
Material Values of the Teke Peoples of West Central Africa
(1880–1920)

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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I, James Green, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

In this thesis I examine the material values of the Teke peoples, whose cultural influence is felt across a vast region – including central Republic of the Congo, south-eastern Gabon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in the vicinity of Congo Pool (*ncouna*) – totalling some 90,000 km² of West Central Africa, an area roughly the size of Portugal. A diverse range of ecological zones exist here, from plateau savannah and equatorial rainforest to the marshy banks of Congo Pool, location of the present-day capital cities of Brazzaville and Kinshasa.

For centuries the Teke acted as vital intermediaries in the trade of valuable natural resources, both in the form of raw materials and as finished goods, across this ecologically diverse region. Gaining insight into indigenous Teke conceptions of materials allows us to better situate and understand the value system of West Central Africa as a whole, for the Teke were bound through trade alliances to hundreds of different ethnicities across the Congo Basin.

Depictions of the Teke in the European archive are understood to be shaped by the material values of outsiders. The earliest extensive account – dating to the 1580s – is based on rumours collected by a Portuguese trader who was unable to travel to the Teke region itself because of geographical and political barriers. Despite this, European traders on the coast were nonetheless aware of the Teke peoples as a source of valuable goods, and that they were in charge of the markets of the *pombo* or Congo Pool. Neighbouring polities, especially the Kongo peoples, remained forbidding gatekeepers to the Teke region until the arrival of Henry Morton Stanley (1841–1904) (hereafter Stanley) in 1877 and Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza (1852–1905) (hereafter Brazza) in 1880 who gained access to the region overland, from ‘behind’ geographical and political barriers along historic trade routes to the Atlantic Ocean.

This critical time of first direct contact marks the beginning of the period under study. A vast amount of data concerning the material value of the Teke – and the resources that could be gained from this inner region of West Central Africa more generally – was generated by a number of different European visitors. Much of it concerns the Congo as a potential place of profit, and therefore often contains information relating to valuable or potentially valuable

materials. This thesis employs this information as a means of uncovering the historical value system of the Teke, who, as traders in charge of the central markets of Congo Pool, were often on the other side of these deals.

This thesis argues that it is possible, by a cross-comparison of the data contained in this web of interlocking sources, to locate the ‘indigenous perspective’ in the colonial archive as it relates to material values. Scrutinising the values attached to different materials offers insights into West Central Africa at a moment of sudden transformation, when, after centuries of relative isolation from direct Atlantic trade, the Teke were thrust into a global economy.

Acknowledgements

I am hugely grateful to my many teachers over the years, from Caroline Leder, who first introduced me to museum work in the Old Speech Room Gallery at Harrow School at the age of 13, to Diane Purkiss, who saw me through my undergraduate years and taught me so much at Oxford. I am especially grateful to Charles Gore at SOAS, who was a supportive teacher and guide during my MA course and beyond. During the time that I worked at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Alisa LaGamma, Yaëlle Biro, Christine Giuntini and Ellen G. Howe all inspired and guided me in innumerable ways. It is thanks to them that my education in African art has continued to develop along its current path. I am grateful for the guidance and support of my supervisor, John Mack, who oversaw the development of this topic from its earliest stages and has been a continual source of patient understanding, sound advice and good cheer.

Work on this project has been conducted in Europe, America and the Republic of the Congo. In all of these places a number of individuals have contributed in countless ways. Phyllis Martin provided me with a generous letter of recommendation, and letters of introduction to contacts in Brazzaville who would come to significantly shape my research. I am especially grateful to Scholastique Dianzinga at the Université Marien Ngouabi in Brazzaville for her assistance. Marie Claude Dupré and George Dupré had me to stay at their house in France and introduced me to the Congo as they remembered it in the 1960s and 1970s. The time I spent with them prepared me for fieldwork and I endeavoured to live up to the standards they had set, even employing their tried and tested techniques of recording information.

In the Congo, I am grateful to my brother Paul Quirk and to Billy Fox who helped me with logistics, housing and company. It was instructive to discuss the modern history of the Congo with Jeremy Lissouba. So many people helped me with my research in Brazzaville, and I would especially like to acknowledge Lydie Pongault, cultural advisor to the President, and Eugénie Mouayini Opou, Mayoress of Mfilou. I would also like to thank Jean Omer Ntady who facilitated my research trip to the Teke court with Alexandre Mpinandzi, who in turn contacted

the court on my behalf and guided me on my visit there along with Aude Paul Sita. I am especially grateful to Mo Harber-Lamond for his thoughtful and tireless reading of the text.

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This project was supported by the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Sylvan C. Coleman and Pam Coleman Memorial Fund Fellow, 2017–2018. I am grateful to this institution and to my mentor there, Alisa LaGamma, who has had a decisive and continuing impact on my career. I hope that this thesis honours the time and energy that went into *Kongo*.

