the provision of online access.

## 2. STATE OF THE ART AND OBJECTIVES

The racial tropes of the colonial period and the master narratives of military conquest have shaped much of our imaginaries on Central Africa and the eastern Congo in particular, especially for the period that covers the second half of the 19th century. During this time a vast area of the Upper Congo Basin was under the hegemony of Muslim merchants from the Swahili city-states on the East African coast involved in the trade of slaves and ivory. However, the Congo-Arab War (1892-1894) cut short Swahili-Arab control, which resulted in the consolidation of King Leopold II's Congo Free State. The narrative of Belgian military heroism and the annihilation of the Arab slave trade became officialized in commemorative monuments and the iconography of various federal institutions, including the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) in Tervuren and the War Heritage Institute (WHI) in Brussels. As regards the RMCA and the WHI they have singular histories and circumstances. The former has recently undergone extensive renovations including an extension of the museum building, renovation work, and a new scenography (<https://www.africamuseum.be/en/discover/renovation>). The latter by contrast features an entire wing occupied by the historical gallery designed in the 1920s and whose scenography has not changed since then. However, both are listed buildings and contain listed iconographic elements, which cannot be removed and/or significantly altered. At the RMCA for instance the rotunda building shows a Swahili-Arab slave trader armed with a dagger and a whip, trampling on a dead child while holding an adolescent girl by the wrists (<https://be-monumen.be/patrimoine-belge/allegories-coloniales-darsene-matton-africa-museum-tervuren/>).

The WHI for its part has the mission to preserve the entire contents and scenography of its historical gallery as a “museum within the museum”, which includes the exhibition displays of the Congo-Arab War put on view in the conqueror's display style of the 19th century (<https://klm-mra.be/en/historic-gallery> and <https://sanzabl01a.wordpress.com/2008/02/10/congo-1884-1908-art-et-histoire/>).

Most recently the RMCA has partnered up with Groundworks (a non-for-profit organization focusing on heritage documentation and valorization in Africa) on the project *The Archaeology and Oral History of Slavery in the Maniema Province* with funding from the Gerda Henkel Foundation (Germany). Launched at the start of 2018, first time archaeological surveys and excavations were carried out in Kasongo on the Lualaba (Congo) river, which together with Nyangwe were the western most slave and ivory markets along the caravan route that connected the interior with the East African coast. Kasongo held a special position in this trade as in 1875 it became the capital of the commercial domain of one of the most notorious slave traders from Zanzibar, widely known by his pseudonym of Tippu Tip. These investigations have not only produced exciting results of the area's archaeological resources and oral history but have also led to a sincere engagement with civil society, who call for an active participation in the documentation and valorization of this heritage. Except for the ancestral sites, however, Kasongo's population and other source communities have been cut-off from this period's material culture of which much has been removed as a result of the Congo-Arab War. Many of these objects found their way from family heirlooms to the RMCA and the WHI. According to the inventories at the RMCA and the WHI, objects connected to the Swahili-Arab include weapons, textiles, religious and prestige objects, architectural elements, banners, writing utensils and photos. There are also considerable amounts of letters and contracts written in Swahili with Arabic script as well as objects that were classified as ‘ethnographic’. Except for the Swahili documents, no intensive research has been carried out on the objects, which may be explained by the artificial divide created by colonial-era scholarship that labelled the Swahili-Arab Muslims and their associated material culture as foreign to this part of the DRC. The Congo-Arab collections of the RMCA and the WHI present exceptional source material, which wait to be investigated. All the more if one considers that the socio-cultural influences left by the Swahili-Arab went mostly undocumented as the Congo Free State and the Belgian Congo

endeavored to erase all traces of influence. They also provide enormous potential in re-evaluating colonial epistemologies with regard to the artificial rift zone between Central Africa and East Africa and thus the circulation of objects, peoples and ideas. As a multidisciplinary team we re-engaged with these collections in a fourfold approach.

#### RMCA

The RMCA's two main objectives in Project CAHN included (1) the update of inventories and their online availability and (2) collaborative provenance and object biography research.

1. An important process concerns the update of inventories at the RMCA to gain insight into the scope of the collections, the type of objects and the connections that can be made between items. At the RMCA inventories were updated using the TMS collection management software, which handles every facet of collection management. The use of TMS facilitates online access, which complies with institutional policies on collection management and communication strategies of the RMCA.

The first objective needed slight adaptation and alignment with the PROCHE project (Recherche de PROvenance sur la Collection Ethnographique – Herkomstonderzoek op de Ethnografische Collectie), launched in 2022. In addition to provenance research on the cultural collections held by the institution, PROCHE aims to make available an online database that is as complete as possible on cultural goods originating from the Democratic Republic of Congo, which covers more than 80,000 inventory numbers.

2. In recent years many museums, which hold collections of colonial origin have been under scrutiny by the postcolonial critique from activist, artistic and academic quarters. As a response to this debate and the need for detailed investigations on the Congo-Arab object collections of the RMCA and the WHI, major attention was directed towards the study of provenance and object biographies. The focus was on a group of objects with the potential to inform on the different interactions and cross-cultural borrowings between the populations of the Upper Congo basin and the Swahili-Arab. Standard questions of provenance were tackled while particular emphasis was directed towards African agency, especially from source communities in the DRC and Tanzania. The objective was twofold: firstly, to decenter the narratives from self-referential perspectives; and secondly, to underscore shared knowledge production.

#### KU LEUVEN

The project partners on behalf of KU Leuven had the main objective to engage with the Swahili-Arab collections in both museums on the level of public history and education in museums. They envisaged the examination and establishment of fruitful educational approaches towards fostering a postcolonial perspective on the integration of (Swahili-Arab) collections in history teaching in museums as non-formal educational settings); this was done via an empirical research – which is novel and innovative, when looking at the state of the art, as research into history museum education is very scarce and seldom involves a wide range of educational actors – in which prospective history teachers, experienced history teachers and museum educators/guides were involved. The research, taking into account existing conceptual frameworks, included a performance task based study with a diverse range of educational actors (prospective and experienced history teachers, museum guides and museum educators) as well as a professional development study, centering around the organization of a professional learning community program of five months, including lectures, educational

collaboration, workshops... aimed at the fostering a postcolonial dealing with collections during museum education.

The following objectives, which were slightly adapted throughout the research process when compared to the initial objectives, were central to the history educational research part of project CAHN:

1. Objective 1: establishing an in-depth view on empirical research findings about effective teaching practices in the informal educational context of (history) museums;
2. Objective 2: building an understanding of how a diverse range of educational actors give shape to teaching processes in history museums, and the role underlying factors play in this;
3. Objective 3: designing a professional learning community program, consisting of a five-month program including collaborative workshops, for a diverse group of educational actors aimed at the fostering of a postcolonial perspective on history museum education;
4. Objective 4: developing online course material for educators in history museum contexts.

#### WHI

As part of the BRAIN-CAHN project the War Heritage Institute has been researching and restoring Arab-Swahili objects within its collection as well as adapting the manner in which these objects were displayed in the Historical Gallery of the Museum of the Armed Forces.

The War Heritage Institute maintained the following objectives:

1. Objective 1: update the digital inventory of this particular collection;
2. Objective 2: conservation treatment for the Swahili-Arab objects;
3. Objective 3: valorisation and refurbishment of the Historic Gallery to a degree that still fits the same atmosphere whilst providing visitors with correct contextualisation of the objects on display. The rearrangement of the display cases has to improve the conservation conditions of the objects as much as possible and enhance the collection.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### RMCA

The following methodology was applied throughout the research process:

##### Objective 1

The first stage of the methodology entailed the choice of objects to be studied as part of the investigations on provenance and object biographies. To begin with we defined the various categories that influenced our sampling strategy. The former included type of objects, geographical and cultural origins and the identity of collectors. The evaluation of the existing Congo-Arab collections databases at the RMCA and the WHI provided a variety of preliminary information that guided us in our sampling strategy. Attention was also directed towards the choice of objects that reflect female agency with regard to production and consumption. The selection of objects to be studied, which was initially earmarked for month 5, proved to be a continuous process. This was due to the contributions made by members of the communities of origin who had been interviewed during fieldwork in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Tanzania.

##### Objective 2

A fundamental practice in provenance research concerns the investigation of primary and secondary sources, which has the potential to shed light on issues concerning original owners, geographical trajectories and museum entry. The sources consulted in the course of our investigations consisted of letters, diaries, photographs, academic articles, books and museum records. The latter, even though they can be a rich source of information - they often document the last link in the chain of ownership and possession – proved in most instances to be silent on the circumstances of acquisition, particularly the acquisition in Congo. The identity of donors and their personal backgrounds were also significant components of the analysis, as they furnish contextual information in instances where museum records were incomplete.

##### Objective 3

Besides using written documentation for the purpose of researching an object's provenance, the objects itself was also considered as a source of information. The notion of object biographies stresses processes and cycles, which are connected to nodes of production, exchange and consumption. In the case of the Congo-Arab collections this was done by comparative analysis of physical and stylistic traits using data from archaeology, anthropology and ethno-linguistics. This provided information on exchange, interaction and cross-cultural borrowing with regard to individual objects and/or group of objects.

##### Objective 4

An important element of the provenance and object biographies research concerned the incorporation of African agency, their voices and perspectives in order to redress the asymmetry created by colonial collecting, which above all informs us on the person who collected instead of the person who produced, owned and used the object. Several fieldwork trips were carried out in the DRC and Tanzania. This resulted not only in African perspectives and interpretations on provenance and object biographies but also in shared knowledge production and multiperspectivity. Initially it was also

planned to integrate the voices of the Congolese diaspora in Belgium, and more specifically the diaspora from eastern Congo. Nevertheless, this objective was ultimately deemed to be overly ambitious. The preparation for the various fieldwork trips, the fieldwork itself, and the subsequent translation of interviews all necessitated a considerable investment of time. Also, we intended to be extra careful for including female agency. However, this proved more difficult than anticipated as women in traditional societies are not as readily available as men.

#### Objective 5

The provenance and object biography research not only aimed at scientific but also societal outcomes, which in the case of CAHN relates to the question of access. Until recently, access on the Congo-Arab inventories was reserved to the museum staff or visitors to the archives, where they have been able to access the online catalogue. The resulting data of the research was continuously fed into the existing databases in order to achieve an updated and more complete format by the end of the project. They will be made accessible online as part of the PROCHE projects of making all objects available online originating from the DRC.

#### KU LEUVEN

In order to meet the objectives identified in the previous section, the following methodological approaches were developed throughout the research process:

#### Objective 1

In order to get a proper view on the existing state of the art, i.e. what has been found already on (effective) teaching processes in the context of history museum education, a systematic literature study was conducted. A thorough and systematic search for studies was done, within three academic databases: web of science, ERIH PLUS and Scopus; via specialized journals (such as Journal of Museum Education, International Journal of Heritage Studies, International Journal of Museum Studies, Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies, Curator: The Museum Journal etc.), and via recently published international handbooks that provide an overview of the current state of the art of studies on history teaching and learning in (in)formal educational settings. This analysis, based on the identification of 45 publications, led to a first scientific publication in an international peer-reviewed journal, and informed (in a later phase) the design of the professional learning community (PLC).

#### Objective 2

Before we started to work on the scaffolding and improvement of effective teaching processes in history museums through means of the PLC, we first developed an understanding of how these teaching processes in history museums are spontaneously given shape. We used a well-established method in educational sciences, a performance task. We designed two studies – a larger-scale one with 21 prospective teachers and a comparative study with 3 prospective teachers, 2 experienced ones and 2 museum guides – aiming at examining how they spontaneously paid attention to: (a) deconstructing the underlying master narrative of history museums, (b) connecting colonialism and nationalism – the two angles from which the museums involved in this research are given shape – to each other, (c) encouraging their audience to consider multiple perspectives, (d) fostering a postcolonial attitude among learners, (e) creating interaction with their audience and provoking dialogue on the subject between participants, (f) enabling their audience to think historically and understand the constructed and interpretive nature of historical knowledge, (g) seek for a balance



between affective, attitudinal, identitarian, cognitive and skills-related goals for a museum activity (see framework Schep, van Boxtel & Noordegraaf).

Both were asked to design, according to specific guidelines they have to follow, a concrete teaching activity (including the formulation of specific goals) in both the Africa Museum and the Royal Military Museum regarding what is exhibited in those museums about the 19th century Congo-Arab history. They were also asked to write a short comparative review about this 19th century Congo-Arab history section in both museums, in order to gauge participants' own perspectives and ability of historical and postcolonial thinking about that history. For both assignments, a sufficiently detailed template was developed and provided. The nature of and differences between the outcomes were explained from:

- (prospective) teachers' and guides' personal and socio-cultural context (identification; motivation; political preferences; extent of Eurocentric conceptions);
- (prospective) teachers' and guides' previous knowledge on the topic of the 19th century Congo-Arab history as well as their procedural knowledge of historical and postcolonial thinking.

These aspects were mapped via a questionnaire (incl. validated scales on eurocentrism and political preferences) and via individual interviews afterwards (that also included aspects of self-evaluation). In order to capture spontaneous ideas, the data gathering was organized before any course on history museum education started. The participants included, for the first study, 21 prospective teachers of the KU Leuven educational master in cultural sciences. For the second, comparative study, after a long and complex recruitment process in both institutions involved in project CAHN, two museum guides from the RMCA, two experienced teachers and three prospective teachers were involved.

The data collection process generated two main sets of data, educational activities and interview transcripts, created through the *verbatim* transcription of each semi-structured interview. Participants' engagement in the performance task resulted in the collection of one document per participant that included a full elaboration of their educational activities. These documents were analysed in order to get a view on the final designs, while the interview transcripts were used for a thorough analysis of the designing process. Both data sets were qualitatively analysed through making use of NVivo coding software. First, the educational activities were analysed by means of the following procedure: after a close reading of the data, relevant parts of it were coded on the level of the smallest coherent unit. The coding itself happened in an iterative way: the process consisted of going back and forth between an *a priori* established coding scheme based on the theoretical framework of postcolonial historical thinking, and a grounded approach that enabled the addition of new codes emerging from the data itself. The iterative coding process resulted in a final coding scheme with various categories, following the structure of the main building blocks of postcolonial historical thinking. Subcategories, highlighting specific aspects of each building block that emerged from the data, were added to the main categories throughout the analysis process. Second, the interview transcripts were coded through application of the same coding scheme that emerged from the analysis of the educational activities. As a result, coded segments within each category emerging from both the educational activities and interview transcripts could be compared in search for explanations.

