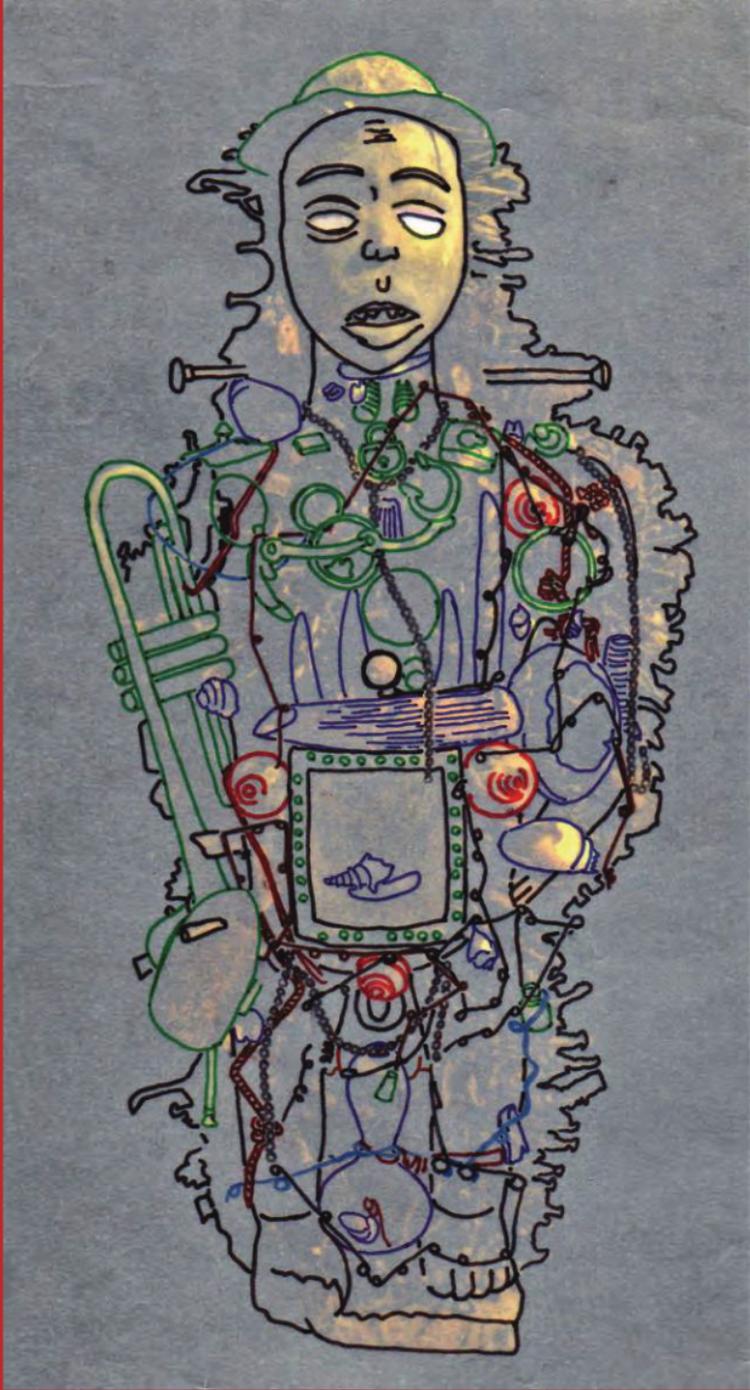
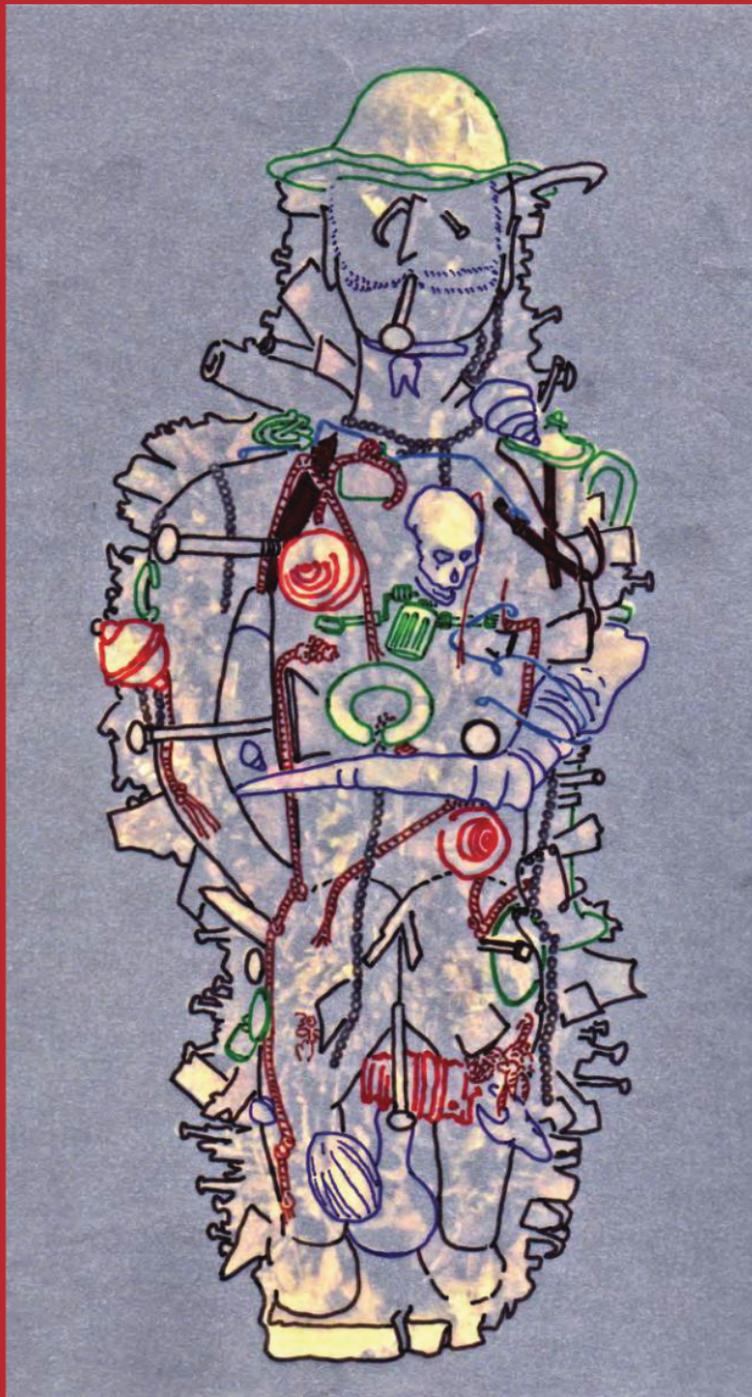


res 69/70 spring/autumn 2018
Anthropology and aesthetics



Writing prehistory





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The attachments on this Bakongo *nkisi nkondi* modeled on a soldier include the regulatory knob from a German lantern used on the Western Front, a trumpet sold by a New York company that supplied military musicians during World War I, and even apparent grenades. I seize the opportunity presented by the statue's assemblage to analyze its significance layer by layer and show how the sculpture is a door between worlds. As we walk through this portal, we will see how the *nkondi* probably testifies both to the religious responses of some Congolese soldiers to the war's violence and to their meeting with such African American troops as the Harlem Hellfighters in a sector of the front with so many black fighters that it was dubbed *L'Afrique*. The untold story of that meeting amidst combat in which whites used blacks to kill other whites will unearth everything from hidden cosmograms to conversations that spawned civil rights and independence movements around the world.

—Duncan Caldwell

Front and back covers: Nkisi nkondi, ca. 1918–21, Bakongo, Loango Coast. 127 x 57 cm. Photos: author.

Inside covers: Enhanced image of the nkisi nkondi, with drawings outlining its various attachments. Photos and drawings: author.

Objects:

- Green: metal attachments other than the nails, blades, and canisters (trumpet, helmet, hoops,

bracelets, horse bit, padlocks, lids, bells, bronze jugs, and a golden object under the skull).

- Dark blue: biological/organic attachments other than leather (fur/hair, gourds, a bone, a coconut, a monkey skull, a wooden antelope head, tusks, horns, teeth, and shells).
- Red: canisters (probable grenades and a trench mortar).
- Solid dark brown bands: leather straps around shoulders.

Networks:

- Black lines: thin wire looping around nails (which are not shown).
- Dark grey series of ovals: chains, including that around the neck.
- Dark brown lines: industrial twine under shoulder lid and through trumpet.
- Brown rope-like lines: coiled and braided artisanal ropes, which lie below the wire (e.g., beside the bell of the trumpet) and below the twine.
- Light blue lines: thick copper wire below the chain around the neck of the statue and around the base of the antelope horn.

Correction: Due to a production error, this introductory page was omitted from the RES v69/70 print edition. The publisher deeply regrets the error.

The magic trumpeter

A Bakongo nkisi nkondi and its links with World War I, the Harlem Hellfighters, and jazz

DUNCAN CALDWELL

The only reason I have been able to see beyond my initial reactions to the *nkisi nkondi* that will become a door between worlds as we delve into its details is that I have lived with it long enough for its story to unfold (fig. 1). I was blind to the importance of many of its details when I first encountered the object in Paris in March 2010, thanks to a friend who had been helping me research such sensitive practices as African birth rituals (Caldwell 2015). On this occasion he visited me at home, arriving with a man named Alfonse Théodore and two statues: the 1.27-meter anthropomorph and a canine *nkondi*, or *kozo*, from the same assemblage (fig. 2). After the three of us struggled to carry the bigger statue up the stairs, my friend told me he had encountered Théodore upon his arrival in France from Africa with the two *minkondi*, and had insisted that he show them to me first. Although Théodore's French was poor, I made out that his priest had sent him to sell the statues so their congregation could contribute to the investiture of a new king. After selling me the pieces, Théodore enthusiastically provided the names of the incoming and deceased "kings," an oral invitation to the coronation, and a deluge of other details. Because I had to attend to an emergency immediately after his arrival, I was unable to take notes of Théodore's statement but hoped to do so at our next meeting. Unfortunately, I never saw him again. I was able to recall two details, however, that he had offered about the anthropomorph: first, that it was considered to be so powerful that it had

been kept long after the chiefdom had sold its other five, and second, that for the thirty years following the death of the last traditional priest charged with the activation of the *nkondi*, who is called an *nganga* (pl. *banganga*), it had been used exclusively by women who hoped to have children. I still dream of locating Théodore and console myself with the thought that my efforts to compensate for my lapse have led to the discovery of things that even he might not have known.

Four years later, a fellow prehistorian, who is also an arms collector, saw the sculpture and revealed to me that the canisters on it were gas and training grenades from World War I. I suddenly realized that the resemblance of the statue's helmet to those used during the war might not be coincidental and that the *nkondi* might have been modeled on a soldier in that conflict. That recognition spurred me to analyze the statue's other details by mapping and identifying them as thoroughly as the features of an archaeological site (fig. 3).

This led to the discovery of other attachments that link the *nkondi* to World War I, including the regulatory knob from a type of German lantern used on the Western Front, and a trumpet sold by a company in Manhattan that furnished instruments to the twenty-seven African American bands who performed with the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF; Lefferts 2012, 2). The musicians who played in these bands while fighting in the war were responsible for introducing jazz to the world. The most plausible explanation for the appearance of the military objects on the *nkondi* is that Congolese veterans who fought in France and fraternized with African American soldiers—like those in the Harlem Hellfighters, the 350th Artillery, and the 807th Pioneer Infantry (Bergerot 2014, 25)—brought these objects home with them and incorporated them into the statue.

This study seizes the opportunity presented by the statue to tell more about the hundreds of thousands of African troops who were thrown into battle and used in logistical capacities from France to Tanganyika, and investigate how they mixed with troops from the African

I am deeply grateful to Zoë Strother and Richard Woodward for spending four days examining the statue in detail after seeing my research, and for their support and criticism, which helped refine this analysis. I am also thankful to Nicolas Menut of the musée du quai Branly, who has curated exhibitions on African representations of whites, for delving into my study and sharing his own observations. I owe further thanks to Peter Lefferts of the Glenn Korff School of Music for help concerning the trumpet, and to John and Reinhold Janzen for reading the manuscript. Needless to say, none of these people are responsible for my errors. Finally, this article could not have been written without the devotion of my late wife, Nancy. This is for her, with a river of tears across my *kalunga*.