List of Abbreviations

AEF	Archives Coloniales de l'Afrique équatoriale Française
AIA	African International Association
ANOM	Archives Nationales D'Outre-Mer
CNRS	Centre national de la recherche scientifique
BM	British Museum
BMS	Baptist Missionary Society
Brazza	Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza
Congo	Republic of the Congo
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
IRD	L'Institut de Recherche pour le Développement
MOA	La mission de l'Ouest Africain
MQB	Musée du Quai Branly, Paris
PRM	Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford
RMCA	Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium
Stanley	Henry Morton Stanley
ORSTOM	Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique Outre-Mer

Dedicated to Makoko Auguste Nguempio (r.2004–present)

'The Teke are materialists in excess'

Prosper Augouard (1852–1921)

Preface: Research History

My research into the material values of the Teke peoples of West Central Africa began with research into the art history of their Kongo neighbours. Between January 2012 and December 2015, I worked on the exhibition *Kongo: Power and Majesty* (September 2015–January 2016) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. This international loan exhibition, curated by Alisa LaGamma, included 134 Kongo masterpieces created by artists from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century. The earliest works were diplomatic gifts sent by Kongo sovereigns to their European counterparts during the Age of Exploration, and took the form of delicately carved ivories and finely woven raffia cloths embellished with abstract geometric patterns. Such early masterpieces of weaving have been preserved in princely European *Kunstkammer* (cabinets of curiosities) alongside other precious and exotic creations from across the globe. Many had been forgotten about since their acquisition, and developing an understanding of their art historical significance required extensive research into the European archive, building on the work of Ezio Bassani who first published a majority of the textiles in 2000. This research initiative was spearheaded by textile conservator, Christine Giuntini.

The exhibition culminated with a dramatic gathering of the entire corpus of fifteen monumental Kongo Mangaaka Power Figures, produced in the Chiloango River region during the second half of the nineteenth century. Scientific analysis of the various components of these works conducted by Ellen G. Howe radically transformed our understanding of how they had been constructed, and the many different agents involved. A brief research trip to the Republic of the Congo with Howe and LaGamma in May 2015 – sponsored by the Metropolitan Museum of Art – inspired my wish to continue working on the art traditions of Central Africa, and led to encounters that would guide the nature of my research into the Teke.

The decision to undertake this project as a PhD dissertation topic developed out of these cumulative experiences. A major catalyst was the research I conducted for the contribution I made to the catalogue essay ‘European Images of the Kongolese in Books’ by Josiah Blackmore, Nancy Clark Smith Professor of the Language and Literature of Portugal at Harvard University,

on representations of the Kongolese in early European printed sources.

I provided a section to this essay on the fantastical descriptions of cannibalism among the Kongo's 'Anzique' neighbours as described in the *Relatione del reame di Congo et delle circonvicine contrade* (A Report on the Kingdom of Kongo and Surrounding Countries – the Italian edition published in Rome in 1591, the English edition 1597) by Duarte Lopes and Filippo Pigafetta. Research revealed that this account was the earliest and most sustained description of the people now called 'Teke', and I desired to learn more about this inner-Central African world that had vexed the European imagination for centuries.

It became clear to me that although the Teke had long been recognised as a vitally important regional power, little scholarly attention had been paid to them compared to their neighbours more directly networked with the Atlantic Ocean. What could be revealed about the art traditions of West Central Africa by focusing on the art traditions of the Teke peoples? Two years of archival research in Europe combined with field research in the Republic of Congo determined to answer this question, to right a perceived imbalance in Central African art history and add a new perspective to an already rich and complex literature.



Map West Central Africa showing ethnic groups, geographical features, and major places

Libreville – capital city

TEKE FUMU – ethnic group

Republic of the Congo – country

MAYOMBE MOUNTAINS – geographical feature

Fig. 1. Map of West Central Africa showing ethnic groups, geographical features, and major settlements.

Introduction

Historical Overview of the Teke peoples of West Central Africa

According to oral traditions current in 2017 in Brazzaville, capital of the Republic of the Congo, the Teke people were the ‘first’ or ‘original’ Bantu population to settle north of the Congo River.¹ They are thus considered the region’s autochthonous people, assuming a position often reserved for pygmy populations in the West and Central African popular imagination (Klieman, 2003: 77, 222). Because of their long presence here, the Teke are believed to be the peoples most attuned to the spiritual forces of the natural and ancestral world. Furthermore, as the original inhabitants of a vast geographical region, the Teke were, in the course of their history, witness to the arrival of migrant groups from different regions. They had a profound religious and social influence on these immigrant populations to the extent that, for many of the Kongo groups living on the edge of the Teke region during the period under study, religious ceremonies were put in the hands of a Teke *ngaa* or religious practitioner (Kiener, 1913: 22).

The figurehead of the culture and religion is the Makoko, king of the Teke Tio, whose court is located in Mbe, some 130 km (80 miles) to the northeast of the Congo Pool in the plateau region.² Makoko Auguste Nguempio (r.2004–present) is the current and seventeenth recorded Makoko since Makoko Iloo I (r.1870–1892), who ruled for the first half of the period under study and functions in the Congo today as a founding figure. A corollary ruler is the Nga-ntsii-bi, who has her own court in Ngabe on the Congo River where she is the guardian over the most important Nkwembali shrine. Nkwembali is the religion of the Teke based around regular

¹ I am grateful to professor Ngoie-Ngalla for elucidating this point. My understanding of the popular conception of the Teke is based on a review of how the Teke are presented in high school and university history courses in Brazzaville in February 2017, along with informal conversations with a number of different people.