### Objective 3

This project did not only want to build an understanding of how teaching processes in the context of a history museum are given shape, it also wanted to work on actively exchanging ideas and practices surrounding the design of museum educational practices aimed at fostering historical and postcolonial

thinking on museum collections. To this end, a professional development study was carried out via the development of a professional learning community program. This was, among others, based on the outcomes of the two first objectives. A series of 6 workshops of two hours with expert-input and educational exchange, over the course of five months and flanked by intermediary assignments was designed, including the following topics:

- The integration (via object-based learning) of untold histories and new perspectives on 19th century Congo-Arab history (via the research of N. Arazi);
- The deconstruction the underlying master narrative of history museums in relation to the representation of 19th century Congo-Arab history, incl. the connection of colonialism and nationalism to each other
- The integration of multiperspectivity in their teaching
- The fostering of a postcolonial attitude among learners
- The creation of interaction with their audience and provoke dialogue on the subject between participants
- Enabling their audience to think historically and understand the constructed and interpretive nature of historical knowledge
- Seeking for a balance between affective, attitudinal, identitarian, cognitive and skills-related goals for a museum activity.

Participants in the PLC were the 3 prospective teachers, 2 experienced ones and 2 museum guides from the comparative study, and a museum educator. In the design of the learning community program, which took place between February and June of 2024, we integrated the five characteristics of a PLC identified by Stoll and colleagues, as well as recommendations based on the research of Mark Schep. Concretely, we organized six physical contact sessions of two hours, each with a distinct thematical focus. Each session highlighted a particular aspect of dealing with colonial heritage and history in museum educational settings. Next to the six sessions, asynchronous online learning assignments were created that served as a preparation for each session. They could consist of online discussion based on an existing educational tool, or on a recent scholarly article. After the end of the six sessions, the eight participants got an additional two months to engage in the co-creation of a new educational activity for use in two Belgian museums, a process which they prepared during the six sessions.

Within the program, we aimed to balance practical- and theoretical-oriented input. Through the intermediary assignments and the final co-creation, we aimed to connect both theoretical contributions to translations to concrete educational practice. We created a sense of collective responsibility through communicating from the start onwards that it was the intention to let the community work as autonomously as possible, with every participant carrying a similar degree of responsibility for the success of the discussion and the co-creation, and the creation of both a safe and a brave space at the same time. Yet we also brought in a certain degree of professional development into the process, regularly providing scholarly expertise both through the intermediary assignments and within the sessions themselves. This was done via short pre-recorded knowledge clips or small lectures by historians and history and museum education researchers, intended to scaffold participants' learning process. Where possible, these experts used existing educational practices from various museums worldwide to model good educational practices.

The main source of data collection was the recording and transcription of the six meetings, enabling an analysis of the dialogue and discussion in each session. Next to that, the collected data concerned

the written online discussions and comments regarding the intermediary assignments and the final co-created educational practice. Individual reflections by each participant were collected as well, through short reflective diary fragments of two minutes recorded after each session and through a final individual interview of circa one hour. For the findings reported upon in this article, we will only focus on the data collected on the group level, namely the transcriptions of the six meetings, and the data from the intermediary assignments. In doing so, we aim to take a close look at the content and the dynamic of both the physical and the online group interactions during the whole process, more specifically through the lens of discussion on the role of objects and object-based learning.

The group-level data were analysed through making use of insights from framing and positioning analysis literature. The transcripts of the sessions and the textual data from the intermediary assignments were divided into meaningful fragments discussing a certain theme or topic. All fragments with a similar topic were put together on a timeline, which resulted in a so-called topic trajectory. We ended up with seven topic trajectories, all dealing with a different theme that was the object of dialogue and discussion between participants during the professional learning community program. These seven topics concerned discussion on (1) the definition of a (postcolonial) museum (e.g. what such museum looks like, what goals museums should pursue in times of postcolonial reflection etc.); (2) the role of objects in museum exhibitions and how they give meaning and are used to make meaning; (3) the role of teachers and/or guides in meaning-making during museum education; (4) the role of students in meaning-making during museum education; (5) the collaboration between schools and museums; (6) historiographical aspects of colonialism and the representation thereof in museum exhibitions and (7) how to translate more theoretical insights into concrete museum educational practice, or on the sharing of practical experiences from one's own practice with the other participants. For each of these topic trajectories, a qualitative analysis was undertaken that led to the identification of frames and counterframes. This came down to analysing the different positions that had been taken by participants regarding a certain topic, and the way they framed their position during discussion with the others in the process.

#### Objective 4

The educational part of the project did not only aim at scientific outcomes, yet also at societal and educational outcomes, in terms of the design of an online course for museum educators, on how to design effective teaching processes aimed at fostering historical and postcolonial thinking. This was based on the outcomes related to the previous objectives, and included the research regarding the objects and the accompanying stories from WP4. In designing the course, insights and good practices from (research into) professional development programs in education were taken into account. During the last months of the project, we hired a student to develop this online course, largely based on the materials that were collected during the research process, and the specific insights generated from the professional learning community.

### WHI

#### Objective 1

The completion of the database for the Arab-Swahili objects involved a comprehensive methodology to ensure accuracy and thorough documentation. This process began with a careful verification of the database inventory against the objects displayed in the Historic Gallery, following the existing rigorous procedures. An offline version of the collection database was developed in order to investigate the objects on site without having to transport them through the museum.

With the assistance of intern Ms. Larisa Otokiti (Université Libre de Bruxelles) and all the concerned collection and technical staff as well as other collaborators in the museum, the objects displayed in the Historic Gallery were systematically checked using the database. The existing information in the primary database fields were systematically verified, supplemented and improved with recent observations. Additionally, supplementary Information from various sources, including the old paper inventories, provenance registers, and other digitized archival materials was used to enhance the quality of our data. New photographs of the objects, taken during this on site verification, were inserted into the database. Since much of the work was done by several people who identified several discrepancies, we included a step of evaluation and verification by the collection managers before information from the offline database tool was uploaded to the general collection database.

This part of the project was led by our E-curator, Robby Houben, together with the collections administration.

The provenance research for these objects was carried out by a team of researchers, including Robby Houben from the Royal Army Museum-War Heritage Institute, who provided institutional records, and Dr. Noémie Arazi, who contributed additional information on joint donors to both the Royal Museum for Central Africa (AfricaMuseum) and the Royal Army Museum. When a selection of interesting objects for further analysis was established, Dr. Arazi travelled to Kasongo with high-definition photographs to further investigate their provenance and connect the objects with the remaining established cultural networks. She presented these photographs to various individuals in order to observe their reactions and to collect additional information regarding the historical and contemporary uses of the depicted objects.

At various stages, further investigation was conducted through a combination of archival research and consultations with Noémie Arazi.

## Objective 2

Conservation treatment of the objects was done by our in-house restorers, technical staff and by three independent restorers (wood, paper and leather and textiles) who were hired for a certain amount of time. The objects were systematically taken out of their display cases and a condition report was made for each item. Paper and wooden objects were treated first while objects containing metal or textile were treated in a later part of the project.

Clara Montero and Alexia Melaniou were employed on a part-time basis to oversee the conservation of wooden and paper & leather objects, respectively. A total of 37 wooden objects underwent restoration. The selection of these items was partially guided by the "priority objects" list compiled by Noémie Arazi and Pierre Lierneux in 2021. The chosen objects were carefully documented through photography and underwent preliminary treatments, including dry cleaning and vacuuming. All conservation and restoration activities were thoroughly documented, with records maintained in the form of photographic evidence and detailed restoration reports, stored on CollecPro as well as in supplementary files.

The paper objects treated by Alexia Melaniou were photographed, dusted and dry cleaned and consolidated where necessary. Some of the documents were subsequently stored in custom-made acid-free folders and were replaced by copies in the display cabinets while the originals are preserved in the Museum's Documentation Centre. Other paper objects were placed back in the showcases.

In 2024 Zoë-Joy Vangansewinkel, head of the department of textiles and small materials, replaced Natasja Peeters for the BRAIN-CAHN project. The conservation of textiles was done by our textile restorer Peter De Groof. The objects were vacuumed and photographed, and where needed, treated and restored. All the work is documented in detail by photos and work or restoration sheets on CollecPro and on additional files and reports. He also provided supports for the objects when necessary. Unfortunately, it was no longer possible to display the original banner of the Congo Free State. It has been replaced by a facsimile to ensure its preservation in our depot.

The textile restorer Anoek De Paepe partly treated the turban (506774) belonging to Rachid Ben Mohamed which was taken out of the showcase due to its fragile condition. Frieda Sorber, as a 'chargé de mission' also researched some of our composite objects in order to analyse the weave. She provided information on the provenance, technique and use of these objects.

Metal objects were restored by internal metal restorer Alexandre Dorlet. The original plan was to recruit a metal restorer, for restoration of a selection of metal objects, part time, for 5 months but no one with the proper qualifications was found in two recruitment sessions for the Dutch or the French language. When objects were made out of mixed materials, the object would go to the different restorers.

Specific material and technical research on objects was done by the AfricaMuseum in the last months of 2023 and overseen by Peter de Groof and Ilse Bogaerts, former curator of textiles. This concerns specifically textiles on the mannequins on the panoplies. Technical-material research was done in the second half of 2023 on one of the wooden sculptures (sculpture n° 507129) by the coordinator conservation of the AfricaMuseum Siska Genbrugge, overseen by Vera Bras, curator of the arts.

### Objective 3

Adapting the Historic Gallery meant reconsidering the way the objects were displayed in the large showcases (n° 36 to 39), the table showcases (n° 8 and 9) and the panoplies. The classification of the Historical Gallery's museology by the Brussels Region government was overturned in 2024 by the Conseil d'État. This decision allowed subtle adjustments to the gallery's museology, while preserving the integrity of the original exhibition.

A multidisciplinary approach was employed, with collaboration between the museology team, consisting of Pierre Lierneux and Olivier Van der Wilt, and the infrastructure and collections teams. The methodology aimed to establish a functional workflow that would address the needs of all involved parties. Key considerations in this process included budget, visibility concerns, and the conservation of the objects on display.

To guarantee the best condition for the objects it was necessary to think about the necessary changes to the show cases. Restorers Clara Montero and Alexia Melaniou conducted a thorough environmental analysis of both the showcases and the broader gallery. They evaluated the conditions of the display cases and offered recommendations for conservation and the enhancement of the exhibition's valorisation. This advice was incorporated into the overall planning and design of the new display case configurations. Several adjustments were made namely artsorb cassettes were added to avoid high humidity and sealing gaps in the showcases to avoid insects from entering the showcases.

To facilitate an improved display of the objects, a chronological reorganization was proposed. In collaboration with Mr. Philippe Jacquij, president of the Royal Society of Friends of the Museum, with

a considerable amount of knowledge concerning the collections of the Congo Free State, the objects were repositioned to reflect a more coherent historical timeline.

In collaboration with some of the restorers, new supports were made for the displayed objects. Unfortunately, some objects were too damaged to be placed back in the showcases. For this reason, the original objects were placed in the depots while facsimiles of the objects were displayed in the Historic Gallery.

#### 4. SCIENTIFIC RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

##### RMCA

The following section presents an overview of the research findings in relation to the five primary objectives of our contribution to the project. It further outlines a series of recommendations intended to inform and guide future museum practices in the context of collaborative provenance research on colonial collections.

##### Objective 1

The selection of objects for this study was guided by two principal criteria: first, to assemble a collection as representative as possible that illuminates the cross-cultural interactions and exchanges between the populations of the Upper Congo Basin and the East African coast; and second, to incorporate perspectives and input from the relevant source communities. A further objective was to maintain a balance between objects imported from the coastal regions and those produced locally.

Although consultation with community members was an integral part of the selection process, not all objects were chosen by the individuals interviewed, who tended to favor locally produced items. Consequently, additional objects were included based on their scholarly and symbolic significance, particularly in relation to the Arab Campaign (1892–1894)—the armed conflict between the forces of the Congo Free State and the Swahili-Arab merchants and their allies.

An illustrative example is the Qur'an from Kasongo, currently held at the WHI (item 507090), which bears a handwritten inscription by Cyriaque Gillain, who was present during the siege of Kasongo. The note reads: "Souvenir de la prise de Kasongo 21 avril 1893," and is followed by the names Dhanis, Gillain, Scheerlinck, Doorme, Hinde, and Cerkel.

A preliminary selection, consisting of 120 objects, was brought down to 22 objects. The final list contains weapons, architectural elements, religious and spiritual objects, flags, musical instruments, and garments.

The main recommendation for achieving this objective is to allocate more time for the selection of objects, as this process is influenced by several factors—including the availability of archival information, the object's scientific relevance, its societal importance, and potential cultural or ethical sensitivities related to its handling.

##### Objective 2

The archival research mainly focused on both primary and secondary source materials. The investigation into primary sources included acquisition records, correspondence, journals, and similar documents. As expected, the museums' acquisition records varied in the level of detail they provided—ranging from nearly empty files to comprehensive descriptions.

To illustrate the variability in documentation, consider object number HP.1965.14.173: a Swahili carved wooden door from the collections of the RMCA. The first page of the acquisition record states: *"Donation by Mr. Van de Ghinste, Governor of the Province Orientale in Kisangani; a sculpted Arab door and a lintel; received by the Museum of the Belgian Congo on 27th March 1931."*

The second page contains a sketch of the door, while the third includes an internal document from the director's office. The document reads as follows (translated from French):

"Transferred to the Section of Moral, Political and Historical Sciences. 1. A sculpted Arab door which decorated the house of the commanding officer in Kasongo and originated from Old-Kasongo (District of Maniema). In attachment a photograph before removal of the door. 2. A lintel from an Arab door, originating from a hostel in Kasongo, currently demolished. Museum entry number: 1250. Donation from Mr. Van de Ghinste, Governor of the Province Orientale in Kisangani. Pieces sent to the museum upon official request by the directorate. The Director of the Museum ...".

The photograph was never found, which would have shown the original house the sculpted door was attached to. One of the key elements of the document is that it states that the door originated from Old-Kasongo, which refers to the location of the former Swahili-Arab settlement. We thus needed to find additional records that could tell us something about Old Kasongo and its architecture. We were lucky to have found a report by Dallons, A. and V. Cornet (1931) *Evolution de poste de Kasongo à travers le temps, 1865–1931*. A.I. (1407), A.A., Brussels. It describes the occupation of the town by the troops of the CFS after the coastal merchants were chased. Following this occupation, a 'new' Kasongo was constructed along the Lualaba River. In the process, the Arab houses in Old Kasongo were demolished, and their materials were repurposed for the new town. For example, the new District Office was outfitted with an Arab door and lintel, while a hostel received similar features. What became apparent from Dallons' and Cornet's report is that sculpted wooden doors, lintels and even windows once decorated the merchants' houses in Old Kasongo, reflecting architectural styles found in Zanzibar and across the Swahili coast. This case illustrates how archival research can offer critical context, especially when museum records are silent. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that the colonial agents involved in the removal of cultural objects during this early period often failed to document the conditions under which these items were acquired.