Figure 1. *Nkisi nkondi*, ca. 1918–21, Bakongo, Loango Coast. 127 x 57 cm. The statue has lost the arm above the trumpet, which probably brandished a weapon. Photos: author.

diaspora. The consequences of those contacts in the midst of World War I—during which black men were ordered to kill whites and exposed to unparalleled violence—spawned or strengthened civil rights and independence movements around the planet. I will also explore the implications of other iconographic elements of the *nkondi*, including dozens of largely hidden but highly organized networks of rope, twine, wire, chains, locks, teeth, tusks, horns, bones, shells, and even other sculptures. As we shall see, the statue represents one of the richest amalgams of metaphorically charged objects known from Africa, which is only compounded by the layers of significance added by the accompanying *kozo*.

Defining *minkondi*

Imposing anthropomorphic statues of the type considered here—which come from parts of Congo-Brazzaville, Congo-Kinshasa, and Cabinda around the

mouth of the Congo River where the Bakongo¹ live—belong to a class of powerful *minkisi* (sing. *nkisi*) called *minkondi* (sing. *nkondi*). From a Bakongo perspective, an *nkisi* or “holy thing” (Fromont 2011, 112) could be anything from a pot full of “medicine” or crucifix (Thornton 2015, 94) to a flesh-and-blood chief (MacGaffey 2000a, 64) who embodied awesome spiritual powers, or one of the big supernatural statues pierced with metal that governed alongside living chiefs (MacGaffey 2000b, 12). While most *minkisi* could be activated directly by individuals or families, *minkondi*, which did not necessarily take the form of humans and included *kozo* (MacGaffey 2000b, 97), were considered to be so powerful that they had to be activated by an

1. I will use “Bakongo” to refer to native speakers of the Kikongo language, who inhabit an area to the north and south of the mouth of the Congo River, and “Kongo” when referring exclusively to the Kongo kingdom, which was south of the river.

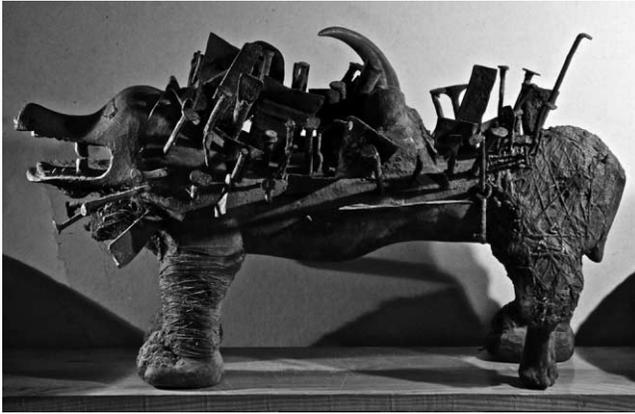


Figure 2. *Nkisi nkondi (koko)*, probably before 1921, Bakongo, Loango Coast. 76 x 43.5 cm. The *koko* has *bilongo* (activating materials that transformed the sculpture into a container of supernatural forces) around the rump and legs, on three paws, under the chin (where it includes fur), and around the base of a tusk and the round *kundu* (or “witch’s gland”) on the back. Almost all of the hardware is massive and artisanal, except for a key above a bone leg. Although MacGaffey (1988, 192) mentions the incorporation of bones from ancestors or deceased *banganga* in *minkisi*, this may be the only known *koko* with such a leg. Photo: author.

nganga. The large, intimidating anthropomorphic *minkondi* were often commissioned by residential groups or lineages—despite the constraints that having one put on their members in the form of taboos—because they were believed to protect their owners by attacking other clans and villages suspected of using witchcraft against them (MacGaffey 2000b, 115).

The anthropomorphic statues and other objects that were used as *minkondi* were powerless until *banganga* attached relics of the dead (Thompson 1978, 209) and other allusive items to them in order to attract and embed the spirit of a junior relative who had been sacrificed,² or that of a dead hunter-warrior who “killed much game, owned much livestock and many slaves, one who was wily, wealthy, virile and successful in fighting other clans,”³ so that the “ghost” could be temporarily put to use.⁴ These *bilongo*, which transformed the object into a container of supernatural forces by catching “spirits of

2. Zoë Strother, pers. comm., June 13, 2016. For a similar case among the Pende, see Strother 2014–15, 7.

3. MacGaffey 2000a, 112, quoting Kavuna, an informant of the Swedish missionary and ethnographer Karl Laman, concerning *nkisi* Mbola.

4. *Minkondi* were not meant to entrap or house ghosts permanently, but only for the useful life of their containers, or as long as the *minkondi* were efficacious.

the dead metonymically . . . in a metaphorical trap” (de Heusch 1971, 182, cited in MacGaffey 1988, 190), were often inserted into a compartment known as a *mooyo*. These chambers appear on the bellies of anthropomorphic *minkondi*, since the Bakongo consider the abdomen to be the center of being.⁵

The *mooyo* on the present *nkondi* and the corresponding knob on its canine partner’s back have a further dimension, since they both represent an intestinal growth known as a *kundu*, which the Bakongo thought gave a “witch” his power (MacGaffey 2000a, 70), even if the supposed witch was unaware that he possessed it. Belief in this “witch’s gland” was so strong that Bunseki Fu-Kiau reported that “*Kundu* is the center of all issues when we . . . talk about taking power from the world of the dead. . . . It is the exact center of all the evil activities of the witch or anti-social being” (Thompson 1978, 219).

After an *nkondi* was empowered, the *nganga* would also tie personal objects known as *mbwa* or *mfunya* (dogs) to the hardware to guide the captive spirit to culprits (and their loot), and to bind people to their pledges (MacGaffey 2000b, 102; Thompson 1978, 209).

How old are *minkondi*?

The earliest documented Western acquisition of an *nkondi* took place in 1865 during an English naval raid to suppress slave-trading (MacGaffey 2010). The earliest unambiguous sighting of such supernatural “chiefs” by a Westerner, however, comes from Captain James Tuckey, who described seeing examples pierced with iron in 1816: “Each village has a grand *kissey* or presiding divinity named *Mevonga*. It is the figure of a man, the body stuck with bits of iron, feathers, old rags, &c. and resembles nothing so much as one of our scare-crows” (Tuckey 1818, 180). But the tradition of making *minkondi* might be even older: in 1670 Olfert Dapper described a seated sculpture of a man with wooden pegs called *nsonso* (which later meant nails) stuck in it. According to Dapper, the statue’s *nganga* claimed that Portuguese sailors had broken the statue while stealing it, tried to reattach the head and an arm with the pegs, and then secretly returned it at night. Dapper went on to report that the Bakongo explained a subsequent Portuguese wreck as the being’s revenge for the “nailings,” which were supposedly done while it was in Portugal (Volavkova 1972; Dapper [1670] 1967). This story of an *nkondi* that could travel back and forth to the land of the whites (and,

5. In the case of most *koko*, the *mooyo* attachments appear on their backs.

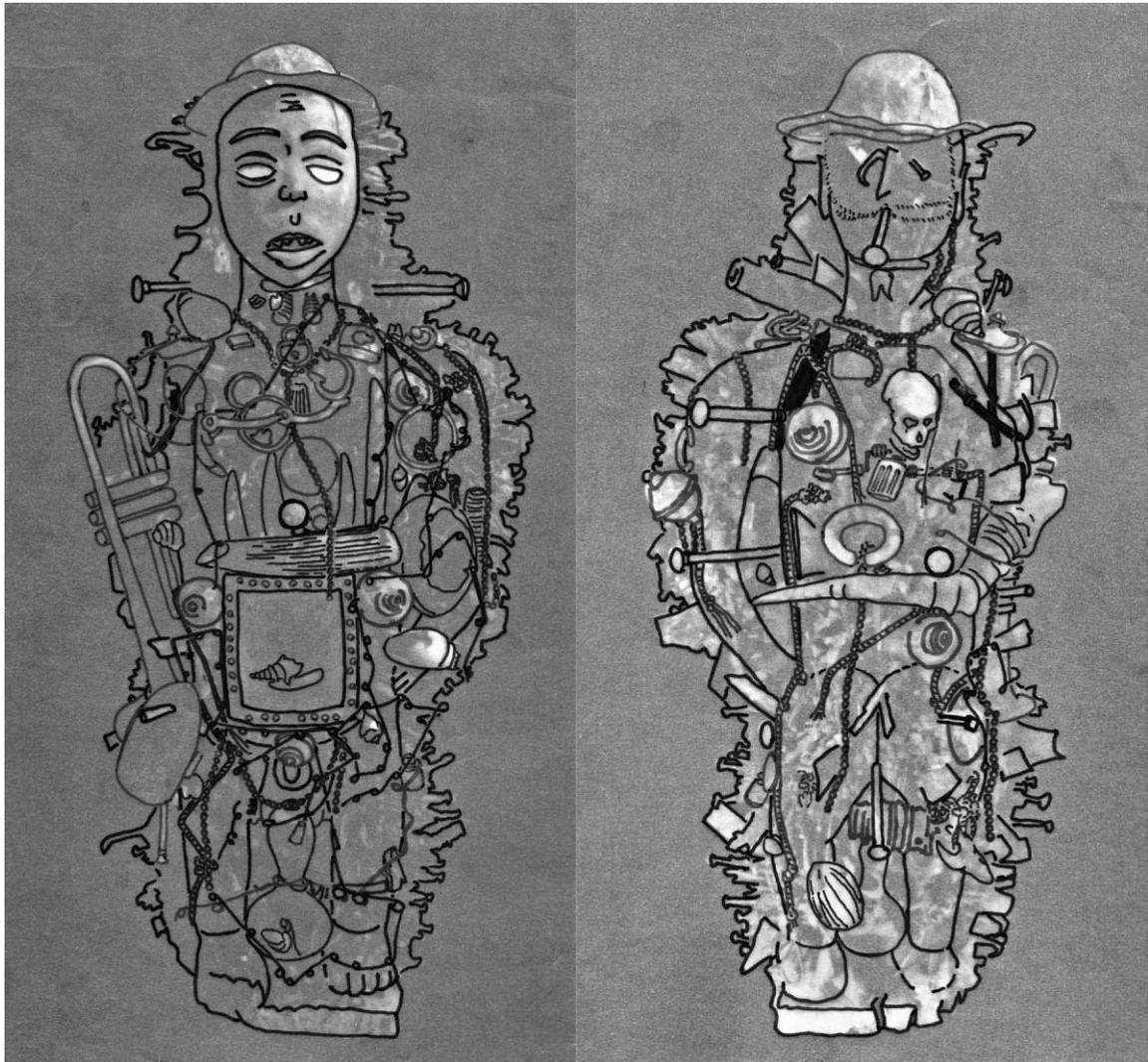


Figure 3. *Nkisi nkondi* (fig. 1), with drawings outlining the attached objects (cf. fig. 11) and the networks of wire, rope, twine, and chains (cf. fig. 5). (Blades and nails are not outlined.) Photos and drawings: author. See journal cover and corresponding captions, or the electronic version of this article, for color images and a legend describing the color-coded objects and networks.

by extension, the whited dead⁶) with such alacrity and wreak vengeance on them will take on special resonance when we come to the World War I *nkondi*.

Although these reports prove that *minkondi* have been used for centuries, they do not tell us how old the practices involving the group to which they belong—power figures, which are used by many central African

6. The Bakongo associate death with the lightening of skin and the whiteness of kaolin, which is found in streambeds; its underwater origins make kaolin something from the realm of the dead.

ethnic groups—might be. Various reports concerning statues that are activated by being jostled and insulted, just like *minkondi*, suggest that the Bakongo statues are part of a very old tradition indeed. The first one is an 1892 illustration of Senegalese women insulting an *nkondi*-like statue while walking it through the village of Carabane (Brosselard-Faidherbe 1892; Richard 2005, 26–27). The second is a 1930 photo of Songye women walking and cursing a power figure in the same way 5,200 kilometers away, in the southeastern part of Congo-Kinshasa (Petridis 2008, fig. 59). The third

involves a statue that was insulted as it was “walked” through Malanga, near Tenkodogo in Burkina Faso, before 1950 (Aminatta Kiello, pers. comm., April 15, 2016). The combination of these uncannily similar reports suggests that many of the practices surrounding power figures (and, to some extent, *minkondi*) might go back nearly a millennium, when the Sahel spawned numerous migrations, or even back to the Bantu expansion from 1000 to 500 BCE (De Grunne 1998, 31).