² Makoko is a Kikongo variation of the Teke word for king or sovereign leader, ‘Ooko’, ‘Uko’ or ‘Me-Uko’. I employ the Kikongo form in this dissertation because it is the recognised term for the sovereign leader of the Teke today. I employ ‘Congo Pool’ in place of ‘Stanley Pool’ or ‘Malebo Pool’ throughout this dissertation to avoid any political associations.

devotion to nature spirits (*nkira*) and important ancestors (*inkwii*). The Nga-ntsii-bi plays a vital role during the process of investiture of a new Makoko, working in close collaboration with several other specialists. The Teke thus possess vital religious authority in the region, distinct from the politics of the nation, with the Teke cultural zone crossing the national borders of Gabon, Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Overlaying a Google Maps of the region with the ethnic information drawn from Felix and Meur's 'People's Atlas of Africa' (2001) reveals the vast geographic region considered Teke [Tio]. It is useful to note its central geographical location, and how numerous, predominantly Kongo groups separate the region from the Atlantic Ocean (Fig. 2).

Commentators from the late sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries noted Teke distinctiveness on account of their language, dress, bodily adornment including distinct striated facial cicatrization marks, cut teeth and elaborate hairstyles. In the earliest accounts the Teke were famed regionally as warriors, for their skills in metalwork and the manufacture of cloth in raffia, celebrated for their wealth in copper, slaves and ivory, and for their success as traders displayed in fine dress (Pigafetta, 1881: 26–29). Sources throughout this period also claimed that the Teke were cannibals (Blackmore, 2015: 119).

Linguistic evidence suggests Bantu migrant populations began moving south from the regions of west and central Cameroon and southern Nigeria some 4,000–5,000 years ago (Vansina, 1990; Ehret, 2001). Along the banks of the Congo River, in the vicinity of the Congo Pool, several archaeological sites testify to the development of a major riverside culture from the eleventh century AD. The archaeological record furthermore suggests that, by this date, the culture settled here was already part of a trade network connecting settlements of the Pool to those much further upstream (Pinçon and Dechamps, 1991). Richly decorated white ceramic, of the kind that continued to be produced by Teke potters in the late nineteenth century and through to the 1950s, has been uncovered at Kingabwa, in Kinshasa, DRC, with an estimated date of

1450–1650.³ This distinct type of pottery has also been excavated as far away as Bandundu, in the vicinity of the Kwango River, and even as far away as Lake Mai-Ndombe.

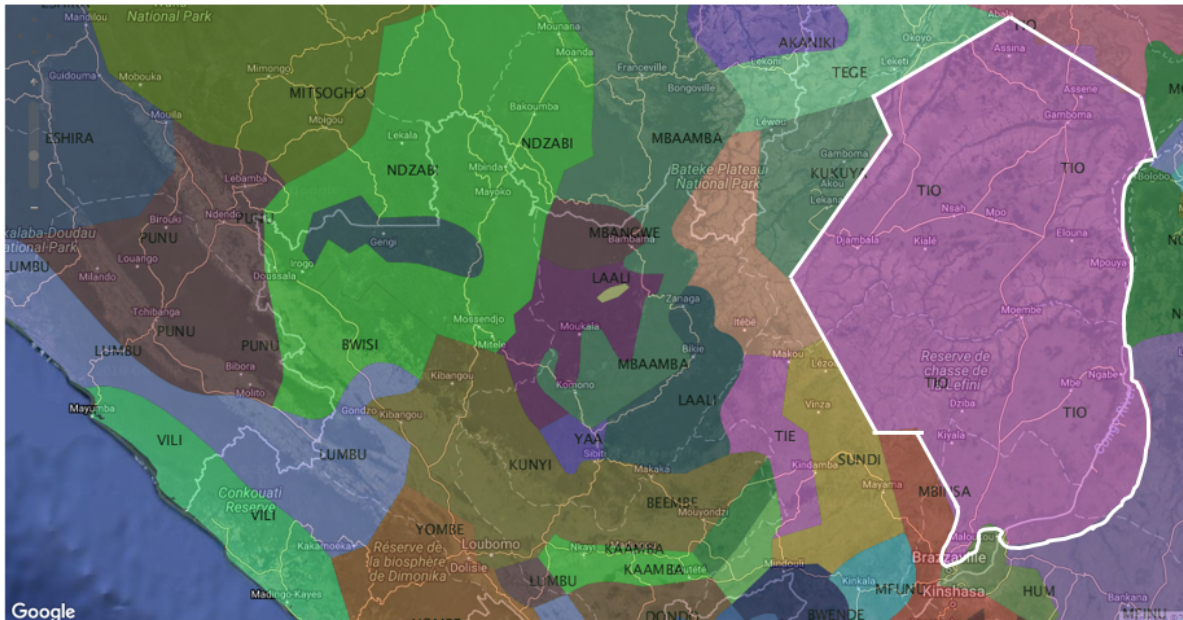


Fig. 2. Google Satellite map with overlay of ‘Felix 2001’ ethnicities of Africa. Teke listed as ‘Tio’ (Source: Harvard University World Map, Africa Map).



