



PROCHE project

Newsletter 2024



*Research in the archives of the RMCA and in the DRC by the IMNC.
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Dear readers,

To inform you about the changes and progress made during the year 2024 and to share the continuation of our activities, this newsletter presents the current state of the PROCHE-project and its perspectives for the year 2025.

The PROCHE team

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In the News

Overview of 2024

The team in 2024

At the AfricaMuseum

- General coordination : Els Cornelissen
- Administration, communication & liaison DRC : Célia Charkaoui
- Provenance research : Lili Boros (since 01/10/2024), Lies Busselen (until 1/04/2024), Madelon Dewitte, Agnès Lacaille (part time)
- Data management : Nanoï Lauwaert (until 01/06/2024)
- Support at the AfricaMuseum : Department of Cultural Anthropology & History, ICT, Collection Management, Documentation Centre and Archives and Administration

At the Institut des musées nationaux du Congo IMNC

- Promotor : Jeanine Yogolelo Amusubi
- Financial Management : Jérôme Asaeni Paliana
- Researchers: Béatrice Beya Obonga, Salomon Koyambutu Tholase, Charles Ngwabwanyi Kunda, Raphaël Gawayala Galume, Jean-Emmanuel Tshibangu Tshiapota

At the Université de Kinshasa - UNIKIN

- Promoteur : Placide Mumbembele Sanger
- PhD-students: Rodrigue Nzelokuli Bampele, Rodrigue Rutebuka Sanvura, Astrid Munyemba

Research within the AfricaMuseum

The 'constituents'

In 2024, research was initiated on people that were involved in the acquisition of the ethnographic objects and musical instruments in the PROCHE corpus, or on the 'constituents' (term used in the TMS museum database). Lili Boros joined the research team of the project on 1 October 2024.

This study proceeds by examining registers, acquisition files, museum archives, the State Archives of Belgium and reference publications such as the *Biographie coloniale belge* and the *Biographie belge d'Outre-Mer*.

In-depth research on the people involved in the acquisition of the museum's collections allows to assign precise identities and roles to the persons involved, to clarify the role of some of them, as well as to rectify errors in attribution.

Indeed, the number of 2,316 individuals and institutions associated with the 83,423 objects from the DRC and Central Africa has already been questioned. As our research progressed, we were able to identify that 21 of them were not linked to the acquisition of objects in the PROCHE corpus, but only to their description. In addition, new people were added to the list of "constituents".

Example of refining the identification of a person linked to an acquisition: the case of Mario Verbeek

As the person responsible for the acquisition of 7 ethnographic objects in 1957, the general title of 'Territorial Administrator of Dekese' was registered in the museum's collection management database. A thorough reading of the object acquisition file, yielded the mention in a letter of 'Mr Verbeek'. This name could be linked to a personal file in the State Archives of Belgium, corresponding to the period of acquisition and the place of activity being that from which the objects came. Mario Verbeek was indeed territorial administrator in Dekese in the 1950s. This way we were also able to identify his nationality, his date/place of birth/death and the rest of his colonial career.



Photography of Mario Verbeek
© State Archives of Belgium - Personal Archives

Bio Forms

In order to structure all possible information on linked persons, we have designed a standard form: the BIO FORMS. They provide key biographical data such as place(s)/date(s) of birth and death, main sites of activity, roles, etc. A short biography will also be copy-edited before being encoded in TMS and published on the PROCHE database.

Example of a Bio Form structure (here in french) - Ghislain de Macar

« <u>Constituents – bio</u> » Form	
Groupe de travail Recherche – PROCHE	
Nom	De Macar
Prénoms	Ghislain
Collections	335 items, n°17328 à 17663 (RG. 572) PROCHE : indexés sous Adolphe de Macar Gazelle : indexés sous Adolphe de Macar TMS : indexés sous Adolphe de Macar

Auteur(s)	AL
Relecteur(s)	

Structure (rappel)	
1.	<u>Lieux et dates d'existence</u>
2.	<u>Lieux d'activité</u> : <u>thesauri</u> (choisir le / les principal/principaux)
3.	<u>Rôles</u> : via thesauri Getty (idem)
4.	<u>Notice biographique</u> : autours (de l'acquisition) des objets (c'est le champs « officiel », celui qui se retrouve aussi sur le site <u>Achives.Africamuseum</u> - statuts : public ou interne)
5.	<u>Sources biographiques</u> : références (bibliographiques et archivistiques)
6.	<u>URL</u> : références web (si elles existent)



