

Art with Fight in It

Discovering that a Statue of a Colonial Officer Is a Power Object from the 1931 Pende Revolt

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This article investigates a Kwilu Pende statue of a Belgian colonial officer (Fig. 1) through the combined perspectives of historical events, an unusual wealth of relevant documentation, and technical analysis. Its origin stems from the chance encounter now more than forty years ago by which Herbert Weiss, a political scientist and student of protest movements in the Congo, was able to acquire the work and learn the identity of the subject. More recently, examination by curator Richard Woodward and conservator Kathy Gillis at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts revealed a series of extraordinary channels—carefully planned and executed in the freshly carved green wood. These discoveries prompted further investigation and dialogue by Weiss, Woodward, and Z.S. Strother, a scholar of Pende art history, in wrestling with understanding this unusual work and seizing a rare opportunity to recover a fragment of African art history.

PART I: THE PENDE REVOLT 1931: OPPRESSION, PROTEST, SURVIVAL, AND ART

—HERBERT F. WEISS

I arrived in the Congo in December 1959 with the task of studying the independence struggle that had begun in earnest early that year. I researched three political parties among the many that existed, but finally focused on the Parti Solidaire Africain (PSA) because its leaders trusted me more than the other parties did and even allowed me to photocopy its files (Weiss and Verhaegen 1963). The PSA was very successful in mobilizing the Pende, the Mbuun, the Mbala and many smaller ethnic groups in the Kwilu District east of Leopoldville/Kinshasa (Weiss 1967). It became a partner in the alliance led by Patrice Lumumba that won the May 1960 elections and formed the first government on

the declaration of independence on June 30, 1960.¹ PSA President Antoine Gizenga—a Pende—became Deputy Prime Minister, and Cleophas Kamitatu, the man who had been responsible for the successful mobilization of the Kwilu population, became governor of the huge Leopoldville Province.

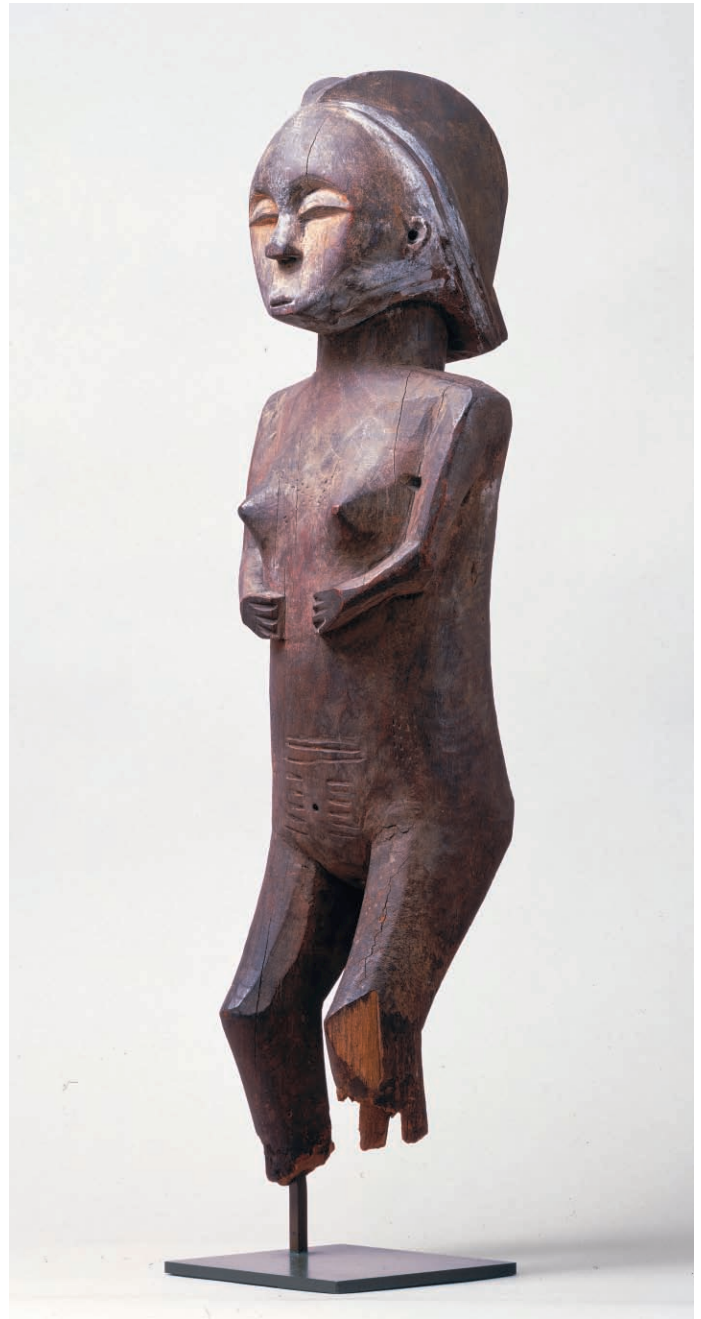
Tragic events galloped one after the other immediately after independence was established—the army mutinied, the richest provinces seceded, the UN sent a peacekeeping force and, most important, the Congo became an arena of Cold War competition. The result was the assassination of Lumumba in January 1961 (Gerard and Kuklick 2015) and the expulsion of his allies from leadership positions (CRISP n.d.a). Some joined the new US-supported government, some went into exile (CRISP n.d.a), and of those, some returned just three years later to start a revolution (CRISP n.d.b).

One of the continuities in Pende history is severe oppression, determined protest, devastating defeat, and repeated resilience. Until recently, they were overwhelmingly a rural people. During the independence struggle, the PSA was led by urban elites and mass support naturally came from the rural grass roots. The Pende tendency to protest manifested itself in the fact that followers were often more aggressively opposed to the whole colonial system than their leaders. It is a phenomenon that I called “rural radicalism” (Weiss 1967).² This pattern follows the earlier Pende Revolt of 1931 that is discussed in this article and yielded the remarkable sculpture that is its main focus.

My attention was drawn to the significance that the 1931 Revolt bore for later events while I was conducting field research in the Kwilu in 1966 and 1972. In 1972 a man in Gungu approached me with two interesting Pende figures. Both were old. One was a beautiful female figure (Fig. 2). The other one clearly represented a white man wearing some sort of uniform (Fig. 1). I didn’t have



1 Power object in the form of a Belgian colonial officer (1931)
 Kwilu Pende, DRC
 Wood, with metal repair staples; H. 62.5 cm
 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (2015.3, Aldine S. Hartman Endowment Fund)
 Photo: Travis Fullerton ©Virginia Museum of Fine Arts



2 Kangulungu (power object) in female form
 Kwilu Pende, DRC
 Wood, pigments; H. 61 cm
 Herbert Weiss Collection
 Photo: Eileen Travell
 Free-standing sculptures in the round were kept in the inner chamber of the chief's ritual house, where they served as power objects intended to protect and discipline the chief.

enough cash on me to purchase both so I left the figure of the white man behind, but not before taking a couple of photos and inquiring about its origin. I was told that it represented the white man who was killed in 1931 and that it had been placed in the clan's house for sacred objects. That was a clear reference to the Pende Revolt. I was further told that it had been made because people thought all whites had been chased away for good and they wanted the children to know what they looked like.³

I had a friend in Belgium who had a family member working not far from Gungu who agreed to look for the figure. By a small miracle, he found it, bought it, and brought it to a village in Belgium, where I was able to buy it from him. In the meantime, I learned the identity of the man who had been killed. He was an administrator, Maximilien Balot, and his death was intimately connected to—indeed was the spark that started—the Pende



3 *Njinda* power figure
Pende, ca. 1930–31
Wood, horn, tortoise shell, cloth, fiber, raffia, vegetable matter; H. 118 cm
American Museum of Natural History Collection, no. 90.2/2957.