Fig. 3. Google Satellite map with outline of Teke region highlighted. Inset showing overlay with Hondius, Jodocus. 1606: *Nova Africæ tabula*. Note reference to ‘Anzicana...populi antropophagi’ (Source: Harvard University World Map, Africa Map).

³ The ceramic has also been recorded at other sites in the vicinity of Kinshasa, such as Dimba cave and Kovo cemetery. The author is, however, careful not to equate ‘people with pots’. See Maria Dores Cruz, ‘Pots are pots, not people: “material culture and ethnic identity in the Banda Area (Ghana), nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”’ *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa* 46, no. 3 (2011: 336–357).

The world was transformed during the period 1880–1920 due to European industrial and technological advances, in what has been termed a ‘crisis of progress’. The impact of this on non-industrialised peoples across the world continues to be felt today. In 1936, the French philosopher and sociologist George Friedmann (1902–1977) remarked that during this time frame, ‘from being the king of creation, man has fallen - or risen - depending on how one understands it- to the role of concessionaire for a planet’ (Friedmann, 1936: 246). European man in 1800 conceptualised himself as a being of mythical origin, inhabiting a planet where much of world’s surface remained *terra incognita*. As the inset of the map above shows, the Teke cultural zone, while located with remarkable geographic accuracy, is a land peopled with mythical creatures and peoples in a map of 1606 (Fig. 3). European man of 1900 was now the ‘concessionaire’ of the raw materials of the planet and harvested them to feed industry. In this map it is possible to see the forty different concessionary companies that the region was divided into in the final years of the nineteenth century (Fig. 4).

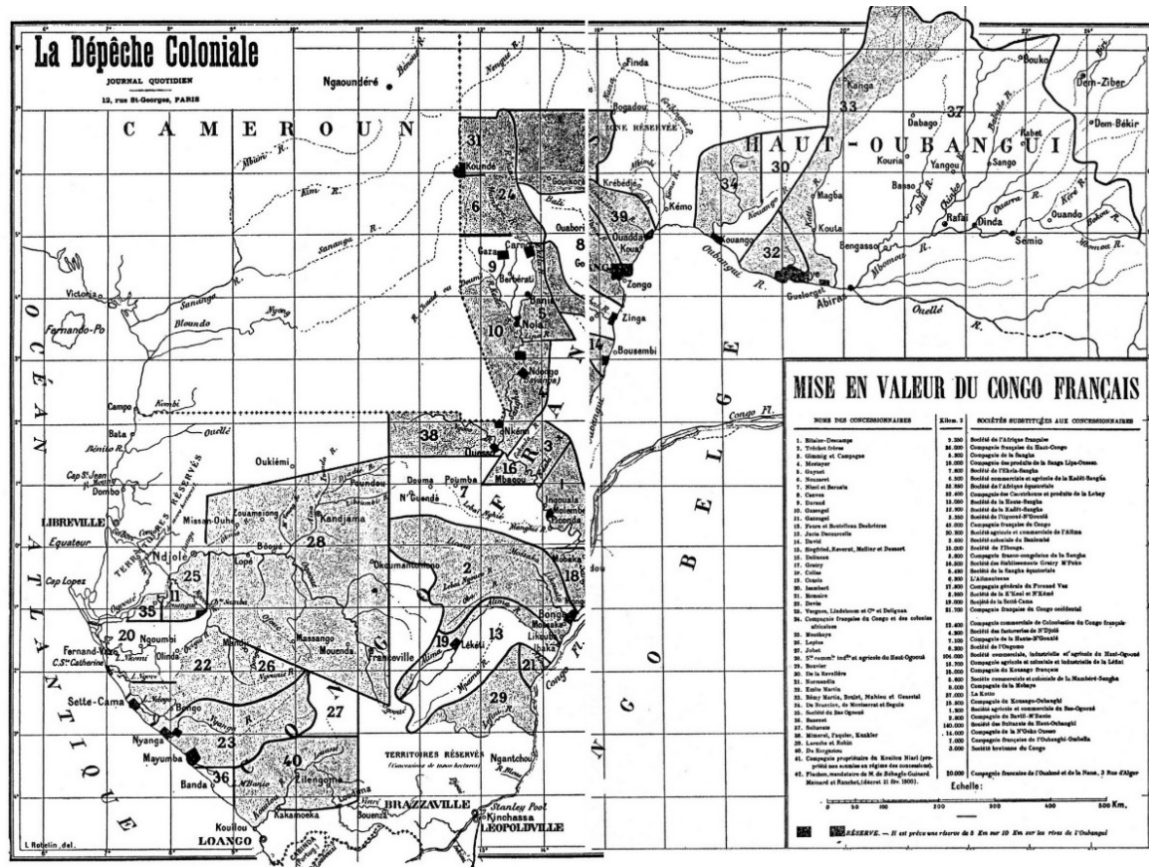


Fig. 4. French Concessionary Companies in 1900 based on *Les concessions en 1900*. Carte au 1/3 760 000 éditée par la Dépêche Coloniale, s. d. S.O.M., Service Cartographique, no 311.