The commonalities between these reports also suggest that the combination of pleas, glorification, and insults directed toward *minkondi*—including the ultimate provocation of stripping a statue’s loincloth to expose its genitals—derived from a long tradition of insulting spirits (MacGaffey 2000b, 248) to force them to adopt their petitioners as if they were fugitives who had insulted a chief to make him enslave them, and thereby protect them from their enemies (Thompson 1978, 213; MacGaffey 2000b, 110).

Martial precedents

Like the aforementioned “war fetish” captured in 1865, *minkondi* were sometimes carried into battle, where they also served as supernatural war chiefs (Delcommune 1922, 95). Some of them set further precedents for the martial example we are about to consider, because their attributes and attachments include such European military hardware as guns, helmets (Lips 1937, 27; McClusky 2002, 157, pl. 76; Menut 2010, 55), musket components (LaGamma 2015, 264–65), and “miniature powder flasks [that] represent the explosions that will fire up the heart of the *nkisi*” (MacGaffey 2000b, 114). But the *nkondi* under investigation goes further than such precedents, since it reflects the stress of being thrown into the most violent warfare anyone had ever known.

The magic trumpeter

Part I: The head

The clearest indication that the *nkondi* alludes to World War I is the brass facsimile of a military helmet, which looks more like the Brodie helmets worn by American and English troops than the French Adrian helmet (fig. 4A). If one looks around the helmet’s base, one sees that it was placed over the same kind of skullcap as seen on other *minkondi* (Martin 2015, 64)—the “lordly *mpú*” worn by priests (Thompson 1978, 214), aristocrats, and trade officials (fig. 4B). The presence of the cap under the helmet suggests that the metal



Figure 4. *Nkisi nkondi* (fig. 1), details of the back of the head, hair, and carved skullcap (*mpu*). Photos: author. (A) Big downward-facing hooks project from each temple and the back of the skull, and huge bolts project from each side of the neck and the middle of the lower skull. (B) The rim of the *mpu* under the helmet can be seen above the ear, where it slopes upward toward our right, while straight brown fur, which resembles European hair, is visible to the ear’s left, where it wraps around the back of the head.

headgear was an afterthought, in which case it is possible that the statue was made before the war and later given a new attribute in light of the struggle. This possibility is also suggested by the layering of networks on the torso, where handmade rope lies below more recent networks of industrial twine and wire, which have not decomposed as much as the artisanal cordage (fig. 5).

Moving to the back of the head, one finds straight brown fur stretching from ear to ear (fig. 4B). This light-colored “hair” is so different from the kinky black human hair applied to many African works of art that it almost certainly alludes to a European’s. If it is a reference to white scalps, it might be to the power of white officers, especially since some Bakongo believed that whites were a class of the dead who had changed their skins and returned to life (MacGaffey 1987, 345, citing Laman 1953–68, 2:164).

Other noteworthy features of the head include hand-forged hooks between the helmet and each ear and in the middle of the back of the head, two nails driven into the earholes, and two wrinkles high on the forehead. Although the face has such conventional features as diastema, which many people in central Africa consider lucky, and eyes composed of mirrors that represent the watery divide between the living and dead (McClusky 2002, 160), the furrowed brow sets it apart. The

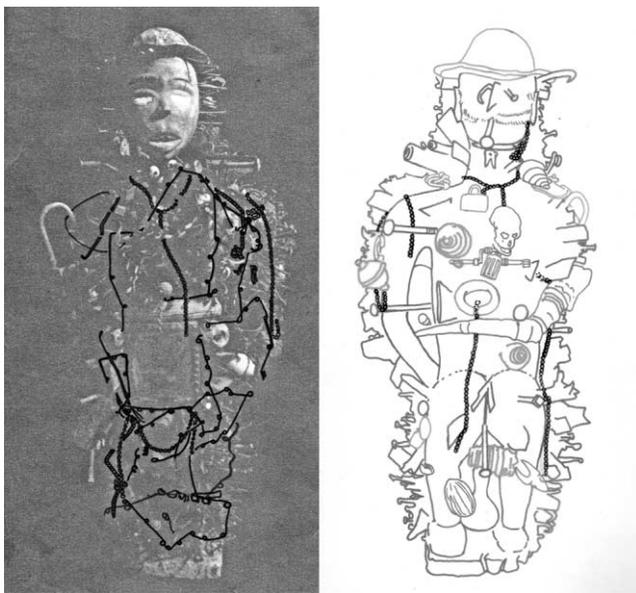


Figure 5. *Nkisi nkondi* (fig. 1), with drawings showing networks of wire, chains, twine, and rope overlaying a frontal photo (left) and a drawing showing salient landmarks on the back (right). Photo and drawings: author.

combination of the raised eyebrows, glazed crescent eyes, and subtly carved wrinkles make it look uncannily like soldiers suffering from shell shock or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), whose “thousand-yard stares,” raised brows, and characteristic wrinkles form an involuntary expression symptomatic of prolonged exposure to cataclysmic shocks. Tens of thousands of Bakongo fought for France and Belgium in Cameroon, Tanganyika, and Europe in World War I, thousands of whom were killed. Although most of these troops survived, many of them were gravely wounded and returned home with inoperable bullets and shrapnel still lodged in their bodies, much like the blades in *minkondi*. Some of these veterans, who had truly been to the land of the dead if they had fought on the Western Front, suffered from PTSD. These men were effectively *nkita*, the word used to describe initiates in Kimbasi secret societies, which literally means a person who has come back from the Other World (Fromont 2011, 117). So it is possible that this *nkondi*’s face, which appears more dazed by the fury being launched at it than wrathful, alluded to soldiers with similarly glazed eyes.

Although neither *minkondi* nor their nailings were usually meant to illustrate an *nkondi*’s victim or his suffering, the presence of a nail in each earhole also gives one pause, since persistent noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) was so common among World War I veterans that the French Army gave 10–20 percent of its white veterans pensions based on the handicap (Traynor 2014). If we assume that Bakongo soldiers had similar rates of NIHL, then we might interpret the statue as referring to the interiorized, trancelike state of some battle-tested veterans who had become deaf.

Furthermore, it is possible that this liminal statue born out of war and an unprecedented level of contact with whites on their own continent might have compounded multiple motivations for and approaches toward *minkondi*, blending both traditional and novel demands made upon them. If so, it might be comparable to other complex works that transcend genres by expressing notions that seem opposed, such as the statue of a Belgian officer named Maximilien Balot, who was stabbed to death during the Pende Rebellion of 1931 (Weiss et al. 2016). Great care was taken in that case to illustrate both the man and the means of his execution, while also bringing his spirit under control with a highly structured but hidden system of radial and axial tunnels that look like a cosmogram. The Bakongo statue has two features in common with the Pende power figure with its averted gaze (Weiss et al. 2016, 60), both of which are a departure from other *minkondi*: its straight brown hair resembling

that of a European, and the worried look created by the wrinkles in the brow.

All the same, it is important to remember that possible allusions to traits that we think of as “symptoms” were probably not meant to be viewed as illustrations of disabilities, let alone the weakness of a patient or victim, but rather as reminders of a supernatural warrior’s transcendental ability to survive even the most violent provocations and excruciating combat in his zeal to fight for his petitioners.

Part II: The neck

As we move to the neck, we find another array of surprising features. Among these is a pair of long grooved teeth that look like feline fangs, which were reserved for chiefs (MacGaffey 2000b, 246), but are probably pig tusks. One of these canines curves around the front of the neck under the chin, while its mate follows the base of the skull on the back, effectively clamping the neck between them (fig. 6A, 6E). The sense that the figure is under the control of a bite or stranglehold is reinforced by the presence of a chain “necklace” (fig. 5) and four padlocks that form a circle around the base of the neck, three in front and one behind (fig. 7B, 7G). The padlock on the statue’s left collarbone has a lion’s head with an open mouth, suggesting that the ring of locks was also associated with the bite of a lion, which is a symbol of chieftom (fig. 7G). It is noteworthy, in this regard, that the Kikongo word for lion, *nkosi*, is an alternative term for *nkondi* and a western Bantu word for “lord” (MacGaffey 2000b, 100). Furthermore, the padlocks recall their use on other *minkisi* (Volavkova 1972, 57, citing Bentley 1900, 257), as well as their use in controlling slaves. It is worth mentioning in this regard that padlocks were among the goods brought to the Loango Coast by a French slave ship in 1763 (Martin 2015, 77).

The symmetrical arrangement of the hardware on the head, where we found nails plugging each earhole and big forged hooks over each ear and in the rear of the head, is repeated here. Three bolts, which are as big as railroad spikes, have been hammered into the opposite sides of the neck (figs. 1, 3) and the exact center of the lower back of the head (fig. 4A). Such symmetry recalls the testimony of Laman’s informant, Lwamba, who reported that *banganga* drove in “one [nail] for each side” (MacGaffey 2000b, 107).

The final surprise in this area is a pair of handmade copper bells, or *madibu* (fig. 8B), that hang between the fanglike tooth under the chin and a round padlock

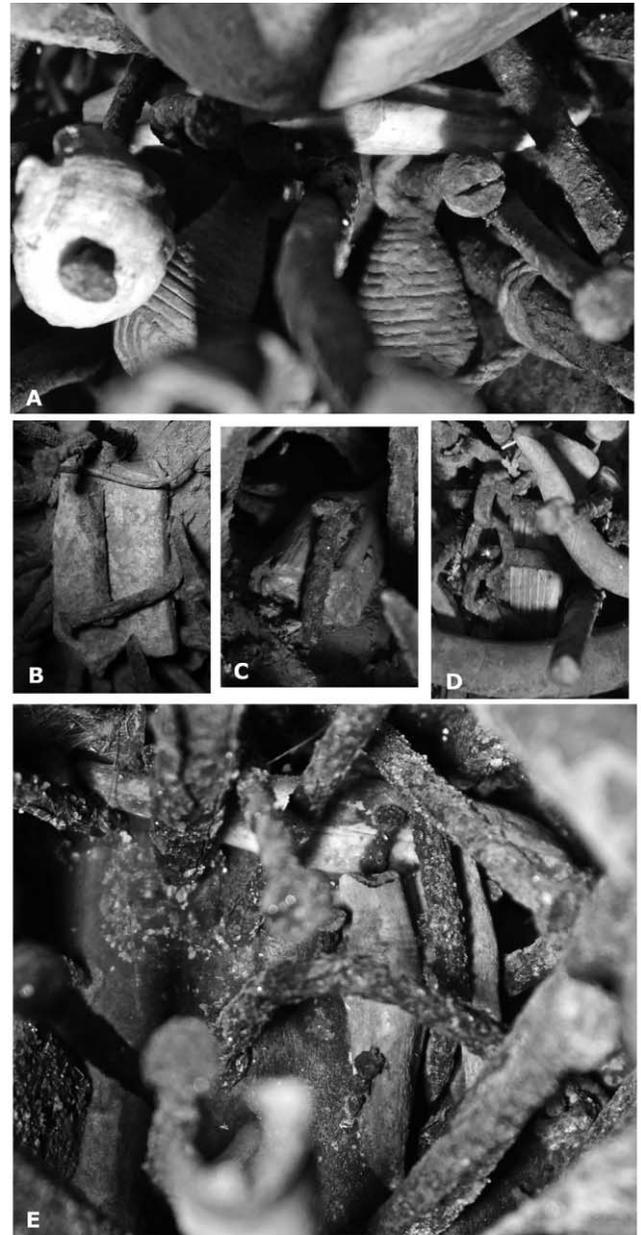


Figure 6. *Nkisi nkondi* (fig. 1), details of teeth and bones. Photos: author. (A) The base of the head is clamped between two canines: this 8.5-centimeter one between the two *madibu* and the jaw, and the other at the nape of the neck. (B) A 7.5-centimeter bone fragment near the outer front of the statue’s left leg. (C) A molar on the left shoulder. (D) A striated tooth in the middle of the chest, at the nexus of a vertical line of discoidal objects and a horizontal arc of circles and crescents. (E) The canine at the top of the back of the neck, where it sits atop a vertical molar. Note: Other bones include those in the *mooyo* and a monkey skull on the back.



