

CENTRAL AFRICA COLLECTIONS AT RAMM - A SUMMARY

The full object list below has been compiled from the RAMM database, object data sheets, archives and accession registers. 180 objects were seen and photographed in early 2006, including 64 objects from the Dennett collection. This is by far the most significant part of RAMM's Central Africa collection - it contains a third of the artefacts, is the only large and well-documented group of Central African objects, and has great historical significance. Other than 20 or so objects for which the donor is unknown, the remainder of the collection was donated by at least 30 different local donors from Exeter, Devon and surrounding areas. These people donated one, several, or up to about 10 objects. Their names indicate that some of them, or their ancestors, may have been missionaries, military personnel or engineers, or otherwise worked or travelled in Central Africa. In addition to these, four groups of objects come from other institutions - a 1939 'loan' from Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (5 objects), a donation from Blundell's School in Tiverton (2 objects); a 1938 exchange with Reading Museum and Art Gallery (3 objects) and a 1993 'loan' from Woodspring Museum in Weston-Super-Mare (11 objects). It is unlikely that any of these individual donors are represented in other museum collections or elsewhere, or that the institutional sources have further documentation, so these avenues have not been pursued at present. Instead, the project has focused on identifying the objects themselves and on researching Dennett.

Dennett donated his collection to RAMM in 1889, just two years after his first book, 'Seven Years Among the Fjort', was published. This book contains a photograph of his collection (1889: 48) which depicts many objects which are still in RAMM's collections, including the dance costume and masks. Other objects are depicted which are no longer in the collection, and there are objects in the collection which are not depicted in the photograph. Unfortunately, the image is of very poor quality and no original photograph has yet been found. At this time, Dennett was living and working in Africa. Presumably he decided to give the collection to RAMM because his family lived at Ashton, near Exeter. Dennett refers to the collection at the 'Exeter Museum' in his later book, 'At the Back of the Black Man's Mind' (1906: 19), which is dedicated to his father.

There is just one entry in RAMM's 1873-1901 accession register for the Dennett collection, which is transcribed below. Separate sub-numbers were allocated at a later date. There appears to be no other original documentation at RAMM relating to the collection.

"Date: 1889. Aug. 26

Catalogue No: 89.9.7 ['- 89.9. 48,49 (skins) destroyed' has been added in pencil]

Description: Collection of ethnological objects from Cacongo, S. Africa ['and West Africa' added in pencil] Collected by Mr. R. E. Dennett.

Donor or how obtained: R.E. Dennett Esq Ashton. Nr. Exeter."

Looking at the collection as a whole, the most numerous categories are as follows: weapons and tools (including blacksmiths' bellows) (87); figures and power bundles (31 - but not all figures are power-figures and other objects may also have magical

significance); smoking pipes (17); clothing (knitted/knotted hats, fibre skirts and a netted cape) (16); musical instruments (12); carved wooden spoons (12); containers including baskets, pots, wooden containers, a net bag and a box carved with a leopard (16). Numerically smaller but also interesting areas include body ornaments (10), combs (6) and mirrors (2). Items of ceremonial wear include a complete costume, two masks and a head-dress. Textiles include a barkcloth and a small piece of Kuba raffia cloth. Other items include paddles (3), a staff-top carved with a leopard, and samples including tobacco, a piece of medicinal bark and a metal currency bar.

Numerically, the largest category of objects in the collection is weapons and tools. However, little significance can be attached to this bias, as the prevalence of weapons is a common phenomenon in many ethnographic collections. Statistics for the Dennett collection differ from those of the collection as a whole - its strength lies in power figures and bundles, reflecting his reputation as an expert on Central African religion, and his publication record. The items of clothing and other religious and ceremonial objects in his collection, including the dance costume and two masks, are also notable. The following tables summarise the collections as a whole.