Photo: Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology
This *njinda* power figure was collected by Georges Caprasse in May 1933, in Kilembe Sector, Kwango Region, Belgian Congo. Caprasse was a journalist for *Le Courier d'Afrique* (Léopoldville) who filed many critical reports on the 1931 Revolt. *Njinda* were power objects created by diviners supporting the millennialist movement hoping to drive the Belgians out of the Congo. This one bears a ceremonial sword (*pogo ya khusa*), the insignia of an invested Pende chief whose election has been approved by his maternal ancestors. Some oral histories describe Matemo a Kelenge delivering the first blow to Balot with a *pogo ya khusa* as the emblem of a just war (countenanced by the dead).

Revolt. For a political scientist, this was a rare case of a work of art contributing fresh evidence to the history of Congolese anti-colonial protest.

THE SPARK

Balot's death in Kilamba, a village not far from Gungu, on June 8, 1931, did indeed ignite the Pende Revolt. The investigating magistrate, Jungers, who was later sent to examine both the causes of the revolt and its repression, recounted the events that led to this moment:

On the 14th May, territorial agent Burnotte arrives in Kilamba village.... He was to collect taxes ... and "facilitate the recruitment mission" of ... the HCB [Huileries du Congo Belge, the Lever Brothers Limited subsidiary in the Belgian Congo] recruiter who accompanied him (Jungers 1931:92–98).⁴

Burnotte demanded that the local chief furnish palm nut cutters. This meant that they would have to leave their homes, wives, and children and spend months in forest camps climbing up palm trees, cutting the fruit and carrying heavy loads to roadside collection points—all for extremely little pay. The village men refused the order and thereupon fled from the village. In response, Burnotte had most of the women arrested. He then ordered messengers (low-level Congolese assistants) to confiscate anything of value—chickens, pigs, goats, etc. Burnotte then heard from other HCB agents that they were also unsuccessful in recruiting palm nut cutters from another village. In this case they had not fled and he had them flogged. When other HCB recruiters joined him in Kilamba they started a drinking session. One of the HCB recruiters—Collignon—had one of the arrested women brought to him and forced her to have sex with him. She was the wife of a man named Matemo a Kelenge. Neither an administrator nor an employee of a private company had the legal right to do any of this, but they were white. The women were released after three days.

Some days after these events Matemo dared to confront Collignon at the HCB factory and demanded compensation—a traditional Pende way of dealing with such matters and all he could ask for under the circumstances. Collignon refused, slapped Matemo, and a brawl ensued (the exact sequence of these events is unclear). Matemo was badly beaten by some HCB staff and ran away with his clothes almost completely torn off. "For his part, Collignon had the gall to lodge a complaint [with the Administration] in Kandale against Matemo, without breathing a word about what had taken place at Kilamba" (Marchal 2008:149). It was in response to this complaint that Territorial Agent Maximilien Balot was ordered to go to the village to investigate the charges and collect taxes (Marchal 2008:149).

Balot arrived in Kilamba on June 8 accompanied by a single soldier and some messengers. He was met by Matemo, supported by some thirty men. Matemo challenged Balot to hit him. Balot ordered the soldier to fire in the air, but the Pende did not disband. Balot then fired his hunting rifle and wounded a Matemo supporter. Thereupon, Matemo hit Balot with a knife or machete and arrows were shot at him, killing him. His body was dismembered and the pieces were distributed to the chiefs of several villages (Jungers 1931:92–98).

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CAUSES

Why did the death of one low-level Belgian administrator result in a major revolt? Two theories have been proposed: first, the oppressive economic conditions that the Pende faced, especially during the World Economic Depression and, second, the existence of an anti-white religious movement among the Kwilu Pende—called "Satana" in Belgian documents but "Tupelepele" by the leading Pende scholar, Siketele Gize a Sumbula—that encouraged the belief that the whites could be forever chased from the land of the Pende.⁵ Both explanations are no doubt valid. Extremely harsh socioeconomic conditions frequently occur at the same time as, or are even the cause of, the creation or expansion of religious movements. Such religious movements developed all over the Belgian Congo.⁶

The Pende were concentrated in the Kwilu and Kasai regions and in the early colonial period had come under the virtually monopolistic control of the *Compagnie du Kasai*

(CK). The CK began to assert pressure on the Kwilu Pende in 1902–03 to harvest rubber after it had become exhausted in other parts of the Congo. In addition, the state demanded a tax paid in rubber supposedly equivalent to forty hours of work per month for adult men, but in fact whole families were obliged to go camping in the bush for weeks at a time to collect the assigned quantities (Sikitele 1986:502). The trading posts routinely flogged resisters and held women hostage to quash resistance (Sikitele 1986:506–508). The Pende were considered rebellious and often refused to leave their homes to fulfill demands for their labor. However, this put them into an impossible situation. Beginning in 1910, they had to pay a monetized head tax, and the only way for Kwilu Pende to gain money was to collect rubber. The price for rubber was, of course, determined by the CK or minor foreign companies. In 1909, a member of a Belgian expedition stated—not surprisingly—that the Kwilu region was very dangerous “because more Europeans have been killed there ...” than in neighboring areas (Nicolai 1963:305).⁷

In the years immediately preceding World War I, the era of rubber died in the Congo because of competition from southeast Asia, although it was revived during World War II. The era of palm nut oil had begun. This was the moment when Lever Brothers Limited managed to obtain a virtual monopoly over most of the Kwilu region. Lever’s subsidiary the HCB developed a similar system for the collection of palm nuts to be pressed for their oil (Nicolai 1963:313). Once again, the Pende, more than some of their neighbors, resisted recruitment which continued to involve being taken to work camps for as long as three months at a time. Conditions in these camps were very minimal and there was insufficient food. In addition, the area was comparatively remote and both the administrators and the merchants “acted without control” (Nicolai 1963:325). The most frequent complaints of the Congolese workers regarded their pay. In sum, without administrative pressure, the financial conditions offered by HCB would not have sufficed to give it anything approaching an adequate labor force. Administrative pressure favoring HCB consequently resulted in forced labor.

Then, the impact of the Depression hit the Kwilu region hard. The already meager price paid for palm nuts was reduced from 8.3 centimes per kilo to 3.3, but the head tax was increased to 85 francs. A cutter had to produce 2.5 tons of nuts to gain 85 Francs (Marchal 2008:153–54).

THE REVOLT AND ITS REPRESSION

After Balot’s death, the revolt spread with incredible speed. Part of the reason was the virtual disappearance of Belgian authority. Key administrators abandoned their posts and took refuge in Kikwit. Some missionaries also fled. But even earlier, security forces were almost entirely absent; only six soldiers were stationed in the entire Territory of Kikwit (Sikitele 1986:1077). This disappearance confirmed for the Tupelepele, erroneously as it turned out, that the whites would be gotten rid of forever (Sikitele 1986:1061, 1072). The rebels were led by Matemo, the husband of the raped woman, now an active leader in the Tupelepele movement. The revolt expanded from the Kwilu Pende to include some Kwese, Mbala, Sonde, Chokwe, and Mbuun. In all these areas, *sombolos* (large lean-tos serving as warehouses) were erected and filled with European commodities in expecta-



4 Detail of Figure 1.

tion that the ancestors would exchange them for equally valuable goods of African manufacture (Vanderhallen 1931 cited in Gusi-mana n.d.; Sikitele 1986:922–43).