Like many other non-European peoples across the globe, the Teke peoples of West Central Africa went from an unknown mythical potential to being forcibly integrated into a global economy between 1880–1920 as consumers of European merchandise. For centuries they had resisted this fate. That a powerful central African polity existed somewhere inland from the Kingdom of Loango, north of the Kingdom of Kongo, near a great lake of the Congo River, is recorded in some of the earliest European sources of the late fifteenth century.⁴ From the perspective of a European individual arriving in the region via the Atlantic Ocean, this realm was located far inland from what could be accessed. Portuguese sea captain, soldier and cartographer Duarte Pacheco Pereira (c.1460–1533) summed up this perspective, writing in approximately 1505 that the Kingdom of Anzica [Tio] was very far from the coast, and ‘we do not know of any profit to be had there’ (Vansina, 1973: 439).⁵

In spite of its distance from the coast, a remarkable amount of information was recorded about the Teke before the nineteenth century. The earliest map that locates the Teke Kingdom was published in Filippo Pigafetta and Duarte Lopes’ *A Report on the Kingdom of Kongo and Surrounding Countries* (the Italian first edition published in Rome in 1591), in which its people were described in the commentary as the Anzique, and the Kingdom is named ‘Anzicana’ on the map. In the version of the map of this region engraved by William Rogers, included in the first English edition of 1597, the Kingdom was positioned in a mountainous region to the north of the Congo River, beyond the named settlements and European style buildings that functioned as symbols of what is known (Fig. 5).⁶

The nineteenth century marked the steady encroachment of Europeans into territory historically controlled by the Teke. The French first entered the plateau region, heartland of the Teke peoples, via the Ogooué River from the direction of Gabon. From 1839 to 1841 Lieutenant Louis Édouard Bouët-Willaumez (1808–1871) claimed possession of the estuary of Gabon River for France; from 1856 to 1865 Paul Belloni Du Chaillu (1831–1903) entered into relations with the Fang (Pahouins) peoples and first travelled up the Ogooué River. From the 1860s European

⁴ The Portuguese historian João de Barros (1496–1570) described ‘a people who inhabited certain islands in a great lake, out of which flows the river Zayr [Zaire], which runs through the kingdom of Congo’.

⁵ D. Pacheco Pereira, *De Esmeraldo de situ Orbis*; Cf. D. Peres, *Esmeraldo*, p.171. *Emcuquanzico* is understood by Vansina to mean *Mukoko Ansiko*. Written in c.1505 and published in 1507, *Esmeraldo de situ orbis* is an important source to scholars of Kongo and Loango and contains some of the earliest descriptions of Kongo textiles. The description of the Anzica Kingdom is, however, perfunctory.

⁶ In the original map from the 1591 Italian edition that depicts the whole continent, the kingdom is positioned directly south of the equator in the same location.

travellers began to skirt the borders of Teke region, first beginning to do so from a north-westerly direction. Still, political and geographical factors prevented easy access for European traders and through the 1870s the very existence of the Teke peoples was debated in various European sources.⁷

From the south, other Europeans were attempting to access the Teke region and the famous markets of the Pool. The British Lieutenant Grandy in 1873–74, as leader of the ‘West Coast Livingstone Search Mission’, travelled north from Ambriz in Angola along the historic caravan routes, reaching Mbanza Kongo, capital of the Kingdom of the Kongo, in May 1873 (Grandy, 1874–75: pp78–105). As his map demonstrates, he failed to complete his journey to the Pool and knowledge of the Congo River peters out at Tungwa (Fig. 6)⁸. Local Kongo chiefs and Zombo traders were convinced that Grandy had come to ‘find out about the ivory trade’ and to look for copper and silver like his predecessors.⁹ Trade protectionism prevented him from accessing the Pool region which continued to exist as a blank space on European maps.

The English Baptist missionary William Holman Bentley (1855–1905) established a mission station in Mbanza Kongo [San Salvador] in 1878, and on thirteen separate occasions failed to walk from there to Congo Pool. Like Grandy before him, Bentley recorded the significant resistance of local people to his travelling from Mbanza Kongo to Congo Pool as a result of ‘their fear of losing the trade in ivory’, and concluded that ‘only an armed force could open the road, and that we could not employ’ (Bentley, 1900: I 295).¹⁰ These factors explain why the Teke region remained isolated from the Atlantic trade until approximately 1880, and why the material values of the Teke recorded from this moment onwards offer valuable insights into the worldview of the interior.

⁷ In *Two Trips to Gorilla Land and the Cataracts of the Congo* (1876) Burton questions the existence of the Anzique [Teke] at length, and concludes that they likely were a fabrication of the European imagination. ‘I inquired vainly about the Anzicos, Anzichi, Anzigui, Anzigi, or Anziki’ peoples, who had a king named “Makoko, the ruler of thirteen kingdoms”’ (Burton, 1876: 234).

⁸ Tungwa, located in the Makuta district, on the road between Congo Pool and Mbanza Kongo, was where the most important marketplace for ivory in the late nineteenth century was located (Bentley, 1900: I 79–81, Johnston, 1908: I 92).