At the WHI, archival research mainly focused on the *Inventory of the Belgian Military Presence Abroad*, which comprise the years 1826 to 1955 (*Inventaris van het fonds, Belgische Militaire Aanwezigheid in het Buitenland, 1826-1955*). This fond includes personal letters, newspaper clippings and other articles associated to a person's military career. Several letters of interest were found of former WHI Directors inquiring for more information on the objects (they are often referred to as 'souvenirs') donated by military personnel who were active in the Congo. However, most of the responses, when given, offered little useful information. Other documents consulted at the archives of the WHI included the *Carnet de la Fourragère*, a journal on Belgium's military history, the *Bulletin Militaire* and the *Bulletin de l'Académie Royale des Sciences Coloniales*. An example on the type of information to be found in the *Carnet de la Fourragère* is best exemplified from an article's loaded title, « Les Trophées de la Campagne Arabe au Musée Royal de l'Armée ». The latter provides details of Leon Rom's acquisition

of objects during the battle against Rumaliza, which include a flag, a coran, three swords, a dagger and an Arab garment.

The archives of the AGR were also consulted to gather additional reports and background information on specific agents active during the period under investigation. The aim was to uncover any details that could help contextualize the working conditions of territorial agents and others. Overall however, few records from this early period provided insightful clues on object acquisitions, as most attention was directed on territorial expansion and governance.

Archival research has revealed two principal categories of object translocation, each corresponding to distinct historical and contextual frameworks. The first category comprises war trophies—objects acquired through military interventions and punitive expeditions. In the context of the CAHN, this primarily pertains to the so-called "Arab Campaign" (1892–1894). The second category encompasses colonial transactions, which involve less clearly defined modes of acquisition. This grouping however emphasizes the "collectors'" affiliation with the colonial system, which was deeply fraught by unequal power relations and its structural violence. However, occurrences of voluntary exchanges and transactions cannot be excluded for this group.

Recommendations: Archival research is an inherently time-intensive process, particularly when significant emphasis is placed on fieldwork. Should a similar project be undertaken in the future, it would be imperative that this component be carried out by at least two people rather than a single individual.

### Objective 3

The analysis of the objects primarily involved a comparative study of similar items, with most of the time dedicated to reviewing literature on African art. In 2022 Noemie Arazi had the opportunity to travel to Washington DC to consult the collections of the Smithsonian's Natural History Museum, especially the objects collected in eastern Congo by Herbert Ward and Richard Mohun during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These objects not only have similar circumstances of acquisition as the ones at the RMCA and the WHI but also share similar characteristics. In 2023 she travelled to Germany as part of the MuseumsLab program, where she spent two weeks in a residency program at the Ethnologische Museum which is part of the Humboldt Forum. There she also had access to the museum's database where she was able to study objects from eastern Congo and Tanzania.

Sofie Dierickx carried out micro X-ray Computed Tomography ( $\mu$ CT) and sub- $\mu$ CT to observe anatomical key features for the identification of the wood species used for a carved wooden door lintel at the RMCA (object EO.0.0.45626). This technology uses small parts of an object that are scanned without the need for a sample or only a fraction of the sample needed for microscopic anatomical examination. The CT approach creates a digital 3D reconstruction of the X-rayed area at very high resolution. This image can then be digitally sliced into multiple thin sections, highly improving the probability of finding enough key features for the identification of the wood species. The door lintel was scanned at 4 $\mu$  voxel size (resolution), which allowed Sofie Dierickx to identify it with some certainty as belonging to *Carapa procera* D.C. or African crabwood (<https://africanplantdatabase.ch/en/nomen/177439>). By clicking on the aforementioned link it becomes clear that this wood species occurs in eastern Congo and not on the coast. This suggests that Swahili merchants may have travelled with artisans from the coast as part of their caravans. Additionally it implies that the coastal merchants and their entourage intended to establish themselves in the area west of Lake Tanganyika for the long term.



Recommendations: Material culture studies are often limited to morphological and stylistic studies. However, Dierickx's result on the wooden lintel have shown that sophisticated methods such as Computed Tomography have much to offer in provenance studies allowing insight into the origin of an item and the nature of the material.

#### Objective 4

Much effort and time was invested to work with source communities in eastern DRC and along the central caravan route in Tanzania. Two field missions were carried out in Kasongo (2021 and 2022), which was one of the principal trading hubs, located in the Maniema Province, and one field mission along the central caravan route from Lake Tanganyika to the coast (2024).

For the fieldwork in Kasongo we collaborated with Olivier Mulumbwa Luna from the University of Lubumbashi, Prof. Kayumba Idrissa bin Ramazani from the ISP Kasongo and Gulda El Magambo Bin Ali, an independent camera man and photographer from Lubumbashi. Our aim was to create an atmosphere of dialogue more than the typical interview style of questions and answers. We structured the meetings around three major themes: clan/lineage history, the person's family and personal history, and finally the choice of objects for discussion. This approach we believed would create pertinent context and background information pertaining to the person's identity (personal and family history, social group), which would underscore the choice of objects to be discussed and their significance. All interviews, twenty-nine in total, were filmed and recorded with a Tascam portable audio recorder.

The fieldwork in Tanzania, which was originally scheduled for 2023, needed to be delayed due to complications for obtaining a research permit by the Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH). We did finally obtain the permit and left in January 2024. The objective was to meet with diaspora groups from eastern Congo and more specifically from the Maniema to probe into the memory of the various migrations that resulted from the presence of the Swahili and Arab merchants in Central Africa during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But we also met with artisans and other descendant groups linked to the different migrations along this route, as well as with people who came from as far away as the Arabian Peninsula and Baluchistan (today situated in Iran). Thirty interviews were carried out in total, of which most were filmed. All of them were recorded with a Tascam portable audio recorder.

The majority of the interviews yielded highly informative insights, substantiating the deep emotional connections that members of the source communities maintain with the objects housed in our museums, as well as their extensive knowledge regarding the objects' functions, names, and cultural significance. The interviewees brought the objects to life by sharing personal anecdotes about their parents and grandparents, who may have once used or encountered them in everyday life. However, the issue of provenance itself did not provoke strong reactions regarding any of the selected items. None of the participants recognized an object as having belonged to one of their ancestors or as having been made by someone known locally. That said, most of the objects discussed were identified as items that used to circulate in the Maniema and along the central caravan route, even if knowledge of their specific uses was sometimes fragmentary. On the question of restitution, most people we talked to in DRC were adamant that the objects should return to the country. However, they would like to see the objects returned to Kasongo, and not to Kinshasa. During a workshop in 2021 and again during a reunion in 2022, the inhabitants of Kasongo expressed the wish for protection measures of

the archaeological site and a community center/museum to keep the Swahili and Arab heritage alive for future generations and for the eventual return of objects from the RMCA and the WHI.

The main challenge encountered was translating the interviews. Due to time constraints, our collaborators were unable to complete all translations, leaving fifteen interviews untranslated. However, the files are currently being stored at the RMCA, and it is hoped that the opportunity to complete this work will arise in the future.

Recommendations: The outcomes of working with source communities highlight the importance of making collaborative provenance research a standard practice. Incorporating African agency is essential, as it fosters meaningful dialogue with source communities and lays the groundwork for potential restitution. Collaborative provenance research has also proven to be highly valuable for our African counterparts, while also strengthening our institutional connections with partners across Africa.

#### Objective 5

In line with Project PROCHE (MB21 - Recherches de Provenance sur la Collection ethnographique), all objects from the RMCA's ethnographic collection are currently being put online. The objects that have been studied for CAHN and/or that can be linked to that period and occupation will be earmarked for users to be able to identify them as such on the online database. This is work in progress. We still need to resolve the question on HO (Historical) objects, which include around 245 items (they also include the personal items of former colonial military officers as well as paintings).

Access to online museum collections for source communities, especially those living in remote areas where internet use is limited to social media apps like Facebook and WhatsApp, continues to pose significant challenges.

Recommendations: no specific recommendations.

### KU LEUVEN

Below, we give a general overview of the research findings in relation to the four objectives of our part of the project, which includes several recommendations with an eye on future museum (educational) practices on colonial collections.

#### Objective 1

The first objective of our part of the project was to review scholarly literature that addressed instruction in a history museum context towards an audience of primary and/or secondary school students. The 45 selected studies were analysed to understand (1) how they designed research on instruction, in terms of research questions, participants involved and theoretical and methodological approaches, and (2) what the research outcomes of these studies revealed about the content, the nature and the approach of instruction.

Before discussing the main results, it is important to point at the limitations of this study. Regarding the selection process, we explicitly aimed at looking for peer-reviewed journal articles, in English, in particular. This means that for instance book chapters and non-peer-reviewed articles, that might possibly also offer interesting insights, have not been included in our analysis; research from the non-Anglophone scholarly world, at least when not published in English, has not been included either. In

terms of focus, we deliberately limited ourselves to the context of history (museums and education), not including research designs or research outcomes on instructional processes in other types of museums. Nevertheless, a recent overview of literature on informal learning in museums in general (Pierroux et al., 2022) resonates many of the conclusions drawn within this literature review, in particular with regard to the (student- and teacher-centered) instructional methods and the collaboration between schools and museums. A last limitation is that we focused the analysis on instruction, and the (underexplored) perspective of instructional agents. While isolating instructional perspectives proved to be useful in identifying major challenges and tensions, it remains clear that instruction cannot be fully understood apart from learners' perspectives, as the reviewed studies also clearly indicate. Therefore, it is appropriate to further consider the results from this review study in combination with studies entirely focusing on students' learning.

The significant increase in the past five years of research addressing instruction in history museums, towards the audience of primary and secondary school students, might indicate that a new subfield is emerging. Within this subfield, certainly museums addressing sensitive, difficult histories such as colonial histories or histories of war and slavery have gained attention. Addressing these themes allows instructional agents to stimulate students' awareness of multiple historical perspectives in combination with their affective engagement. This parallels a growing attention for these themes in history education research in classrooms (Goldberg & Savenije, 2018).

However, the variety between the 45 reviewed studies regarding their research designs might at the same time offer an indication that such subfield is not yet established quite strongly. This variety provides a major challenge in building an adequate, generalizable view on effective instructional practices, as the claims that the various studies made were sometimes difficult to compare, due to the fact that not many studies had similar focuses. When considered globally, the studies focused upon different combinations of agents, different aspects of instruction and performed their research in various (national and museum) contexts with different finalities. Some studies, particularly in the first category we distinguished when analysing the research design focuses, concerned majorly descriptive, non-analytic studies. The other three categories we distinguished included empirical analyses of instructional processes, albeit from different methodological and theoretical perspectives. Methodologically, the reviewed studies ranged from large-scale quantitative studies to small(er) scale qualitative studies using data collection methods such as questionnaires, interviews, performance tasks or interviews. Theoretically, both discipline-specific and more general pedagogical frameworks were used, but not often combined. The relationship between instructional practices and students' learning has for example been extensively studied from a disciplinary point of view, while PSTs' beliefs predominantly from a general pedagogical point of view.

Taken together, these findings regarding the research design of the reviewed studies provide pathways for both future practices and research. The descriptive studies for instance, while in essence not being driven by concrete research questions or methodological approaches, often provided concrete examples and case-studies of good instructional practices. For future research, a lot of unexplored territory remains, e.g. in carefully contrasting a wide range of instructional agents' (for example epistemological, didactical or more personal) beliefs with their instructional practices, both in terms of designing instructional resources or of physically enacting instruction. Additionally, through incorporating PSTs into research designs which already integrate experienced teachers or museum educators, expert-novice research could be conducted, exposing differences and similarities through contrasting beliefs and practices of these three different groups of instructional agents. Regarding theoretical frameworks, a thorough use of the concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) could

for example provide a pathway to more extensively map instructional agents' pedagogical and historical content knowledge (e.g. Tuithof et al., 2019). Combining the framework of 'object-based learning', frequently used in higher education literature in various domains such as anthropology and science teaching from both cognitive and affective viewpoints (e.g. Adams et al., 2008; Adams, 2015; Schultz, 2018), with disciplinary insights about reasoning with and about historical sources and historical empathy would also be a fruitful way forward. Historical objects in museums, for instance through interrogating their provenance or their (emotional) significance in past and present, are particularly suited to mediate students' learning about history (Bain & Ellebogen, 2002).

Despite the great variety of research design focuses in the analysed studies, we were able to identify, based on the analysis of their research outcomes, three categories that identify key debates in the research on history museum instruction. Regarding goals to be set for instruction, studies found that both cognitive and affective aspects of historical thinking have found their way into history museum instructional practices. At the same time, they indicated that, in order to effectively engage students in disciplinary thinking, a balance between cognition and affect is difficult to be found. For instance, when considering the relationship between past and present or historical empathy, studies concluded that instructional agents' own skills and knowledge, as well as an explicit insistence upon temporality and contextualisation (i.e. how the past is different from the present), were crucial for bridging cognitive and affective historical thinking. If instructional goals focused more on the present (such as on present-day norms and values, human rights, critical citizenship or students' identification with cultural heritage), this bridge was more difficult to cross, as they (from a disciplinary point of view) entail the pitfalls of presentism, oversimplification or moral judgment based on present-day worldviews. For future research, it seems that more profound insight needs to be gained into how citizenship- and disciplinary-related goals precisely interact or co-exist. Nevertheless, the findings regarding instructional goals provide practitioners with the insight that the affective-emotional engagement of students can be used as an entry point into deeper, critical engagement with multiple historical perspectives (thus connecting emotional-affective perspectives with cognitive historical thinking acts).

Empirical analyses of instructional methods have rather unanimously pointed towards the positive effects of combining student- and teacher-centred methods in history museum instruction. Certainly regarding learner-instructor interactions, studies have emphasized how these created dynamics that often lead to profound engagement in historical thinking, and also bridged cognitive and affective learning. As a result, the choice for this particular instructional method seems to influence the successful obtaining of goals regarding cognitive and affective dimensions of historical thinking. In addition, while experienced teachers' beliefs about instructional methods aligned with the entanglement between teacher- and student-centred methods, PSTs rather associated museum instruction with teacher-centred methods. This was explained through their lack of experience with instructional practices, a lack of specific training on museum education and a reliance upon their own experiences as a student. For future research, these two findings reveal that analysing the alignment between goals for instruction and instructional methods, as well as also examining how PSTs design and enact instructional practices, would prove useful. For practitioners, as well as for teacher educators and facilitators of professional development programs, it becomes clear that the training of instructional agents is necessary to make them familiar with both disciplinary and general pedagogical approaches towards history museum instructional practices.