Initially, the uprising also registered some military victories, even though they fought only with bows, arrows, and spears.

Before their crushing defeat, the Pende warriors fought fiercely for three and a half months against the celebrated Force Publique and they often routed these colonial forces and thus achieved some brilliant victories (Sikitele 1986:1078).

It took the Administration several weeks to mount an effective repression. Perhaps the most singular aspect of this repression is the fact that Belgian commanders were given the order not to accept capitulations until all the pieces of Balot’s body had been given up—some were reclaimed but far from all (Marchal 2008:167).

The various Belgian analysts and reports indicate that some 550 Congolese died, but the actual number is probably much higher. Prisoners numbered 1,356 and many of them were tortured—even to death—for information regarding the location of parts of Balot’s body.⁸

In a moving declaration, Balot’s wife was quoted as saying:

The natives killed my husband in the most horrible fashion. Yet, in spite of everything, I understand their revolt ... The agents of the private companies—it is fair to say—have mistreated the blacks and exploited them. The facts need to be known, what's going on down there must be put a stop to, for otherwise there will be revolt everywhere (Marchal 2008:163).

In general, the colonial administration in the Congo had been almost entirely free from interference from Brussels but, for once, the Pende Revolt and the abuse it brought to light resulted in public attention and parliamentary debate. The result was the decision to send a senior magistrate, Eugène Jungers, to the Kwilu to investigate what happened. In this sad story, the Jungers Report stands out as a rare monument to the rejection of impunity for whites—official or private. However, most of Jungers's recommendations regarding individual malfeasance were not implemented.

**PART II: MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE:
THE STATUE OF MAXIMILIEN BALOT**

—RICHARD B. WOODWARD

The two Pende sculptures that Herbert Weiss first encountered in 1972 (Figs. 1–2) were displayed next to each other in his home when I saw them in 2011. Both were published by Z.S. Strother in her 2008 book *Pende*, in which she cited the unique circumstance of a power object taking the form of a colonial figure, and she associated it with other power figures, divination sculptures known as *njinda*, in use at the time of the Pende Revolt (Fig. 3) (Strother 2008:36–37, 41–47, 109, pl. 42). The statue of Balot and the five *njinda* known to exist reveal the role sculptural works played for the Pende in dealing with their tribulations (Strother 2000b:110–11).

Although the impact of colonialism on art from Africa calls for broader examination, images of Europeans recorded in publications or in collections generally display a humorous or even cynical character; some are uninspired in execution; many were produced for colonial buyers as souvenirs. Upon first glance, however, the statue of Balot came across differently both from norms of Pende figures generally, such as the serene female figure that Weiss had acquired in Gungu, and from other images of colonials. The ramrod stance and aggressive glare of the eyes (Fig. 4) cast a physical and psychological intensity different from other colonial works.⁹ The dark character of the image registered immediately to my eye.

Breaking from the Pende norm of figures with head upright and gaze straight ahead, the head of this work leans forward (Fig. 5). The agent's glare is lowered and it is also turned slightly aside, as if deliberately avoiding direct eye contact.¹⁰ The general bearing of the statue, the turn of head, and especially the staring eyes suggest disrespect and anger. The work is brooding. It is not a dispassionate, commercial image of a colonial agent, but one that exposes contempt by the artist toward the subject. As they so ably demonstrate with masks, Pende sculptors are keenly sensitive to the animation of the face and adept at manipulating wood to achieve a wide range of characterizations. Balot's face is as deftly composed as their most expressive masks.

The artist's depiction of the colonial agent as a hostile character is understandable in view of the antagonism between the Pende



5 Profile comparison of Figures 1 and 2, with lines indicating the upright head and level gaze of the female figure and the forward tilt and downward gaze of the statue of Colonial Agent Balot. The photo also highlights the extraordinary rigidity of the European figure in contrast to the elastic posture of the female figure, standing with flexed arms and legs.
Photo and diagram: Travis Fullerton ©Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

and the Belgian administration and private industry that played out over many years and erupted with the killing that led to the creation of this work. The clan's retention of the Balot statue from the 1930s to the 1970s substantiates that it was not intended as an item of trade, at least not until years later when memory of the episode ebbed, people directly involved had died, and other more current concerns arose, such as the need for funds to send children to school that the seller related to Herbert Weiss.

Given the exceptional nature of the sculpture, I studied it closely, noting the erosion in the feet and lower legs, and a few (so-called native) repair staples. I also examined the hole drilled vertically into the proper right side of the head that extends through body and right leg, exiting at the foot. Immediately obvious, this vexing channel is inconsistent with the composition and carving of the figure. It violates the form of the sculpture in a disturbing way. Drilling this shaft marred the detailing of the head and hair; it cut open the neck and the right leg; and it breaks through the top of the shoe (Fig. 1). Had it been posi-

tioned further back, the shaft could have penetrated the figure internally without damaging the neck, leg, and foot. The surface of the statue also has small holes or pitting and some surface scarring, likely caused by insects and handling, conditions not unusual with African wood sculpture.¹¹ In addition to those random marks, a number of distinctive almond-shaped holes penetrated the surface. Nine or ten were readily evident in the chest, forehead (Fig. 4), and back. Uniform in size and shape, these small, slender holes have crisp edges resulting from a puncturing instrument and not from insect activity. But why and how was the figure pierced?

Several months after my visit, opportunity presented itself to feature both works in an installation project at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Herbert Weiss graciously agreed to lend both figures and consented with great interest to my request that Kathy Gillis, former Chief Conservator of Objects at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and I examine the holes. What we discovered provided essential clues about the creation and use of the statue.

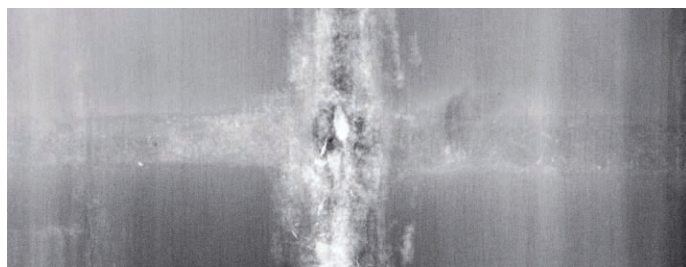
TECHNICAL ANALYSIS

Technical examination in the VMFA conservation department revealed that the statue had been subjected to a deliberate and precisely organized series of penetrations soon after it was carved, while the wood was still green. Kathy Gillis and I started with the most obvious penetration, the vertical shaft described above, which is about 1 cm in diameter (Fig. 6) and passes through the sculpture from top to bottom. The shaft breaks through the wood in the neck and right leg. In the past, a wooden rod had been inserted into this shaft, fragments of which still remain inside the head and torso and can be seen in the two openings.

Detailed scrutiny of the sculpture's surface revealed more of the mysterious almond-shaped holes than had been apparent initially. Some occur in locations easily missed in quick surface examination, such as in the folds of an ear and the crease where an arm joins the body. Ultimately, we located twenty-four holes. Except where the figure is damaged or eroded, the holes are precise and clean at their points of entry and measure 19 mm high.¹² Kathy Gillis started investigating the holes by inserting a slender probe to check the depth and the internal profile of the holes in the chest. This would tell us about the form of the blade and its angle of insertion and thereby about the action of making the hole. We expected the probe to hit an end point inside the wood, but it did not. Progressively longer probes were tried without hitting an end to the hole. Finally, a long, 4.76 mm brass rod was inserted and in two instances on first pass the rods exited from the other side of the sculpture.