YEAR	NUMBER	OBJECT	DONOR
1866	E 583/1	Drum	Redway
1866	E 583/2	Drum sticks	Redway
1868	E 1395	Figure - nkisi	Dunn
1869	E 551	Throwing knife	Hamilton
1872	E 632	Pipe bowl	D'Urban
1872	E 633	Pipe bowl	D'Urban
1872	E 634	Pipe bowl	D'Urban
1872	E 1405/1	Pluriarc	Barrett
1874	E 1409	Female figure	Jones, W
1874	E 640	Spear	Jones, W
1875?	E 1454	Spear	Jansen
1875?	E 1455	Spear	Jansen
1875?	E 705.1	Spear	Drew
1875	E 705.2	Spear	Drew
1877	E 564	Throwing knife	D'Urban
1889	89/9/39	Figure - nkisi	Dennett
1889	89/9/40	Bundle - nkisi	Dennett
1889	89/9/41	Bundle - nkisi	Dennett
1889	89/9/42	Bundle - nkisi	Dennett
1889	89/9/43	Costume	Dennett
1889	89/9/44	Bundle - nkisi	Dennett
1889	89/9/45	Bundle - nkisi	Dennett
1889	89/9/46	Mask	Dennett
1889	89/9/47	Mask	Dennett
1889	89/9/48	Skin sample	Dennett
1889	89/9/49	Skin sample	Dennett
1889	89/9/50	Skin sample	Dennett
1889	89/9/51	Two chairs	Dennett
1889	89/9/52	Pluriarc	Dennett
1889	89/9/53	Figure - nkisi	Dennett
1889	89/9/54	Figure - nkisi	Dennett
1889	89/9/55	Staff with leopard	Dennett
1889	89/9/56	Pot - nkisi	Dennett
1889	89/9/57	Nkisi - dog	Dennett
1889	89/9/58	Knife & sheath	Dennett
1889	89/9/59	Cape	Dennett
1889	89/9/60	Figure - nkisi	Dennett
1889	89/9/61	Nkisi - dog	Dennett
1889	89/9/62	Figure - nkisi	Dennett
1889	89/9/63	Figure - nkisi	Dennett
1889	89/9/64	Figure - nkisi	Dennett
1889	89/9/65	Bracelet	Dennett
1889	89/9/66	Nkisi - shell	Dennett

1889	89/9/67	Nkisi - shell	Dennett
1889	89/9/68	Box - leopard	Dennett
1889	89/9/69	Pot	Dennett
1889	89/9/70	Clay pipe	Dennett
1889	89/9/71	Clay pipe	Dennett
1889	89/9/72	Clay pipe	Dennett
1889	89/9/73	Nkisi - tobacco ball	Dennett
1889	89/9/74	Broom	Dennett
1889	89/9/75	Nkisi - tobacco ball	Dennett
1889	89/9/76	Two pots	Dennett
1889	89/9/77	Pot	Dennett
1889	89/9/78	Pot - crucible?	Dennett
1889	89/9/79	Pot	Dennett
1889	89/9/80	Pot	Dennett
1889	89/9/81	Nkisi - shell	Dennett
1889	89/9/82	Cap	Dennett
1889	89/9/83	Cap	Dennett
1889	89/9/84	Cap	Dennett
1889	89/9/85	Cap	Dennett
1889	89/9/86	Cap	Dennett
1889	89/9/87	Two baskets	Dennett
1889	89/9/88	Dagger	Dennett
1889	89/9/89	Dagger & sheath	Dennett
1889	89/9/90	Dagger	Dennett
1889	89/9/91	Dagger	Dennett
1889	89/9/92	Dagger	Dennett
1889	89/9/93	Dagger	Dennett
1889	89/9/94	Spoon	Dennett
1889	89/9/95	Fork	Dennett
1889	89/9/96	Spoon	Dennett
1889	89/9/97	Spoon	Dennett
1889	89/9/98	Figure - nkisi	Dennett
1889	89/9/99	Sheath	Dennett
1889	89/9/100	Sheath	Dennett
1889	89/9/101	Sheath	Dennett
1889	89/9/102	Slit-gong/beater?	Dennett
1889	89/9/103	Bellows	Dennett
1889	89/9/104	Clay funnel	Dennett
1889	89/9/105	Fibre bag	Dennett
1889	89/9/106	Double bell/rattle	Dennett
1889	89/9/107	Nkisi - bundle	Dennett
1889	89/9/108	Spoon	Dennett
1889	89/9/109	Bark	Dennett
1889	89/9/110	Nkisi - bundle	Dennett
1889	89/9/111	Paddle	Dennett

