

Belgian Collectors of Musical Instruments from the Perspective of Critical Organology¹ and Museology

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Abstract

Between 1850 and the First World War, about a hundred Belgian collectors of musical instruments were active, although some of them, such as Adolphe Sax, were living abroad. This is an astonishingly large number, compared to the size of the country and its population – about 7.5 million people just before the First World War. Even more astonishing is the exceptional quality of these collections. The historical importance and great variety of artefacts in the collections of the notary César Snoeck, and of the instrument makers Adolphe Sax, Victor-Charles Mahillon and others, are beyond dispute. The collection of African musical instruments, at the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) in Tervuren – currently 8,500 items – is the largest and most important collection of African musical instruments worldwide. The present contribution considers the actions of these Belgian collectors from the perspective of »critical« organology.

Sammler von Musikinstrumenten in Belgien aus der Perspektive der kritischen Organologie und Museologie

Zwischen 1850 und dem Ersten Weltkrieg waren rund 100 belgische Musikinstrumentensammler aktiv, darunter auch einige wie Adolphe Sax, die im Ausland lebten. Im Hinblick auf die Größe des Landes und die Anzahl der Bevölkerung – kurz vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg ca. 7,5 Mio. – ist dies eine erstaunlich hohe Zahl. Noch erstaunlicher ist die außerordentliche Qualität dieser Sammlungen. Die historische Bedeutung sowie die große Vielfalt von Objekten in den Sammlungen des Notars César Snoeck, des Instrumentenbauers Adolphe Sax sowie von Victor-Charles Mahillon u. a. ist unbestritten. Die Sammlung Afrikanischer Musikinstrumente im Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) in Tervuren ist mit derzeit 8.500 Objekten die größte und bedeutendste Sammlung afrikanischer Musikinstrumente weltweit. Der vorliegende Beitrag betrachtet das Vorgehen dieser belgischen Sammler aus der Perspektive der sogenannten kritischen Organologie.

Belgian collectors in the 19th and 20th centuries

Even though only a minority of Belgian collections of musical instruments were of a relatively large size between 1840 and 1940,² the profiles of many such minor collectors are fairly well documented. Among them are music professionals and musicologists, enthusiastic music lovers, artists, and fine art experts or collectors.³ The path followed by collectors of

non-European instruments⁴ is also of major interest with regard to questions of identity and globalisation.

Unfortunately, information about collecting strategies and policies is available only in the case of the so-called organographes⁵, who were in fact a minority among Belgian collec-

- 1 The term »Critical Organology« has been used to denote critical writings on contextualizing musical instruments, cf. Sue Carole De Vale (Ed.): *Issues in organology* (Selected reports in ethnomusicology 8). Los Angeles 1990, pp. 1-34. – Eliot Bates: *The social life of musical instruments*. In: *Ethnomusicology* 56 / 3, 2012, pp. 363-395.
- 2 See the table in Ignace de Keyser: *Les collectionneurs belges à la fin du XIXe siècle*. In: *Musique – Images – Instruments*. *Revue française d'organologie et d'iconographie musicale* 9, 2007, pp. 74-101.
- 3 See de Keyser 2007 (note 2), pp. 77-84.

- 4 Auguste Herpin (52 instruments) in Cairo, Hubert Serruys (1846–post 1902; 26 Chinese instruments) in Shanghai and Caracas, Paul Hagemans (1853-1926; 10 Georgian instruments) in Tbilisi and Odessa, Jules Van Aalst (45 Chinese instruments) in Canton, Gustave Beckx (1819-1902; 7 instruments) in Melbourne. The inventories of the organological collections of Tervuren's RMCA mention 22 collectors who were active before the First World War, among them Henry Pareyn (d. 1928; 121 instruments), one of the first dealers in African ethnographic artifacts.
- 5 Victor-Charles Mahillon was the first to use the term »organographie musicale« for what we now call organology, in: *L'Echo musical* 7 / 14, 10. July 1875, p. ii–iii. The relevant quotation reads as follows (translation by the present author): »The Mahillon Company's museum of musical organography has been enriched with several instruments etc.« *L'Echo musical* was the Mahillon Company's magazine, and in this

tors. César Snoeck (1834-1898)⁶ was perhaps the most outspoken of the organographes in presenting his policy of collecting musical instruments. According to him, »the handling and use of various instruments of music would help to better understand their functions in an ensemble, and to better appreciate the talent of those who play them.«⁷ He expresses the desire to understand music in a tangible way and, in doing so, makes tangible an art that is as intangible as possible. Unlike the approach of systematic musicology, of Guido Adler and others, which was developing during this period, Snoeck's approach is neither theoretical, nor philological, but pragmatic (fig. 1).⁸