Example of adding a person linked to an acquisition: the case of Adolphe de Macar and Ghislain de Macar

A vast collection of nearly 700 objects was recorded in the collections management database as coming from the 'collections' of Adolphe de Macar (1847 - 1918), a Belgian soldier seconded to the Congo between 1885 and 1888. A review of the timeline of the arrival of these collections at the museum and, above all, a closer look at the intermediaries - most often women (wives, widows, daughters, etc.) - revealed that more than half of this collection actually came from Ghislain de Macar, a business lawyer and entrepreneur from Liège who went to the Congo in 1891 on behalf of the *Société du Haut-Congo*.

This rectification reveals an important issue in the history of the collections (which is also a challenge for provenance research today) relating to the available sources of which most come from the administration of the colonial state which are still accessible in Belgium (via the State Archives). This survival is much less evident for the archives of private companies, of which the conservation is often random, complicating access to key information on players in this sector. In the case of Ghislain de Macar, he was identified thanks to the crosschecking of the daily press at the time and genealogical data and thus allowing to establish his link with the museum's collection.

Recognizing Absences in Colonial Archives

A focus on Congolese people

In 2024, an initial effort was made to identify Congolese people mentioned in the museum's archives. **This initiative identified 828 people of Congolese origin who appear to have been involved in the acquisition of objects in the PROCHE corpus.**

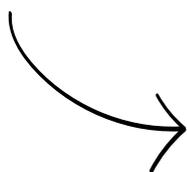
However, the information available on the lives of these individuals remains fragmentary. Databases such as TMS and archives often contain very little information about them. This absence of documentation highlights the limitations of colonial archives, that in general lack a systematic recording of individual information on Congolese people.

=> Recognizing archival absences is essential. It underlines the need to document these absences in order to better understand the historical realities of the colonial period and their impact on contemporary research. Through this, PROCHE is contributing to a critical reflection on the role of archives in the construction of historical narratives.

PROCHE database

In 2024, the PROCHE database was updated with **photographs of the objects**. According to figures provided by the ICT department, the database has been consulted around 10,000 times by visitors and different institutions. The majority of connections come from the DRC, but also from Belgium, Egypt, Côte d'Ivoire, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda and South Africa.

<https://proche.africamuseum.be>



Conversation Piece

During 2024, the project started the process of writing a **conversation piece**. This is an innovative, evolving and accessible tool designed to stimulate debate on provenance research. The contributors will discuss the topic in text form, without any hierarchy of knowledge, to explore multiple perspectives.

This format emphasises ideas and reflections rather than definitive results, by posing a problem accompanied by a contextualising text and an analysis of existing gaps.

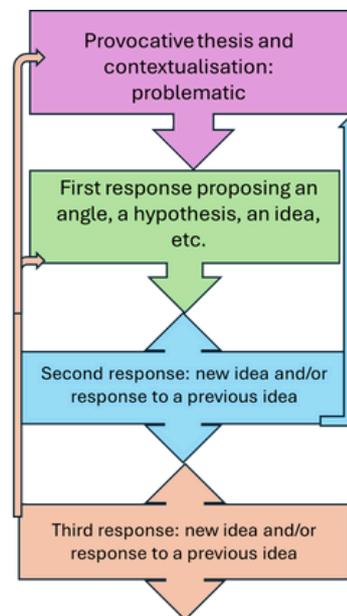
This conversation piece, intended for publication in a scientific journal like *Museum Worlds* and available in French and English, aims to respond to the critical issues of the PROCHE project by encouraging collective and experimental reflection on the challenges associated with provenance in a museum context.



What is a conversation piece ?

The conversation piece is

- Exploratory: new or controversial ideas or concepts, often with the aim of provoking thought or discussion.
- Preliminary: The results or conclusions presented are not definitive and may be subject to modification on the basis of feedback received.
- Collaborative: It is designed to be shared with other researchers or professionals in the field, who can provide constructive feedback.
- Non-formal: Although academically rigorous, it can be less formal than a journal article, allowing for a more open and speculative presentation of ideas.
- Evolving: The discussions and debates generated by the paper may reveal angles or perspectives that the authors had not initially envisaged. In response, the document may evolve to include these new perspectives.