Similar results were obtained with the holes in the head, leading us to x-ray the figure. The x-ray images confirmed the presence of material inside the vertical shaft—remains of the wooden rod that we could see a bit of with the naked eye. More significant and astonishing, however, the x-ray images revealed that all the holes in the head and in the chest aligned precisely in horizontal plane with each other, substantiating that the penetrations were carefully planned and executed rather than random (Fig. 7).

During examination, we discovered that the knees had also been pierced. The erosion of the wood fabric in this area soft-



6 This x-ray detail shows the path of the vertical shaft and the horizontal penetrations through the chest so precisely aligned that they overlay in the x-ray and read as single bar. The light spot at the crossing shows a penetration perpendicular to the lens, thereby revealing the shape of the blade.

X-ray: James Heitchue

Photo: David Stover © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

ened the outline of the holes, making them harder to find. However, insertion of the probes through the legs revealed a key clue about the arrangement of all the penetrations. Where the interior of the right leg had been broken open by the vertical shaft, we observed that all four piercings through the knees were not only in plane horizontally but were aimed precisely through the axis of the vertical shaft. This surprising discovery suggested comparing the direction of the penetrations through the chest and head. Looking at the probes from a point directly above the vertical shaft revealed that all the horizontal penetrations intersected this axis. Thus, at each level (head, chest, knees) not only were the small holes aligned horizontally, but all twelve penetrations passed through the vertical shaft like spokes through an axle. The illustration (Fig. 7) identifies the twelve passages through the statue, four at each level, and how they pass through the vertical shaft. We were able to insert the brass rods all the way through ten of the twelve holes with our probes. We did not force the probe through two that curve, but no doubt they also go all the way through, with the impasse owing to the movement of the wood when it split as it dried. We suspect the curvature of some of the paths owes to the thin blade being flexed by the grain of the wood as it was pushed through the statue.

Upon examining the vertical splits in the figure caused by the drying of the wood, especially the split down the proper right side, we determined that the penetrations were made while the wood was green. Telltale impressions left on both walls of the gap of this major split confirm that the wood was pierced before it split open from drying (Fig. 8). Had the blade been inserted after the split occurred, it would not have left an impression where the gap widened. Examination of this hole also showed that the thin blade used to pierce the wood had parallel sides. We then engaged a blacksmith to fabricate an iron blade matching the exact shape of the holes in order to get a clear sense of the instrument used.¹³ The blade (Fig. 9) fits the holes exactly. Being thin, the blade is supple, thereby supporting our conjecture that it flexed while being pushed through the rings of the wood grain, sometimes resulting in a curved channel as several of the charted paths of the twelve holes illustrate (Fig. 7).

7 To show where the colonial figure was pierced, twelve thin brass rods were inserted through the channels in the conservation studio at VMFA. The rods are numbered at both ends for clarity; dotted segments indicate where the channels pass through the substance of the figure. The heavy dashed line indicates the path of the vertical shaft through the figure.

Photo: Travis Fullerton; diagram: Brandon Robertson
©Virginia Museum of Fine Arts



The wood used for the sculpture is *Ricinodendron*, a species plentiful in many areas of Africa, including the Pende region.¹⁴ *Ricinodendron* is soft and light, having characteristics comparable to balsa. It is easy to carve and is widely employed for fashioning household items, such as bowls, cups, and spoons, and equipment requiring buoyancy, including large rafts and floats for fishing nets. Our team has not had access to a freshly cut sample of *Ricinodendron* in order to try piercing it with the blade. However, its softness and comparability with balsa, which has been tested, suggests that piercing in this manner is plausible, especially when the wood is fresh and the grain still supple before it stiffens from drying. *Ricinodendron* is susceptible to movement, breakage, and insect damage as is evident in the splits and chipping in various areas and the insect damage in the feet and legs (Plenderleith 2000:17–18).

Although our analysis reveals much about the holes and their

physical characteristics, several mysteries remain. Contrasting with the awkwardly placed vertical shaft, why were the horizontal holes aligned in plane with such engineering precision at the three levels? We suspect that all of the holes were made by the same blade inserted in one location, removed, and then repeatedly inserted in the other locations and removed—rather than by twelve similar blades, each left in place—for the reason that any one blade would obstruct passage through the vertical shaft by other blades in the same plane. Therefore, why was it important to pierce the statue at exactly the same horizontal level in the head, chest, and knees? We were able to pass multiple 4.76 mm rods through the channels at the same time (Fig. 7). The rods made contact but could pass by each other at the intersection due to their slenderness. Did the Pende owners insert something very slender into the passages made by the blade? The answer to this question remains a mystery.

When we embarked on the examination, I never envisioned finding a carefully planned series of channels. In short, the complete picture of the sculpture exceeded what could be seen, and the discoveries made remind us that this or any work of art derives from a larger context that cannot be fully reassembled, though our investigation of the clues—technical, historical, and cultural—provides significant steps in that direction. As with other scientific studies that have revealed works with channels and embedded materials inside—Songye, Bamana, Nok, and Inland Niger Delta sculptures, for example—we are reminded of the need to consider what cannot be seen.¹⁵ What becomes apparent, however, with the statue of Balot is that in addition to being an artistic indictment of a despised colonial agent, the figure was carved in response to the call to furnish a work for ritual function. Said another way, this statue is not indicative of art subjugated to colonial oppression but art that has fight in it.

PART III: BALOT: THE MAN, THE STATUE

—Z. S. STROTHER

Both portrait and power object, the figure of Balot defies easy categorization and opens a new window on the role of the arts during the colonial period. But let us begin with the man himself. Maximilien Balot had a typical history combining both military and civilian service in the Congo.¹⁶ As a youth, in 1910, he had enlisted in a lancers (cavalry) regiment in the Belgian army and rose to a rank equivalent to sergeant (*Maréchal de logis*). From 1913–1919, he served on-and-off as a noncommissioned officer in the Force publique and participated in the campaign against the Germans in East Africa. Near the end of his service, he was delegated to the Labor Exchange of Katanga in Elisabethville (Lubumbashi) and continued with them after his demission until 1929.

Before he was transferred to the Labor Exchange, where he would have primarily recruited Congolese to work in the mines, Balot received a thorough evaluation from the Force publique.¹⁷ Three superior officers agreed that he had “very good conduct,” was “sober” in disposition, “active” in his duty, a good accountant. They agreed that he was doing an excellent job as platoon leader (*chef de peleton*) and had the potential to make a “good” or “very good” agent territorial.

The evaluation process gives some insight into colonial psychology. The form specifically asked how the soldier interacted with 1) his superior officers, 2) with foreigners (i.e. non-Belgians) in the colony, 3) with subordinates, and 4) with natives. A second question asked whether or not the subject was able to maintain “moral authority” over 1) “whites,” and 2) “natives.” In response, his superiors wrote that Balot had a good education, was frank and agreeable, and maintained authority over his men.