1889	89/9/112	Spear	Dennett
1889	89/9/113	Girdle/twine	Dennett
1895	3/1895/9	Knife	Purchased
1900	1900/11/29	Necklace	Peek
1920	8/1920	Barkcloth	Brown
1923	8/1923/2	Whip	Oke Smith
1923	35/1923	Figure - male	De Carteret
1925	65/1925/5	Spear	Reese
1925	65/1925/6	Spearhead	Reese
1925	65/1925/7	Spearhead	Reese
1925	65/1925/10	Spear	Reese
1925	65/1925/11	Spear	Reese
1929	79/1929/6	Figure - nkisi	Jackson
1931	80/1931/128	Wooden pipe	Dyson
1931	80/1931/129	Wooden pipe	Dyson
1931	80/1931/134	Clay pipe	Dyson
1931	80/1931/136	Clay pipe	Dyson
1931	80/1931/137	Clay pipe	Dyson
1931	80/1931/138	Clay pipe	Dyson
1931	106/1931/1b	Scabbard	Glover
1931	106/1931/5	Club - figural	Glover
1931	106/1931/16	Knife	Glover
1931	106/1931/17	Knife	Glover
1931	106/1931/21	Knife	Glover
1931	106/1931/22	Knife	Glover
1931	106/1931/23	Knife	Glover
1931	106/1931/24	Sword	Glover
1931	106/1931/37	Dance rattle	Glover
1931	106/1931/38	Pipe	Glover
1931	106/1931/39	Pipe	Glover
1931	106/1931/40	Pipe	Glover
1931	106/1931/41	Pipe	Glover
1931	106/1931/42	Axe	Glover
1932	91/1932/1	Sheath	Woods
1932	91/1932/2	Axe	Woods
1932	91/1932/3	Throwing knife	Woods
1932	91/1932/5	Knife	Woods
1932	91/1932/8	Knife & scabbard	Woods
1932	91/1932/48	Axe	Woods
1934	88/1934/6	Club	Pass
1938	15/1938/20	Axe	?
1938	48/1938/1	Kuba cloth	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/2	Cloth 'curtain'	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/3	2 barkcloths	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/4/1	Waist ornament	Rose-Troup

1938	48/1938/4/2	Waist ornament	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/4/3	Waist ornament	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/4/4	Waist ornament	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/4/5	Waist ornament	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/4/6	Waist ornament	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/4/7	Waist ornament	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/4/8	Waist ornament	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/5	Fan	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/6 a-b	2 baskets/tobacco	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/7	Basket	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/8/1	Wooden pot	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/8/2	Wooden pot	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/9	Neck-rest	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/10	Spoon	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/11	Knife/scabbard	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/12	Metal bracelet	Rose-Troup
1938	48/1938/13	Brass beads	Rose-Troup
1938	57/1938/18	Bracelet	C.Francis/Blundell's School
1938	57/1938/20	Axe	C.Francis/Blundell's School
1938	57/1938/27	Spear	C.Francis/Blundell's School
1938	57/1938/30	Spear	C.Francis/Blundell's School
1938	100/1938/1	Harpoon	Reading M&AG exchange
1938	100/1938/2	Spear	Reading M&AG exchange
1938	100/1938/3	Shield	Reading M&AG exchange
1938	100/1938/4	Rattle	Reading M&AG exchange
1939	E 4368	Knife	Bristol M&AG 'loan'
1939	E 5377	Knife	Bristol M&AG 'loan'
1939	E 5378	Knife	Bristol M&AG 'loan'
1939	E 5388	Knife	Bristol M&AG 'loan'
1944	12/1944/5	2 fire-sticks	Howarth
1945	9/1945/12	Comb	Waterfield
1948	50/1948/13	Knife	Tabor
1948	60/1948/82/1-5	5 arrows	Broun
1948	60/1948/90	Stool	Broun
1949	49/1949/135	Club	McAlpine Woods
1949	89/1949/4	Figure-black	Buckler
1950	27/1950	Flint flake	McAlpine Woods
1950	49/1950/1	Knife	Woods
1950	49/1950/2	Knife	Woods
1950	49/1950/3	Dagger in sheath	Linn
1950	58/1958/3	Knife in sheath	Linn
1959	26/1959/3	Figure-black	Cooper
1974	55/1974	Xylophone	?
1974	64/1974/39	Figure	Woodspring Museum 'loan'
1986	56/1986/1	Arrow	?