Figure 7. *Nkisi nkondi* (fig. 1), details of discs, lock-and-key imagery, and hidden figural elements. Photos: author. (A) A moonlike glass disc on the “solar plexus.” (B) This round

(fig. 7B) at the top of a column of circular objects placed along the middle of the torso. Bakongo hunters hang such bells from the necks of a silent breed of hunting dogs to keep track of them (MacGaffey 2000b, 102). Several examples of *kozo*, including one in Geneva (Wastiau 2008, fig. 68), have bells alluding to such canine attachments and, by extension, to a dog’s prowess as a hunter (although the bell on the Geneva *kozo* probably has additional connotations, since it is the same kind that whites used to call servants, suggesting that it also embodies an *nganga*’s control over the *kozo*’s spirit). As we will see, the World War I *nkondi* has its own “servant” bell on its solar plexus, but it is so different from these *madibu* hanging like guinea fowl wattles under the chin—right where *madibu* hang on dogs—that it is probably safe to say that they were mainly meant to show that this *nkondi* could detect malefactors, much like its own accompanying *kozo*.

Part III: The front of the torso and legs

There are too many postcranial attachments to inventory here, so we will focus on a few intriguing ones, which form larger structures:

- The intact rectangular *mooyo* (box), studded with tacks along its edge (fig. 9).
- A hippo tusk lying on top of the *mooyo* like a parade belt (figs. 9, 10G).
- A network of wire and twine forming a perimeter around three sides of the box (figs. 5, 9).

padlock is the nexus of a hidden cross composed of a column of discoidal objects up the middle of the chest and an upward-turned horizontal crescent composed of three padlocks that increase in size from the statue’s right to its left. A fourth padlock at the center of the upper back completes the circle of locks around the base of the neck. (C) A lid with a leafy motif on the top outside of the left leg. (D) A lid with a beaded rim and turban top on the shoulder of the now missing right arm, which would have held a raised weapon. (E) This key, which resembles the one above the *kozo*’s bone leg, is beside a goat horn (fig. 10F), an engraved bracelet, and a probable grenade on the left arm. (F) This regulatory knob from a lantern, which is marked “Made in Germany / AIDA,” is centered over the hippo tusk and *mooyo*. (G) A rectangular padlock in the hollow below the left shoulder with a bas-relief lion head facing toward the statue’s own left. (H) The trumpet’s logo shows a lyre, woman’s head in profile, and the words “B and J Serenader” in an art nouveau frame. (I) An 11.5-centimeter wooden antelope head on the back of the right leg.

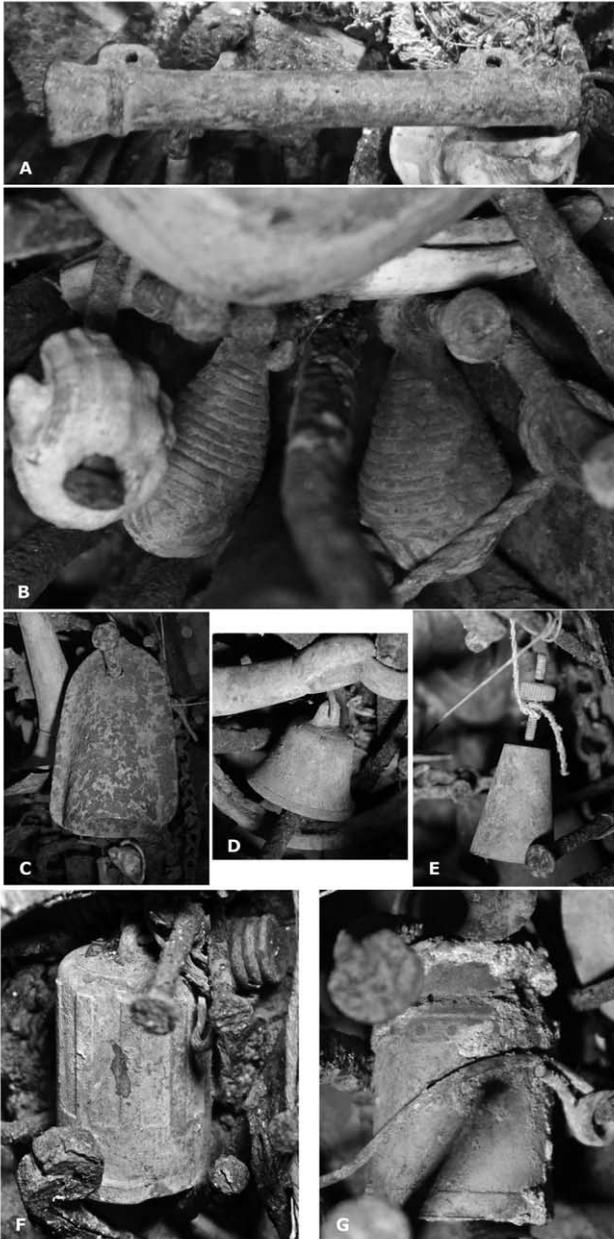


Figure 8. *Nkisi nkondi* (fig. 1), details of bells, whistles, and bell-like canisters. Photos: author. (A) This 10-centimeter whistle hangs just below the trumpet, beside a hand-forged bell, grouping the statue's largest musical devices together. (B) Two 4.2-centimeter slotted dog bells. These coiled copper *madibu* hang under a canine below the chin. (C) The 15.5-centimeter forged iron bell between the trumpet mouth and *mooyo*. (D) A small bronze bell under the center of the horse bit. (E) A small, bell-like, bronze cone on a threaded rod with a ring. The rod is tied to a nail in front of the wooden penis. (F) A small bell-like canister in the middle of the back



Figure 9. *Nkisi nkondi* (fig. 1), detail of the *mooyo*, which is framed by tacks and an isosceles triangle of possible grenades. The top of the box is braced by a hippo tusk covered in ochre or camwood powder, while its bottom and sides are guarded by a wire and twine perimeter. The triangle becomes a lozenge with the addition of the big bolt above the tusk. Photo: author.

- An isosceles triangle composed of two canisters beside the top corners of the box, and a third orb centrally placed below the box, which resembles a phallus due to its placement as well as its appearance (fig. 9). This triangle is transformed into an equally centered lozenge by a huge bolt with a round head above the tusk (fig. 9). Such lozenges can be associated with:

over a partially masked golden device, which may be a barrel organ crank. (G) A small bronze pail next to the lacy lid on the outside of the left leg.

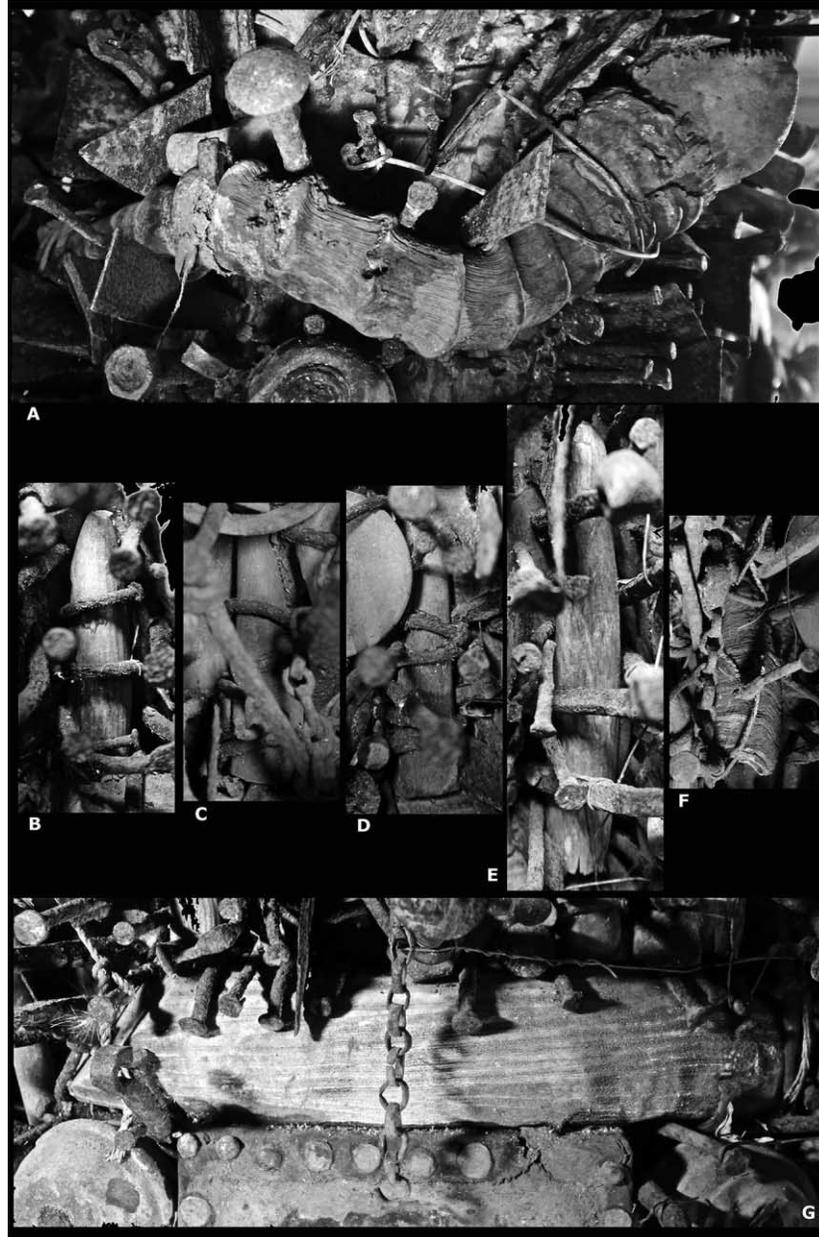


Figure 10. *Nkisi nkondi* (fig. 1), details of horns and tusks. Photos: author. (A) A 51-centimeter antelope horn across the back. It reflects the hippo tusk on the front (fig. 10G) in its size and level. (B) The first of four vertical horns (moving from the statue's right to its left) that form a palisade on top of the hippo tusk "belt" (fig. 10G) is 8 centimeters long. The palisade's two outer elements are white horn cores, while its two inner ones are dark horns. (C), (D) These dark 8-centimeter horns from the same animal are the second and third elements of the palisade. (E) The largest element is the 16.5-centimeter whitish core on the left. (F) This 13-centimeter goat horn is hidden on the front of the statue's upper left arm. (G) This 27-centimeter hippo tusk looks like a parade belt, but alludes even more directly to a hunter's prowess and the power of hippos.

- The *tendwa kia Nza-n'kongo* cosmogram, which represents “the four moments of the sun” (Thompson and Cornet 1981, 43–46).
- The shape formed by linking the four ends of cross motifs, as well as the metal lozenges found at the intersection points of Bakongo crucifixes, which replace their halos (Fromont 2011, 115–22).
- The diamonds in the center of the foreheads of some *minkondi*, “the seat of intelligence and authority,” where they refer to the beings’ “souls” (MacGaffey, in Phillips 2004, 245) and to networks of ancestors who grant chiefly power.

In addition to representing the “moments of the sun,” the canisters might also be significant at another level, since orbs (*makolo*) can be references to key points in a leader’s reign (Thornton 2015, 115).

