

Kinshasa, June and July 2026

Translating Kuba Raffia: Source, Archive and Global Circulation

These notes were written in the evenings during fieldwork in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, from 22 June to 6 July 2026, and kept close to the original recordings. Some days are missing: they were rest days, family days, or time simply spent in the city.

Each entry gives the date, place and a short account of the day, followed by an evening reflection and a note on its potential for KIMA3D. The photographs referred to are published with these notes on <https://www.kima3d.com/field-notes/> and are not included in this file.

WEDNESDAY 24 JUNE 2026

The living library

Marché des Artistes, Seventh Street

The researcher spent three hours with Papa Shama Kwete Nicolas in his workshop, surrounded by Kuba Kingdom art. Nicolas is described as a living library of Kuba history and comes from a lineage tied to the installation of the designated king. He told the history of a nomadic people and showed woven sleeping cloths, some dating from around 1900.

He explained the meaning of the name Kinshasa, which he links to an alliance of peoples and to a raffia cloth symbolising peace. This differs from written etymologies, which cite salt and trade. He described the many uses of the raffia palm and noted that the cloth outsiders call Kuba has its own name: shombo.

At the end of the day he gave the researcher two necklaces: one marking acceptance into the Kuba community, and one of shells for protection.

Evening reflection *Following a traced path makes the answers to the research come to you.*

Potential for KIMA3D *The workshop photographs and historic sleeping cloths are the first corpus material for the digital archive.*

Photographs *approx. 12 on [kima3d.com/field-notes](https://www.kima3d.com/field-notes/) (not included here)*

THURSDAY 25 JUNE 2026

IRMA by the river

IRMA, bank of the Congo River, City Centre

The researcher toured IRMA, a fashion institute on the bank of the Congo River: its classrooms, sewing atelier, music studio, and a library rich in African textile scholarship. Congolese and African culture visibly shapes the institute's work.

A possible academic partnership between Liverpool John Moores University and IRMA was discussed, together with how KIMA3D assets could serve IRMA students working in CLO3D.

In the afternoon, an uncle offered advice: anger blocks life's paths, while joy opens them.

Evening reflection *The scale of what is possible is larger than expected, and that should shape the ambition of the research.*

Potential for KIMA3D *A university partnership, and a route for the assets to reach a new generation of Congolese students.*

Photographs *approx. 13 on [kima3d.com/field-notes](https://www.kima3d.com/field-notes/) (not included here)*

FRIDAY 26 JUNE 2026

The interview, and a surprise

Kinshasa: remote interview via Microsoft Teams, then a visit in person

The formal interview with Papa Shama Kwete Nicolas was conducted remotely and recorded with the support of the Congo Vision Image production team, under LJMU ethics approval (ref. 260617LJMUREC666). Questions covered the origins of the Kuba Kingdom, the origins of Kuba textile, and his views on digitising Kuba art.

He gave verbal agreement for the assets to be published on the project website. A written agreement will be signed before any commercial use.

Later, the researcher visited his workshop informally, outside the recorded interview, and acquired textiles for documentation: a Mapwete worn by men of power, a queen's textile, a Shoowa piece from the Kasai velvet tradition, and a beaded headband with Kuba motifs. A cousin, Henock, also made a surprise visit.

Evening reflection *Let destiny work, and believe in yourself so that it can.*

Potential for KIMA3D *The textiles and workshop photographs form the first substantial body of the corpus, ready for digitisation.*

Photographs *approx. 17 on kima3d.com/field-notes (not included here)*

SATURDAY 27 JUNE 2026

A day for the eyes

Parc de la Vallée de la N'Sele

A rest day: about four hours of safari among green hills. The researcher handled a royal python and touched dried caiman and crocodile skins. Their textures suggested that translating such materials into 3D could create new digital materials for the library.

Evening reflection *Listen to yourself and enjoy your own company: the best strength and ideas come from within.*

Potential for KIMA3D *Caiman and crocodile skin textures as future digital materials.*

Photographs *approx. 10 on kima3d.com/field-notes (not included here)*

SUNDAY 28 JUNE 2026

Family, rhythm, and a meeting

Family house, Ndjili, Kinshasa

The day began with an emotional family moment with an uncle and the researcher's paternal grandmother, followed by a first drumming lesson with the teacher Mbonda. During the lesson, a stranger, later identified as the beatmaker Mofiako, joined on guitar and helped the researcher find the tempo.

In the afternoon, the researcher met Dr Jonathan Bitufula, youth representative for Ndjili. They discussed a possible partnership between the Kinshasa Ministry of Youth and Institut NSAKA to offer digital fashion training to young people locally.

Evening reflection *Important doors open on unplanned days. Heritage includes living people: family, music, and the young people who will carry it forward.*

Potential for KIMA3D *A route to bring digital fashion training to young people in Ndjili.*

Photographs *approx. 4 on kima3d.com/field-notes (not included here)*

MONDAY 29 JUNE 2026

A study day

At home, Kinshasa

A working day. The Congo Vision Image team began editing the interview, while the researcher organised the Major Project and studied the textile motifs.

Stock-take of the collection: between ten and fifteen items to work from, including the textiles, the beaded headband, a belt, two boxes, a fan, and at least three cloths visible in the filmed material.

Evening reflection *Patience and wisdom are the keys to this project.*

Potential for KIMA3D *The collection stock-take is enough to begin the library.*

TUESDAY 30 JUNE 2026

Independence Day

Musée National de la RDC, Boulevard du 30 Juin

Independence Day, spent at the National Museum. The researcher compared the clothing sections, including Kuba and Luba textile arts, and viewed instruments and household objects.

Every object in the museum is described, named and located, but none is dated, which says something about what the archive keeps. The day ended with photographs of the celebrations on the Boulevard du 30 Juin.

Evening reflection *Colonial narratives about African dress and textiles are biased. Congolese people always knew how to dress and what textile was.*

Potential for KIMA3D *Recreating the dress and textile objects of each ethnic group in 3D would broaden the archive beyond the Kuba.*

Photographs *approx. 13 on kima3d.com/field-notes (not included here)*

SATURDAY 4 JULY 2026

Closing the loop

Molokai Quarter, Kinshasa

A visit to the statue of Papa Wemba, the artist who had inspired the Master's research from the start, to pay homage. The visit marked the end of the research days in Kinshasa.

Evening reflection *Returning home changed, with new perspectives and enough sources to move the research forward faster.*

Photographs *1 on kima3d.com/field-notes (not included here)*

BEYOND THE FIELD

The fieldwork is the foundation of KIMA3D. Any share of benefit from work drawing on Kuba motifs is set aside for the Kuba community and held in reserve until it can be remitted, as described in the Ethics and Credit section of kima3d.com.

Source: <https://www.kima3d.com/field-notes/>