With his »museum«, Adolphe Sax (1814-1894)⁹ offered a material basis in the dispute concerning the originality of his inventions. However, the most interesting items are the

different prototypes of his new instruments, the numerous new models that he had developed and displayed in national or universal exhibitions. His endeavour of collecting many ancient Western musical instruments of a high quality, and of non-European instruments as well, suggests a curiosity about musical instruments as a highly efficient device of sound production across all cultures.¹⁰ Victor-Charles Mahillon (1841-1924)¹¹ – director of the musical instruments workshop founded by his father, acoustician, collector, and curator of the Brussels Conservatoire museum – worked with a view to one and the same idea in all his functions: he researched the workable parameters for making musical instruments. Mahillon's lifelong commitment to elevating musical instruments to the same level as classical works of art, preserved in the same way, i. e. as a public collection, can be understood as a celebration of the art of musical instrument making, a tribute to his own profession.¹²

The common trait shared between these three men is the seriousness with which these collectors approached musical instruments, not as a decorum, but as tangible sources of an intangible culture.

Organological premises

Since the publication of Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy's article on »The Beginnings of Organology and Ethnomusicology in the West«¹³, Victor-Charles Mahillon has been accused of »plagiarising« the Indian encyclopaedia »Natyasastra« when he established his fourfold instrument classification of auto-

article Mahillon describes recent acquisitions to the musical instrument collection of his own Company.

- 6 César Snoeck's »international« collection of 1.145 »ancient and curious« instruments was acquired by the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Berlin in 1902 and is now at the Musikinstrumenten-Museum of the Staatliches Institut für Musikforschung, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin. In 1908, the »Flemish and Dutch« collection joined the Conservatoire museum, now Brussels MIM. A final group of 363 items was purchased by Baron von Stackelbergh for Tsar Nicolas II of Russia in 1909, and these items are now housed in the St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music at Sheremetev Palace. See Ignace de Keyser: César Charles Snoeck. In: *The Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*, vol. 4, 2nd ed. Oxford 2014, p. 548.
- 7 The original quotation reads: »Un instinct naturel, un caprice, l'idée qu'il est utile, pour un simple amateur de connaître le maniement et l'emploi des divers instruments de musique, afin de mieux comprendre leurs fonctions dans ensemble, et de pouvoir mieux apprécier le talent de ceux qui en jouent.« See [César Snoeck:] *Catalogue de la collection d'instruments de musique anciens ou curieux formée par C. C. Snoeck*. With an introduction by Guy Rooryck. Ghent 1894, Reprint: Ghent 1999, p. III.
- 8 Ignace de Keyser: César Charles Snoeck. Rendering the intangible, tangible. In: *Through the eyes and ears of musical-instrument collectors (c. 1850-1940)*. Ed. by Christina Linsenmeyer. London (forthcoming).
- 9 Adolphe Sax's private collection consisted of 467 instruments, both Western European and Russian instruments, but also included non-European instruments. See Malou Haine, Ignace de Keyser: *Le Musée instrumental d'un artiste inventeur. La collection privée d'Adolphe Sax*. In: *Adolphe Sax. His influence and legacy. A bicentenary conference. Proceedings of the international conference. 3-5 July 2014 (Revue belge de musicologie / Belgisch tijdschrift voor muziekwetenschap 70)*. Ed. by Anne Emmanuelle Ceulemans, Géry Dumoulin, Howard Weiner. Brussels 2016, pp. 149-164.

10 Malou Haine, Ignace de Keyser: The rare museum of an artist and inventor. Adolphe Sax's collection of musical instruments. In: Linsenmeyer (forthcoming [note 8]).

11 Victor and Joseph Mahillon's collection comprised 369 ancient woodwind and brasswind instruments, harpsichords and virginals by Andreas Ruckers, Johannes Petrus Bull, Shudi & Broadwood, a Hammerflügel by André Stein, as well as Asian instruments. 167 further instruments, especially wind instruments, were donations by members of the Mahillon family. The whole collection is now part of Brussels MIM.

12 Ignace de Keyser: Celebrating the art of musical instrument making. The Musée d'organographie musicale of the Brussels Mahillon Company (1870-1883). In: Linsenmeyer (forthcoming [note 8]).