Balot returned to colonial service in August 1930, at the age of 40, his family having pulled strings to get him appointed during a hiring freeze in the Depression (Van Inthout 1993:81).¹⁸ Initially, Balot filled in for personnel on leave in the Haut Kwilu and was evaluated on March 23, 1931, by Commissaire de District Vanderhallen, who gave him full points for good character and education, and judged him adequate in vehicular Kikongo. However, he did not recommend him for promotion. The “active” young man commended by the Force publique was now deemed lacking in “zeal” (receiving 7.5/10 points). His supervisor

reprimanded him with clear frustration for having spent only sixty-eight days in the field (i.e. off the post), which was clearly “insufficient [to administer] a territory.”¹⁹

In May 1931, Agent territorial Edouard Burnotte (cited by Jungers for abuses provoking rebellion) left on furlough, and Balot replaced him in Kandale Territory. His first assignment was to investigate the (contemptible) accusation of assault lodged by Henri Collignon against Matemo a Kelenge and to begin “tax” collection at Kilamba. Given his recent chastisement, it was probably difficult for Balot to heed repeated warnings from Congolese and abandon his first mission off the post.

As Balot’s biography and evaluations indicate, the Belgian colonial service sought to project an image of virile authority and favored the hiring of military men.²⁰ The Pende figure reveals the same conflation of civilian and military roles in the eyes of Congolese, depicting the administrator in the guise of a soldier, standing at attention, heels together, toes separated, with locked knees and straight arms pressed to his side, the middle finger positioned in the middle of the seam of his pants (Figs. 1, 5). Contrast his stance to the flexed knees and suppleness of a more conventional Pende figure (Figs. 2, 5). Pende often class men who receive European-style military training as *ngunza*—killers—because they are ready to take human life on a moment’s notice, given orders.

What does the *ngunza* look like? Twentieth-century Pende sculptors drew upon a sophisticated practice of physiognomy to express character through the shape of the face.²¹ According to this theory, men who live by violence have long, narrow faces. Their skulls show a pronounced supraorbital torus, which makes their foreheads bulge and crease deeply. Their eyes flash white. Always in danger of losing control, they stare shamelessly at others with wide open eyes, seeking to subordinate them.



8 The crack in the proper right side of the colonial figure’s torso reveals telltale impressions made by the blade before the wood split.
Photo: Richard B. Woodward © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

9 Iron blade made by Daniel Tokar to fit the horizontal penetrations.
Photo: Richard B. Woodward © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts



THE STATUE OF BALOT

Interview with Christophe Gudijiga by Sindani Kiangu, November 5, 2012

Following the discovery of the lateral piercing of the statue of Maximilien Balot as described by Richard Woodward, Herbert Weiss consulted historian Sindani Kiangu of University of Kinshasa (UNIKIN). The latter suggested showing photographs to his colleague Christophe Gudijiga (UNIKIN) and conducted a formal interview on the subject, November 5, 2012, which Weiss has translated below. Gudijiga is a Pende anthropologist from the Kwilu, the center for the Revolt.

Sindani Kiangu: Why has this figure been trans-pierced?

Christophe Gudijiga: In order to understand why this figure of Balot has been subjected to this ill treatment, one must, before any other consideration, note that in Pende culture, when someone dies in a state of “hostility” in relation to society, he must be buried in a hostile fashion. One is subjected to such a state of hostility when one has committed an act that does violence to the community. For instance: incest, theft, bad behavior, adultery, suicide, etc.

Concretely, when one buries someone in a hostile fashion, this involves placing thorns in the tomb and throwing the body into it in such a fashion that the thorns pierce it. For the community, this was a method of definitively rejecting him and preventing him from returning among the living.

This practice is linked to the Pende belief in reincarnation. However, the community only wishes that the “good” return. The “bad” ones were declared *personae non grata*. The metallic shafts that cross the statue appear to be related to this belief.²²

In effect, Balot was perceived as a “bad” person since he came to protect an adulterer—Collignon—the agent of the Kasai Company in Kilamba who carried off the wife of a Pende in order to abuse her. Behaving like a white man (*mundele*), he refused to pay the fine which the community imposed. This resulted in the following consequences:

Balot subsequently found himself in Kandale. He came to protect Collignon in the name of white racial prestige on the basis of which colonization was founded. This had a bad end for him; he was immediately classified as a “bad” and therefore an adulterer like Collignon.

As regards the long column that goes from the head to the bottom of the figure, one can ask whether this is not related to the practice of smoking meat, in this case suspended above the fire after having been pierced by a spit. Certainly this is a supposition, but one must note that the different parts of Balot were distributed and kept as an insignia of leadership. In order to preserve them it was necessary to dry them following methods that had been developed regarding human flesh.²³ It is interesting to note that when paramount (*mbandji*) chiefs cut off the heads of condemned individuals, they use a heavy sword called *pogo ya khusa* that was kept in a sheath made of treated human skin.

It is difficult to take the measure of the consequences of the Balot affair. Since the repression was ferocious, much of the immediate discussion focused on the resulting deaths. But, above all Pende society was decapitated—the true chiefs were simply exiled. They were replaced by *capitas* who were allied to the colonial power and many of whom were informers and people who had denounced others. The consequence can even be felt today, especially after colonial restraints ended, in the many problems linked to the exercise of power.

The artist has represented the Territorial Agent as *ngunza* (Fig. 4). His visage is long and narrow. The continuous brow is familiar from Central Pende masks but the carver has deeply undercut the forehead of the figure so that it seems to bulge in a point. As Woodward realized, the eyes are extraordinary. Each is outlined by a raised, crisply carved, almond-shaped frame. Inside, a perfectly round iris is incised, floating in the “white” of the eye. The large eyes stare out of the narrow face with a mesmerizing intensity, called “dangerous eyes” (*meso abala*). The root *-bala* signals peril from someone strong and aggressive, who has no compunction about hurting others, e.g. a dog who bites (*mbua yabala*). Nonetheless, it is contradictory that the figure’s gaze is deflected, his head angled downwards and slightly to the left, as a child avoiding eye contact (Figs. 4, 5).

Historically, the Pende have restricted naturalism for works of art belonging to high-ranking chiefs. Resemblance to living individuals in three-dimensional sculpture is anathema (Strother 2014–15). Imagine my surprise, therefore, to discover a photo of Maximilien Balot taken within a year of his death (Fig. 10), which shows him with long, narrow face, bony chin, pronounced supraorbital torus and deeply creased forehead, large eyes with lots of white, oversized ears, and hair parted on his left side! The resemblance is remarkable. Pende theorists must have found satisfaction that Balot’s character as an *ngunza* was marked indelibly on his face.

The Balot figure is a power object which, in Central Africa, is a container charged by a ritual specialist with life’s energy or the actual spirit of a deceased individual to “work” for a specific purpose.²⁴ There is no need for a container to take the form of a statue and, among the Pende, only high-ranking chiefs possess large anthropomorphic statues, which warn visitors (in one specialist’s words) that they have entered a “dangerous locale,” where the chief has a ghostly “garde-de-corps” watching over him, fiercely loyal and tireless. The accumulation of diverse materials can be another strategy to induce astonishment and awe (Rubin 1974, MacGaffey 1988). In the 1920s, diviners imported a new type of power figure, Njinda (probably from the Lele), which eventually played a role in the Pende Revolt (Sikitele 1986:957–62, Strother 2000b:110–11) (Fig. 3). Expressionist in form, it has a long narrow face with protruding white eyes and incorporates diverse materials including raffia, shells, animal skins, turtle shell, and bushbuck horn.

Not only anthropomorphic but portrait-like, the Balot figure results from the exceptional circumstance where the work also served to commemorate a historical event. The statue must have been made in the few weeks following Balot’s death, when people believed that they had driven out the foreign invaders once and for all—before the troops arrived. Clues to the piercing of the figure, uncovered through the physical analysis conducted by Woodward and Gillis, may be found in the circumstances of Balot’s death.