These structures become less overt as one moves up from the box onto the chest, where they are hidden by nails and become particularly elaborate. The most obvious of these structures is a palisade rising above the tusk and *mooyo* (fig. 11), composed of two black horns (fig. 10C, 10D) flanked by two white horn cores (fig. 10B, 10E). Since the Bakongo associate black with life and white with death, and the black horns look the way they would have in life, whereas the cores are typical of dead horns that have lost their sheathes, this symmetrical structure probably symbolizes life sandwiched between the mysterious states that precede and follow it. The two 9-centimeter black horns frame the bottom three elements of the column of discoidal objects mentioned in relation to the *madibu* and round padlock (fig. 7B). Moving upward, the column is composed of the following elements:

- The huge bolt with a round head, which forms the peak of the lozenge.
- A round knob approximately where one might expect a navel, given the displacement induced by the presence of the *mooyo* (fig. 7F).
- A moonlike disc that becomes pinched before being embedded in the wood, suggesting that it is the bottom of a glass (fig. 7A). This object’s centrality might be linked to the fact that “the moon was considered to be both the cause and the healer of maladies” (Fu-Kiau 1969, 126).
- A striated tooth (fig. 6D).
- The round padlock (fig. 7B).
- The *madibu* (fig. 8B).
- The “fang” between the head and neck (fig. 6A).

The knob at the column’s base (fig. 7F) is especially interesting because it is the regulatory device of an early Aida model 214 or 233 lantern. This lantern would have been made by Jacob Hirschhorn and his company, Hirschhorn Aktiengesellschaft, between 1906, when they were granted the trademark Aida (Moore 2004), and the period between 1926 and 1928, when Aida was gradually absorbed by Ehrich & Graetz. The Aida template is considered to be the “mother” of Petromax lanterns (Weissner 2010, 101), which were developed in 1910 (Breidenstein 2016). Both Aida and Petromax lanterns ignited a mixture of vaporized fuel and air to produce a clean flame that heated a mantle to incandescence. They then used compressed air to force kerosene into a “vaporizer” near the superheated mantle, which gave off up to five times more light (1,000 candlepower) than lanterns without the mantles and other innovations. As a result of their improvements in safety, reliability, brightness, and portability (Breidenstein 2016), they were considered to be the best lanterns on the Western Front even by Allied soldiers, who searched for them when they overran German positions.

The column of circular elements that includes the knob also turns out to be part of a larger crosslike structure with two crescent-shaped horizontals, which span the chest. The upper crescent consists of the three padlocks across the top of the chest, with the round one in the middle, while the lower one, which consists of circles and semicircles, is centered on the vertically lined tooth (fig. 6D). Moving from the statue’s right shoulder, where a lid from a tea service sits like an epaulet (fig. 7D), to the left, one finds the following elements in the lower crescent:

- A thin bracelet, which appears braided but is made of a single piece of metal.
- A lead pendant representing a phallus and scrotum (fig. 12B).
- The two arcs of a bronze horse bit (fig. 12D, 13D), which might have metaphorically strengthened the *nganga’s* ability to direct the *nkondi’s* spirit. The bit is a reminder of how astonishing these foreign animals, which were unsuccessfully introduced in the 1880s, were to the Bakongo. One of Laman’s informants, Konda, reported the existence of an *nkisi* known as Mabimba, which was “a very large statue . . . in the shape of a horse (*kavalu*), not a man” (MacGaffey 2000b, 102). The bit’s inner links are framed by an iron circle in the center of the chest, which also contains the same kind of small European bell that appears on the Geneva *kozo*

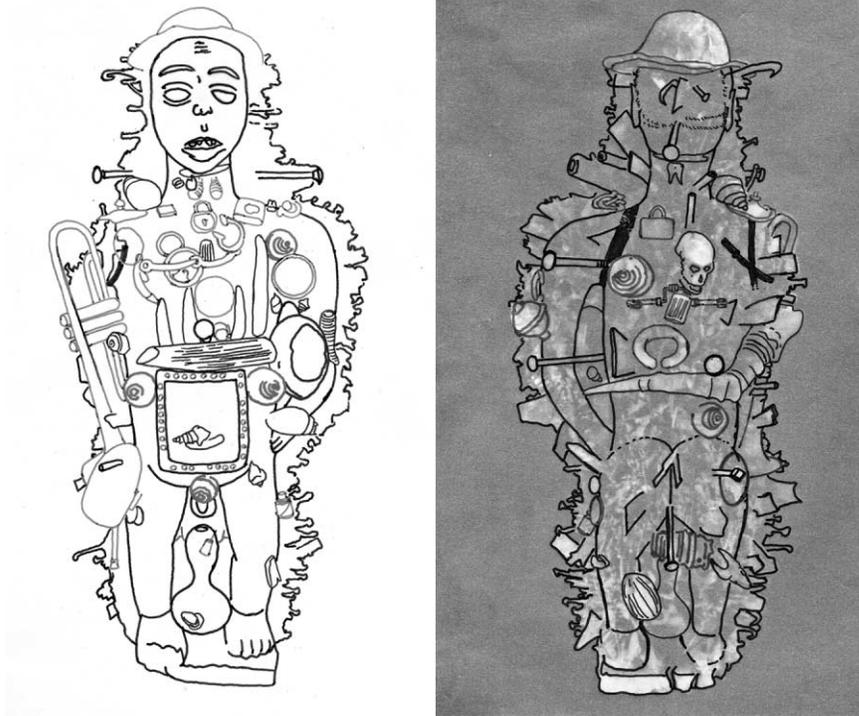


Figure 11. *Nkisi nkondi* (fig. 1), with drawings showing attachments other than iron hardware and networks of wire, rope, and string. Photo and drawings: author.

(Wastiau 2008, fig. 68). Once again, the bell probably alludes both to a dog's ability to detect malefactors and to an *nganga's* ability to make the *nkondi's* spirit do his bidding.

- A bronze bracelet with flared ends (fig. 13A).
- Another orb like the three around the *mooyo*.
- A large iron bracelet.
- Two more bracelets with flared ends, which lie together on the left shoulder (fig. 12E). Such open bracelets, or *nlunga*, in the form of crescents (*bika*) have been linked to the "reappearance of the moon, meaning that the departing lord is beginning a new life" in the world of the dead. The *nlunga* identifies the *nkondi* as a "dead man . . . entrusted with the transmission of . . . precious aspects of authority" (Thompson and Cornet 1981, 51).

The cross composed of discs, circles, and crescents (except for the tooth at the nexus of the largest horizontal and vertical elements) also recalls the cross-shaped partitions in the round *mooyo* of *minkondi* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin (LaGamma 2015,

236–37, 261–62, figs. 166, 178), which were revealed when their *bilongo* were removed. Although such structures have been studied, nobody seems to have suggested that the combination of the cross and circular frames might form one of the variants of the *tendwa kia Nza-n'kongo* (Thompson and Cornet 1981, 43–46), in which the *Lemba/Yowa* cross (Fu-Kiau 1969, 122; Thompson 1984, 108–9) is inscribed in a circle. This cosmogram, which is also known as the *dikenga dia Kôngo* (Fu-Kiau 2001, 23), was drawn on the ground before *minkondi* for patients seeking cures (MacGaffey 2000b, 107–8, 247) and for people taking oaths. The latter had to stand on the horizontal line across the circle, or *kalunga*, which represents both God (Thompson and Cornet 1981, 44) and "the shining water that forms a thin barrier between the living and dead" (McClusky 2002, 160), and invoke the judgment of the creator and their ancestors on themselves (Thompson 1984, 108–9, citing MacGaffey).

If the hidden crosses in round *mooyo* form the *dikenga*, then the cross composed of circles and crescents (and vertical tooth) might likewise represent one of the cosmogram's variants, which are often drawn



Figure 12. *Nkisi nkondi* (fig. 1), details of bracelets, a horse bit, and a phallic pendant. Photos: author. (A) A thick grey bracelet with a small opening in the middle of the back. (B) The lead phallus-and-scrotum pendant between a thin “braided” bracelet and the bit. (C) An engraved copper bracelet with pinched ends on the upper left arm under interlaced bracelets with flared ends (fig. 12E). (D) The wear on this two-piece bit fastened across the chest indicates that it was used for riding. (E) Two copper bracelets with flared ends on the left shoulder. (An identical bracelet “clasps” the central padlock.)

with arcs, discs, and spirals (Fu-Kiau 1969, cover, ill. T25; Thompson and Cornet 1981, 43–46; Martinez-Ruiz 2013, 68–69, 77–81). But the closest Bakongo sign or *bisinsu* to the present arrangement is a related symbol, which was often disarticulated or hidden, composed of a long arrow crossed by a shorter arrow and bow-shaped arc. This *bisinsu*, which is called *dionga* in Mbanza Kongo, is widespread: it appears on ceramics dating around 1600 from the Lovo caves southwest of Kinshasa

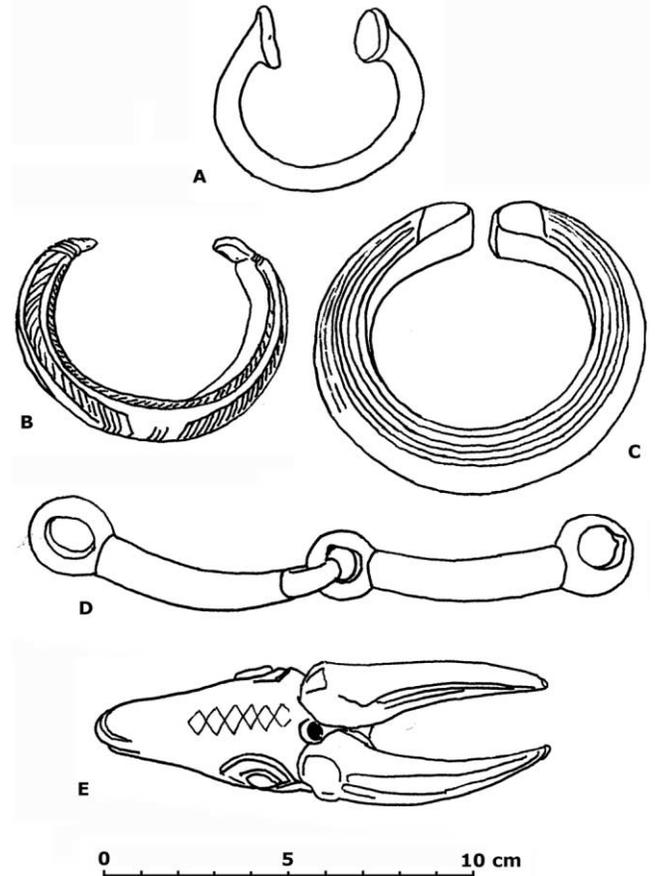


Figure 13. Drawings of objects found on the *nkisi nkondi* (fig. 1). Drawings: author. (A) One of three open copper bracelets with flared ends. Two are on the left shoulder (fig. 12E), and the third clasps the round padlock under the chin. (B) A heavily engraved copper bracelet with pinched ends on the upper left arm (fig. 12C). (C) A thick grey bracelet above the horn on the back (fig. 12A). (D) The horse bit on the chest (fig. 12D). (E) The wooden antelope head on the back of the right leg (fig. 71).

and is used today by Palo Monte priests in Cuba. It is intriguing that the African symbol refers to a successful hunt or hunter and the labyrinthine paths and shortcuts he must take to find his prey, while its Cuban equivalent refers to “justice and lawsuits” (Martinez-Ruiz 2013, 52, 82, 92, 98, 99, 101, 103). The sign’s presence on the chest of this supernatural hunter who resolved conflicts and the use of the closely related *dikenga* to avoid perjury suggest that this *bisinsu* encompasses both sets of interpretations.

The cruciform structure is also reminiscent of the crosses on the chests of Portuguese noblemen (Fromont 2011, 111), as well as on those of both the initiates

(Thompson and Cornet 1981, 46) and “idols” of Kimpasi ceremonies, which were first described in 1687 (Fromont 2011, 117). The more discontinuous horizontal, which is formed by the padlocks, might even transform the structure into a double-barred Caravaca cross, in which case it would probably be a reference to metal examples used by the Bakongo (Malgouyres 2016, 175, 182–85). This suggests that the structure is an example of Cécile Fromont’s shared “space of correlation” (Fromont 2011, 112, 115) in which Christian crosses coexist and resonate with Bakongo cosmograms representing the cycle of life, death, and reincarnation, in addition to the stages of the sun (Fu-Kiau 1969, 121–23; Janzen and MacGaffey 1974, 34; McClusky 2002, 157, 160, fig. 45), and the hunt and hunter.