13 Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy: The beginnings of organology and ethnomusicology in the West. V. Mahillon, A. Ellis and S. M. Tagore. In: *Issues in organology (Selected reports in ethnomusicology 8)*. Ed. by Sue Carole De Vale. Los Angeles 1990, pp. 67-80.



1 César Snoeck as a one-man band, c. 1863. Courtesy of Brussels Musical Instruments Museum (MIM)

phones, aerophones, membranophones, and chordophones. However, Mahillon had already distinguished musical instruments according to their mode of vibration¹⁴ in his »Eléments

14 In contrast to von Hornbostel and Sachs, Mahillon considered the sources of sound-production to be characteristic of aerophones (air reeds, single and double reed, and a lip reeds) – not the air itself. Herbert Heyde reconsidered the air in aerophones as an energy transformer [German: Wandler] and not as a vibrating principle. See Ignace de Keyser: Sachs und Mahillon: Ein verpasster Dialog. Die Beziehungen zwischen Curt Sachs (und Hornbostel einerseits) und Mahillon (und Closson andererseits) vor und nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. In: Vom Sammeln, Klassifizieren und Interpretieren. Die zerstörte Vielfalt des Curt Sachs (Klang und Begriff. Perspektiven musikalischer Theorie und Praxis 6).

d'acoustique«, published four years before the first version of his »Essai de classification«¹⁵. It is this acoustically based approach which forms the basis for his distinction be-

Ed. by Wolfgang Behrtens, Martin Elste, Frauke Fitzner. Mainz 2017, pp. 223-236, esp. pp. 225-231. – See also Malou Haine: Classifications des instruments de musique en France de 1761 à 1819 et l'élaboration d'une terminologie organologique. In: Musique – Images – Instruments 2015, pp. 188-205.

15 The first edition of Mahillon's »Essai de classification méthodique de tous les instruments anciens et modernes« was published in the *Annuaire of the Brussels Conservatoire* in 1878, his »Eléments d'acoustique musicale et instrumentale« in 1874 (Brussels).

tween membranophones and »autophones« – »idiophones« in the terminology of Erich von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs. Mahillon's appreciation of the *Natyasastra* as a source of inspiration for organology must thus be understood from within his acoustical approach of musical instruments. The primary concern in his »Essai« was to enable the classification of musical instruments, even if their vernacular name was unknown. Nevertheless, Eliot Bates's criticism of Mahillon's and von Hornbostel-Sachs's classification systems as guideline for displaying musical instruments is not unfounded,¹⁶ for presenting a musical instrument collection as the materialisation of a classification system is indeed highly pedantic. However, Mahillon did more than classifying musical instruments. His *Catalogue of the Brussels Musée Instrumental* is an example of how to contextualize musical instruments in their social functions, their relationship to tone systems, musical practices, repertoires, or traditions. Moreover, Mahillon's policy of collecting is guided by a true interest in instruments of different cultures, without prejudices regarding their level of technological development. This aspect is evident in his correspondence, e. g. in his letter to R. de Bennenkampf in Saint Petersburg (1896): »Please allow me to remark that the [Conservatoire] museum contains not only art instruments, but also rustic instruments. The primitive character of popular instruments does not diminish in any way my interest in them«¹⁷; or to Mrs. Mary Crosby Brown in New York (1901): »You are right, a thousand times over, to care about instruments of primitive populations. It is among them that we often find the most interesting and most surprising artefacts for us.«¹⁸

16 »Mention organology to an ethnomusicology student, and what probably first comes to mind are museums, the Hornbostel-Sachs classification, and perhaps [...] a seemingly outdated class on measuring and documenting physical objects. This is not surprising: such legacies abound in many organology courses, scholarly articles, and institutions [...]. Instrument museums are mausoleums, places for the display of the musically dead, with organologists acting as morticians, preparing dead instrument bodies for preservation and display.« Bates 2012 (note 1), p. 365.

17 »Je me permettrai de vous faire remarquer que le Musée ne contenant pas seulement des instruments artistiques, mais aussi des instruments rustiques, le caractère primitif des instruments populaires ne diminue en rien l'intérêt que j'y attache.« Letter from Mahillon to R. de Bennenkampf (St. Petersburg), 21 March 1898; Archives Brussels Musical Instruments Museum (MIM), Dossier Conservatoire 1897-1900, pp. 120-121.