Contextualisation text

‘Restitution issues are at the heart of current debates in Belgium and DR Congo. Since the 2020 marches and the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement, a wave of decolonisation has gained momentum in the West. This debate, once confined to the West and activist circles, has become an institutional issue in Belgium and DR Congo. Can the AfricaMuseum meet society's expectations? Answers are emerging through provenance research, as shown by the Afrisurge (2019-2024), HOME (2019-2022), PROCHE (2022-2026) and PROMA (2023-2024) projects. These programmes are the result of societal pressure on Belgian policy, but are also part of ethnographic museums' need for control, as they are the instigators of these projects. While the countries of origin are adopting capacity-building strategies, if these countries were to become the architects of these programmes, how can we imagine museum research practices on an equal footing?’

PROCHE in support of the 'ReThinking collections' exhibition

The temporary exhibition *ReThinking collections*, which opened in January 2024, was extended for several months before closing its doors in December 2024. It attracted more than 60,000 visitors.

The exhibition sought to shed light on current issues and the many different approaches to provenance research. It showcased a variety of collections, some of which were unexpected, and included questions relating to this now-contested heritage. The exhibition also explored new perspectives on the future of colonial collections.

The book *(Re)Making collections*, which inspired the exhibition, is still available for purchase.



Van Beurden, S., Gondola, D. & Lacaille A. (2023). *(Re)Making collections : origins, trajectories and reconnections*. Tervuren: Africa Museum.

COMING SOON: Online publication of 21 biographical notes:

In February 2025, the biographical notes of the twenty-one people who played a key role in the acquisition of the AfricaMuseum collections will be published on the PROCHE website. Each of these people is associated with a number of objects in the order of more than 700 items up to several thousands. The aim of these short historical presentations is to show the diversity of those involved in the formation of the collections and to highlight the contexts of their activities in relation to the collections under study in PROCHE.

These notes are the result of the work of the research team in collaboration with Aline Cuvelier, Maarten Couttenier and Martin Hullebroeck.

Collaborative work in DRC

Fieldwork by IMNC-Researchers

Fieldwork in national museums in various provinces and with source communities intensified in 2024, at the request of Congolese researchers. An initial visit to these communities highlighted the urgent need to preserve the fragile but still present memory of musical instruments and other cultural artefacts. This underlined the importance of continuing and stepping up efforts to document and safeguard this intangible heritage before it completely disappears.

Starting on 10 February 2024, the five IMNC researchers each conducted a research visit of 45 days in different regions of the DRC:

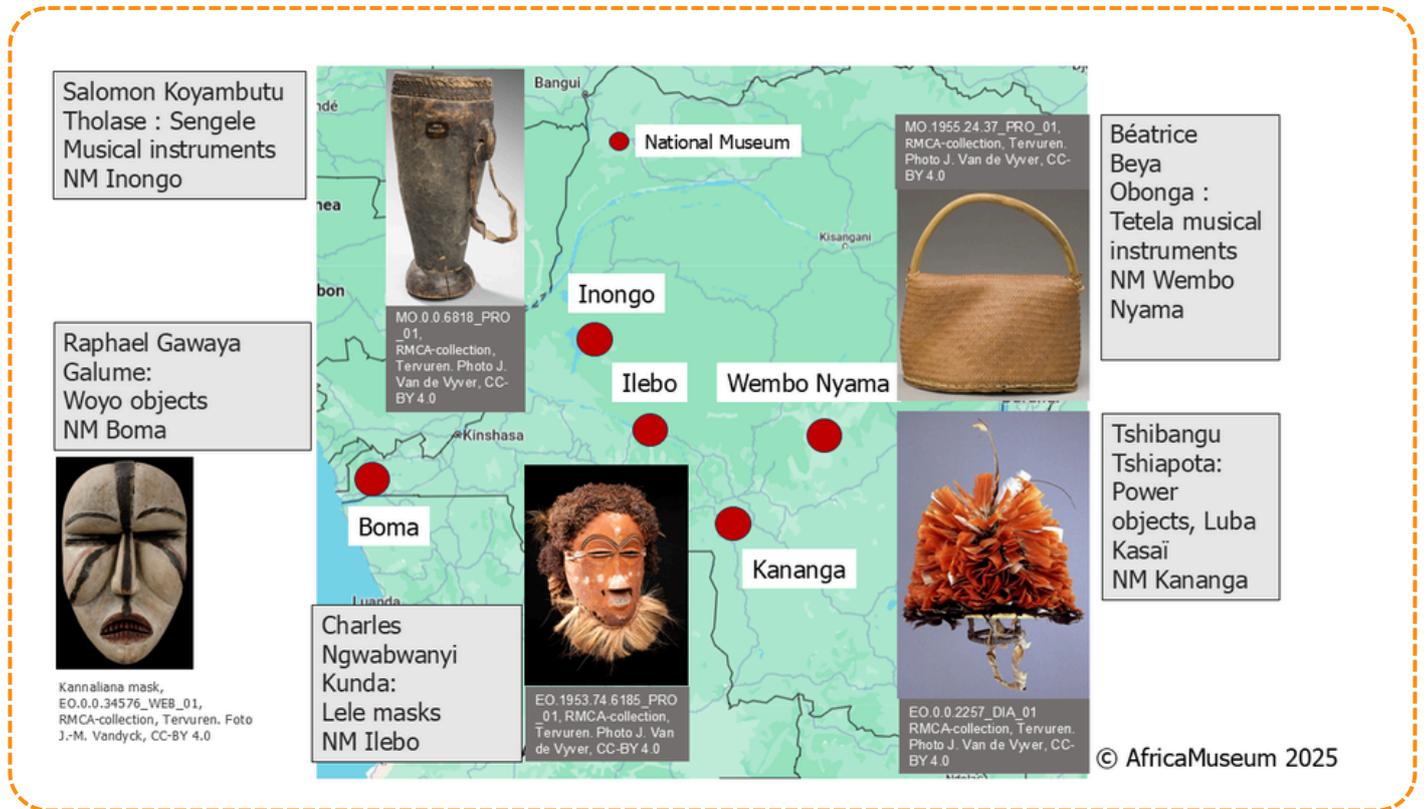
- **‘Contexte d'acquisition des instruments de musique Sengele à l'AfricaMuseum’** (Inongo Province) by Salomon Koyambutu Tholase: The study of Sengele drums reveals their ritual role and their acquisition under colonial violence, particularly in Ngongo and Basimba, villages that are marked by massacres and looting.
- **‘Leele masks’** (Kasai Province) by Charles Ngwabwanyi Kunda: Research focused on fives masks and revealed unequal acquisitions, some under coercion from missionaries.
- **‘Sur les insignes du pouvoir chez le peuple Vili’** (Central Kongo Province) by Raphaël Gawayya Galume: His study traced the provenance of several objects, with hypotheses of theft or forced exchange by clerics.
- **‘L'histoire des objets de la dot chez les Nande’** (North Kivu Province) by Emmanuel Tshibangu Tshiapota: His research examined dowry objects among the Nande and retraced their acquisition, thereby interviewing various local stakeholders in order to better understand the context in which they were handed down.
- **‘La provenance et les fonctionnalités des instruments de musique Tetela’** (Sankuru Province) by Béatrice Beya Obonga: Her research concerned three instruments, enabling to identify various acquiring methods often in inequality, such as confiscation or donation.

Changes in Fieldwork:

Emmanuel Tshibangu Tshiapota, for security reasons relating to the conflict in eastern Congo, has changed his research topic and is now concentrating on power objects from Kananga among the Luba of Kasai.

Raphaël Gawayya Galume, as a result of his finding that most of the objects that he studied in the RMCA's collections were in fact originating from Congo-Brazzaville, shifted his focus to Woyo objects during his second research visit to the AfricaMuseum.

During the months of November and December 2024, IMNC-researchers carried out a second season of fieldwork in order to deepen their research.