Finally, the position of a knob for extinguishing, reigniting, and regulating a flame at the bottom of the hidden cross might not be coincidental if the structure is a variation on the *dikenga*, since the bottom of the cosmogram is associated with “eventual rebirth” (McClusky 2002, 160) and the yellow sun of perfection (Martinez-Ruiz 2013, 70), as well as “midnight, femaleness, south [and] the highest point of a person’s otherworldly strength” (Thompson 1984, 109). If the knob’s placement was intended to lend metaphorical force to the arrangement, other elements might have been positioned just as deliberately. The dead tooth at the nexus of the cross’s biggest elements, for example, is at the center of a design that brought “God’s power upon that very point” (Thompson 1984, 110).

Moving downward, we come to the orb under the *mooyo* that resembles a penis (fig. 9) and a naturalistic wooden penis and scrotum hidden behind it in the crotch (fig. 11). A great many objects are found in this area, including the following, as we move from the statue’s right leg (from its point of view) to its left:

- A large iron bell, which might allude to the Bakongo’s legendary “Blacksmith” kings (Martin 2015, 56), near the *mooyo*’s bottom right corner (fig. 8C).
- A military-style whistle with suspension rings at both ends (fig. 8A). This instrument, placed below the hand-forged bell, is next to a marine gastropod and clam tied to a nail. It might refer simultaneously to the *konki* whistles used by witch-hunting *banganga*; the nocturnal cries of diurnal *ntoyo* birds, which spy and herald the death(s) of “witches”; and whistles used to give orders in battle. Around 1900, one of Laman’s informants, Matunta, described a similar *nkisi* known as Lunkanka, who blew

“his *ntoyo*” (i.e., *konki* whistle) when he struck, so that “everyone [knew] that Lunkanka [had] taken someone and they [would] be much afraid, not knowing who in the village [had] been seized” (MacGaffey 1988, 194).

- A chain dangling down the front of the right leg (fig. 5). The top of the chain loops under the penis in the crotch and dangles down the left leg as well.
- A bell-shaped bronze cone (fig. 8E) by the gourd’s mouth and two clams (fig. 14F) tied to a nail near its “pregnant” bottom.
- A wire network strangling the choke point in the gourd’s neck and binding the statue’s legs.
- Going downward from the *mooyo* again, a fourth clam tied to a nail at the *mooyo*’s bottom left corner, two more clams on a nail on the inside of the left leg, and another tea service lid on its outside (fig. 7C), followed by a small bronze “pail” (fig. 8G) and large bone fragment (fig. 6B). Although the lid is reminiscent of the one on the *nkondi*’s right shoulder (fig. 7D), it is so similar to a lacy one on the same shoulder of an *nkondi* named Makoango at Tervuren (MRAC EO.1979.1.346, registered in 1938; see Tollebeek 2010, 127, fig. 59) that it is possible that the two *minkondi* were actually composed by the same *nganga*.

While we are focusing on this zone strewn with shells, it is worth noting that the statue’s shells fall into three categories:

- Small marine shells (figs. 14A–B, 14E–F) tied with string, making them *mfunya* or “dogs” (MacGaffey 2000b, 102). This includes all the shells around the penis. The profusion of such *mfunya* here is a reminder of Théodore’s testimony that women considered this *nkondi* to be so effective that they continued to use it for thirty years after the last *nganga* died. This demonstrates how important the continuation of practices involving fertility and the survival of childbirth can be to women even after the body of beliefs that those practices once belonged to has largely been abandoned by men (Caldwell 2015, 42–43; see MacGaffey 2000b, 108–9, for a discussion of such practices in relation to *minkondi*).
- Two 15.5-centimeter-long tree snails, which appear higher on the torso and are nailed on (fig. 14C). Such big snails, or *kodya*, are associated with childbirth and strengthening the body, since *kodya* evokes *kola*, meaning “to be strong,” while the

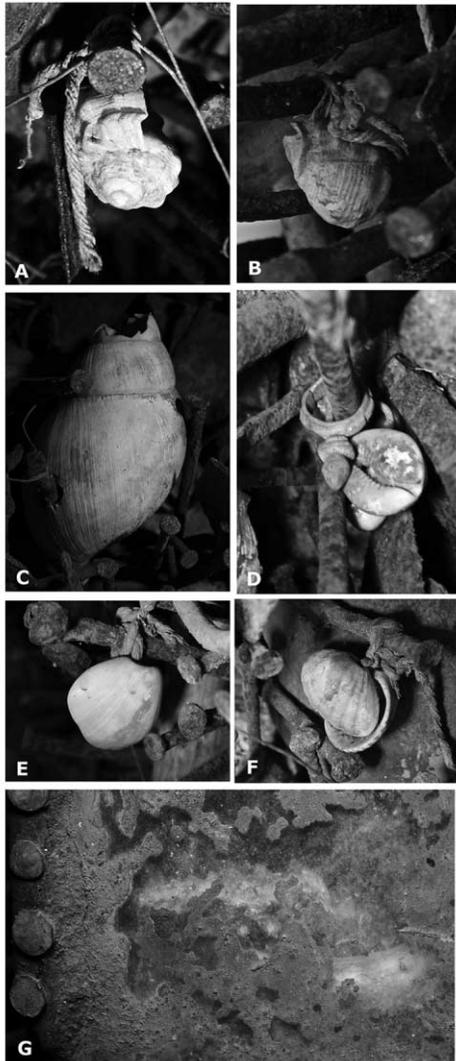


Figure 14. *Nkisi nkondi* (fig. 1), details of shells. Photos: author. (A), (B) Marine gastropods. (C) One of the statue's two tree snails. This 12-centimeter one (not counting the missing tip) is under the gourd to the left of the *mooyo* (from the statue's perspective). A complete 15.5-centimeter specimen sits atop the right shoulder near a lid (fig. 7D), which looks like an epaulet. (D) One of the two money cowries under the jaw is connected to a small bronze ring with a knob. The other cowry, which is behind it, is attached to a nail by a simpler ring. (E) A clam on the outside edge of the vertical horn core on the left side of the "palisade." (F) Two clams in front of a gourd, whose neck forms a receptacle under the wooden penis. (G) A spiny gastropod inside the *mooyo*, which also seems to contain a thick canine and the thoracic cage of a medium-sized bird.

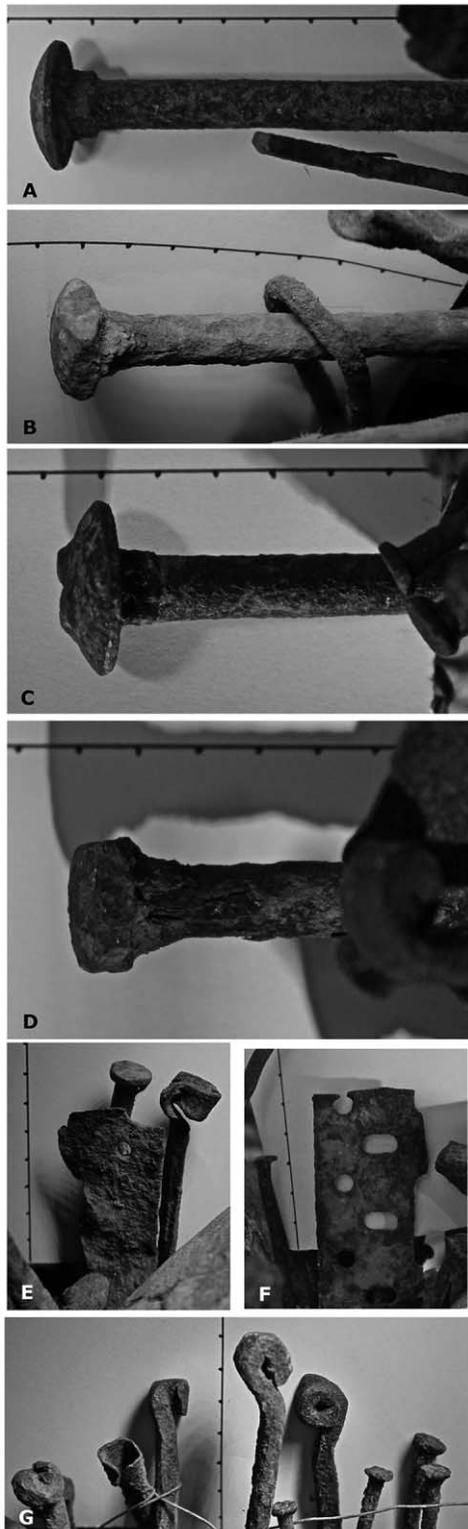
spiral *kizinga* evokes *dizinga*, which means "long life" (MacGaffey 1988, 192). The *kodya's* spiral also "symbolized the daily journey of the sun around the mirrored worlds of the living and the dead" (Thompson 1984, 106), much like the *dikenga dia Kôngo*.

- Two money cowries near the neck, which are attached by small bronze rings (fig. 14D).

The *nkondi's* networks should also be examined in conjunction with this zone filled with bindings. As mentioned above, it appears that the oldest network is the one composed of artisanal rope, which snakes all over the statue under better-preserved networks of industrial wire, chains, and string (fig. 5). The meaning of the networks is enigmatic, but they may be related to the hunting nets wrapped around many *minkondi*, including one at Tervuren collected before 1878 (MRAC 22438), and another photographed around 1897 (Princeton University Art Museum, Holly W. Ross Postcard Collection).

But other possibilities spring to mind. The most obvious one is that the lines linking nails, bolts, and blades are associated with the events that inspired their insertion, and the relationships that connected them in the *nganga's* mind. Another is that the networks control the *nkondi* like the padlocks (and, for that matter, perhaps the nets, which might not be just for hunting victims). A third possibility is that some of the networks form mnemonic patterns, making them the equivalent of an *nganga's* personal ideograms, in which case they might have links to Bakongo cosmograms like the cross-shaped partitions in round *mooyos* and the cruciform structure composed of circles and semicircles. Finally, the networks (fig. 5) are a reminder that World War I was the first war in which wire was ubiquitous, not only in protecting trenches and bunkers, but in setting traps, including ones meant to kill soldiers collecting cadavers, which were often booby-trapped with trip wires and grenades. It might be important in this regard that black troops were often used for such dangerous duties as retrieving the dead (and probably, while they were in no-man's land, rigging enemy bodies so they could wreak further vengeance).

The *nkondi's* profusion of sharp hardware (fig. 15) richly illustrates the revelations of Fu-Kiau and Thompson concerning the intentions behind each type of blade (Thompson 1978, 216–17), although their forms and the motives for their insertion probably shifted over space and time. According to Fu-Kiau, *mbeezi* blades (fig. 15F), which are "roughly rectangular in shape," were hammered



in for affairs less serious than murder, while *baaku* (fig. 15E), which have flared ends and tapered stems, were “believed to have the power to kill by supernatural means” (Thompson 1978, 216–17). Long, sturdy spikes “with circular or square-sided heads,” or *nsonso* (fig. 15A–D), on the other hand, “were used when a person ‘tied *mambu*’ . . . ‘In this case you hammer more strongly than when driving in a blade, and this heaviness of force symbolizes serious crimes, like murder’” (Thompson 1978, 216, citing Fu-Kiau).

Nailing an *nkondi* (*koma nloko* or *nkomonono*) could also be a euphemism for sex and was considered to be a way of burying curses (*ziika maloki*) in the statue (MacGaffey 2000b, 105; 2000a, 66; 1988, 196; Thompson 1978, 213). Similarly, healers were said to “nail” disease by planting palisades of medicinal plants around their homes, and judges placed seeds, pebbles, or crystals on the ground during legal proceedings as a mnemonic device for “tying” the points of a lawsuit, in a practice called *koma mambu*, or “nailing the affair” (Thompson and Cornet 1981, 42). The profusion of hardware on this statue and the one at Tervuren (MRAC EO.1979.1.346) with a similar lid is so extraordinary that we must also consider the possibility that some of the nails might have been added in thanks (Bassani 1977, 36; Volavkova 1972). If this was the case, as Albert Maesen suspected for some *minkondi* (Friedman et al. 1967, 21), then this *nkondi* with links to World War I might have been used by veterans to rid themselves of suffering and trauma caused by the war, and to give thanks for supernatural help in surviving it.