18 »Vous avez mille fois raison de tenir aux instruments des peuplades primitives, c'est parmi eux que l'on rencontre souvent les spécimens les plus intéressants et les plus surprenants pour nous.« Letter from

Moreover, Mahillon categorically rejects musical instruments that are interesting for their decorative aspects rather than for their sonorous qualities, like in his letter to a certain Mr. Bellon in Lyon (France):

»According to your information, the instrument that you propose is of no use to us. We maintain a strictly functional point of view, which means that an object that is remarkable as an *objet d'art* is not of much interest to us. Instead, your harpsichord is an object for a museum of Fine Arts.«¹⁹

In the same vein, Mahillon was unmoved by the lure of ancient Italian violin making, fostered in France with great passion by makers such as Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume and Gand & Bernardel. A remarkable refusal can be found in his correspondence about an ancient Italian violoncello:

»Unfortunately the Conservatoire museum cannot acquire a similar instrument without breaking the terms of its acquisition program. Indeed, if its mission were to buy all kinds of instruments that are highly expensive because of the extreme richness of their make or finish rather than because of their relevant performance qualities – then the selection would be too large and, above all, the expenditure too high.«²⁰

The contrast with his colleagues is enormous. Paul de Wit, who had his private musical instrument museum in Leipzig, gives his opinion about ethnographical collections:

»Although I do not have as many instruments as the Brussels [Conservatoire] Museum, I have the advantage of having exclusively European, i. e. scientific instruments; all the

Mahillon to Mrs. Crosby Brown (New York), 13 November 1901; Archives Brussels MIM, Dossier Conservatoire 1900-1902, pp. 188-189.

19 »D'après les renseignements que vous nous fournissez, l'instrument en question ne nous serait aucunement utile. Nous nous en tenons uniquement au point de vue instrumental, de manière qu'un objet remarquable surtout au point de vue plastique ne nous intéresse qu'indirectement, comme tel, votre clavecin me paraît plutôt du domaine d'un musée de peinture.« Letter from Mahillon to C. Bellon (Lyon), 24 March 1900; Archives Brussels MIM, Dossier Conservatoire 1897-1900, pp. 255 and 258.

20 »Malheureusement le Musée du Conservatoire ne saurait se rendre acquéreur d'un pareil instrument [un violoncelle italien ancien] sans sortir de son programme. En effet, s'il entraînait dans celui-ci d'acheter toutes espèces d'instruments d'une énorme valeur intrinsèque provenant plutôt de l'extrême richesse de la facture ou de son fini que d'une particularité quelconque en faisant un spécimen intéressant – le champ serait trop vaste et surtout les frais trop élevés.« Letter from Mahillon to Simoutre (Paris), 21 November 1893; Archives Brussels MIM, Dossier Conservatoire 1893-1897, pp. 93.

other things I have always held far from me; with pleasure, I leave them to ethnographic museums, such as they exist in almost every major city in Germany.«²¹

Universalism and museology in Belgium at the turn of the 19th century

When receiving a set of Egyptian instruments from Auguste Herpin in Cairo, Mahillon affirmed his intention to build a global museum. The protection of King Leopold II proved to be an effective aid in Mahillon's acquisition strategy:

»The protection that H. M. the King was willing to offer to the museum of the Conservatoire has been successful; thanks to this high-level patronage, it is justified to hope that the Conservatoire's museum will gather together the complete collection of instruments of the entire world in the near future. To become reality, this wish needs only to be taken up by the numerous agents in our consulates, of which Mr. Aug. Herpin and his friends have given a so generous example.«²²

Mahillon's »Universalism« was real, and it could have been inspired by the ethnographic galleries that he encountered at World Exhibitions. However, at the end of the nineteenth century²³, a specific form of this »universalism« can be seen in the

21 »Wenn ich auch nicht so viele Instrumente besitze, wie das Brüsseler Museum, so habe ich doch den Vorteil, lauter europäische, also wissenschaftliche Instrumente zu haben; alle anderen Sachen habe ich mir immer vom Halse gehalten und überlasse dieselben gerne den ethnographischen Museen und solche giebt es in fast jeder grösseren Stadt Deutschlands.« Letter from Paul de Wit to Victor Mahillon, 6 May 1902; Archives Brussels MIM, Dossier Paul de Wit.

22 »La protection que S. M. le Roi a daigné accorder au Musée du Conservatoire a porté d'heureux fruits; il est permis d'espérer, grâce à cette haute sollicitude, que le Musée du Conservatoire réunira dans un avenir prochain la collection complète des instruments du monde entier. Ce vœu, pour être réalisé, ne demande en effet que l'imitation, par nos nombreux agents consulaires, de l'exemple offert si généreusement par M. Aug. Herpin et ses amis.« Victor-Charles Mahillon: Musée du Conservatoire royal de musique de Bruxelles. In: *Echo Musical* 11/24, 22 Nov. 1879, pp. 5.