⁹ Grandy recorded several rumours of a white man living in the centre of Africa. On questioning informants more closely, however, he came to the conclusion that accounts of ‘their long journeys were pure fiction’.

¹⁰ A group of Baptist missionaries including Comber and George Grenfell had failed to make this journey for these very reasons in 1880, as described by Comber above, and were forced to make a retreat.



Fig. 5. A Map of the Kingdom of Congo, after a drawing by Filippo Pigafetta (c.1533–1604) and Duarte Lopes (active late 16th century). Engraving by William Rogers (born c.1545, active c.1589–1604).



Fig. 6. A Map of the Kingdom of Congo, after a drawing by Filippo Pigafetta (c.1533–1604) and Duarte Lopes (active late 16th century). Engraving by William Rogers (born c.1545, active c.1589–1604).

1875–85: Stanley, Brazza and the formation of the Congo

The direct colonisation of West Central Africa by France and Leopold II, King of Belgium, was born out of the imagination of two men: Henry Morton Stanley and Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza. The ethnogenesis of these two colonial nations are thus embedded within the personalities of two individuals (see p.260 for an extended account). We can picture Central Africa as being thrust into the imagination of two European men whose outlook on the world encapsulates ‘types’ in European thought current at the time and in portrait photographs Brazza was presented as a barefoot wanderer in an oriental costume who preferred to hold a stick in place of Stanley’s gun (Figs. 7–8).



Left: Fig. 7. Mr H. M. Stanley (with boy), 1872. London Stereoscopic & Photographic Company. Carbon carte-de-visite, 8 x 5.4 cm. Photographs Collection, National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG x128738).

Right: Fig. 8. Portrait of Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza in Oriental Costume, c.1880. Attributed to the Nadar workshop. Paper, 53 x 38.6 cm. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (75.15639).

In 1871, around the beginning of Ilooi's reign, Stanley travelled to East Africa to locate the Scottish missionary and explorer Dr David Livingstone (1813–1873), who was missing on an expedition. His disappearance was a cause of public consternation and Stanley's eventual success propelled him to celebrity. His account of the journey *How I Found Livingstone: Travels, Adventures, and Discoveries in Central Africa, Including Four Months' Residence with Dr. Livingstone*, published in 1872, was an instant international bestseller. It would function as – and

was intended to be – a source book of primary information for many future travellers to Africa and his success spurred Stanley himself on to ambitious plans of travel.

In 1875, Stanley returned to the East Coast and proceeded to cross the continent in 999 days, descending the Congo River to reach the Atlantic. In February 1877, just above Congo Pool, Stanley battled against Ngala traders, neighbours of the Teke, in what he described as his thirty-first fight on the Congo River and ‘certainly the most determined conflict that we had endured’ (Stanley, 1878: 301). It is likely that the Ngala, like generations of traders before them, did not want to give up their trade monopoly on the stretch of river above the Pool. Stanley, however, through brute force made his way through and reached Congo Pool, which he named Stanley Pool in March 1877. It was here that he would first meet the Teke peoples.

As Stanley was beginning his cross-continental voyage, Brazza, Alfred Marche (1844–1898) and Noël Ballay (1847–1902) began an exploration of southern Gabon that would last for three years. Brazza settled with Ballay at Lopé on the Gabon coast and travelled from there on various exploratory missions. Brazza and Ballay mapped the source of the Ogooué and descended the N’gampo River, which flows into the Alima, a tributary of the Congo. Here, Ngala traders refused to let them descend the river and he was forced to return to France.¹¹ He blamed Stanley for having fought with the Ngala a year previously, contrasting Stanley’s violence with his own pacific intentions.

Only a month before Brazza’s return, in December 1878 Stanley’s account of his 999-day cross-continental journey *Through the Dark Continent* was published, and included a fold-out map of the Congo River from ‘Stanley Pool’ to the coast. A detailed map of the Pool was published in 1885 (Fig. 9). On reading this account, Brazza was quick to put the pieces of the geographic puzzle together. He was now convinced now that the Alima was an affluent of the Congo – the ‘Gordon Bennet’ of Stanley’s account and illustration. Anxious to return, he wrote a 300-page report which he delivered to the Minister of Marine of France presenting his findings and requesting government funding for a second mission. This funding was not forthcoming, so instead, Brazza made a proposal directly to the French Committee of the African International Association (AIA), established by Leopold II in 1879. The project was accepted, and 20,000 francs was granted for its completion.

¹¹ Historians have debated how close he was to reaching the Congo River. Some scholars believe he was as little as three days by boat. See Abraham Ndinga-Mbo, 2006: 23 for the full debate.