A relationship that has been deeply examined is the one between schools and museums and their corresponding instructional agents. Small-scale case studies, as well as descriptions of existing

instructional practices have largely described and analysed the opportunities of collaboration in both designing and enacting instructional practices, both regarding widening the scope of classroom historical narratives and didactical approaches. Through embedding the museum visit in the curriculum, through assigning clear roles to each instructional agent and through co-creating didactical activities, positive impacts on students' learning have been found. However, larger scale examinations revealed that on a more general level, several hurdles existed that hindered fruitful co-creation. Misconceptions about each other's expertise or opposing expectations seem to hinder fruitful collaboration. Deeper analysis of how collaboration or co-creation can be facilitated, taking into account both pedagogical as well as historical expertises of various instructional agents, would be an interesting way forward for research. In addition, practitioners and researchers who train instructional agents can seize opportunities in training programs to bring together educational agents from both schools and museums in professional learning communities (e.g. Prenger, Poortman & Handelzalts, 2019; Schep, 2019) in order to learn collaboratively from each other's knowledges, practices and approaches and to enable them to work in co-construction. Given that many studies have considered co-operation as a critical success factor, this will be without any doubt be beneficial for both future practices, as well as for being studied in empirical research.

## Objective 2

In order to meet the second objective, we examined how and to which extent prospective secondary school history teachers integrated postcolonial historical thinking into the design of educational activities about the Belgian colonial past for a fictive 11<sup>th</sup>-grade ethno-cultural diverse class group, to be used in two Belgian museums, the AfricaMuseum and the Army Museum. Previous research with prospective secondary school history teachers had shown that they often reported to lack the knowledge and skills to develop museum educational activities themselves. Besides, earlier findings exposed that prospective teachers' mastering of historical thinking skills does not always automatically result into integrating these into the design of their own educational practices, although this has been only studied in formal classroom contexts, and not regarding their postcolonial historical thinking skills.

This study has shown that participants have quite extensively managed to design museum educational activities that integrate postcolonial historical thinking. In terms of the historical content knowledge they integrated, all participants acknowledged the need to go beyond Occidentocentric perspectives. In so doing, they intended to broaden and enrichen students' historical frame of reference. However, the level of the profoundness of this broadening varied. Those who did pay attention in depth to this explicitly focused on reciprocity in intercultural contacts and on precolonial perspectives.

Regarding critical disciplinary practices relating to postcolonial historical thinking, such as source analysis and the deconstruction of existing narratives, more differences were observed. Existing national or colonial master narratives were consistently deconstructed by almost all participants. While two participants mainly focused on the elaboration of a historical frame of reference in their designs, and did not widely pay attention to disciplinary practices, the other twelve participants actually did. They did pay profound attention to underlying (master) narratives which are present in museum exhibitions, and applied postcolonial and historical thinking while deconstructing them. At the same time, the majority of the participants much less frequently incorporated the disciplinary practice of reasoning *about* objects. Most participants used objects and accompanying labels and texts mainly for reasoning *with* objects. Except for four participants, the others did not profoundly add postcolonial source critiques that question object labels, spark an understanding of objects' provenance and ownership or that uncover the intentions behind the showcasing of an object in a

Western museum. However, such critiques are necessary to foster students' historical and postcolonial thinking. They are even crucial: previous research has shown that students do not spontaneously approach objects critically as historical sources (Peloquin, 2022). Besides, museum educational activities not encouraging students to approach objects critically, risks giving them an image of these objects as neutral and objective, hindering historical contextualisation (Savenije & de Bruijn, 2017, p. 842). It is, apparently, difficult for prospective teachers as well to include a critical approach of sources and objects. That finding is in line with previous studies, showing that reasoning about sources in general, also in classroom contexts and concerning other types of historical sources such as textual ones, constitutes a difficult aspect to integrate for both prospective and experienced history teachers (Nokes, 2010; McCrum, 2013; Van Nieuwenhuysen et al., 2017). In addition, this finding underscores the importance of sharpening prospective teachers' 'museum literacy' skills (Stapp, 1984). Thoroughly integrating museological language in teacher training programs, providing tools on how to critically assess and deconstruct exhibitions, might contribute to a higher ability to consider and to 'read' museum objects as layered, multi-modal historical sources, as various scholars have already suggested (Donnelly, 2018; Gilbert, 2016; Schwartz, 2008).

In terms of critical reflections on the relationship between past and present, we observed that participants addressed this aspect particularly in a cognitive way. Socio-cultural perspectives, starting from students' various own positionalities, were not explicitly integrated, few exceptions in two participants' designs left aside. Apparently, the majority of participants did not consider the combination of cognitive and socio-cultural dimensions when engaging students in thinking about the relationship between past and present. This could be considered surprising, certainly if one takes into account the sensibility of the colonial past in the post-colonial present, and the fact that students spontaneously approach the past both cognitively and emotionally (in terms of identity formation or ethical judgements for example). It is therefore remarkable that none of the participants made mention of the restitution of "colonial" objects in their designs, while this is very present in societal debates, where they trigger strong (also emotional-affective) reactions that closely relate to the ongoing presence of stereotypes, discrimination and racism in present society. At least some students in ethno-culturally diverse composed class groups undoubtedly encountered these last issues in their daily life, shaping their attitudes towards the (colonial) past (Savenije et al., 2014; McCully et al., 2021). A possible reason for not integrating these issues could be that (prospective) history teachers often hesitate to bring in emotional-affective, and possible sensitive issues as they often do not feel sufficiently competent, safe or comfortable to do so (Kello, 2016; Zembylas & Kambani, 2012). Another reason for avoiding to address controversial issues, as various studies show, might be found in (prospective) history teachers' desire to detach themselves emotionally from the past while teaching history. In so doing, they believe that they either have to deny or conceal their own positionality (including personal emotions, opinions or identifications) and thus have to stay 'neutral' while teaching students about the past (Bentrovato & Buhigiro, 2021; Savenije & Goldberg, 2019).

When looking at the instructional methods prospective teachers used, it is at first glimpse surprising to find that participants mainly integrated a variety of learning and instructional activities to foster postcolonial historical thinking, in which students mainly worked independently while being encouraged to adopt an active enquiring attitude. This is at odds with previous research on prospective teachers' beliefs, showing that these mostly associate museum visits with teacher-centred methods and as a result also prefer these themselves (Geerts et al., 2024). Our results show the opposite: it seems as if the academic history teacher training program, in combination with prospective secondary school history teachers feeling at ease with postcolonial historical thinking, proves fruitful.

Apparently, the different approaches of the AfricaMuseum and the Army Museum in terms of contextualisation and the degree to which they challenge colonial and national narratives themselves, influenced participants' designing practices. Several of them differentiated their approach on learning and instruction in both museums, stressing the need for scaffolding and contextualisation particularly in the Army Museum. The absence of critical self-reflection and contextualisation accompanying the "frozen" vitrines in the Army Museum led participants to a more direct critical instruction in this respect. Questions on and Socratic dialogues about objects here tended to encourage students more to critically reason about objects. This was done in absence of accompanying labels or museum texts, providing rich contextual information. In the case of the AfricaMuseum, these labels and texts are present, and often contain answers that participants expected their students to give. These were used to enrich students' historical frame of reference going beyond colonial perspectives, but which perspectives on the actual objects these labels and texts revealed, was not questioned. Not letting students critically reason about the relationship between objects and their labels and texts might confirm the authority of the museum or the curator of the exhibition, not leading them to questioning their place within a constructed narrative. This less critical attitude could even be reinforced in the AfricaMuseum, as is illustrated in the case of two participants who stated that students themselves would not need to be too critical over there, as the museum itself is "very strong in it". The museum indeed is far more self-critical after the renovation. However, while its decolonisation is ongoing, it is also strongly contested, as quite some criticism has risen on the renovation from both within academia and diaspora communities. Criticism runs that the museum has not fully "shed its colonial curse" and that the renovation failed to include "the broader and enduring coloniality that defined the institution and would hamper efforts to effect radical change" (Hassett 2022; Bevernage & Mestdag, 2022; Bluard, 2021).

This last finding, that the Army Museum exhibition of "colonial" objects seems to have triggered more criticality among participants when compared to the exhibitions in the AfricaMuseum, resonates earlier research findings concerning popular representations of the past. Canadian history education scholar Peter Seixas, in his research, confronted young people with two historical films on Native American-White relations: one traditional western from a dominant white perspective and one contemporary film containing a revisionist reading, attributing agency to Native Americans. Students strongly engaged critically while watching the 'outdated' movie, considering it as a cultural construct of the 1950s. They considered the contemporary film, in contrast, as a transparent window upon actual nineteenth-century history: it corresponded much to contemporary historical culture, going against the dominant white settler perspective. However, when asked to compare both movies, students started to challenge the more recent film as well, based on their challenging of the older one (Seixas, 1993; Seixas, 1994). Our findings resonate those of Seixas: 'outdated' historical representations, barely taking into account Indigenous perspectives might more directly evoke a critical disciplinary approach than more recent postcolonial inspired perspectives. These findings advocate for the critical corroboration, within educational practices, of rather colonial popular historical representations in museums with more recent ones that trigger postcolonial perspectives.

When considering our main findings, three major limitations of this study need to be considered. First, we did not analyse the possible differences in participants' designing practices that may result from a variety of their existing beliefs and experiences. Second, most participants held an academic bachelor's or master's degree in history or archaeology and were currently enrolled in an academic teacher training program. We thus did not involve in our research either non-historians or prospective history teachers in professional bachelor's programs. Third, we cannot address what the actual learning

outcomes among an ethno-culturally diverse class group would be, as we did not ask to bring the designed educational activities into practice. Our findings therefore remain limited to the way our participants intended to do so, and are mainly derived from the answers and outcomes they expected themselves from students. While some participants already indicated the motivations behind their design choices to some extent, extensive follow-up research could consist of confronting our findings with the analysis of questionnaires and interviews in which participants explain the choices behind their designing practices. This would allow us to adequately capture their beliefs and how these played a role in shaping museum educational practices. Besides, further research, incorporating prospective history teachers trained in other institutions as well as students, could further enrich our view on both the integration and effective fostering of postcolonial historical thinking.

Despite these limitations, our findings contain useful implications for teacher training practices. They point towards the continuous necessity to provide prospective history teachers with in-depth non-Occidentocentric knowledge in order to enable them to go beyond a pure Occidentocentric historical frame of reference. Regarding the treatment of certain aspects of the historical practice, our results suggest that careful modelling of ways to trigger reasoning about objects are needed to improve postcolonial source critiques, as prospective teachers clearly experience difficulties in applying strategies to reason about objects. Training them in doing so could not only benefit learning and instruction in history museums, but also in history classrooms. Equally so, prospective teachers need to be trained more in how to deal with socio-cultural dimensions of historical thinking when visiting museums that centre around sensitive topics such as the colonial past, as secondary school students do not exclusively engage with the past in a cognitive way. It is therefore necessary to provide prospective teachers with the necessary competencies of how to deal with (the interconnection between) various dimensions. Lastly, letting prospective history teachers corroborate “older”, more “outdated” popular representations with more recent ones might overall sharpen their criticality towards these constructed accounts of the past.

### Objective 3

The largest share of findings regarding the third objective is currently still being analysed and written up in the overall PhD dissertation. The collected data of the professional learning community consisted of the following:

- 8 intake questionnaires;
- a video and audio recording of the six sessions, each about 2 hours long, which were transcribed using sonix.ai, so transcripts are already available; in addition, the main points of each session were recorded through handwritten and digital notes taken upon reviewing each session shortly after it ended;
- a diary fragment per participant (audio recording averaging 2 minutes) after each session (a total of 54 diary entries), which have also been transcribed;
- interim assignments: annotations made by participants while preparing assignments related to the theme of the respective session. This includes, for example, a shared document with comments and discussion on knowledge clips, or annotations made via Perusall, where academic articles were discussed or commented on. Several members of the advisory committee contributed to this, which was greatly appreciated by the research team and the participants.



- The final educational package, that was co-created by the participants.
- Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted in the first week of July 2024 and then transcribed.

The qualitative thematic analysis of the collected data, in light of the predefined research questions and methodology is ongoing at the moment, and is centered around four major research questions. The first two focus on the group level and intend to focus on insights that were generated during group dynamics and group discussions. The third and the fourth one rather relate to the individual level, and are aimed to bring forward each of the eight different participant's personal experiences during the process, and the impact on their own professional development.

1. What insights, related to postcolonial historical thinking and its integration into (the design of) museum educational products, develop during the interactions between participants in heterogeneous professional learning communities and with expert input?
2. What interactions occur between different participants and with expert input during their participation in heterogeneous professional learning communities, and how do these unfold?
3. How does participation in heterogeneous professional learning communities impact, according to the participants themselves, their own professional development and their ability to co-create a museum educational product that promotes postcolonial historical thinking?
4. How did the different participants themselves experience the collaboration during the sessions and the co-creation, in relation to the setup and characteristics of the professional learning community? What did they find effective, and where did they feel additional needs?

A part of the results obtained by pursuing our third objective have already been disseminated, and have resulted in the following findings, that also integrate practical recommendation for (history) museum education based on colonial collections:

In his influential essay from 1971, then director of the Brooklyn Museum and museologist Duncan Cameron spoke of two conceptions of the modern museum: as a temple, or as a forum. He saw a different meaning for objects inherent to both conceptions:

A work of art, an archeological specimen, or an antique is just that and nothing more when it is in the shop or in the street or perhaps in the forum. The moment that it is purchased or accepted by the museum it takes on a new quality. You and I will judge it differently. When the object was not in the museum, we were completely free to decide whether we approved or disapproved, liked it or disliked it. Once it is in the museum, we make our judgment in the knowledge, if not awe, of the fact that the experts have already said, "this is good", or "this is important", or "this is real". The object has been enshrined.

Within the different discussions in the professional learning community, and the positions participants took in them, two larger frames can be distinguished regarding the role of objects in museum educational programming. They echo the insights raised by Cameron. The first frame considers objects during museum educational programming as an instrument for teaching an often closed historical narrative where the teacher or the guide is the main narrator or meaning-maker. This closely connects to a conception of a museum as an institute that, with right and authority, showcases "enshrined objects", where people come to watch them. The second frame contests this idea, and questions

rather traditional conceptions of a museum as a shrine of objects. Viewed from the angle of postcolonial theory, it rather interrogates the way in which objects are exhibited, questions whether they should be exhibited, their acquisition etc. This results in a rather different vision on museum education, where discussion between object, learner and instructor is more important and where exhibitions are critically deconstructed rather than used as a trustworthy source of information.

Both frames can be considered as two extreme positions at both sides of a continuum. Discussion during the learning trajectory brought more nuance to the fore. While some of the participants navigated between both frames (e.g. museum guide 2), four of them seemed to strongly identify with one of both frames. Teacher 1 and museum guide 1 on one hand frequently used arguments in favor of centering knowledge acquisition, based on museum collections and guides' expertise. In both cases, this coincided with a rather skeptical position towards students' prior knowledge, the as unequal or even contradictory considered relationship between knowledge and experience, and strong reservations about the emotional-affective power of object-based learning. The museum educator and prospective teacher 1, on the other hand, rather strongly invoked aspects of the second frame, supplying room for discussion on the concept of a museum, on the showcasing of objects, and favored dialogue and debate over linear instruction that takes the often assumed authority of the museum for granted.