Figure 15. *Nkisi nkondi* (fig. 1), details of hardware used for *koma nloko* (hammering in curses) (MacGaffey 1988, 196). Photos: author. (A) A bolt with a round head 3 centimeters in diameter. According to Fu-Kiau (cited in Thompson 1978, 216), long sturdy iron nails (*nsonso*) with square or round heads “were used when a person ‘tied *mambu*.’” (B), (C), (D) Bolts with the same function as A. (E) The probable knife blade with a European nail and hand-forged hook is probably a *baaku* (meaning “demolish” or “destroy”), which had the power to kill by supernatural means (Thompson 1978, 216–17). (F) A perforated metal plate, probably from a large saw. It is either an example of a *mbeezi*, which is hammered in for affairs less serious than murder (Thompson 1978, 216), or another *baaku*. (G) Hand-forged hooks and imported nails.

In short, the hardware alone on this statue could tell hundreds of stories. The giant threaded bolts (fig. 15A–D) might have been extracted from the railway trestles that Joseph Conrad saw being built. Almost every piece of metal (and perhaps the connective networks) records a spell, contract, judgment, alliance, or other story that the *nganga* was responsible for knowing. Van de Velde recognized this in 1886, when he said that an *nkondi* was not an idol but “a history book or communal archive” (MacGaffey 2000b, 113, citing Van de Velde 1886, 392). As a consequence, *minkondi* of such complexity are not only aesthetic triumphs because of their tension between order and disorder and the richness of their conceptions, but unintended metaphors for the work of historians, who deepen our understanding of the past.

We could go on analyzing dozens of other features, such as the equally remarkable objects and structures on the back (fig. 16), which include the following:

- A small coconut on the left leg.
- An 11.5-centimeter wooden antelope head, which probably alludes to the *nkondi*'s prowess as a hunter, under nails on the right leg (figs. 7I, 13E).
- The remains of a leather vest or bandolier, which seems to have rotted away in front.
- A golden object with right angles and ribbed cylinders, which might be a barrel organ crank.
- A cluster of three pale objects—a monkey skull, a grey bracelet, and another orb—that stand out from the hardware (fig. 16).
- A 51-centimeter corrugated, black antelope horn (fig. 10A), which reflects the hippo tusk (fig. 10G) in front in its size and position, although its color, patterning, and curvature contrast with it. Like the antelope head and tusk, the horn probably alludes to the *nkondi*'s prowess as a hunter of formidable prey, including men.

But analysis of these elements will have to await another publication.

Part IV: The explosives and the trumpet

I have been coy so far in referring to eight metal orbs and corrugated canisters. These objects, which fall into six types (figs. 17, 18), include the canister forming a pseudo penis (figs. 9, 11, 17B, 18B) and another hidden amid hardware under the buttocks (figs. 17G, 18F). As mentioned earlier, they have been identified by arms collectors as a trench mortar and five types of gas



Figure 16. *Nkisi nkondi* (fig. 1), detail of the back of the torso. The landmarks amid all the hardware and complex networks of wire, rope, and string are a skull, horn, bracelet, and two canisters, which are apparently gas or training grenades. Photo: author.

and training grenades, although lamp sections and lighting suspension eggs, which are used to hide wiring above chandeliers (fig. 19E), were sometimes made in the same way. Such weapons from the Great War are composed of two halves, often made of different metals that have been sealed (rather than screwed) together in a factory. Even if one or more of the objects are not arms, they might have been added to the statue because of their resemblance to grenades (fig. 19), as such statues often incorporated the powder flasks mentioned above and were activated by *banganga* who provoked *minkondi* by detonating explosives (MacGaffey 2000b, 114).

The most striking and incongruous attachment of all, however, is the trumpet on the statue's right side, since nothing like it has ever been reported on an *nkondi* (figs. 1, 3, 7H). The instrument was manufactured



by the Romeo Orsi Company in Milan, which began supplying instruments to military bands at least as far back as 1881, when it won a competition to supply the Italian Army. Orsi used its expertise in making cheap, sturdy instruments to supply military bands in other countries, including America, where they were distributed by Buegeleisen and Jacobson. The distributor, whose logo appears on the trumpet's bell (fig. 7H), opened an office on 17th Street in New York in 1897, another at 113–15 University Place after 1913 (according to a 1915–16 catalog), and a third at 579 Union Square, but it was apparently already selling such “B and J Serenader” trumpets earlier, since one example has the year 1892 engraved near the mouthpiece (which is missing on this instrument) and the serial number 2212 on the second valve. The number in the same place on this trumpet is 4328, placing it between the 1890s and late 1920s, when the numbers reached 6000.

The presence of the American version of a trumpet often sold to military brass bands raises the possibility that the sculptor or original *nganga* acquired it either directly or indirectly through fraternization between Bakongo troops and some of the 200,000 African Americans (Williams 2008, 24; 2013, 249) in the AEF sent to France. If so, the Bakongo soldier who brought

Figure 17. *Nkisi nkondi* (fig. 1), details of canisters. Photos: author. (A) An ovoid canister with three ribs around the waist, nipple at one end, and capped neck at the other. This object, which arms collectors have identified as an early grenade, is on the back of the statue's left arm. (B) This orb with four ribs around the waist and a four-tiered nipple at one end is under the center of the *mooyo*, where it looks like an engorged (and perhaps explosive) penis. (C) This orb with one median rib is at the top right corner of the *mooyo*. Its upper half resembles two “cups” that frame the *mooyo* of an *nkondi* at the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne (Wentinck 1978, fig. 35a). (D) This half-canister similar to B is placed like a nipple on the statue's left side. (E) This complex “accordion” canister at the top left corner of the *mooyo* is composed of a zinc or aluminum top fastened to a narrower brass or bronze bottom. The canister's wavy silhouette resembles the American Mk II gas grenade and Italian Breda 35 grenade. (F) A larger corrugated canister in the middle of the back, where it forms a triangle with a skull and bracelet. The remains of a leather vest or bandolier is visible near this canister and may be another reference to a soldier's gear. (G) The largest canister is fastened against the buttocks, where it is hidden from all but the most prying eyes. It is reminiscent of the top end of a trench mortar, although it might be a lamp segment.

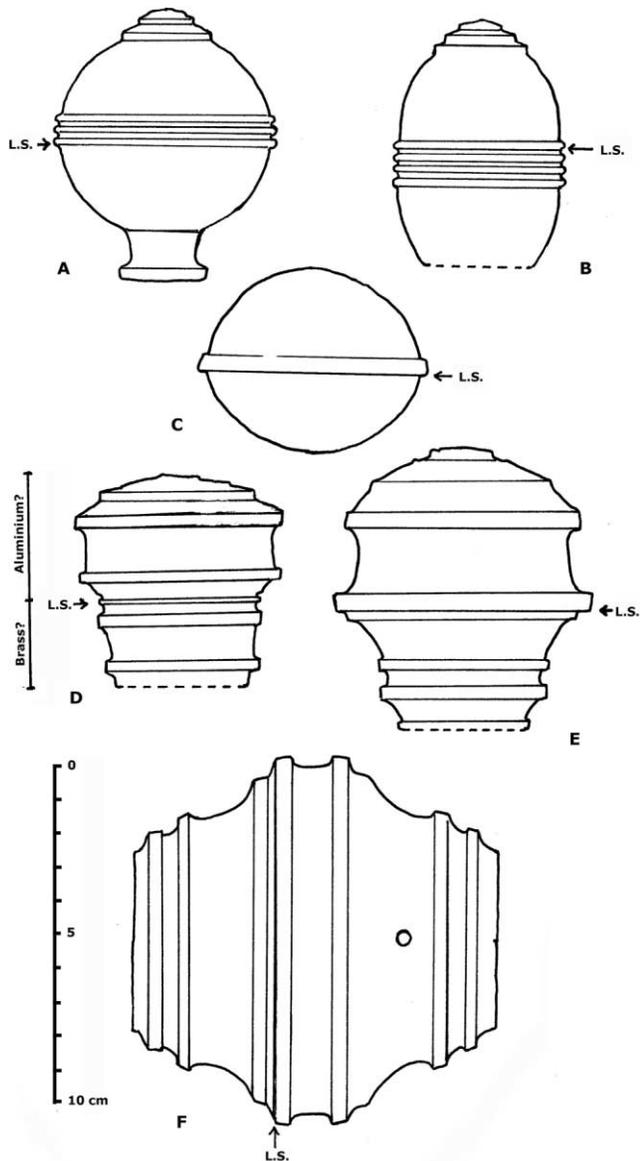


Figure 18. Drawings of canisters found on the *nkisi nkondi* (fig. 1), showing lines of separation (marked L.S.) between the factory-sealed segments. Drawings: author. (A) A canister with three median ribs on the back of the left arm (fig. 17A). (B) A canister with four ribs under the center of the box, where it suggests a penis (fig. 17B). (C) The canister at the top right corner of the *mooyo* (fig. 17C). (D) The smallest corrugated canister, at the top left corner of the *mooyo* (fig. 17E). (E) A large canister in the middle of the back, next to a skull (fig. 17F). (F) The canister hidden under the buttocks (fig. 17G).

back this trophy—which showed that he had survived the land of the dead and become a great hunter of men, just like *minkondi*—had probably acquired it from a musician in one of the twenty-seven African American military

bands (Lefferts 2012, 2) that introduced jazz to Europe and, by extension, the world.

The most famous of these bands were Will Vodery's 807th Pioneer Infantry Band, Tim Brynn's Black Devils of the 350th Artillery (Bergerot 2014, 25), and James Reese Europe's Black Rattlers or Harlem Hellfighters, as the soldiers of the 369th Infantry Regiment were known. Vodery's and Europe's bands played for the French president, Raymond Poincaré (Nelson 2009, 233), who declared that the Pioneers' music was "astounding" after hearing them play at Verdun, according to Vodery's correspondence (Lefferts 2012, 19). Europe's drum major and vocalist, Noble Sissle, described one of the Hellfighters concerts, which included a jazzed-up "La Marseillaise" (Nelson 2009, 233), as follows: "the whole audience began to sway, dignified French officers began to pat their feet along with the American general, who, temporarily, had lost his style and grace. . . . [Jim Europe's] head was bobbing as it did in the days when terpsichorean festivities reigned supreme. He turned to the trombone players, who sat impatiently waiting for their cue to have a 'Jazz spasm,' and they drew their slides out to the extremity and jerked them back with that characteristic crack. The audience could stand it no longer; the 'Jazz germ' hit them" (cited by Stovall 1996, 21). Jim Europe's Society Orchestra had already made a name for itself in New York, where it had accompanied Vernon and Irene Castle's popular dance act and played for the Astors and at Carnegie Hall. The enthusiasm of so many generals and politicians, not to mention the French press, gave white American war correspondents, who were basically in France to cover the exploits of their white compatriots, a chance to crow about an unexpected American success in the eyes of the world's cultural arbiters. Their articles about the bands' musical triumphs made jazz increasingly appealing even to some white readers back home who had disdained it before.

Some of these musicians won fame and were photographed with their battle-damaged instruments (fig. 20), which they called "casualties" (Peter Lefferts, pers. comm., April 29, 2014). But in spite of their growing renown, they still had to fight with their units. The AEF high command had basically given these African American contingents to the French army—with secret instructions to their new masters to treat them poorly (Barbeau and Henri 1996, 114–15)—since General Pershing did not want black Americans either to fight beside his white troops or to start thinking they had earned any rights or respect.