23 This »universalist« tendency in Belgium is perhaps due to its situation at the crossroads of German and Romance cultures. In 1830, the founding fathers of the newly created Belgian state adopted a very liberal constitution that attracted immigrants from neighbouring countries, seeking to express themselves more freely than in their homelands – e.g. Karl Marx and the French *proscrits* or political opponents. See Sophie de Schaepdrijver: *Elites for the capital? Foreign migration to mid-nineteenth-century Brussels*. Amsterdam, Leiden 1990, pp. 111-114.

actions of two Belgian lawyers, Henri La Fontaine²⁴ (1854-1943) and Paul Otlet²⁵ (1868-1944), with regard to museology. La Fontaine, »a distinguished participant in the long battle for pacifism and feminism«²⁶, received the 1913 Nobel Peace Prize for his work with the International Peace Bureau. Together with Otlet, he founded the International Office and Institute for Bibliography and within this framework they put into action the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC 1895), using Melvil Dewey's Decimal Classification (1874) in order to overcome linguistic problems in classification and scientific documentation. Gradually, this documentary unit was woven into different information portals for iconography and documentation: the Newspaper Museum, the Museum of the Book, a recent encyclopaedia (*Encyclopedia Universalis Mundaneum*, EUM), and the »Palais Mondial« or World Palace, later called *Mundaneum*. The first plans of the Palais Mondial were drawn up in 1910, during the Brussels World Exhibition.²⁷ According to Martin Prösler,

»[m]useums played a part in defining the nature of the nation: it was a space in which national culture and history were constructed, expressing the difference between one nation and all the others, a distinction all the more necessary since their state structures were broadly similar [...]. In parallel to this, the creation of ethnological museums based on the cultures of »non-civilized« peoples, and the introduction of colonial pavilions at world exhibitions, served to chart a difference between peoples and hence reinforce a national consciousness.«²⁸

The *Mundaneum* was all but a Belgian national museum, nor did it need, in parallel, an ethnological section. »Otlet redefined the concept of a museum which, for many of his contemporaries, was still no more than a cabinet of curiosities or a monumental exhibition space for artistic treasures«.²⁹ The Palais Mondial opened its doors in 1919 in the Parc du