10 Maximilien Norbert Balot and his wife Maria Louise Thibaux, 1930. (The date of death pencilled at the top of the card is incorrect. Balot died June 8, 1931). Brussels, Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Archives africaines, SPA 15998 (K2615), No. 7323, p. 1.



According to Sh'a Gindungu (Fig. 11), the man who confessed to killing Balot:

After [Matemo] hit the White Man with his blade, I, Fumu-shiko, and Matamuheka each shot him with an arrow. The late Balot fled and that's when our arrows struck (lit. "pierced") him. We were three followed by our men. I shot the first arrow point blank on the left side of the chest. It came out the back. The white man still advanced but slowly. Fumushiko shot him at close range with an arrow in the back. It came out in front on the right side of the chest. The late Balot fell screaming in pain. Matamuheka shot him point blank again with an arrow in the right side. It came out on the left side. The White Man was still moving, sometimes opening his eyes and mouth. He was lying on his back. I put my knees between his legs and examined his wounds. The eyes and the mouth no longer moved. I opened his shirt and observed a weak beating of the heart. The White Man wasn't dead yet. Then I wanted to take the title for myself of a great chief [*fumu ya mbandji*] and cut off his head. I was drenched in blood.²⁵

Sh'a Gindungu took the head but it was not until the next day that the rest of the body was divided among eight or more communities (Sikitele 1986:1054–57).

It is a tough and dirty business to kill a man without a gun, especially a recognized *ngunza* such as a colonial official. According to Sh'a Gindungu, Matemo's nerve failed and he would have let Balot get away. Young men sometimes translate "ngunza" in French as "assassin," highlighting the psychology of a stone cold killer who acts with malice aforethought and often with sanction from above. However, technically, the *ngunza* is someone who has spilled blood, a lot of blood, in killing a dan-

gerous adversary (a dog, a crocodile, a leopard, a human). The method par excellence of the *ngunza* is cutting off the head with a single blow (*kusamba*)—he "slaughters" his opponent.

On that fateful day, Sh'a Gindungu delivered the coup de grâce and donned the blood red feather from the *nduwa* bird (Lady Ross's turaco). In fact, it was this feather that betrayed him when a Pende policeman recognized its significance (Vanderstraeten 2001:143). He was too proud to get rid of it when he was arrested. In his defiant confession, Sh'a Gindungu stressed how he had acted with deliberation and how he had been drenched with blood in order to claim the title of *ngunza*.

The choice to cut off the head was meaningful. During colonial conquest, Belgians sometimes took heads as trophies.²⁶ There was precedent for Pende chiefs to display skulls of warriors killed in battle.²⁷ Furthermore, at the investiture of a paramount chief (*fumu ya mbandji*), the candidate must recite his genealogy and then move quickly to strike off the head of a ram in a single blow (Strother 2000a:49–50). Folklore claims that the office once required the execution of a man. The candidate's success demonstrates that the dead approve his election. Realizing that Balot was dying, Sh'a Gindungu saw the opportunity of transforming the skirmish into a ritual act of investiture justifying his election as *fumu ya mbandji*.

From the narrative, it appears that Sh'a Gindungu shot Balot from the front on the left side of his chest so that the arrow came out the back. A second man shot him in the back after he had turned to flee. This arrow came out the right side of his chest. Balot fell and a third man shot him through his right side so that



11. Sh'a Gindungu, the man who confessed to killing Balot. Van Inthout papers.

the arrow came out the left side. The narrative stresses that Balot was shot at point blank range—"pierced"—by three separate arrows coming from three separate directions (from the front, from the back, and from the right side).

How likely is it that three arrows exited the torso without hitting bone? The story of how Balot was killed must have spread like wildfire and there are signs that it was perfected in the telling.²⁸ Perhaps Balot was brought down by three arrows, but three is a perfect number in Pende ritual symbolizing completeness.²⁹ Four—representing the cardinal directions—is a less common but equally resonant image of wholeness. Sh'a Gindungu recounts that it took *four* men to kill Balot, counting Matemo who struck the first blow.

The piercing of the statue also plays off three and four (Fig. 7). It is tempting therefore to see the emphasis on the complete piercing of the body of the statue as a reference to how the man himself was shot through from multiple directions. However, the statue was pierced from four directions (not three) on three different levels.³⁰

Gudijiga (see sidebar, p. 64) refers to the burial of individuals who have turned against the community. Even today, for example, suicides by hanging will be cut down and allowed to fall into a hole prepared with a bed of thorns. Many described this as a gesture of contempt that reinforced the appalling burial curse: "Go underground [and become food for] maggots."³¹ The memory of pain and shame will inhibit the spirit from seeking reincarnation. It is possible that the pricking of the figure both recalls the circumstances of Balot's death and conveys contempt.

There was a (limited) history for displaying skulls among the Pende but exceptionally other parts of Balot's body were distributed to a number of neighboring communities. Whoever accepted relics was complicit and could only hope to survive by standing united.³² Sikitele (profiting from numerous interviews in 1970) has confirmed suspicions that certain elders also hoped to "capture" (*kukuata*) some of Balot's life force as a warlike individual to strengthen [*kukolesa*] their power objects [*wanga*] (1986:1058). Others sought a historical memento to confirm for

posterity their participation in a momentous event. Despite desperate efforts, the Belgians were unable to recuperate more than one-third of the body and Sikitele believes that certain relics were preserved until after Independence.³³

Balot's death was unforeseen and the carving made after the fact. In any case, specialists *do not* assemble power objects with the goal of making the represented individual suffer (on the model of Hollywood "voodoo dolls" stuck full of pins).³⁴ Instead, the form of the carving speaks allegorically, indicating something about the nature of the spirit contained or the function of the power object.

In the normal course of events, spirits housed in chiefly statues are junior family members, whose journey to the other world has been temporarily suspended so that they may guard the community. Since the spirit must eventually be released, the statues are never intended to be permanent and the forty-year life for the European figure is exceptional. Since the Belgian was not related by blood, and would have no good will for the community, his spirit would have to be "enslaved" to be transformed from aggressor into bodyguard.

Gudijiga speculated that the vertical pole driven through the figure might recall a spit made for smoking game animals. When segments of Balot's body were distributed to outlying communities, they must have been smoked for preservation. The official records do not speak of this but it is a reasonable assumption given what was recovered.³⁵ Again, the manipulation of the figure recalls the treatment of the man but takes on additional symbolic connotations. The unique insertion of a vertical shaft of wood immobilizes the figure from head to toe (Fig. 7).³⁶

Although Balot was shot through by three arrows on the level of the chest, what is striking about these horizontal shafts is that they all intersect with the vertical pole from four directions on the level of the brow, chest, and knees, as if securing the vertical pole in place. Many Pende were buried through the 1940s upright, in fetal position, with their knees tied to the chest. In the case of predatory chiefs, sorcerers, or "bad deaths," the com-

munity would often take the precaution of “nailing” the knees by running them through with a metal rod, which passed through the upper arms. Oral historian Sh’a Kabeya (b. 1917) explained that this gesture was necessary so that the deceased would not have the “strength” to free himself and to return to trouble the living. Sacrificial victims (rams or dogs) will have their legs broken before they are placed in a grave in order to impede their locomotion.³⁷

The territorial agent reveals himself in his “dangerous eyes” and yet he is forced to deflect his gaze and to accept his subordination. He stands at attention and is transfixed as if by the spit used to smoke his body. He is immobilized, pinned, the form of the statue expressing visually a prayer directed to the dead to maintain control over Balot’s unruly spirit and to direct it to beneficial purposes for the community.