Map of localities and corpus of objects related to the research subjects of IMNC-researchers



From left to right: Raphaël Gawaya Galume, Tshibangu Tshiapota and Salomon Tholase in the field in the DRC ©IMNC



Seminar on methodology at the MNRDC in progress ©PROCHE

Fieldwork by UNIKIN doctoral students

Doctoral students from the University of Kinshasa carried out fieldwork throughout 2024 in various regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

- **Rodrigue Rutebuka** focused his work on *‘La route des masques Lega du bwami, résistance et adaptation dans les arts et rituels’* between 1953 and 1960. He carried out his research in two distinct territories of the DRC: that of Pangi in the province of Maniema, and the territory of Shabunda in the province of South Kivu. The aim of this study is to understand the cultural and historical dynamics of the Lega masks in the context of the bwami rites, in particular their evolution and resistance in the face of the social and political changes of the time.
- **Rodrigue Nzelokuli** explored the subject of Mbole objects from Lilwakoy, from the AfricaMuseum’s colonial collections. He conducts comparative studies on in vitro and in vivo data on the provenance of the objects, in order to gain a deeper understanding of their origins and history. The research sites are Kisangani and Opala, key towns in Tshopo province, for which he collected crucial information on these artefacts and their links with local communities.
- **Astrid Munyemba** conducted a study on the history of Songye objects in the AfricaMuseum’s collections, as part of her research into the circulation and significance of art objects in the colonial period. Her fieldwork took place in Kabinda, in the province of Lomami, where she analysed the Songye objects and their cultural impact, at the same time examining their conservation in a Belgian museum. Her research aims to shed light on the issues surrounding the representation of Congolese cultures in European museums.

Methodological Seminars

As part of the project, **two methodological seminars were organised in 2024 in Kinshasa to develop approaches adapted to critical source analysis and fieldwork in the DRC.**

The first seminar, which took place in February, brought together researchers, doctoral students and local experts to identify specific methodological issues, in particular access to sources and the use of historical information. The participants worked on developing an evolving methodology, adapted to the realities on the ground.

The second seminar, in April, deepened these discussions by integrating interdisciplinary perspectives, with presentations of the research progress and sessions open to a wider audience. Particular emphasis was on oral history as a key source.

These meetings helped to strengthen local capacity, improve dialogue between partners and lay the foundations for more inclusive and collaborative provenance research in the context of the collections concerned by the PROCHE project.



Methodology seminars in Kinshasa in February and April 2024 ©PROCHE

Civil society engagement

Integrating Congolese perspectives for an inclusive dialogue on colonial heritage

As part of the project, the PROCHE team has chosen to concentrate part of its efforts and resources directly in the DRC. Working on collections from the colonial period and originating from the DRC, the project makes a point of encouraging exchanges with Congolese researchers, experts and members of civil society. At midterm of the project, the major decision was taken to **actively include the voices of Congolese civil society in order to enrich the discussions and ensure that the final recommendations at the end of the project reflect local expectations.**

This approach is based on a participatory methodology that combines several methods: presentations on themes such as restitution and re-appropriation, discussions on community links with heritage, and the inclusion of a diversity of interlocutors - civil associations, cultural players, religious representatives and customary chiefs. The workshops, held in non-governmental venues such as cultural centres, provide an opportunity for free and inclusive discussion.

The responses received will be compiled in the final project-report, which will be submitted to the Belgian and Congolese authorities. This document will provide recommendations for aligning collection restitution practices with the needs and aspirations expressed in the DRC.

Database training

A five-day training course on databases was held at the Musée national de la RDC (MNRDC) in Kinshasa, by Franck Theeten, ICT professional at the AfricaMuseum, bringing together twelve participants, scientists and IT specialists from the IMNC and the MNRDC.

The training covered :

- Advanced use of Excel for data analysis and management.
- The basics of relational database design.
- Introduction to international standards (ISO 8601, ISO 3166) and tools such as Docker.

This initiative strengthens local capacities in the management and exploitation of heritage data, an important step towards international interoperability.



Database training at MNRDC

©PROCHE



Participants in the MNRDC database training course with their certificates ©PROCHE

Overcoming the Risks of Academic Extractivism

The PROCHE project, like all research projects on the colonial past involving the DRC, is faced with the risk of academic extractivism, i.e. the unilateral exploitation of local intellectual and cultural resources without any benefit for the partner institutions or Congolese society. To avoid this problem, the PROCHE project must develop a self-criticism of its practices and implement responses such as :



- Establishing collaborations based on equality between Belgian and Congolese researchers, leaving researchers free to use their data and results.
- Investing in training and skills-development for researchers and institutions in the DRC.
- Ensure open communication with local communities (source communities, civil society, academic and institutional worlds), with their consent and respecting their interests, while responding to concrete requests.