24 Hervé Hasquin et al.: *Henri La Fontaine, traçé[s] d'une vie*. Un Prix Nobel de la Paix. Mons 2002.

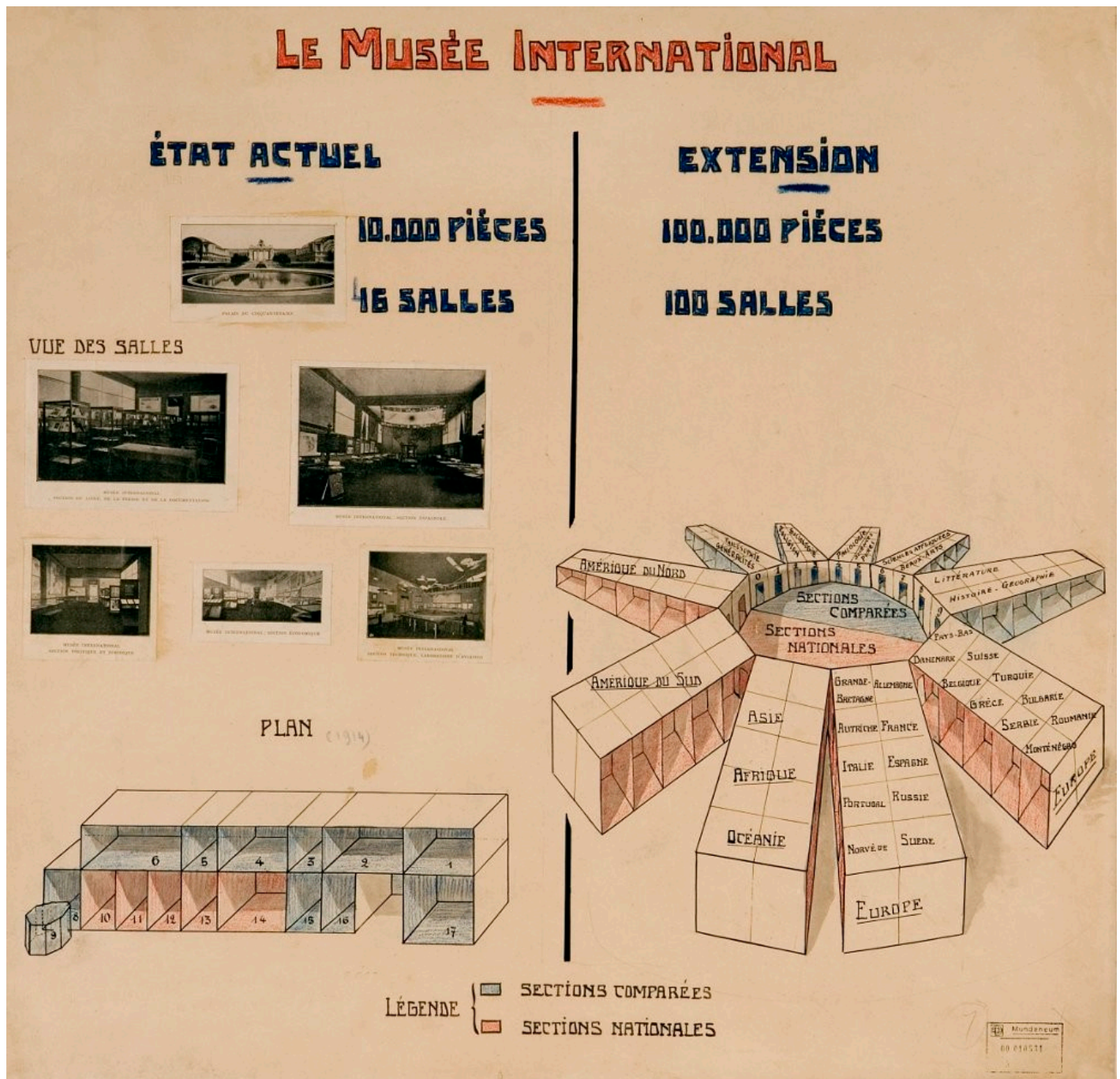
25 Warden Boyd Rayward et al: *Paul Otlet, fondateur du Mundaneum (1868-1944)*. Architecte du savoir, artisan de paix (Hors collection). Brussels 2010.

26 See Warden Boyd Rayward (transl. and adapted by): *Mundaneum*. Archives of knowledge (Occasional Papers 215). Illinois 2010, p. 1.

27 Rayward 2010 (note 26), p. 3.

28 Martin Prösler: *Museums and globalization*. In: *Theorizing museums. Representing identity and diversity in a changing world*. Ed. by Gordon Fyfe and Sharon Macdonald. Oxford 1998, p. 34.

29 Rayward 2010 (note 26), p. 3.



2 The different galleries of the Mundaneum at Brussels Cinquantenaire (1914), Mons EUM Collections. Courtesy: Collections de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, en dépôt au Mundaneum (Mons)

Cinquantenaire. It was closed in 1934 by order of the Belgian government in order to allow for the extension of the Royal Museums of Art and History (now the Head Office of Brussels MIM), directed by the Egyptologist Jean-François Capart (fig. 2).

It is difficult to conceive that the Belgian King Leopold II and Belgian settlers entered wholeheartedly into the colonization race, following the example of the great Western colonial powers, at the same time that La Fontaine was concentrating all his efforts on building a lasting peace. The results

of King Leopold's exploitation of Congo's natural resources – especially the latex for use in rubber production – and the action of these early settlers were disastrous for the indigenous people.³⁰ 1908, a year before King Leopold II's death, the Belgian government took power. In the following decades, some exceptions among the colonial agents and missionaries were committed wholeheartedly to the case of the indigenous people. In 1911, Armand Hutereau (1875-1914), a former captain of the *Force Publique* of King Leopold's Congo Free State, was sent on an anthropological expedition to northern Congo in order to gather anthropological artefacts. This mission, undoubtedly, was part of the international competition for such artefacts led in that region by Count Adolf Friedrich von Mecklenburg, Herbert Lang, James Chaplin, and others. Hutereau had already made known his profound interest in the family life of the indigenous peoples.³¹ Among a total of more than 10,000 ethnographical objects, he gathered 634 musical instruments for the Congo-Museum; he documented his mission on wax cylinders (Edison rolls) and films, among other formats. Unfortunately, his field notes are frequently of a poor quality, and his interest for »physical anthropology« was already outdated.³²

One of the missionaries, Father Gustave Hulstaert (1900-1990), showed real empathy for the culture of the Mongo people living in today's Congolese provinces of »Equateur« and northern Bandundu: he even wanted to see the Lomongo language recognized as one of the official languages of the Belgian colony. On questions of »indigeneity« and colonialism, he made known his disagreement not only with his religious superiors, but also with the Belgian colonial government,³³ and to some extent, even with Joseph Maes at the

Congo-Museum.³⁴ Father Hulstaert provided this museum with a selection of very interesting musical instruments, including horns with an extended bell and pluriarcs.