The discoveries of Woodward and Gillis prove beyond a doubt that the statue of the colonial officer served as a power object. The calculated modifications to the interior of the work could serve no other function. The work served as a locus for power and yet that force had to be tamed and redirected. Ashis Nandy describes the “ultimate violence which colonialism does to its victims, namely that it creates a culture in which the ruled are constantly tempted to fight their rulers within the psychological limits set by the latter” (Nandy 1983:3). The specialists who crafted the statue of M. Balot resisted the temptation described by Nandy to adopt the psychology of the colonizer and instead sought to change the terms of engagement, to create a space of liberation defined according to their own terms. As such, the work provides important evidence on the inner life of colonialism and the psychology of rebellion. Nevertheless, it was not usually deemed necessary to make such extensive modifications to empower a work (e.g., Fig. 2). Consequently, the multiplicity of interventions and the precision with which they were executed signal acute danger and betray doubts from within about the odds of success for the rebellion underway.

EPILOGUE

—HERBERT F. WEISS

The Pende Revolt was short lived, lasting only about four months, and its repression reached a level of harshness that was surprising even by the standards of the early 1930s. The rebels faced many obstacles: not all Pende and few members of neighboring groups joined them, they possessed no modern weapons, and the colonial authorities assembled a substantial military force against them.

Nonetheless, the stirrings that gave rise to the Revolt had a long-lasting impact: first, repeated opposition to state authority; second, a continuity of religiously inspired protest movements; and third, internal Pende antagonisms over which traditional leaders were legitimate (see sidebar, p. 64).

The next episode of Pende opposition to state authority came during the independence struggle. This time the vast majority of the Pende participated, and virtually all ethnic groups in what was then the Kwilu District allied with them under the leadership of the Parti Solidaire Africaine (PSA). Independence was achieved almost without violence though the use of force was envisioned if needed.

Just months after independence in 1960 Prime Minister Lumumba and his supporters—notably several PSA leaders—were driven from power. Three years later, the Kwilu became the first arena of what soon became the largest post-independence revolution in Africa. The leader of the Kwilu Rebellion was Pierre Mulele, an Mbuun and former PSA minister. The Kwilu Rebellion gained the support of the Mbuun and the Pende but failed to broaden its appeal beyond the Kwilu region and failed to connect geographically with the much larger Eastern Rebellion. Together, they controlled over half the Congo.

After the end of the Mobutu dictatorship (1965–1997), ex-PSA President Gizenga—a Pende—returned from exile and regained the leadership of the Kwilu population. He became the king-maker of the 2006 election that confirmed Joseph Kabila as president. Gizenga became prime minister. This post stayed in Pende hands for several years.

Religious dimensions of the Pende Revolt also persisted. The Tupelepe who survived the repression were given long prison sentences, sent into internal exile, and forced to work in gangs on roads (Blouin 1983:101–104). They were finally allowed to return to their homes in 1947, and according to Verhaegen (1966:47) this coincided with the emergence of a new religious movement, the Lupambula. In turn, this movement gave birth to another, the Mpeve. Its existence helped the PSA mobilize the Kwilu rural masses in 1960. But, this movement also was at the root of illusionary beliefs about what independence would bring. Farmers failed to plow their fields expecting the delivery of tractors—a curious echo of the Pende belief in 1931 that the ancestors would fill their warehouses with goods when they had driven the whites from their land, only this time the expectation was for Western goods.

During the Kwilu Rebellion (1963–65), supernatural powers were widely invoked and partisans received medicines to make them immune to the bullets of the Congo Army. Mulele, by this time a Maoist, opposed the use of rituals appealing to the supernatural, but that did not stop the practice. Indeed, with the Kwilu Rebellion, as in the earlier Pende Revolt, the religious dimension fed the fervor of rural radicalism. The power figure representing Maximilien Balot is a remarkable testament to this, as are the *njinda* sculptures, while new forms of divination instruments and masks (Strother 2000b, 1998:ch. 8) created by the Pende throughout the colonial era reflect the dimensions of religious response to their dire circumstances.

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1 The new nation was initially called the Republic of the Congo (1960–64), followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1964–71), and Republic of Zaïre (1971–97). In May 1997, it became again the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

2 When one looks at violent protest movements in sub-Saharan Africa today, most are rural despite the phenomenal growth of urban populations. In contrast with North Africa, sub-Saharan cities have rarely risen in violent protest.

3 This explanation strongly suggests that the figure was produced *during* the revolt—afterwards there were lots of whites present.

4 Jungers, a Belgian senior magistrate based in Leopoldville, was sent to investigate the causes of the Pende Revolt after it had been successfully repressed. His report is a rare and extraordinary colonial document proving that sometimes Belgian colonial officials could not get away with incredible and illegal acts of oppression with complete impunity. Jungers rose to the rank of Governor General in later years.

5 The best sources on the Tupelepele movement are Vanderhallen, “Révolte des Bapende” (dated 31 Dec. 1931) (in Gusimana n.d.) and Sikitele 1986:922–43. The message of returning to the practices established by one’s ancestors could appeal to Congolese across ethnic and language borders. The founding prophet was half-Pende, half-Sonde, and the Tupelepele also found adherents among Kwese, Sonde, and Chokwe, 1930–31. There is a rich literature on the Pende Revolt, including Gusimana wa Mama 1970; Mulambu-Mvuluya 1971; Sikitele 1973, 1976, 1986; Robin 1979; Van Inthout 1993; and Vanderstraeten 2001.

6 Today, as in earlier years, there is a proliferation of religious movements. Many terms have been used to distinguish them from more recognized religions; “églises de salut,” “messianic,” “prophetic,” “religio-political sects,” “religions of despair,” “syncretic,” etc. The validity of these distinct appellations is questionable. We can identify them by the words they use to designate themselves, or we can call them religions and then add an analytic designation explaining why we believe they appeared—for instance, out of despair given existing living conditions.

7 The original “red rubber” scandal occurred during the years of the Congo Free State (1885–1908) and was concentrated in the King’s domain and Equateur District (Marchal 1996a, 1996b; Hochschild 1998). Reforms were put into place when Belgium took control of the colony from King Leopold II in 1908. However, many practices rendered illegal (e.g., the taking of women as hostages) came back during the Depression, particularly in ill-supervised regions such as the Kwilu.

8 “The greater number of these detainees were mustered . . . in Kabobola, where Vanderhallen set the *chicote* [whip] working for as long as was necessary (40 lashes per session) in order to recover a good part of Balot’s remains” (Marchal 2008:167). Marchal cites *Annales*, June 21, 1932, pp. 2149–50.

9 For African depictions of Europeans more broadly see Lips 1937, Jahn 1983, and Quarcoopome 2009. The statue of Maximilien Balot is different from other statues of colonials in being a charged power object for Pende use, a key point pursued in this article.

10 The tilt is 8 to 10 degrees below horizontal (level) and the turn is 10–12 degrees left of center. The extent of movement in each direction is too great to be a matter of chance or ineptitude and contributes decidedly to the menacing psychology of the sculpted figure.

11 Both eyelids have deep lateral scratches. Though they were clearly deliberate, surface evidence indicates these scratches were made after the wood had dried,

making it difficult to determine when or why the eyes were defaced in this manner.

12 There is no evidence of burning by repeated application of a heated metal rod, a technique often used for making holes in wood.

13 Blade made by Daniel Tokar. Thanks to conservator Amy Fernandez Byrne for suggesting that a blade be fabricated.

14 Identification by Michael C. Wiemann, Forest Products Laboratory, Center for Wood Anatomy Research, Forest Service, US Department of Agriculture.

