Bryn Mawr College Special Collections
SUPPLEMENTAL BOOKLET
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My Museum Studies Fieldwork Seminar PRAXIS placement was in Bryn Mawr Special Collections working on 12 Congolese ceramics. This collection was donated in January of 2022 by Wyatt MacGaffey, a former professor of anthropology at Haverford College.

From 1965 to 1970, Wyatt MacGaffey and his wife, Janet MacGaffey (Ph.D. 1981, Bryn Mawr College) lived in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, doing anthropological research. The MacGaffeys became friends with two potters, Mayivangwa Therese and Wadimbudla Esther, and Janet MacGaffey acquired various ceramics from these potters. These ceramics are the collection I have been studying. Janet MacGaffey wrote an article about the 12 ceramics, which has been a great source for my research. The article and a few ethnographic photographs were also donated to Bryn Mawr.
Janet MacGaffey's article, *Two Kongo Potters*, which details how the ceramics were made, who made them, and includes photographs of the ceramics now in Bryn Mawr's care.
An image of the entire Congolese ceramics collection that I was working on. Most of the collection is water pitchers.
In Janet MacGaffey's article *Teo Kongo Potters*, she states that the Congolese ceramics are from Vunda, a providence known for good clay that is 50 miles away from the Port of Matadi. This information is very helpful because it tells me exactly where the objects are from.
A labeled map of Africa with the Democratic Republic of the Congo highlighted

A labeled map of where Vunda is in relation to the Port of Matadi
What I Did

I firstly gave the 12 ceramics their accession numbers, a unique number assigned by Bryn Mawr so it is easy to locate it in the database. The ceramics all have accession numbers beginning with the number: 2022.7. Then I photographed the objects so people can see what these objects look like online.

One of the photographs I took for this collection.
Object: Four-Handled Water Pitcher (2022.7.6)
After giving the Congolese ceramics their accession numbers and photographing them, I inputted all the information that was detailed in the article about the ceramics into Bryn Mawr College's collection management database, EmBark Collections Manager.

An image of me inputting information onto EmBark
Aside from cataloging, rehousing, and photographing the collection I also conducted research on the Congolese ceramic collections to learn more about these objects. My initial questions for my research were these:

1. Why do the water pitchers have the shapes that they do?
2. What do the engraved motifs communicate?
3. Are there any secondary uses for these water pitchers?
I mostly did comparanda research, which is finding related objects (known as the comparanda object) to the object I am researching. For me, I tried to find comparanda objects that looked like any of the objects in Bryn Mawr's Congolese ceramics collection. This involves me going on massive databases and trying to find good comparanda objects. Based on the information I can glean from the comparanda object, I can go into more in-depth research to find out more about the collection.

An image of the African Heritage Document & Research Centre Database. I used this database to find out lots of comparanda objects and information on the collection.
In addition to the comparanda research, I also read up on African pottery or ceramics, to better understand African artistic practices. One of the most important books that helped me understand the water pitchers was *Nzungu: La Ceramique Bakongo* which was created by the Galerie Congo in Belgium.
The book, *Nzungu: La Ceramique Bakongo* gave lots of information that answered almost all of my initial research questions. From the information detailed in the book, I was able to determine that the water pitcher shapes came from the former **Kakongo Kingdom region**. All of the engraved decorative motifs (cross-hatching, protruding circular motifs, squiggly lines, slanted verticle lines) are evocative of traditional Kakongo ceramic motifs.

**Kakongo Kingdom region**: The Kakongo Kingdom is an ancient African empire established in the 1600s that is located on the Atlantic coast and was part of the Kongo Kingdom which ranged from present-day Angola through western present-day DRC.
A historical map of the Kongo and Kakongo Kingdoms. The circle details where the water pitcher motifs and shapes came from.
Example of the traditional Kakongo engraved motifs

The slanted vertical lines are a staple of traditional Kakongo ceramic motifs.

The squiggly zig-zagging line is a staple of traditional Kakongo ceramic motifs.

The cross-hatching is a staple of traditional Kakongo ceramic motifs.

Object: M'vungu (Stirrup-Handled Water Pitcher) 2022.7.4 a-b
Further research on Congolese ceramics will answer some questions that have arisen since I have begun this project. Various books on Congolese pottery said that water pitchers were placed on graves and were part of funerary practices. It is unclear if these particular objects would have this secondary function since the pitchers I was studying were made for the market. The zig-zagging line in Kakongo ceramics is evocative of a serpent, which is believed to be the source of men in certain Congolese spiritual belief systems. Water and serpents are used commonly as motifs in Kakongo ceramics and Kakongo funerary practices. Whether these ceramics are used in funerary practices is yet to be determined.