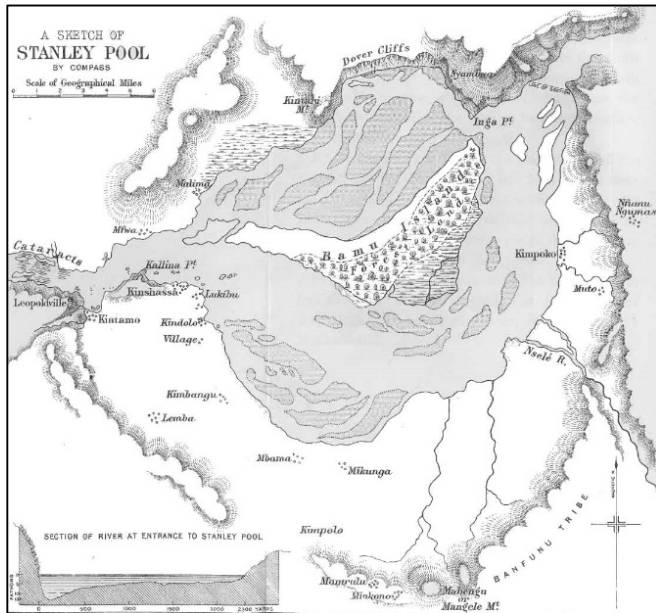


Fig. 9. A Sketch of Stanley Pool by Compass. Engraving. From Henry Morton Stanley, Congo and the Founding Free State (1885), vol. I, 312–13.

Brazza sailed from Liverpool on 27 December 1879 and arrived in Lambaréné by March 1880. During his first months in Africa he identified several locations for European trading stations and established Franceville in Gabon. While Stanley had approached the Pool from the east, Brazza approached from the direction of Gabon. His proposed route would necessarily take him into the plateau region and the heart of the Teke Kingdom – marked as the land of Makoko on the sixteenth century maps he had studied as a child (Crisenoy, 1946: 25). Reaching the plateau region in the summer of 1880, Brazza first tried to secure a plot of land for his station from the Teke chief Ngampey, whose territory was based north of the Lefini River (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1972: 23). Ngampey instead sent him on to meet the sovereign leader Iloo I in Mbe. Brazza became the first European to meet the Makoko, and he and his men went on to spend 25 days as his guest and more than two months in the area between August 1880 and October 1880.

During this time, he was able to ascertain that the Makoko was recognised as the supreme ruler with spiritual authority on the north bank of the Congo, and on both sides of the river in the vicinity of Congo Pool. He was also able to ascertain that beneath the Makoko were a series of powerful chiefs who wielded real political authority, with whom he had to negotiate the terms of his treaty; the most powerful of whom was chief Mpocontaba. The region was not populous and the few settlements that existed were spread out. Between the Pool and the Lefini there were

only three major villages on the north bank, and in total about 15 villages in the area (Stanley, 1885: I 509; Johnston, 1910: 144, 151, 185). Mbe itself was small, with Ibali (the royal graves) located nearby. The three major chiefs with villages of the largest populations were those of Mpocontaba, Ngaliö and Ikukuri. Indeed, the heartland of the kingdom itself was located in a ‘desert’ or a land of thirst’ (Vansina, 1973: 6).

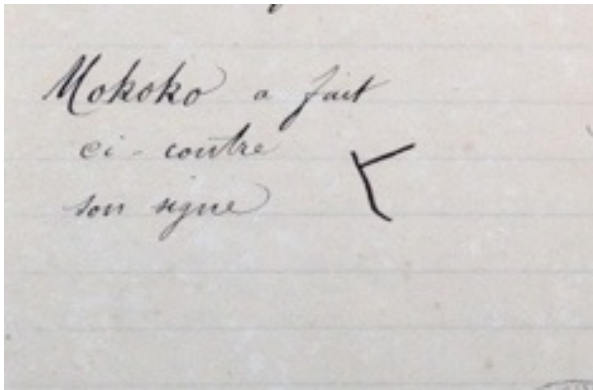


Fig. 10. The signature of Makoko Iloo I (‘Mokoko a fait ci contre son signe’). 16 PA II / 2 ANOM.

On 10 September 1880, Makoko Iloo I (r.1870–1892) was urged to put his signature on copies of a document that transferred sovereignty of his lands north of the Congo River and in the vicinity of Congo Pool to France (Fig. 10). The text of the first sentence ran: ‘King Makoko, who is sovereign over the lands lying between the mouth of the Lefini and Ncouna (Pool) having ratified the cession of territory made by Ngampey for the establishment of a French station and moreover ceded his hereditary rights of supremacy...’.¹² Instead of retracing his steps to the Ogooué River, Brazza followed the Congo River to the coast, exploring the possibility of a railway or road. On the way, he encountered French missionaries who he encouraged to go upriver to the Congo Pool as representatives of France. Brazza’s principal fear was that Stanley would try to undo the treaty, and when the two men met at Vivi, close to the Congo mouth, Brazza chose not to mention the treaty he had recently signed.

¹² What the Makoko would gain in return is not specified in the treaty documents, but it is clear that access to trade goods and the establishment of a trading relationship with the French were of key importance. Although the Teke had no direct link to the coast, for centuries they had known and valued European goods, and it is likely they wished to build up trade. Furthermore, rumours of both Stanley’s and Brazza’s battles with the Ngala would have reached Mbe, making the Makoko aware of the growing presence of Europeans in the area. The fear of having two hostile European parties in the region may have influenced his decision and encouraged him to sign a treaty with the devil he knew rather than the one he didn’t (Vansina, 1973: 414).