The French assigned units like the 369th Infantry to a section of the Western Front with so many African

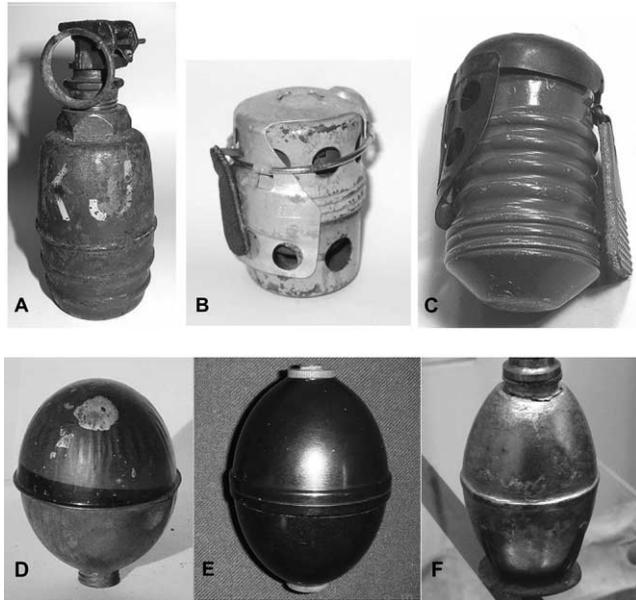


Figure 19. Five grenades and a lamp suspension egg. (A) A World War I American Mk II gas grenade. (B) A World War II Italian OTO 35 practice grenade. (C) An Italian Breda 35 “red devil” grenade. (D) This 1914 French OF1c ball grenade is almost identical to the French M61 grenade (not shown). (E) A lamp suspension egg. (F) A 1914 French suffocating gas grenade.

troops that it was known as “l’Afrique” (Williams 2008, 26). This segregated sector around Soissons and Chateau-Thierry included Belleau Wood, where the Hellfighters, who fought with the French 16th Division, had their baptism of fire on June 6, 1918, and Chaudun and Vierzy, where an African division consisting of Tirailleurs Sénégalais, Chauffeurs d’Afrique (Algerians and Moroccans), and the Légion Étrangère took the first town while the Hellfighters beside them took the second on July 18, 1918. The 27,000 men of the African American 93rd Division, which the American headquarters had almost forgotten after handing them to the French, fought with more than 100,000 African colonial troops in this and other battles. The 369th Infantry, or Hellfighters, spent more time in combat (191 days) than any other American unit in the war, won a *Croix de guerre* as a regiment and about 170 more for its individual officers and men (Barbeau and Henri 1996, 121), and was the first US formation to reach the Rhine.

The Bakongo soldiers who served next to such units belonged to the misnamed Tirailleurs “Sénégalais,” who the French recruited from New Caledonia to Brazzaville through a variety of tactics, including forced levees on



Figure 20. Musicians from an African American regimental band with mangled instruments, which they called “casualties.” Dr. Peter Lefferts of the Glenn Korff School of Music (University of Nebraska–Lincoln) suggests the soldiers might be members of the Harlem Hellfighters and that the photographs would have been taken in February or March of 1919, after their return to New York (pers. comm., April 29, 2014).

chiefs. One of these Bakongo Tirailleurs was André Matswa, who started a messianic movement in the French Congo after the war (Van Reybrouck 2015, 153)—probably one of many religious responses to the veterans’ encounters with the heart of darkness north of Paris.

The Tirailleurs and other French colonial troops fought throughout the conflict, playing major roles at Ypres and Dixmude (Diksmuide) in 1914, Fort de Douaumont in 1916, Chemin des Dames in 1917, and the Battle of Reims in 1918. They lost 7,000 out of 15,500 troops at the Chemin des Mains, and 81,000 out of 600,000 by the end of the war (Nantet 2004, 209).

Many Bakongo—including a scholar named Paul Panda Farnana M'fumu, who had graduated from both the *École d'agriculture d'état de Vilvorde* and the *École supérieure d'agriculture tropicale* in Nogent-sur-Marne (Mobe 2013)—also fought for the Belgian Corps des *Volontaires Congolais*, but they don't seem to have served beside American soldiers.

When black American and African troops did meet, they often met in no-man's land, where they constructed trenches and gathered the dead, or facilities in the rear, where they typically served together as laborers (Williams 2008, 24). They were assigned such tasks because they were believed to be “mentally and physically inferior” to whites (Williams 2013, 252). Ironically, white soldiers were sent into harm's way more often (at least by the Americans) despite their higher status, because they were considered to be better qualified for fighting. Such “combat, labor, and social fraternization brought both African American and African colonial soldiers into close contact with each other throughout 1918” (Williams 2008, 26), everywhere from hospitals to rest areas, where black American brass bands often provided entertainment for everyone. Jim Europe himself gave us an idea of the importance of this bridge between blacks when he wrote that “I have never seen one [black French soldier] without some sort of decoration and I have met thousands” (*New York Age*, July 28, 1918, cited in Williams 2008, 28–29). In another dispatch, he noted that “many of the men have become fluent French talkers and I have heard animated conversations between [American] Colored men and the Senegalese [*sic*] who chanced to be passing” (*New York Age*, June 8, 1918, cited in Williams 2008, 29).

Before examining the consequences of these interactions, it is essential to compare the war's industrialized holocaust both with the violence in traditional African societies and the pretenses of colonialists, who thought they represented more orderly societies with a “civilizing mission” to impose Europe's standards on “barbaric” peoples. As Wyatt MacGaffey put it in one of his magisterial articles about *minkondi*, the “BaKongo were appalled to hear of the continuing slaughter in Europe,” since “their own wars, being essentially divinatory ordeals or trials by combat, ended after the first casualties” (MacGaffey 2000a, 71). In his equally remarkable book, David Van Reybrouck put it this way: “they had seen how the whites—who had taught them not to kill anymore and to stop waging tribal warfare—had applied an awesome arsenal for four whole years to combat each other for reasons unclear, in a conflict that claimed more lives than all the tribal

wars they could ever recall. Yes, that did something to the respect they felt for these Europeans. It began to crumble” (Van Reybrouck 2015, 140).

The war exposed a lie, and did so all the more plainly because it led the imperial powers to bring together oppressed populations from both sides of the Atlantic, who would not have met otherwise, to the European heartland. Here they could see for themselves how brutal whites could be with each other, and were even ordered to kill whites. The war also allowed them to compare notes while rising in stature: some African Americans became officers (Wilson 2015), while a black officer from Guadeloupe, Camille Mortenol, directed the air defense of Paris in 1915. The result was just as explosive as the thunder associated with *minkondi*.

In 1919, NAACP cofounder W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, who was writing a book about black Americans in the war, and Blaise Diagne, the first African in the French Chamber of Deputies, convened the first Pan-African Congress to call for the end of racial discrimination and colonial rule. The result of such political ferment, the feeling that blacks had shown that they deserved to be treated equally, and the acclaim many had received, including for bravery, was that blacks returned to Africa wanting independence and America wanting civil rights. But the *Greenwood Commonwealth*, which was the mouthpiece of one of the South's most racist politicians, Mississippi's Senator James Vardaman, responded to the returning American veterans' strengthened sense of pride and entitlement by inciting whites to “pick out these suspicious characters—those military, French-women-ruined negro soldiers and let them understand that they are under surveillance” (Barbeau and Henri 1996, 177). Spurred on by such blessings, Southern mobs lynched at least ten African American veterans, some of whom were wearing their uniforms at the time. One of them, Daniel Mack of Sylvester, Georgia, was killed for simply saying that “he had fought in France and did not intend to take [any more] mistreatment from white people” (Barbeau and Henri 1996, 177).

World War I also planted the seeds of Congolese independence. During the war, the aforementioned scholar Paul Panda Farnana was taken prisoner (Van Reybrouck 2015, 138) during the defense of Belgium and was exhibited by the Germans as an example of the range of soldiers they had captured. After the war, the ex-POW asked Belgium to honor the unknown Congolese soldier with a statue. Around the same time, the very man who had seized a Bakongo “war fetish” in battle, Alexandre Delcommune (1922, 95), described how the war had made the Congolese intractable in

L'avenir du Congo belge menacé (Delcommune 1919). A newspaper for Belgian veterans, *Le Journal des Combattants*, went so far as to say, “let us repatriate [Congolese veterans] and send them back to the shade of their banana trees, where they will certainly feel more at home. There they can relearn their negro dances and tell of their war experiences to their families, who sit around them on chimpanzee skins” (cited in Van Reybrouck 2015, 178). Panda’s response was scathing: “In the trenches the soldiers never tired of repeating that we were brothers and we were treated as the whites’ equals. Nevertheless, now that the war is over and our services are no longer required, people would rather see us disappear. In that regard we are in complete agreement, but then under one condition: if you insist so vehemently on the repatriation of blacks, it would be only logical for us to demand that all whites now in Africa be repatriated as well” (cited in Van Reybrouck 2015, 178).

As Delcommune had predicted, it did not take long for Congolese to start making more demands. Having failed to get the Belgian government to honor his request for a statue in 1919, Farnana and his new organization, the Union Congolaise, escalated their struggle in 1920 by demanding that forced labor be ended and that Congolese be allowed to vote, serve as legislators, become doctors, and win promotions to the top of the civil service (Van Reybrouck 2015, 178–80). The march toward independence, which had started with a simple request to honor soldiers with a statue, had begun, but an *nganga* and his sculptor had already found an indigenous way of honoring the Bakongo dead—and their encounter with their brethren from the far side of the world.

* * *

In conclusion, one of the best arguments that this anthropomorphic *nkondi* was used ritually is to be found in its hidden features, which turn the statue’s assemblage into a web of entrapping and empowering metaphors. Foreigners like myself remained ignorant of the statue’s importance until these hidden details were discovered in the process of mapping the *nkondi*’s many attachments. Instead of flaunting these intriguing aspects, the *nganga* deliberately embedded them deeply and intimately at the core of the metaphor-laden trap, so that they would effectively draw someone’s spirit into the *nkondi*. In fact, some of the things that imbued the statue with supernatural force are probably so well concealed that they will only appear when it is X-rayed. Furthermore,

the discovery of these hidden features—such as the horn palisade, wooden antelope head, canine behind the neck, *mpu* under the helmet, necklace of padlocks, canister under the buttocks, and cross composed of circles and semicircles—is likely to lead to similarly concealed features on other *minkondi*, in which case the analysis will have proven itself like a theory with predictive powers.

If one had more space, one could also try to reconstruct the statue’s underlying garments from surviving traces (which are mainly found on the back) or examine its chemical evolution by studying the states of decay of embedded features (such as the network of artisanal rope) in comparison to those above them. In any case, the identification of hidden structures and objects linked to World War I makes it clear that the *nkondi* was the focus of complex and impassioned beliefs.

Furthermore, there is reason to believe that the statue’s attachments were applied by the same *nganga* (or school of *banganga*) as those on an *nkondi* in the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne (inv. 48922; Wentinck 1978, fig. 35a), although the core was probably made by a different sculptor. For one, it has similar orbs, which are even in comparable positions beside the *mooyo*. Nobody would have recognized them as possible grenades before this study, since the canisters, which were once sealed at their equators, have been pried apart to make two “cups” with ribbed rims. The other commonalities include the following:

- A “dead” object placed horizontally across the top of each rectangular *mooyo*: a black bone in the case of the Cologne *nkondi*, a white hippo tusk in the case of the World War I *nkondi*.
- A goat horn to the right of the *mooyo* on the Cologne *nkondi*, and on the arm of the World War I *nkondi*.
- The same kind of chain around the necks of both statues.
- A broken gourd under an arm on each *nkondi*.
- A similar placement of a large blade over the top center of the box, with symmetrically placed spikes or giant bolts around the neck.

Hundreds of questions remain unanswered. For example, one wonders whether new recruits sought the *nkondi*’s protection before entering colonial forces. Second, did the *nganga* appropriate the courage of a dead soldier in the same way that an *nganga* had bound the spirit of a dead warrior to an *nkondi* called *nkisi Mbola* (MacGaffey 2000b, 112)—and, if so, whom?

Finally, and rather arbitrarily, what does the *mooyo* (fig. 9) contain and what is the partially hidden golden object across the back? It would be fascinating to scan the assemblage and determine, for example, whether the *mooyo* really does contain a half-seen fang and thoracic cage of a bird, in which case the investigations might even be able to tell if the bones come from a *kintombo* bird, “whose cry foretells the future” (MacGaffey 1988, 193), a *ntoyo*, which “announces news of death” (MacGaffey 1988, 194, citing Matunta), or another species entirely. Whatever the outcome, this *nkondi*, which has already borne witness to so much, has only begun to speak.

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