Displaying musical instruments in Belgium after Mahillon

After Mahillon's death in 1924, his successor at the Brussels Conservatoire museum, Ernest Closson (1870-1950), organized the European galleries chronologically and according to musical instrument families, while the non-Western and ethnic musical instruments were ordered geographically.³⁵ When Brussels Conservatoire museum was redesigned to become the new MIM between 1995 and 2000, it became clear that a full contextualization of the musical traditions on display was unrealistic.³⁶ The path taken envisaged a four-point approach, with audio-guide information in the galleries, stand-up concerts during opening hours of the museum, conference-concerts, as well as full concerts.³⁷ In fact, this plan was nothing new and can be seen, for example, in a very helpful roadmap described by Ernst Emsheimer (1904-1989) in 1970.³⁸ With time, conference-concerts and concerts were

Grand Rapids 2012, pp. 228-234. – Bambi Ceuppens: Congo made in Flanders? Koloniale Vlaamse visies op Blank en Zwart in Belgisch Congo. Ghent 2003, pp. 429-512.

30 Daniel Vangroenweghe's *Rood rubber. Leopold II en zijn Kongo*. Brussels 1985 reflects that the terror that accompanied the exploitation of King Leopold II's rubber plantation concessions in Congo caused such a disruption to the living conditions and the local economy of the indigenous people that the population of large regions was diminished by half.

31 See Armand Hutereau: *Note sur la vie familiale et juridique de quelques populations du Congo*. Brussels 1909. His »Histoire des peuplades de l'Uele et de l'Ubangi« was published posthumously in 1927 in Brussels.

32 See Maarten Couttenier: *Congo tentoongesteld. Een geschiedenis van de Belgische antropologie en het museum van Tervuren (1882-1925)*. Leuven, Voorburg 2005, pp. 268-274.

33 See Honoré Vinck: *Ideology in scholarly knowledge in Belgian Congo. Aequatoriana, Centre de recherche africanistes. The mission station of Bamanya (RDC), 1937-2007*. In: *The spiritual in the secular: Missionaries and knowledge about Africa*. Ed. by Patrick Harries and David Maxwell.

34 »Art raffia does not exist [...]. No money to earn with that [...]. And then, you still need a [European] high level quality? Where does INDIGENOUS art remain?« Letter from Hulstaert to Maes, 8 September 1937, translated from the Dutch original by the present author; RMCA Archives DA.2.710 – Dossier ethnographique 682. According to the author, Hulstaert always demanded »a just price« for the native people from whom he acquired musical instruments for the Congo-Museum.

35 Ignace de Keyser: *Het Brussels Muziekinstrumentenmuseum, een case study naar de achtergronden van een specialistisch museum*. In: *Bulletin van de Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis* 1997, p. 220.

36 The example of the Musical Instrument Museum (MIM) in Phoenix given by Eliot Bates does not completely reflect the real problem (Bates 2012 [note 1], p. 365). Labels in museums are not a good way of contextualizing musical instruments on display; audio-visual information and audio-guides are more efficient in this respect.

37 Ignace de Keyser: *Is een muziekinstrumentenmuseum maatschappelijk relevant? Het geval van het Brusselse MIM*. In: *Onder hoogspanning. Muziekcultuur in de hedendaagse samenleving*. Ed. by Marc Leman. Ghent, Brussels 2003, p. 168.

38 Ernst Emsheimer: *Entwurf zu einem Musikinstrumentenmuseum*. In: *Studia Musico-Museologica. Bericht über das Symposium »Die Bedeutung, die optische und akustische Darbietung und die Aufgaben einer Musikinstrumentensammlung«*. Nuremberg 1970, pp. 19-31.

abandoned, and the severe budget cuts of the present would have made them impossible in any case.