Of course, the findings presented in this article are based on a small-scale case study and can hence not be generalized. Yet they do provide an entry point into a deeper understanding of the broader debate, taking place globally, on museums' role in decolonization processes, and the position (museum) educators might take in them. Our findings reveal that next to practical factors such as time allocation, more profound beliefs held by different educational actors do play prominent roles in negotiating the meaning of colonial heritage objects during museum education. The interplay between epistemological beliefs on the nature of how historical knowledge is constructed in museums and educational beliefs on museum learning seems key to this negotiation. Combining educational beliefs on the importance of dialogue and interaction between objects and learners and a questioning of the epistemic authority often ascribed to museums allows to open the discussion on how to bring learning *about* and learning *from* objects in practice. Conversely, closely sticking to the epistemological belief that objects are direct windows into the past, in combination with an insistence on the importance of a strong historical knowledge basis that is best provided by guides themselves through direct instruction, foregrounds learning *with* objects. This combination, however, resulting from a difficult challenging of one's own interpretive authority, reinforces the idea of museums as repositories of truthful knowledge where guides or educators act as storytellers of museum exhibitions and the objects integrated in them. Based on these findings, we advocate and invite for a thorough reflection and dialogue among educators, both within schools and museums, to consider what exactly influences their own position in this debate. Openly discussing and making explicit this diversity of beliefs held within a group of teachers or educators, while working toward better alignment, could provide a framework for more effectively achieving a more decolonial museum (educational) practice in the future.

## WHI

Thanks to our internal staff and external professionals, the War Heritage Institute has made a lot of progress in terms of the changes in the historical hall, the completion of the database and the treatment of the objects by the various conservators.

### Objective 1

Most of the African objects displayed in the Historic Gallery have now been correctly registered in the database. All vital primary information such as a correct identification, multilingual titles and descriptions have been provided. Additionally, the objects have also been photographed outside of their display cases. There are still some textile objects that need to be treated by Peter De Groof. He will add more technical information to the database concerning their current state and conservation status. Unfortunately, some of the objects have not yet been located.

### Objective 2

The paper objects and wood objects of all of the show cases have been treated. Most of these objects have been replaced by facsimiles.

Almost all of the objects containing textiles have been treated. There is still some work that remains, however. A few mannequins in show case 39 have not been checked by our textile restorer. Unfortunately, the treatment of the African turban has not been finished yet. Due to Anoek De Paepes pregnancy leave, unexpected long delay of the purchase of the linen, and the general work within our museum (new acquisitions, museum loans etc.) the African turban will be treated at a later time by Peter De Groof.

The panoplies will undergo further treatment by our textile restorer Peter De Groof. Closer inspection of the mannequins will determine their state and whether they can be placed back in the original place in the Historic Gallery. In coordination with Zoë-Joy Vangansewinkel new African raffias have been purchased, as this was possible match that was found. After further treatment, these will replace the original raffia's, which will be placed in our depot. Some banners will also need to be replaced by facsimiles which Peter De Groof will provide.

Another meeting between the department of collections (specifically textiles) and museology will be necessary in order to determine the final scenography for the show cases. Based on this, a final list can be made regarding the objects that need to be placed back in the show cases. In collaboration with Peter De Groof the types of supports that need to be made in function of these fragile objects will be discussed .

All of the metal objects in showcase 36 and a selection of showcase 37 that needed treatment have been treated by Alexandre Dorlet. The metal objects in showcases 38 and 39 have yet to be inspected by the metal restorer.

### Objective 3

Even though much work has been done to change the show cases, they are not finished yet. New LED-lights will be installed in the show cases. In order to ensure the best possible conditions for the displayed objects research is currently underway to minimize the exposure of the objects to UV-light.

The contextualization of the collections will be achieved through two primary methods: the installation of background panels within the display cases and the integration of interactive touchscreens. The panels, positioned at the rear of each case, will provide a trilingual summary (limited to 800 characters) outlining key geostrategic issues. Complementing this, a 17-inch touchscreen located in front of each case will present detailed labels and highlight significant elements of the display. The texts have already been provided and were developed collaboratively by various partners involved in the project.

Due to spatial and readability constraints within the display cases, object labels (cartels) are incorporated digitally via the touchscreens as part of the contextualization strategy. The editorial process was shared among the collection managers, several specialists from partner institutions, and people who were recommended by these specialists.

General problems :

It is important to highlight that restoration work was temporarily suspended due to refurbishment activities undertaken by the Building Agency (Régie des bâtiments) following a calamity in June 2022. In August and September 2023, as well as into early October, staff were primarily occupied with preparations for the new exhibition, which resulted in a pause in conservation efforts. Further disruptions occurred during a subsequent phase of refurbishment by the Building Agency in November-December 2023, when the Historic Gallery was closed to both the public and staff for several weeks for security reasons.

Moreover, the overall environmental conditions within the Historic Gallery are not ideal for conservation purposes. The decision however to preserve the original scenography reflects a desire to help the public understand how the Belgian authorities historically viewed the institution's subject matter—namely, military history in the strictest sense of the term. This choice entails considerations on both contextualization and conservation.

## 5. DISSEMINATION AND VALORISATION

### RMCA

The objects that were studied in the framework of CAHN will also be disseminated digitally through the RMCA's involvement in Project PROCHE, an initiative dedicated to enhancing access to over 80,000 cultural artifacts from the Democratic Republic of Congo via an online database."

Throughout the course of the project and due to the success of the documentary film *Kasongo (Im)Material* by Noemie Arazi and Georges Senga, it was determined that the most appropriate format for disseminating and promoting the project's new insights is to be an exhibition. It is scheduled to take place in Brussels during the first half of 2026 in collaboration with Moussem Nomadic Art Centre (<https://www.moussem.be/fr>). Provided there is sufficient funding, the exhibition might travel to different locations, including the DRC.

For book chapters, journal articles and presentations, see chapter 6.

### KUL

For scientific dissemination and valorization, including a broad range of output directed towards a professional audience of teachers and educators, see the publications section of KU Leuven. An additional book publication for a broad audience is scheduled for 2026: a volume in the series 'historisch denken' (Leuven University Press) – see annex 1 to this report for a description of this volume.

The (public) dissemination and valorization output of our share of project CAHN is mainly situated under the fourth research objective: the development of an online training course for museum educators. In February 2025, a student (Hanne Peeters) was hired via funding received by [Leerpunt](#) for the project 'Historische Bruggen Bouwen'. Over the course of four months, and based on the diverse findings of our research (especially the professional learning community), Hanne is and will continue to develop an asynchronous online and reflective training course. The aim is to put this course online towards the end of 2025, and to disseminate it to a broad audience of teachers and museum educators in Belgium and abroad. To give a short idea of the specific goals and contents of this online course, an overview is given in KUL annex 2 to this report.

### WHI

From a scholarly perspective, all corrections to the initial identifications have been communicated to our colleagues at the AfricaMuseum in Tervuren, particularly regarding edged weapons and firearms, and to the department of Translation and Communication of the Université Libre de Bruxelles, for the linguistic aspects and ongoing publications.

There is also an ongoing project to merge the online inventories of the Royal Museum for Central Africa and the Royal Military Museum in order to make them accessible to a wider audience.

From an educational standpoint, the relevant department within our institution will organise visits for the guides of our institution, based on the contextual texts and the new arrangement of objects in the display cases. Although the scenography must respect the spirit of the nineteenth century, a curated selection of the exhibited objects will reduce their total number by twenty to thirty percent, allowing

for a more focused presentation a group of object. In line with the institution's mission, the labels and contextual texts primarily address the military campaigns of the Public Force of the Congo Free State against the Zanzibari traders, the Mahdist warriors of Sudan, and the rebellious soldiers of Dhanis (Vice Governor General of the Congo Free State).

The recontextualization of the exhibition cases related to the Arab Campaign is currently underway. The recent declassification of the Historical Gallery by the Brussels Region now permits the incorporation of interpretive media beyond traditional text panels. It has been decided to install interactive touch screens, enabling visitors to engage more deeply with the complex history of Swahili-Arab merchants in Central Africa. These displays will also present the findings of provenance research conducted in collaboration with the communities from the countries of origin.

As our colleague Brent Geerts from the KU Leuven remarked, the Historic Gallery of the Royal Military Museum, with its nineteenth century scenography, mainly reflects how the various expeditions involving Belgian soldiers, temporarily exempted from service in the Belgian army, were perceived during the period from 1900 to 1930. Cultural heritage is not ideologically neutral, as it inherently involves a selective representation of content.

Like a time capsule, the exhibition is intended to provoke discussion; the tools provided through the touchscreen system or guided tours aim to stimulate visitors' critical thinking.

There were no articles published by researchers from the War Heritage Institute during the project. However, the results will form the basis for future research. Also, it can draw on two specific examples of related research:

- HULLEBROUCK (M.), *Les collections, trophées et vétérans coloniaux et la naissance du Musée royal de l'Armée*, PhD thesis, Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, décembre 2023, 2 volumes. Martin Hullebrouck was a student of the Université Libre de Bruxelles at the time and used multiple sources from the documentation centre of the War Heritage Institute and the objects that were on display in the Historic Gallery.
- DUBRUNFAUT (Paul), *Armes à feu de traite et armes des Zanzibarites*, as yet to be published, Bruxelles, sd, 10 p. Paul Dubrunfaut is the former head of the department of firearms of the War Heritage Institute. He is an expert in African trade of firearms.

## 6. PUBLICATIONS

### RMCA and KU LEUVEN

#### Journal articles

Arazi, N. in prep. for *Museum Anthropology Journal*, “From Colonial Collections to Community Narratives: Reframing Congo-Arab Heritage through Transnational Research”.

Arazi, N. in prep. for *Museum Studies Journal*, “Colonial Loot: Exploring Object Histories from the Congo-Arab War”.

Arazi, N., Matonda, I., Luna, O.M. and A.L. Smith 2024. “Kasongo – Tongoni: a nineteenth-century caravan town in Maniema, Democratic Republic of Congo”. *Azania*, doi: 10.1080/0067270X.2024.2389003.

Geerts, B., Depaepe, F., Van Nieuwenhuyse, K. (2024). Instructing students in history museums: A systematic literature review. *Historical Encounters-A Journal of Historical Consciousness Historical Cultures and History Education*, 11 (1), 180-202. [doi: 10.52289/hej11.111](https://doi.org/10.52289/hej11.111)

Geerts, B., Depaepe, F., Van Nieuwenhuyse, K. (2025). Fostering postcolonial historical thinking through museum education: exploring prospective teachers' design practices. *International Journal for History and Social Sciences Education*. [to be published in June 2025]

Geerts, B., Van Nieuwenhuyse, K. (2025). Negotiating the Meaning of Objects during Museum Education on Colonial Heritage and History - Insights from a Professional Learning Community. *Journal of Museum Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2025.2479291> [accepted after 1 major revision, to be published in May 2025, The link activates upon publication of the paper!]

Geerts, B. (2024). Instructie in historische musea: wat we weten uit twee decennia onderzoek. *Hermes: Tijdschrift van de Vlaamse Leraren Geschiedenis*, 28 (2), 17-22. (professionally oriented)

Geerts, B. (2024). Het educatieve potentieel van weinig vertellende museumopstellingen. *Hermes: Tijdschrift van de Vlaamse Leraren Geschiedenis*, 28 (1), 10-14. (professionally oriented)

#### Book Chapters

Arazi, N. in press. *Swahili Cultural Footprints in Central Africa*. In *Colonizing Objects*. Jeanne Walschot & Congolese Art in Belgium, edited by A. Lecaille and S.V. Beurden. Tervuren, Royal Museum for Central Africa.

Arazi, N., Matonda, I. and A. L. Smith. 2024. Chapter 11: Slavery Legacy in the Congo Basin. In *Critical African Heritage Studies*, edited by A. Sinamai, John Giblin, S. Chirikure, and I. Odiaua. Abingdon: Routledge. doi.org/10.4324/9781003025832.

Geerts, B., Depaepe, F., Van Nieuwenhuyse, K. (2024). Vers une pensée historique postcoloniale: la conception de pratiques éducatives muséales sur le passé colonial belge. In: S. Doussot, M-A. Éthier, N. Fink (Eds.), *Didactique de l'histoire et compétences critiques. Penser l'apprentissage de l'histoire par la notion d'enquête*, Chapt. 4, (85-113). Louvain-la-Neuve: De Boeck Supérieur. ISBN: 9782807361744. <https://doi.org/10.3917/dbu.douss.2024.01.0085>

### Abstracts/Presentations/Posters

Arazi, N. *Unravelling the past in the eastern Congo: memory, landscapes and colonial collections*. Congo Research Network Conference, Africa Institute, Sharjah 29-31 January 2025.

Arazi, N. and D. Mgumba *Congo-Arab Heritage in Historical Narratives (CAHN) in Dar Es Salaam, Coast and Tabora regions of Tanzania*, From history to present: Dealing with museum collections from colonial contexts in Hesse and beyond conference, Museum Wiesbaden (Germany), 23-24 September 2024.

Arazi, N. *Nieuwe perspectieven op het Arabo-Swahiliverleden: objecten en herkomstonderzoek, Expert-input, Sessie 3: Object-based learning*, 13 March 2024, RMCA.

Arazi, N., Magambo, G. and D. Mgumba *Swahili Connectivity in the Upper Congo Basin*. Seminar Series at the University of Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, 9 February 2024.

Arazi, N. *Swahili Connectivity in the Upper Congo Basin*. Material Cultures of Eastern Africa: New Historical Perspectives from the Local to the Global, 7-8 February 2024, British Academy (Online).

Arazi, N. *Extraction and resistance in the eastern Congo during the second half of the 19th century*. Society of Africanist Archaeologists, 26th Biennial Meeting, June 1-6 2023, Rice University, Houston, Texas.

Arazi, N. and A. Smith, *Kasongo (im)matériel: transmission, mémoire et affect aux confins du monde Swahilie*, Online Seminar Series, Archaeology of Migration, Moving beyond Historical Paradigms, ULB, 22 April 2022.

Arazi, N. CAHN project poster. *Science days of the RMCA*. From 17/10/2022 until 18/10/2022.

Arazi, N., Smith, A., Matonda, I. and O.L. Luna, *The material and immaterial heritage of Swahili-Arab interaction in the Upper Congo Basin*, Paper presented at the 25th biennial meeting of the Society of Africanist Archaeologists (SAfA), ONLINE University of Oxford, UK, August 2021.