UPCOMING

- Célia Charkaoui and Lili Boros schedule a visit to the partners in Kinshasa in January 2025, to run workshops with researchers from the IMNC and UNIKIN, about their fieldwork and to prepare an **exhibition on canvas**, as a means of valorizing their research in the DRC at the request of the source communities, and of promoting their research results in the national museums in the provinces. The visit will also provide an opportunity to set up workshops with **Congolese civil society to learn on their priorities** in terms of research, reconstitution and reappropriation of the heritage in the DRC. This will be followed by a knowledge transfer **event** between Kinshasa and Brussels at the end of the project, in December 2025/January 2026.
- Following his presentation at the Ecole du Patrimoine Africain in Porto Novo, Benin, in November 2024, which PROCHE supported, **Placide Mumbembele** has been invited by the Director of the National Museum of Cameroon. The aim is to participate in a **meeting** entitled '*Pour une stratégie sous-régionale de rapatriement sans heurts des biens culturels africains*' (31-31.12.2024) and in a seminar of experts and researchers on provenance studies in Central Africa (3-7.01.2025).

IN THE NEWS

- 10.03.2024 Participation by Agnès Lacaille in the radio programme *Les Eclaireurs* on Belgian radio station *La Première* to present the exhibition “ReThinking Collections”.
- 24.05.2024. **Presentation** by M. Dewitte and M. de Clippele, of the Belgian legal framework for restitution and of the PROCHE project at a symposium organised by the University of Leiden entitled ‘Decolonisation of Heritage: Conference on New Approaches to Restitution’.
- 15.06.2024. Support to the Belgian premiere of the **documentary** *The Story of Ne Kuko* by Festus Toll at the AfricaMuseum as part of the cultural program relating to the “ReThinking Collections” exhibition.
- Participation in the catalogue for the temporary exhibition *Baz'Art! Art et commerce chez les Kongo*, at the *Musée du Nouveau Monde* in La Rochelle, in partnership with the AfricaMuseum, curated by Julien Volper: C. Charkaoui, M. Dewitte, and J. Volper. 2024. ‘Artistic adaptation and the emergence of the commission: the impact of Europeans on the production of Kongo artists’. *Baz'art ! Art et commerce chez les Kongo. Exhibition catalogue, Musée du Nouveau Monde, 18 May-18 November 2024. La Rochelle: Musée du Nouveau Monde, 63-67.*
- 07.10.2024. Presentation of the PROCHE project during exchanges between the *Collectif pluridisciplinaire de recherche de provenance* and the *Group “France” of the Arbeitskreis Provenienzforschung*.
- 12.10.2024. Support to the preview of the VRT **documentary** film *Kakungu* at the AfricaMuseum and ensuing debate as part of the cultural program relating to the *ReThinking Collections* exhibition.
- 20.11.2024. **Presentation** of the project by Madelon Dewitte at the International Congress: *Decolonizing Museums and Resignifying Monuments* at UNED Madrid.
- **Article** in the investigative magazine *Médor* on the fieldwork of Raphaël Gawayya Galume, researcher at the IMNC and member of the PROCHE project: Colin Delfosse, ‘L'impossible retour?’, *Médor*, n°37, winter 2024.
- 15.12.2024. **Article** on the blog of the *Collectif pluridisciplinaire de recherche de provenance (CPRP)* by M. Dewitte, R. Gawayya Galume, E. Tshibangu Tshiapota, S. Koyambutu Tholase, entitled ‘L’AfricaMuseum (Belgique) et la Recherche de Provenance : le cadre du Projet PROCHE’.

UPCOMING :

- The publication of the **Conversation Piece** mentioned on page 6. If you would like to know more about this, please contact us (proche@africamuseum.be).
- Madelon Dewitte's **presentation** of the PROCHE project at the *Spoliations, restitutions et circulations des objets. Pour une géopolitique du patrimoine*, organised by UCLouvain and to be held in Fribourg and Neuchâtel from 4 to 6 June 2025.

Overview of 2024

JANUARY

- Visit Célia Charkaoui to Kinshasa:

During her stay the financial reports were finalized as well as the planning of activities for 2024. A field preparation workshop was held with the five IMNC-researchers. New provenance research methodologies were developed, specific to the Congolese context, via a series of local seminars.