15 For significant reports concerning radiographic examination of African art see Kaehr, Perrois, and Ghysels 2007, Bouttiaux and Ghysels 2008, Hersak 2010, 2013. Additional studies and CT images can be found on Marc Ghysel’s website: <http://www.scantix.com/varia/bibliography/>

16 Balot’s biography is drawn from his two service files (Brussels, Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Archives africaines, SPA 480 (K62) and SPA 15998 (K2615). There are small inconsistencies in the records and the most trustworthy summation is probably found in the letter arguing for his readmission into colonial service (SPA 480 [K62], Letter No. 295, dated May 10, 1930). I thank Archivist Alain Gérard for his help in identifying these records with their accompanying photograph.

Balot received posthumously the Croix de Chevalier de l’Ordre de la Couronne on July 29, 1931, shortly before his widow returned to Belgium and was subsequently buried in the cemetery of Banningville (Bandundu) with full military honors on October 15, 1931, when the investigation into his death was nearing an end.

17 Brussels, Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Archives africaines, SPA 480 (K62), “Notes biographiques,” dated Aug. 8, 1918.

18 A letter dated May 10, 1930, from the Personnel Office of the Ministry of the Colonies to the Governor General recommended the “readmission of M. Balot to colonial service,” as agent territorial (in the highest grade), citing “excellent” reports from the Labor Exchange (SPA 480 [K62], Letter No. 295). His immediate superior believed that the circumstances of his appointment made Balot afraid to fail (Van Inthout 1993:81).

19 Balot’s overall score was 85.5. Brussels, Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Archives africaines, SPA 15998 (K2615), Report of March 23, 1931, signed by Commissaire de District Jules Adolphe Vanderhallen.

20 Dembour (2000) found that “prestige” and “command” were constantly on the mind of Belgian colonials even after World War II and were cited as grounds to bar women from service.

21 For an in-depth discussion of physiognomy, based on extensive interviews with Central Pende sculptors, see Strother 1998:ch. 5–6.

22 Christophe Gudijiga’s comment references the brass rods in Fig. 7, which is the photo he was shown.

23 Gudijiga is not here speaking of cannibalism (see n. 32). He is making the point that relics taken from Balot required preservation and that practices developed for drying meat make a natural prototype. Oral history says that Matemo struck the first blow on Balot with the ceremonial sword *pogo ya khusa* (Gusimana 1970:68, Sikitele 1986:1031, 1052–53) (Fig. 3). It may be this interpretation which brought to mind a legend that great Kwilu Pende chiefs sheath their ceremonial blade in human skin. Although *pogo ya khusa* is often displayed in public, the sheath of skin is a matter of whisper and conjecture. Unsubstantiated rumors that great chiefs break the rules of human society reinforce their mystique. (ZSS)

24 For a full analysis of Pende power objects, see Strother 2000, 2014–15.

25 “Après que [Matemo] avait frappé le Blanc avec

son couteau, moi, Fumu-shiko et Matamuheka [Mwata Muheka] lui avons tiré chacun une flèche. Feu Balot s’était enfui et c’est alors que nos flèches le percèrent. Nous étions tous trois suivis par nos hommes. Je tirai la première flèche à bout portant du côté gauche de la poitrine. Elle sortait par le dos. Le Blanc avançait encore mais très lentement. Fumushiko lui lança une flèche à bout portant dans le dos. Elle sortait devant du côté droit de la poitrine. Feu Balot tomba en criant de douleur. Matamuheka lui tira alors toujours à bout portant une flèche dans le côté droit. Elle sortait du côté gauche. Le Blanc remuait encore ouvrant parfois les yeux et la bouche. Il était étendu sur le dos. Je posai alors mes genoux entres ses jambes et regardai les blessures. Les yeux et la bouche ne bougeaient plus. J’ouvris la chemise et constatai de faibles battements de cœur. Le Blanc n’était donc pas mort. Je voulus alors m’attribuer le titre de grand chef et coupai la tête. J’étais inondé de sang” (Vanderstraeten 2001:142). Vanderhallen gives more data on the interrogation of Shà Gindungu, whom he describes as “haughty, arrogant, contemptuous. Although Shà Gindungu confessed freely, it took torture to make him reveal where he had buried the head” (Vanderhallen n.d.:2–3).

26 For analysis of this phenomenon, see Roberts 2013. He quotes Emile Storms: “People know that I have taken a few chiefs’ heads in my collection, and it inspires bloody horror” (Roberts 2013:145). The most notorious Belgian headhunter was Léon Rom, the station master at Stanley Falls (Kisangani), who exhibited twenty-one heads in his garden in 1895. Hochschild believes that he served as a model for Kurtz in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1998:144–49).

27 Torday met Kwilu Pende Chief Yongo in 1906, who received him sitting in a shelter displaying a number of skulls on sticks (Torday and Joyce 1907:149). Torday recognizably describes a *mbandji* altar, which paramount chiefs maintain in front of their ritual houses, usually adorned with the skulls of predators, once leopards and crocodiles, today usually civets or genets.

28 See Roberts 2013:ch. 2 on political narratives in Eastern Congo.

29 According to a favorite proverb: “It takes three chunks of termite nest to balance a cooking pot over the fire” (*Mafika thatu, zungu ya kuata tsuya*).

30 Among the Eastern Pende, the chief’s ritual house (*kibulu*) also plays off three and four. The house is square, laid out by applying the length of a palm frond three times along each wall. Since a mature palm frond often measures around a meter in length, the house is approximately three meters square. The house creates a safe and controlled portal to the other world.

31 *Uya kambolombolo, mavinyo*.

32 Jungers 1931, Vanderhallen 1931 in Gusimana 1980:6, Van Inthout 1993:82. Despite sensationalizing reports in the colonial press, Belgian officers charged with interrogation (including torture) never once leveled charges of cannibalism. See Arens (1979) for tools in analyzing the literature on cannibalism. In this case, the taking of relics inspired certain journalists to make false accusations in order to demonize the enemy.

33 Vanderhallen n.d.:3; Gusimana 1970:67; Sikitele 1973:147–48. Magistrate Jungers observed that torture had yielded “mediocre results” since those with knowledge of Balot’s body feared to be implicated in a capital crime (Vanderstraeten 2001:125).

34 The making of a miniature image to harm what it represents is one of the oldest ritual practices in *European* history extending in an unbroken chain from ancient Mesopotamia through ancient Greece and Rome up to the present (Betz 1992, De Meuter and Poriau 1995, Farone and Obbink 1991, Gager 1992). Practices originating in *European* witchcraft have recently been projected onto

Haitian vodoun. On mimesis (or naturalism) in Central Africa, see Strother 2014–15.

35 Vanderhallen n.d.:3. During parliamentary debate, the delegate M. Fieullien referred to a tanned piece of skin recovered (*Annales*, June 21, 1932, p. 2150).

36 The insertion of a vertical shaft of wood serves no obvious function. If the maker had intended to engineer a figure to be attached to a base or to stick it in the ground, he would have drilled from the foot up into the leg, but would not have needed to go all the way through the head. (RBW)

37 The external reviewer noted that the forehead, chest, and knees are “points of spiritual efficacy for other Congolese peoples,” which often receive medicinal charges during healing rituals. Could the piercing therefore serve as a “means to activate points of critical anatomical articulation”? The unusual rigidity of the figure with arms pressed to the side and knees locked argues against any form of activation (Fig. 3). The form of the sculpture instead communicates a concern for control and immobility, which resonates with Pende burial practices designed to inhibit movement of the deceased.

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