Arazi, N. Contributor to plenary session, *Archaeology as Long-Term Anthropology*, at the 25th biennial meeting of the Society of Africanist Archaeologists (SAfA), ONLINE University of Oxford, UK, August 2021.

Geerts, B., Van Nieuwenhuyse, K., Depaepe, F. (2024). Negotiating the balance between critical distance and emotional proximity in museum education about colonialism: insights from a professional learning community. Presented at the 8th Conference of the International Research Association for History and Social Sciences Education (IRAHSSE): Values in History, Social Science and Human Geography Education, Cartagena, Spain, 21 Oct 2024-23 Oct 2024.

Geerts, B., Van Nieuwenhuyse, K., Depaepe, F. (2024). History classrooms and historical museums across the great divide: negotiating the meaning of museum education on colonial heritage and history in a professional learning community. Presented at the Conference of the International Society for History Didactics (ISHD): History and its Discontents, Rhode Island College, Providence (USA), 10 Oct 2024-12 Oct 2024.

de Bruijn, P., Geerts, B., Hülsken, M., Savenije, G., Van Doorselaere, J., Van Nieuwenhuyse, K. (2024). Panel 'Erfgoed- en museumeducatie als ongedisciplineerde geschiedenis: de educatieve wisselwerking met scholen'. Presented at the Historicidagen 2024: Ongedisciplineerde geschiedenis, Maastricht, 22 Aug 2024-24 Aug 2024. [Open Access](#)

Geerts, B., Van Nieuwenhuyse, K. (2024). In- or Excluding Colonial Violence? The Representation of “Small War” Trophies in Belgian Museum Exhibitions. Presented at the 10th Annual Conference of the Historical Dialogues, Justice and Memory Network, "Travels Beyond the Holocaust: Memorialization, Musealization and Representation of Atrocities in Global Dialogue", Vienna, 25 Jun 2024-28 Jun 2024. [Open Access](#)



Carpentier, S., Debroyer, T., Geerts, B., Minne, E. (2024). Panel 'Valorisatie van historisch onderzoek naar subalterne groepen'. Presented at the Dag van de Nieuwste Geschiedenis, BELvue museum (Brussel), 13 May 2024.

Geerts, B. (2024). "Wat doet dit ding hier?" Een meerstemmig gesprek voeren met leerlingen over de herkomst en de toekomst van koloniaal erfgoed. Presented at the Forumdag Humane Wetenschappen 2024. Thema Roofkunst, Gent, 06 Mar 2024-06 Mar 2024. (professionally oriented)

Geerts, B., Van Nieuwenhuyse, K., Depaepe, F. (2023). Closing the gap between history classrooms and historical museums: prospective history teachers and the implementation of postcolonial and historical thinking in Belgian museum settings. Presented at the 7th Conference of the International Research Association for History and Social Sciences Education (IRAHSSE), Cologne, Germany, 18 Sep 2023-20 Sep 2023. [Open Access](#)

Geerts, B., Van Nieuwenhuyse, K., Depaepe, F. (2023). Towards mutual understanding and expertise sharing? Designing professional learning communities to foster collaboration between history teachers and museum educators. Presented at the 7th Conference of the International Research Association for History and Social Sciences Education (IRAHSSE), Cologne, Germany, 18 Sep 2023-20 Sep 2023. [Open Access](#)

Geerts, B., Van Nieuwenhuyse, K., Depaepe, F. (2023). Integrating 'colonial heritage' into history education: museum education as a means to foster young people's postcolonial historical thinking. Presented at the Conference of the International Society for History Didactics (ISHD): Heritage in History Education, Tallinn, Estonia, 23 Aug 2023-25 Aug 2023. [Open Access](#)

Geerts, B., Van Nieuwenhuyse, K., Depaepe, F. (2022). Historical and postcolonial thinking on the national and colonial past within the context of Belgian museums: the design of teaching practices for diverse class groups. Presented at the 6th Conference of the IRAHSSE: Teaching and learning history and the social sciences in relation to minorities-majorities dynamics in a national context, Trois-Rivières (Québec, Canada), 22 Sep 2022-24 Sep 2022. [Open Access](#)

Geerts, B., Van Nieuwenhuyse, K., Depaepe, F. (2022). Penser et enquêter comme des historiens sur le passé Congo-Arabe dans le contexte des musées belges: analyse de la conception des pratiques d'enseignement à la lumière du transfert des contextes formels aux contextes informels. Presented at the XVIIes Rencontres du REF, Namur, Belgium, 05 Jul 2022-08 Jul 2022.

### Science Outreach

Geerts, B. (2023). Waarom een weinig vertellende museumopstelling net erg sprekend kan zijn. ([URL](#))

### Book Reviews

Geerts, B. (2024). Compte rendu de Boltanski, Christophe (2023). King Kasai. Stock. *Revue des Sciences de l'Education*, 49 (2). [doi: 10.7202/1113036ar](https://doi.org/10.7202/1113036ar)

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### MRAC

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all our project partners, Karvel Van Nieuwenhuyse, Pierre Lierneux, Natasja Peeters, and Brent Geerts, for their collegiality and truly collaborative spirit throughout this work. We are deeply grateful to everyone we interviewed in Kasongo and along the central caravan route in Tanzania, as this research would not have been possible without their valuable contributions. A special acknowledgment goes to Placide Mumbembele in Kinshasa, Bertin Mukali and Prof. Kayumba in Kasongo, Gaston Tambwe in Kindu, and Mama Mariam Mohamed Ramiya in Bagamoyo for their exceptional support. Our warmest thanks also go to our colleagues in the DRC and Tanzania: Olivier Mulumbwa Luna, Georges Senga, Gulda El Magambo, and Deonis Mgumba. We also wish to thank all members of the Follow-Up Committee, with particular appreciation for David Gordon, who attended every meeting and provided insightful comments and observations. Finally, our sincere gratitude goes to our colleagues at the RMCA: Els Cornelissen, Yves Geens, Tine Huyse, Julien Volper, Agnès Lacaille, Alexandre Smith, Maarten Couttenier and Muriel Garsou. At BELSPO, we thank Heleno Calvo Dell Castillo and Georges Jamart.

### KU LEUVEN

We would like to warmly thank all project partners of project CAHN – and especially project leader Noemie Arazi – for the fruitful collaboration of the past four years. A strong thank you to the various members of the Follow-Up Committee of this project, and especially Denise Bentrovato for her most relevant remarks and suggestions during the various FUCOM meetings. In addition, we would particularly like to mention the four members of the doctoral committee of the PhD of Brent Geerts, linked to our part of the CAHN project: Maarten Couttenier, Geerte Savenije, Denise Bentrovato and Mark Schep. Many thanks as well to Pieter de Bruijn, who served as a referee for this PhD research during a postgraduate seminar at the KU Leuven History Research Unit. Finally, we would like to especially thank all experts who, based on their own research and expertise, provided crucial and most interesting input in our professional learning community program: Maarten Couttenier, Pierre Lierneux, Noémie Arazi, François Makanga, Geerte Savenije, Mark Schep and Fien Depaepe.

### WHI

The BRAIN-CAHN project has been made possible through the collaboration and support of numerous individuals and institutions. We extend our sincere gratitude to our partners: the AfricaMuseum in Tervuren and KU Leuven.

Our deepest thanks go to BELSPO, whose funding has provided the foundation for the project. Their support has been instrumental in enabling us to embark on this important work, and we are grateful for the opportunity they have given us to examine this vital historical context. We would like to particularly acknowledge the leadership and vision of Noémie Arazi. Her extensive fieldwork, including research on the provenance and use of specific African objects in the context of the Congo-Arab military activities and history, has been essential for this project.

We would like to express our gratitude to our dedicated museum staff whose expertise, commitment, and collaboration were essential to the success of the BRAIN-CAHN project. This initiative would not have been possible without their tireless efforts. We sincerely thank the restorers, whose meticulous

work on the Arab-Swahili objects preserved and revitalized these important objects, ensuring their longevity for future generations. To the museology team, we are grateful for your thoughtful curatorial input and your role in recontextualizing the displays to reflect both historical accuracy and contemporary relevance. Our appreciation also extends to the infrastructure staff, whose behind-the-scenes efforts in refurbishing the showcases were crucial to the project's execution. We would also like to thank all of our museum staff that was involved in the digital part of the project.

Additionally, our heartfelt thanks go to the many external researchers and experts who have generously shared their knowledge and expertise. Their contributions on materials, techniques, and the intricate details of specific objects have been indispensable in advancing our research and ensuring the accuracy of our findings.

## **ANNEXES**

### **Annex 1: Concept Note for an Exhibition**

# ***Congo-Arab***

## ***The Afterlives of an Unsettled Past***

Exhibition Proposal

Prepared by Noemie Arazi (Royal Museum for Central Africa)

In collaboration with Moussem Nomadic Art Center

(<https://www.moussem.be>)

January 2025

**Congo-Arab** weaves together diverse sources from long-term research in an attempt to explore new vantage points on the production, narration and display of history and heritage. Assembled works from scientific and artistic research explore the entangled temporalities and accumulated significations of what persists and “survives” in the present from a past deeply affected by coloniality.

The fruit of extensive investigations carried out over a seven year period in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania and Belgium, **Congo-Arab** merges data from archaeology, archival sources, oral history and provenance research. Building on the success of the documentary *Kasongo (Im)Material* by Noemie Arazi and Georges Senga (Kinshasa, Luxor, Saint Louis, Sharjah, New York, Brussels, etc.), the exhibition project seeks to probe deeper into the events that unfolded from the mid 19th century onwards, when the eastern Congo became entangled in territorial conquest, predatory extraction and the global trade in natural resources. Initially led by Swahili and Arab merchants from the Indian Ocean coast, it was taken over by the agents of the Congo Free State shortly afterward. These tumultuous times coincided with the first universal exhibitions, where objects and natural resources appropriated from the colony were showcased against alluring backdrops, instilling new imaginaries within the Belgian public. Objects that migrated with the Swahili and Arab merchants into the eastern Congo and locally produced objects constituted a significant addition to what became the collections of the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren and the Royal Army Museum in Brussels. Provenance research revealed that contexts of appropriation were mostly silenced. This is why dialogue and engagement with communities from the countries of origin stand at the core of this work. Their narratives and affective connection seem like an antidote to the epistemic violence of the archive and the ordering of objects in museums.

As an exploration into alternative heritage practices, **Congo-Arab** brings into focus polyphonic epistemologies, narration and display by researchers, artists and students from both continents. None of the museum objects will be on display. This radical choice seeks to highlight the ongoing power imbalances between museums in the global north and the previous makers, users and owners of the objects. At the same time the exhibition seeks to disrupt the museum’s intrinsic ordering of disciplines and types by blurring the lines between the scientific, the documentary and the artistic. What will be featured are evocations of past and present materialities in the form of installations containing archaeological remnants, archival sources, museum records, audio-visual recordings, photographs, drawings and sound creations. They will be framed in overlapping chapters, assessing historical representation, (post-)colonial violence and extraction, counter narratives, repair and post-colonial futures. Recognizing the need to imagine post-restitution futures, Congo-Arab proposes a relational space as potential alternative for engaging with the colonial past and its legacies.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a discursive program that offers a platform for reflection on repair and alternative narratives.

After Brussels, the exhibition will travel to different locations, including the DRC.

## Prologue to the exhibition, the idea of Congo-Arab

In a darkened room the visitors can sit and contemplate on a series of archival and contemporary photographs from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania<sup>1</sup> projected on a split screen. Another screen shows drone footage mostly with lavish landscapes such as the Congo River and Lake Tanganyika, urban conglomerations and villages. A short text, which serves as an introduction to the exhibition, is displayed on one of the walls.

*How can one approach a portrayal of historical events that occurred more than a hundred years ago in the heart of Africa? What if the ones involved were not only African but also Arab, Asian and European? 'The idea of Congo-Arab' stands in homage to Valentin Mudimbe's work on 'The idea of Africa'. In it he offers a comprehensive analysis of the various historical and geographical contexts in which Africa has been conceived. Congo-Arab merges a variety of sources and gazes on historical events whose fine lines of myth and reality were blurred by the colonial library and the official histories of the Congo Free State and the Belgian Congo. Various research trips to "original" locations in the eastern DRC and Tanzania have resulted in the creation of new images and recordings. Do they afford a more authentic realignment on the idea of Africa, or in this case Congo-Arab history? In Mudimbe's words, "this is just a story and it can be challenged".*



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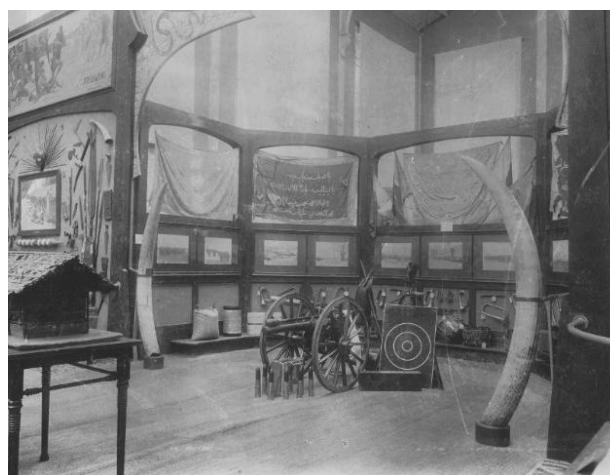
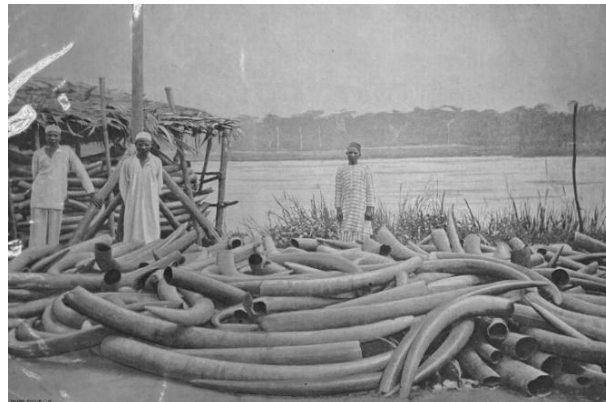
<sup>1</sup> Above: Caravan route, Kasongo (DRC), linking the Maniema to Lake Tanganyika and ultimately to the East African littoral, ©N. Arazi; below: Aerial photo of Kasongo with surface vestiges of Swahili and Arab occupation, ©N. Arazi and A. Smith.

## Historical Representation, that ghost that is and yet is not<sup>2</sup>

This space introduces the visitor into the complex history of the Swahili and Arab merchants who ventured into the eastern Congo from the Indian Ocean coast of East Africa, and the ensuing Congo Free State era.