After visiting German ethnographical museums in 1912, Joseph Maes (1882-1953), director of the Anthropological Section at Tervuren's Congo-Museum, proposed a more vivid presentation of the musical instruments:

»All these objects, even accompanied by a strong ethnographic label, are dead objects. To understand what a xylophone is, or a harp guitar, a pluriarc [»mandolin«], or even a horn, one needs to hear the sound [...]. A label for a slit drum in Tervuren states that the instrument plays a central role in daily life and that it can be heard up to fifteen kilometres away. Visitors may believe this, but they DO NOT UNDERSTAND, and cannot grasp it, as long as they cannot account for the remarkable sound of the slit drum [»tam-tam«]. And that's exactly what we forbid them.«³⁹

Renamed after the Congolese Independence of 1960, the current Royal Museum for Central-Africa (RMCA) remained as an example of a colonial museum for a further fifty years, in which the galleries represent »culture within a dominant visual metaphor as an inherently political act which separates those who view the exhibit from those who are on display«⁴⁰. At the time of writing, RMCA is completely reviewing its galleries, now in dialogue with representatives of the African Communities (COMRAF), and seeking to give voice to artists and intellectuals from the diaspora and the homeland. One of RMCA's leading researchers, Zana Etambala, stresses the fact that »it is impossible to transform a colonial museum into an African one. Where paradigms are too different, a dialectal encounter is necessary«⁴¹. This idea concurs with James Clifford's vision of »museums as contact zones«, inspired by the late Mary Louise Pratt's definition of contact zones as »the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations«⁴².

Karel Moens redesigned the Antwerp Vleeshuis Museum that re-opened in 2006 with a thematic exhibition called »The Sound of the City«. His highly original approach selected those instruments that have a close relationship with the historical »soundscapes« of this city, that housed, among others, the Ruckers dynasty, famous harpsichord builders from the 16th and 17th centuries. A particularly interesting aspect of Vleeshuis Museum's current communication strategy are the conference-concerts »Woensdagklanken«, strictly focused on the repertoire and musical instruments to which the galleries make reference.

Critical museology

Not only critical organology, but also critical museology can be a source of inspiration for organologists. According to Anthony Alan Shelton, critical scholarship has had its greatest impact in temporary exhibitions curated by ethnographic museums or by anthropologists during the past three decades. Corresponding to Shelton, the following strategies can be inspiring for musical instrument museums as well⁴³:

- Comparative thematic approaches;
- Deconstruction of the conditions under which collections have been made in order to focus on the interpretation and production of museological effects;
- Dialectical approaches which examine the mutual relationships and reciprocal interpretative strategies through which different nation-states have represented others;
- Artist interventions that expose a museum's paradoxes and contradictions;
- Multiple or plural interpretations which return to the basic focus of all ethnography on the speaking, interpreting subject; and
- A refusal to shy away from political subjects, even when these involve a museum's own funding bodies.

39 See the report »Voyage de Maes en Allemagne« [translation by the present author] in Couttenier 2005 (note 32), pp. 303-304.

40 See Henrietta Riegel: Into the heart of irony. Ethnographic exhibitions and the politics of Difference. In: Fyfe/Macdonald 1998 (note 28), p. 83.

41 Personal communication to the present author, 31 July 2017.

42 Cited in James Clifford: Museums as contact zones. In: Routes. Travel and translation in the late twentieth century. Ed. by James Clifford. Cam-

bridge, London 1997 p. 192, and borrowed from Mary Louise Pratt's book: Imperial eyes, travel and transculturation. London 1992, pp. 6-7. Mary Louise Pratt (b. 1946), this great linguist, passed away on 15 June 2017, during the preparation of this text.

43 See Anthony Alan Shelton: Museums and anthropologies. Practices and narratives. In: Museum studies. Ed. by Sharon Macdonald. Malden, Oxford, Victoria 2006, pp. 77-78.

Some final remarks as a conclusion

Belgian musical instrument collectors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not live on an island, but gathered with the same passion that their colleagues showed elsewhere. However, their achievement – in the author's opinion – was relatively more important than that of their colleagues, both in terms of quantity and quality, and they had remarkable preferences: avoiding any bias regarding the technological level of development of musical instruments (Mahillon); collecting musical instruments as a concrete way of understanding their specific nature (Snoeck); and preserving musical instruments as »monumental sources« (Sax).

In general, large parts of these private collections have entered public museums whose survival depends on sustained subsidy by public bodies; their main problem was, and still is, to ensure a constant and high museological quality. This problem is paramount today, for Belgian Federal Government measures impose flat rate cuts – in the hope that these savings will be offset by a greater contribution from the museum's own resources or sponsorship. »Public challenges« should thus rather be formulated in terms of defining concepts, or ethical principles, and in the creation of real »contact zones« in museums, for different audiences, and not only in ethnographic museums. In order to confront these public challenges, a renewed intellectual input from critical museum curators and researchers is much needed.

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