1986	56/1986/2	Arrow	?
1986	56/1986/3	Arrow	?
1986	56/1986/4	Arrow	?
1986	56/1986/5	Arrow	?
1986	63/1986/1	Paddle	?
1986	63/1986/2	Paddle	?
1986	83/1986	Harpoon	?
1986	106/1986/1	Spearhead	?
1986	106/1986/2	Spearhead	?
1986	106/1986/3	Spearhead	?
1993	106/1993/2	Spoon	Woodspring Museum
1993	106/1993/3	Spoon	Woodspring Museum
1993	106/1993/4	Spoon	Woodspring Museum
1993	106/1993/5	Spoon	Woodspring Museum
1993	106/1993/6	Spoon	Woodspring Museum
1993	106/1993/7	Spoon	Woodspring Museum
1993	106/1993/8	Gourd rattle	Woodspring Museum
1993	106/1993/9	Gourd rattle	Woodspring Museum
1993	106/1993/10	Comb	Woodspring Museum
1993	106/1993/11	Mirror	Woodspring Museum
1993	106/1993/12	Mirror	Woodspring Museum
1993	106/1993/13	Comb	Woodspring Museum
1993	106/1993/14	Comb	Woodspring Museum
1993	106/1993/15	Comb	Woodspring Museum
1993	106/1993/16	Comb	Woodspring Museum
1993	118/1993	Mask	Richard Edwards
1993	136/1993/46	Barkcloth	Woodspring Museum
1996	17/1996/6	Spear	?
1996	17/1996/16	Spear	?
1998	193/1998	Headdress	Mrs Helen Jones
2000	97/2000/3	Pipe	?
2000	97/2000/4	Pipe	?
2000	97/2000/5	Pipe	?
2000	136/2000/52	Rattle	?
2000	158/2000/1/1	Bracelet	?
2000	158/2000/1/2	Bracelet	?
2000	158/2000/2	Axe	?
2000	158/2000/3	Knife	?
2002	2/2002	Power bundle	Shirley Blaylock
2003	19/2003	Tobacco sample	?
2005	136/2005/3	Pipe	Weston-Super-Mare Museum
2005	136/2005/4	Pipe	Weston-Super-Mare Museum
2005	458/2005	Axe	McDonald
2005	601/2005/3	Ingot	McDonald

SUMMARY OF OBJECT TYPES IN THE RAMM COLLECTION

TYPE	TOTAL	DENNETT	OTHER COLLECTORS
Body ornaments	10	1	5
Clothing	16	7	9
Combs	6	0	6
Containers - bags	1	1	0
Containers - baskets	5	2	3
Containers - boxes	1	1	0
Containers - wood	2	0	2
Containers - pots	7	5	0
Furniture	3	0	0
Masks	3	2	1
Mirrors	2	0	2
Musical instruments	12	3	7
Paddles	3	1	2
Pipes	17	3	14
Figures/bundles	31	20	8
Samples	7	1	2
Spoons	12	5	6
Staffs	1	1	0
Textiles	6	0	4
Tools	8	4	1
Weapons	79	8	48
TOTAL OBJECTS	233	65	120

SUMMARY OF RAMM COLLECTION SOURCES

Institutions

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery loan	5 objects
c. C.Francis; d. The Governors, Blundell's School, Tiverton	3
xch. Reading Mus & AG (1938), Curator A.W. Smallcombe	3
Woodspring Museum loan, Weston-Super-Mare	11

Individuals

Barrett , Mr. W.M.	1
Blaylock, Ms. S.	1
Broun, Mrs. M.A.	1
Brown, Mr. A.F.	2
Buckler, Mr. J.	1
Cooper, Dr. H.J.	1
De Carteret, Mr. Val. G.	1
Dennett, R.E.	64
Dunn, Mr.	1
D'Urban, Lieutenant Gen'l W.S.M.	1
Dyson , Rev. F.J.	6
Edwards, Mr. R.	1
Glover, Dr. W.E.	9
Hamilton, Mr. G. de Courcy	1
Jackson, Miss G.	1
Jansen, Mr. H.U.	1
Jones, Mrs. H.	1
Jones, Mr. W.	2
Kensham, Mr. W.D.	2
Linn, I.J.	1
McAlpine Woods, J.	2
McDonald, Mr. I.R.	1
Oke Smith, Mrs.	1
Pass , Mr. D.	1
Peek, Sir C.E.	1
Peel, C.A.V.	1
Reese, Mrs,	4
Redway, Mr. R.	3
Rose-Troup, Mrs F.	16
Tabor, Major E.	1
Waterfield, Mr. R.	1
Woods, Mr H.F.G.	7
Unknown	19