A visual and textual timeline will occupy an important part of that space. It will feature archival material such as photographs, textual excerpts and illustrations from Imperial explorers and colonial agents, maps and handwritten information extracted from the colonial archive and the postcolonial literature. It will illustrate ‘evidence’ but also silences/absences to confront the inequalities of power in the production of sources, archives, and historical narratives. The timeline also acknowledges orientalist conceptions of African and Arab leaders as cruel tyrants and a broader fascination in Belgian society with cultural superiority, and differences between East and West, North and South.

Artistic proposals will feature the work of Jan Kempenaers’ (Belgium) colonial monuments related to the Belgian colonial past. Mega Mingiedi’s (DRC) newly commissioned illustrations will stand in dialogue with Kempenaers’ photographs as an allegory to the silences of the archives and as an alternative reading of the colonial library.



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<sup>2</sup> Taken from Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) *Silencing the Past*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press. Illustrations: Above, Tippo Tip's ivory store at Stanley Falls, Upper Congo (Herbert Ward 1889). Below, The Military Section at the 1897 Congolese Exhibition in Tervuren (original title), Albert Drains (photographer), © Royal Museum for Central Africa.

### Extraction, the necessary furniture of Empire<sup>3</sup>

Extraction lies at the heart of this history of histories. The trade of ivory, or white gold as it was called, by the coastal merchants signaled the start of a long history of extraction and dispossession that still continues to this day. The extraction of ivory went hand in hand with the trade in enslaved peoples. During the Congo Free State period ivory continued to be extracted in large quantities in addition to rubber and other natural resources. The removal of cultural objects became part of this extractive regime. In spite of the official abolishment of slavery, King Leopold II's reign became the signature example of colonial violence with his brutal system of forced labor to collect wild rubber. The legacy of these labor regimes, which were marked by the use of force and violence, is most blatant in the eastern Congo. At the center of one of the deadliest conflicts in recent contemporary history, it is closely associated with the contemporary plunder of its minerals and coerced labor.

Installations will feature archival records and other sources that are closely linked to ivory exportations and the slave trade before and during the Congo Free State period. Museum records and photographs will illustrate the types of confiscated cultural objects that ended up in the collections of the Royal Museum for Central Africa. Artistic contributions will include the work of Hadassa Ngamba (DRC), Gulda El Magambo (DRC) and other Congolese artists. Ngamba uses cartography to chart natural resource exploitation and Magambo's photographs of Katangan miners remind us of the historical continuities that pairs extraction with dispossession, violence and unfree labor<sup>4</sup>.



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<sup>3</sup> Citing George Nathaniel Curzon's views on Oriental Studies as an academic discipline, taken from Edward Said (1978) *Orientalism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

<sup>4</sup> Above, silver anklet from the WHI (object 507096) confiscated during the Arab Campaign, Photo: N. Arazi, below: © Gulda El Magambo, *Kaziterremines*, 2022.



### Counter Narratives, in search of lost time<sup>5</sup>

This space centers on the narratives from the countries of origin where cultural objects were taken during the Congo-Arab War and the period leading up to World War I. Audio-visual recordings from fieldwork conducted in eastern DRC and Tanzania highlight not only the deep emotional ties individuals maintain with these ancestral objects—removed over a century ago—but also the meanings these objects hold within their communities. Such perspectives are often absent in the ethnographic museums and storage facilities where the objects are currently kept. The recordings further reveal how interviewees begin to embody the objects themselves, with the artifacts coming to symbolize the lived histories and identities of their communities.

Alongside the recordings will be George Senga's and Gulda El Magambo's photographic work in Kasongo and along the central caravan route in Tanzania<sup>6</sup>. Having participated in several of the research trips afforded them to create an important output on the cultural legacies of the communities whose ancestors experienced forceful and deliberate migration between the Arabian Peninsula, the East African coast and Congo. Their work also highlights the legacies of Islam, colonialism and Christianity.



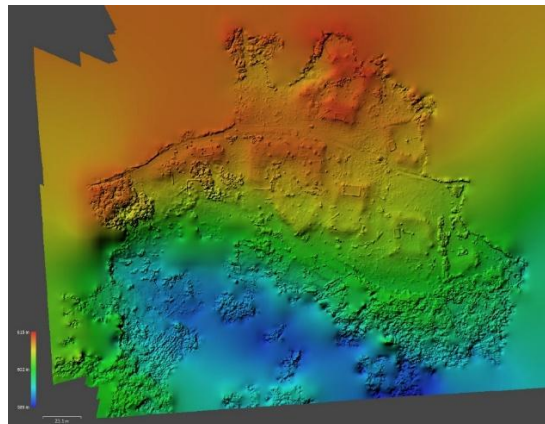
<sup>5</sup> See Marcel Proust *In Search of Lost Time*, trans. C.K. Scott-Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin. London: Chatto & Windus, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Left and Right: Rachid Abdallah's family album, resident of Bagamoyo (Tanzania) since three generations. His great-grandfather migrated from Yemen, © Gulda El Magambo.

### Repair and Postcolonial Futures, this debt of truth<sup>7</sup>

This section of the exhibition attempts to address issues of repair and postcolonial futures. Archaeological records and remains from investigations in Kasongo – one of the principal Indian Ocean trading hubs in eastern Congo - will be on display. Congo Free State agents destroyed the site during its siege but archaeological excavations succeeded in identifying some of its remaining vestiges<sup>8</sup>. As a result of that work and the close collaboration with various community members, many of Kasongo's inhabitants have voiced the urgency to preserve the site with a community center near by as a site of commemoration to the slave trade.

This space will also feature work by secondary school students from Brussels on one of the most emblematic colonial monuments, *En souvenir des pionniers belges au Congo*, located in the Parc de Cinquantaire. This could take the form of a film and/or ideas for a counter monument; they will be working in close collaboration with an artist and architect. Artistic contributions will include the work of Rehema Chachage (Tanzania) and M'barek Bouhchichi (Marocco). Chachage describes her practice "as a performative archive which untraditionally collects stories, rituals and other oral traditions in different media". Bouhchichi's unifying thread in his work alludes to individual expression that allows for a rewriting of the self by means of installation, painting, drawing or video.



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<sup>7</sup> Taken from Achille Mbembe (2020) *Brutalisme*, Paris: La Découverte.

<sup>8</sup> Above: Drone images of house foundations at the 19<sup>th</sup> century site of Kasongo-Tongoni, © Noemie Arazi and Alexandre Smith. Below: Monument *En souvenir des pionniers belges au Congo*, Brussels, ©N. Arazi.

## **Annex 2a. TABLE OF CONTENTS VOLUME IN THE HISTORICAL THINKING SERIES**

The book will consist of four parts:

- 1) Sketch of the historical background and context of the late-nineteenth century history of the eastern Congolese region, in relation to the Leopoldian and later Belgian colonization
- 2) Sketch of the historical background and context, acquisition and biography of the collections from the 19<sup>th</sup> century up until today, incl. explanation of provenance research (this will be done on a general and object level)
- 3) Ethical reflection on dealing with the past by means of museums and objects
- 4) Didactical approaches: explanation (e.g. object mediated learning etc.) and concrete tools/examples

## **ANNEX 2b. ONLINE COURSE BUILDING HISTORICAL BRIDGES BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND HISTORICAL MUSEUMS**

This concerns an online asynchronous course, consisting of 5 modules, which can be gone through, independent from one another. It is meant for (prospective) history teachers, history teacher trainers, history museum guides, en history museum educators. It consists of knowledge clips, texts, exercises and assignments and (good) practices.

### **Module 1: theoretical and conceptual frameworks**

The goal is to offer

- An understanding of theory and concepts on history learning and instruction (e.g. socio-constructivism, historical thinking, contextual model of learning, object-based learning etc.)
- A common language
- Self-reflective instruments to assess how one relates to the concepts

### **Module 2: Goals**

The goal is:

- To invite participant to critically reflect on the goals they set for a museum visit
- To offer inspiration in terms of a broad range of goals to be achieved.

### **Module 3: didactical approaches**

The goal is here to

- Foster reflection on possible instructional strategies and methods for history museum education
- Offer good practices for a wide range of approaches

### **Module 4: collaboration school-museum**

The goal is to

- Foster reflection the importance of collaboration
- Offer concrete tools for collaboration
- Show the added value of collaboration

In each of the modules, we include

- Knowledge clips and tests
- Testimonies
- Practices
- Good practices
- Self-assessment and self-reflection tools



### **Annex 3 Verslag van de behandeling van de panoplie van de Congo vrijstaat vlag 506887 in de Historische zaal van het Koninklijk museum voor de Krijgsgeschiedenis en het Leger.**

Verslaggever: Peter De Groof Datum :

16/05/2025

#### **BESCHRIJVING VAN DE VERSCHILLENDE ONDERDELEN EN HUN STAAT VAN CONSERVATIE**



Panoplie voor behandeling juni 2023

#### **Opbouw van de panoplie**

De panoplie is gemonteerd op ooghoogte tegen een wand in de historische zaal, met ervoor een tafelvitrine met kleine Afrikaanse objecten geplaatst.

De panoplie is samengesteld uit meerder zeer diverse materialen. Ze is opgebouwd op een houten achtergrondplaat waarop veertig Afrikaanse lansen, speren en een harpoen. Deze zijn gemaakt uit verschillende soorten metalen, hout en plantaardige vezels, en zijn in waaivorm gemonteerd op de houten ondergrond met metalen strips met vijzen en spijkers.

Op de lansen zijn zes werpmessen in metaal en hout gemonteerd met ijzerdraad of nylon bolletjesdraad. Ze zijn gepositioneerd rondom een vergulde houten kader met glas met daarin

een Congo vrijstaatvlag in zijde en metaal draad vastgemaakt, met daarop een strik in zijde en metaal draad gemonteerd.

Sommige van de werpmessen zijn haast onzichtbaar doordat ze bijna helemaal achter de kader zijn gemonteerd. Het grootste deel van de onderkant van de lansen zitten waar ze samen komen verborgen achter de kader.

De kader steunt onderaan op twee grote brede metalen haken die tegen de houten achterwand zijn gemonteerd. Achteraan is ze vastgehaakt met dikke ijzerdraad aan twee ogen in de achterwand van de panoplie.

#### Staat van conservatie

De algemene staat van de panoplie is zeer stoffig en vuil. De houten achtergrond is stabiel en vertoont geen sporen van aantasting door insecten of schimmels.



Panoplie voor behandeling, na afname van de kader met de vlag

#### **Opbouw van de werpmessen en lansen**

De lansen zijn opgebouwd uit verschillende soorten houten schachten, met bovenaan blanke metalen lemmeten. Bij een aantal lansen is aan de onderkant een metalen beschermingspunt aangebracht. Bij enkele lansen zijn er gevlochten koorden in plantaardige vezels, stukjes dierenhuid met haren of metalen strips rondom de schacht gebonden. Het hout van sommige schachten is gesculpteerd met geometrische patronen.



detail in dierenhuid rondom de schacht van een lans

### Staat van conservatie

De lemmeten van lansen en werpmessen zijn zeer vettig door een oude voorgaande behandeling van het invetten van het metaal. In het vet is zeer veel stof en vuil blijven hangen waardoor het metaal is verdonkerd. Tussen de houten schachten van de lansen zijn achter de grote kader met de vlag hebben zich grote stofophopingen gevormd.



stofophoping op de schachten achter de kader

De meeste lansen en werpmessen waren voorzien van een oud loden inventaris nummer, vastgemaakt met een koperdraad. Enkele lansen en één werpmes hadden geen eigen inventaris nummer meer bevestigd. Deze werden opgezocht in de database, uiteindelijk werd van één speer het inventarisnummer niet teruggevonden.

Sommige werpmessen zijn vastgemaakt aan de schachten van de lansen met nylon bolletjes draad, deze nylandraad is verduurd en breekbaar geworden waardoor het werpmes kan loskomen en vallen.

### **Opbouw van de vergulde kader**

De houten kader heeft vooraan een simpele moulure, en is afgewerkt met een fijne gips laag en een goudkleurige verflaag. Aan de binnenkant van de moulure is een fijnere fries van gestileerde acanthusblaadjes. Het glas van de kader is oud en nog gemaakt van een plaat geblazen glas, en heeft enkele kleine luchtbubbeltjes en onregelmatigheden. Onderaan op de kader is een goudkleurig synthetisch plaatje met uitleg gemonteerd met twee vijzen. De achterwand van de kader is een soort houten oude multilagen triplex plaat. De houten plaat is rondom de vlag met een donkere bruine kleur gebeitst.

### *Staat van conservatie*

De goudkleurige verflaag op het hout van de kader is dof geworden, verspreid zijn er kleine lacunes in de goudkleurige verflaag, enkele daarvan zijn in het verleden al eens geretoucheerd met een onaangepaste goudkleurige verf. In de fries met acanthusbladeren is een lacune, ook deze is met de een goudkleurige verflaag beschilderd. De kader is achteraan met twee metalen ogen in de laterale kanten, met dikke ijzerdraad vastgemaakt aan grote metalen ogen die in de houten achtergrond zijn bevestigd.

Het oude glas is vuil aan binnen- en buitenkant, maar wel intact. Het glas is aan de binnenkant van de kader vastgemaakt met kleine spijkers en rondom een gekleefde bruine papieren afwerkingsband. De papieren band is op meerdere plaatsen losgekomen en lacunair.

De achterwand van de kader is zeer vervuild aan de achterkant, en vertoont oude boorgaten van insecten. De plaat is vervormd en sluit niet meer helemaal tegen de kader aan. De spijkers waarmee de plaat tegen de kader is vastgespijkerd vertonen roestsporen.

De kader heeft geen eigen inventaris nummer en draagt het nummer van de vlag, achteraan op de houten wand van de kader geschreven met zwarte inkt.

### **Opbouw van de Congo vrijstaat vlag**

Het is onduidelijk of de vlag dubbelzijdig gemaakt is geweest, omdat de achterzijde niet zichtbaar is door een oudere restauratie behandeling.

De vlag heeft een achtergrondstof in blauwe ribzijde, met in het midden een ster in goudlaken gemonteerd. Het goudlaken bestaat uit een zijde kettingdraad en kleine bundeltjes van goudkleurige metaaldraden als inslagdraad, en is in een ribbinding geweven.

De ster is afgezet met gevlochten galon in goudkleurige metaaldraad.

De vlag is aan vier randen afgewerkt met een galon in geweven goudkleurige metaaldraad met een geweven geometrisch motief. Aan drie randen van de vlag is er een franjegalón gemonteerd in goudkleurige metaaldraad met franjes in goudkleurige spiraal-metaaldraad. Alleen de linker laterale kant van de vlag is niet afgewerkt met de franjegalón.





De kader, met de vlag en strik, gemonteerd op de panoplie voor het wegnemen ervan

#### *Staat van conservatie*

De vlag is in de jaren 1920 gemonteerd geweest in de kader, en heeft in het verleden al verschillende ‘restauratie’ behandelingen ondergaan.