For 2024 a cycle of methodological seminars and follow-up workshops for researchers was launched, as well as discussions on the organisation of a closing event in Kinshasa and other regions of the DRC to promote the results of the research.

FEBRUARY

Field research in different provinces of the DRC:

- Starting on 10 February 2024, each of the five IMNC-researchers conducted a 45-day field research in different regions of the country.
- First methodological workshop on provenance studies in the DRC at the IMNC: Organised by the PROCHE project in partnership with the IMNC and UNIKIN. Introductory speeches by university professors to guide the discussions with the five IMNC-researchers and three UNIKIN-PhD students.

APRIL

- Lies Busselen, provenance researcher at the RMCA left the project for a doctoral thesis on a colonial collection of ancestral remains and the impact of erased and forgotten colonial histories in Belgium and the DRC (KULeuven).
- Célia Charkaoui, Agnès Lacaille and Madelon Dewitte visited the partners in Kinshasa : This visit was an opportunity to accompany the work of IMNC-researchers and to organise a methodology workshop with the PhD students, professors and Belgian partners to take stock and set priorities for 2024. The second edition of the methodological seminars on provenance research was also launched. They also explored the national and judicial archives in Kinshasa.



Visiting the permanent exhibition at the *Musée national de la RDC*, Kinshasa, april 2024 ©PROCHE

MAY

- Presentation of the project and the Belgian context of restitution by Madelon Dewitte and Marie-Sophie de Clippele during a conference on new approaches to restitution at Leiden University.
- Hosting UNIKIN-PhD-student Astrid Muyemba for a research stay at the AfricaMuseum until July.

JUNE

- Visit P. Mumbembele to the AfricaMuseum, 12-19.06.2024

JULY

- Online training course on archives in Belgium for IMNC-researchers by Bérengère Piret, who is in charge of the management of colonial archives of Belgium.
- 12.07.2024 Presentation of the Conversation Piece to the PROCHE follow-up committee

AUGUST

- Célia Charkaoui, Kinshasa:

The priorities of the PROCHE project were clarified in response to the change in leadership at the IMNC. Research stays for Raphaël Galume and Jean-Emmanuel Tshibangu at the AfricaMuseum were prepared. The decision was made to include Congolese civil society in the discussions through workshops. The planning of activities for 2025 began, including an poster-exhibition to enhance the visibility of research results in the DRC, as well as a closing event in Kinshasa and in Brussels.

SEPTEMBER

- Stay of Célia Charkaoui in Kinshasa continued.
- Preparation of the Activity Report for the IMNC.
- Visit of two IMNC-researchers at the AfrciaMuseum, 15/09 - 19.10.2024, R. Gawaya Galume & J.-E. Tshibangu Tshiapota

OCTOBER

- Stay of Célia Charkaoui in Kinshasa continued
- Lili Boros joined the research team on provenance research.
- Research visit IMNC at AfricaMuseum continued.

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER

- Manon Fournil, Master's student in Museology at the *École du Louvre*, joins the PROCHE team as an intern.
- Presentation of the project by Madelon Dewitte at the International Congress: *Decolonizing Museums and Resignifying Monuments*, organized by UNED Madrid.
- Placide Mumbembele travels to Benin, *Ecole du Patrimoine Africain* for a conference and seminar titled "Rethinking the Museum Model in Africa: New Strategies for Renewing Offerings in the Era of Post-Colonial Societies and Socio-Ecological Transitions." He also participates in an expert group selected to propose ideas on the future of African museums.
- Second fieldwork of researchers from the IMNC in various regions of DRC.



Visit to the judicial archives in Kinshasa and the MNRDC restoration/conservation room. Kinshasa, April 2024 ©PROCHE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The PROCHE team would like to extend its warmest thanks to the colleagues at the AfricaMuseum who assisted us during the research stay of one doctoral student and two of the IMNC-researchers: the ICT team, Collection Management Department, the Documentation Centre, fellow researchers, the RAAC and accountancy staff.

Your expertise and availability facilitated various aspects of their stay, as well as of the implementation of the project.



Questions ? Remarks ? Suggestions ?
 Stay in touch at proche@africamuseum.be