De vlag is rondom vastgespijkerd tegen de houten achterwand van de kader met metalen spijkers en duimspijkers door de randen en buitenste gallon. Meerdere punten van de ster zijn met de ondergrond zijde stof losgescheurd en terug vastgezet met een duimspijker tegen de houten wand, andere punten hangen vervormd los van ondergrond de vlag. Eén punt van de ster hangt los.

De origineel blauwe zijde stof van de achtergrond is helemaal grijs verkleurd door te veel lichtinval en door een oude lijmbehandeling.

De vezel van de zijdestof is totaal vergaan en verbrokken nog meer door de voorgaande verlijming behandeling die onomkeerbaar is. Verspreid zijn grote lacunes en scheuren in de zijdestof. Ongeveer veertig procent van de zijdestof van de achtergrond is verdwenen waardoor het papier van de oude verlijming zichtbaar is.



De vlag na het wegnemen van de kader met glas

In de achtergrond stof zijn meerdere verschillende soorten interventies uitgevoerd met verschillende soorten naaitechnieken en verschillende soorten draden. De zijde achtergrond, met al oude genaaide restauratie in, is algeheel verlijmd geweest op een papieren achtergrond, deze heeft mede de verkleuring van de stof veroorzaakt. Na de verlijming zijn er nog interventies met naaitechnieken uitgevoerd, omdat ook in het papier als achtergrond van de verlijming scheuren zitten. Uiteindelijk wordt de vlag nu met duimspijkers tegen de achterwand bijeen gehouden.

De metaaldraad van het goudlaken en de galons zijn helemaal donker aangelopen en de goudlaag op de lamel van de metaaldraad is aangetast en dof geworden. De spiraal-metaaldraad van de franjes daarentegen hebben nog een bepaalde glans behouden.

Bovenaan hangen de franjes voor de vlag en hebben schade op zijdevezels van de ondergrond van de vlag veroorzaakt op die plaats. Aan de laterale kant hangen de franjes naar beneden.

Aan de vlag is geen inventarisnummer bevestigd.

## Opbouw van de strik

De strik is opgebouwd uit drie verschillende stukken rode, gele en zwarte zijde in ribbinding die met de hand aaneen zijn genaaid. De grote knoop in de strik is met naaisteken vastgezet.

Het borduurwerk van de tekst is met de hand uitgevoerd met een gladde en een gekartelde goudkleurige spiraal-metaaldraad. Onderaan de twee uiteinden van de strik is een franjegalon gemonteerd in goudkleurige metaaldraad met franjes in goudkleurige spiraal-metaaldraad.

Tekst op het linker pand van de strik: La Garde Civique Du Royaume De tekst

op het rechterpand van de strik: Au Roi 1885



de strik voor behandeling gemonteerd op de vlag

## Staat van conservatie

De strik is met duimspijkers en spijkers door de achtergrondstof van de vlag vastgezet tegen de wand van de kader. Verspreid zijn meerdere spelden gebruikt om de strik in vorm te houden.

De drie kleuren van de zijde gebruikt voor de strik zijn vaal-grijsig verkleurd. Het geel is bijna niet meer te onderscheiden naar grijs verkleurd. Het rood is naar roze verkeurd, en het zwart is grijsig verkleurd.

Bij de verschillende gebruikte zijdestoffen van de strik zijn, net zoals bij de achtergrond van de vlag, de zijdevezels helemaal vergaan. Daardoor zijn er verspreid zeer veel lacunes in de stof, waardoor de metaaldraden van het borduurwerk op meerdere plaatsen loskomen. De verschillende soorten metaaldraad van het borduurwerk zijn helemaal donker aangelopen en de goudlaag op de lamel van de metaaldraad is aangetast en dof geworden. De spiraal-metaaldraad van de franjes daarentegen hebben nog een bepaalde glans behouden.

Aan de strik is geen inventarisnummer bevestigd, de strik heeft geen eigen inventarisnummer.

## **BEHANDELING VAN DE PANOPLIE**

De behandeling bestaat uit twee delen; de conservatie van de originele vlag en strik en het plaatsen in reserve, een replica laten maken van de vlag en strik en de montage in de kader.

De kader met vlag en strik worden van de panoplie gedemonteerd en naar het conservatie- restauratie atelier textiel gebracht.

### **De lansen en werpmessen**

Sommige werpmessen worden gedemonteerd omdat ze niet zichtbaar hangen door de kader met de vlag of met een verkeerd materiaal waren opgehangen aan de schachten van de lansen.

De lansen en sommige werpmessen worden ter plaatse eerst gereinigd met een museumstofzuiger met regelbare zuigkracht en mondstukken. De houten schachten van de lansen en werpmessen worden met een microfiber doek verder gereinigd. Het metaal van de lemmetten werd ontvet met White spirit. Het inventaris nummer wordt met witte inkt geschreven op een laagje vernis op het metaal op de basis van elk lemmet en terug afgedekt met een laagje vernis. De oude inventarisnummers worden niet gedemonteerd omdat als de geschreven inventarisnummers zouden verdwijnen bij een reiniging in de zaal, ze nog identificeerbaar blijven. Deze handelingen werden uitgevoerd samen met, en onder leiding van de metaalrestaurator Alexandre Dorlet.

### **De kader**

De kader met glas, maar zonder houten achtergrond, wordt naar het Conservatie-restauratie atelier schilderijen gebracht voor behandeling door Stéphanie Meunier

De kader wordt aan alle kanten gereinigd met een museumstofzuiger en de goudkleurige verflaag wordt gereinigd met een vochtige doek met gedemineraliseerd water. Het glas wordt aan beide kanten met een neutraal detergent gereinigd en goed afgespoeld met water en droog gewreven.

Oude retouches op de goudverf worden weggenomen en hernomen met een correcte kleur goudverf. De lacune in de fijne bladmoulure wordt niet opgevuld, maar alleen geretoucheerd.

De oude bruine papieren kleefband aan de binnenkant van de kader wordt weggenomen met scalpel en gedemineraliseerd water waar nodig.

De verroeste spijkers tegen het glas worden gereinigd en geïsoleerd met een dunne vernislaag van paraloid B 72. Er wordt tussen elke spijker en het glas een stukje fijn karton geplaatst. Een nieuwe bruine papieren kleefband wordt over de spijkers geplaatst.

### **Originele vlag en strik**

Gezien de erbarmelijke fysieke staat van de zijdestoffen gebruikt voor de vlag en de strik, maar ook door de ernstige verkleuringen is de vlag niet leesbaar meer en didactisch ontoereikend geworden.





de vlag na afname van de strik en reiniging

De staat van de vlag en de strik zijn onomkeerbaar en zo slecht dat de beslissing werd genomen om van beide een zo exact mogelijke replica te maken met de originele kleuren, zoals de vlag vroeger moet geweest zijn, en de originele vlag en strik te bewaren in reserve.

De spijkers, duimspijkers en spelden worden verwijderd, en de strik wordt van de vlag verwijderd door er voorzichtig een zuurvrije kartonnen plaat op maat onder te schuiven. De vlag wordt van de oude houten plaat afgeschoven op een zuurvrije kartonnen plaat.



de strik na het wegnemen vanop de vlag

De vlag en strik worden voorzigt gestofzuigd met een museumstofzuiger en gefotografeerd. De vlag wordt tussen twee kartonnen platen gedraaid en aan de achterkant ontstoft en gefotografeerd, en ook zo met de strik.



achterzijde van de vlag

Voor de vlag en de strik worden apart een polycarbonaatplaat op maat gesneden en voorzien van luchtgaten en een laag synthetische watten, en worden overtrokken met een voorgewassen natuurlijk grijze linnen stof. Op de achterkant van elke polycarbonaatplaat wordt het inventarisnummer en de titel van het object geschreven met blauwe stift

Een inventarisnummer met onuitwisbare zwarte inkt wordt op een katoenlint geschreven en met naaitechnieken met witte 100% katoendraad wordt vastgenaaid onderaan de vlag, en strik aan de franjegaloon.

De vlag wordt bovenaan en aan de zijkant vastgelegd met lijnen voorsteken in Gütermann 100% zijdedraad in aangepaste kleur door de galon in metaaldraad en het papier van een oude restauratiebehandeling op de linnen van de beklede polycarbonaatplaat. De vervormde punten van de ster in goudlaken worden ook vastgelegd met lijnen met voorsteken op de linnen van de plaat.

Alle franjes rondom de vlag werden één voor één vastgelegd met een steek in de richting van de torsie van de spiraal-metaaldraad met een zijdedraad in aangepaste kleur.

De strik wordt vastgelegd met losse voorsteken in aangepaste kleur van 100% zijdedraad op de linnen ondergrond van haar eigen op maat gemaakte polycarbonaatplaat.

Er zijn twee zuurvrije kartonnen dozen besteld, een beetje groter dan de maat van de polycarbonaatplaten. Deze worden correct voorzien van etiketten voor identificatie en manipulatie. De vlag en de strik worden nu in hun respectievelijke zuurvrije doos op maat vlak bewaard bovenop een compactus-kast in de historische reserve, en zijn nog beschikbaar voor onderzoek.

### **De replica vlag en strik**

Er word een goede gedetailleerde beschrijving van elk onderdeel, materiaal, maten en de tekst van de vlag en strik opgemaakt. Aan de hand daarvan wordt een gedetailleerd lastenboek opgesteld, en deze wordt naar verschillende firma's gestuurd om een offerte op te maken.

Slecht één firma 'Vlaggen De Ceulenaere' kon voldoen aan de eisen van het lastenboek. Zij hebben ook stalen van materialen opgestuurd, en deze worden besproken en kleine veranderingen worden voorgesteld. Na overleg met Pierre Lierneux word de definitieve keuze van materialen doorgegeven en kan de vlag geconfectioneerd worden. Het werd hun laatste opdracht want de firma is nu, na veertig jaar, gestopt wegens pensioen.

De replica vlag is correct geconfectioneerd, maar de galon rondom de vlag is niet meer van geweven goudkleurige metaaldraad gemaakt omdat deze niet meer geproduceerd wordt. Deze werd vervangen door een in wit-zwarte zijde geweven galon met een soortgelijk geometrisch motief. Daarmee geeft ze hetzelfde effect als de geoxideerde donkere metaaldraad van de originele galon.



de replicavlag voor montage



Dezelfde goudlaken stof als het origineel wordt niet meer geproduceerd en werd vervangen door een goudlaken stof met een andere weefstructuur in goudkleurige metaaldraad geweven. De originele galon in gevlochten goudkleurige metaaldraad rondom de ster wordt niet meer gemaakt en werd vervangen door een geweven galon in goudkleurige metaaldraad met het uitzicht van vlechtwerk. De franjes zijn exact dezelfde als de originele franjes van de vlag, maar wel nieuw.

Van de strik is de eerste nieuw gemaakte versie afgekeurd door een verkeerde interpretatie van de firma. De strik bestond uit een gedrukte Belgische driekleur op ribzijde, daarnaast was het woord 'Garde' vergeten in de tekst, en was het borduurwerk van de tekst machinaal uitgevoerd.



De replica strik met fout in de tekst



De correcte versie van de replica strik

De tweede versie van de strik bestaat uit drie verschillend kleur zijdestoffen in ribbinding met de hand aaneengenaaid. Het borduurwerk is met de hand uitgevoerd in de twee soorten goudkleurige spiraalmetaaldraad zoals bij het originele borduurwerk. De franjes zijn exact dezelfde als de originele franjes van de strik, maar wel nieuwe.

De eerste versie van de strik wordt nu dankbaar gebruikt door de educatieve dienst.

Voor de replicavlag en strik wordt een polycarbonaatplaat op maat gezaagd en geperforeerd voor verluchting. De plaat wordt voorzien van een laagje synthetische watten en overtrokken met een voorgewassen natuurlijk grijs linnen.

De vlag wordt op dezelfde manier en plaats en met dezelfde technieken en materialen vastgenaaid op het linnen van de polycarbonaatplaat. Extra geschrante verticale lijnen met voorsteken worden in het blauwe veld toegevoegd.

De bovenste en laterale franjes rondom de vlag worden één voor één met steken in de richting van de torsie van de spiraal-metaaldraad vastgelegd met een 100% zijdedraad in aangepaste kleur.



Dit opdat de franjes bovenaan niet voor de vlag zouden hangen, en ze aan de zijkant niet naar beneden zouden hangen zoals origineel wel het geval was. De franjes onderaan worden niet vastgelegd en blijven los hangen.

De strik wordt met lijnen en losse voorsteken in 100% zijdedraad vastgelegd bovenop de vlag in ongeveer dezelfde positie als origineel.

De plaat met de gemonteerde vlag en strik erop worden gedurende drie weken verticaal geplaatst om te observeren hoe de stoffen, naaitechnieken van de onderdelen zich gedragen en of ze niet te veel beginnen verzakken door de zwaartekracht.

### **De kader met het geheel**

Er is geen UV filter op het glas geplaatst omdat dit op oud glas een vertroebelend effect geeft.

De kader met het glas wordt op de polycarbonaat met de gemonteerde vlag en strik gepositioneerd en met op L-vorm gefreesde latten rondom vastgezet met vijzen door de latten, maar niet door de plaat, in de achterkant van het hout van de kader, zodat er geen spleten blijven tussen de latten en de kader waar insecten zouden doorkunnen. De latten werden gemonteerd zonder de kader om te draaien! De latten werden gemaakt door de schrijnwerker Jeroen Wynants, het monteren ervan gebeurde in samenwerking met hem.



de replica vlag en strik na montage in de kader

Er worden nieuwe metalen ogen aan de achterkant van de kader voorzien voor het terugplaatsen op de panoplie.

De kader word bevestigd aan de originele metalen ogen van de houten ondergrondplaat met staalkabels, dit werd uitgevoerd in equipe. Twee van de op de schachten gemonteerde werpmessen werden een beetje anders gepositioneerd omdat ze hinderde bij het plaatsen door de nieuwe latten achteraan de kader bij het terugplaatsen ervan.



montage van de kader met de replica vlag en strik

## Conclusie

De panoplie is in zijn geheel structureel nagekeken en van alle objecten die erop gemonteerd zijn is een materiaal beschrijving gemaakt, de maten genomen, uitgebreid gefotografeerd, een conditierapport opgesteld, en zijn uiteindelijk allemaal aangepast behandeld in de omstandigheden deels in situ, gemonteerd op de panoplie, deels in de restauratie ateliers.

De panoplie met de ingekaderde vlag valt nu erg op door de felle kleuren, maar geeft zo wel een correcter en beter beeld van hoe ze origineel uitzag. Bij de vlag moet nu nog een duiding geplaatst worden dat het een replica betreft.



De panoplie met de replica Congo vrijstaat vlag na behandeling