Stanley was in the process of blasting a slow path up the lower Congo (Stanley, 1885: I 231). After surveying the landscape in the vicinity of Vivi, Stanley described how he dreamt of a railway line that would connect the markets of the Pool to the coast. He described 'the chaos of stone, worthless scrub' as having 'large bold features of solidity, ruggedness, impassiveness'. To Stanley it is a landscape that is valueless and yet possessed of a defiant personality. He was determined 'to temper this obstinacy...to quicken that cold lifelessness; to reduce that grim defiance to perfect submission' (Stanley, 1885: 140). He wanted to 'infuse vigorous animation into a scene which no one but the most devoted standard-bearer of Philanthropy could ever have looked at twice with a view to its value' (Stanley, 1885: 140). In order to do this, he had to blow the landscape up. He ordered 100 men to attack the mountainside with sledge hammers and dynamite, earning himself the title Bula Mutari ('breaker of rocks'), for which he was soon known throughout the region.

The Makoko treaty, as it would become known, or the Brazza-Makoko treaty, was duly ratified by the French government on 22 November 1882, and France claimed possession of the north bank of the Congo. An employee of Stanley's, Lieutenant Louis Walcke, an agent of the Comité d'études du Haut-Congo, travelled to Mbe on behalf of Stanley in December 1882 with the ambition of signing a new treaty with the Makoko which would replace that signed by Brazza, in exchange for 'considerable donations' (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1887: 334). Iloo I refused to sign the treaty and rejected the gifts that Walcke offered him. Chief Mpocontaba, however, sided openly with Walcke against the Makoko. In order to exert their control, European agents were increasingly putting pressure on existing fissures in Teke politics.

On 11 January 1883 the voting law credit for the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (MOA) was published in the Official Government Journal in France. Brazza was appointed lieutenant and received the title of Commissioner General of the Republic in West Africa. While the commercial and scientific aims of the MOA were a continuation of those set out in his previous missions, Brazza's role was now more overtly political. He was required to 'lay the foundation for the establishment of France' in the region. The MOA was also organised on a much larger scale, and 87 Europeans were recruited through advertisements in the Official Journal. In February 1884, a French army lieutenant arrived in Dakar, Senegal, to recruit the bulk of the mission's manpower. This time, instead of a mere 12 laptots (the name for regionally celebrated Senegalese sailors), 139 were hired. The recruiter went to great lengths to track down Sergeant

Malamine, as well as Samba Thiam, who had played important roles in Brazza's previous mission. Brazza's brother, Jacques, and his companion, Attilio Peçile (1856–1931), while not officially part of the mission, were also in the region on a related scientific mission. Towards the end of March 1883, members of the expedition began to arrive in Africa. The first year was devoted to the foundation of French posts, and for two years there was a race between the French and the Belgians for the occupation of the territory. A vast amount of material of various kinds was collected from the many peoples of West Central Africa as a result of this mission.

It was not until 9 April 1884 that Brazza, accompanied by Charles de Chavannes, Attilio Peçile and Jacques de Brazza, arrived in Mbe with 60 porters. This journey created a wealth of additional documentation. Makoko Iloo I was presented with the treaty, ratified by the French government, displayed in a crystal and brass display case. He was photographed wearing the *onlua* and resting on the royal seat of office (*likuba*), on a leopard skin next to the treaty in its casket by Jacques de Brazza (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11. Makoko, Sovereign Leader of the Teke peoples leaning on the royal seat (likuba). Next to him is the treaty signed with France in a crystal and brass coffer. ('Makoko, Gran Capo dei Bateke del Congo. Accanto a lui e il cofano contenente il Trattato d'alleanza e di protettorato con la Francia.'). April 1884. Jacques de Brazza (1859–1888). Published in Elio Zorzi and Attilio Peçile (1940), 448–49.

Mpocontaba, Ngaalio and Ngaatsu, who had signed the alternate treaty with Stanley's agent Walcke, were forced to carry out homage to the Makoko on their knees and to accept the French flag (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1887: 335). Brazza went on to choose the definitive location

of the future station, now known as Brazzaville, on a plateau about 30 metres above the Congo, and the first buildings were constructed between 1884 and 1887. At the same time, Stanley moved into the village of Kinshasa, which became Léopoldville, located across from Brazzaville on the southern bank of the Pool. Once the Makoko had received his copy of the treaty, his importance to the French regime diminished and individuals who visited his court after this point did so in the capacity of tourists.¹³ On 15 July 1885 Brazza was recalled to France and learned of the result of the Berlin Conference, which recognised the new independent State of Congo. Then came negotiations between the Congo and the neighbouring states, Portugal and France, which led to the fixing of the separative limits of these various powers along the political lines as they exist today.

1885–1900

Begun in 1889 it was not until 1898 that the opening of Stanley's railway line from Léopoldville (present-day Kinshasa) to Matadi was finally completed, generating wealth among Belgian capitalists who had invested in King Leopold II of Belgium's Congo Free State on the southern side of the Congo River. This, predictably, inspired envy amongst their French counterparts.¹⁴ Within a few months around 40 concessionary companies were constituted, with a combined capital of 45 million French francs (Pourbaix, 1899: 2).

In January 1898 Brazza was dismissed from his role due to poor revenue generated from the colony during his tenure (West, 1972: 141). A commission to divide French territory into areas ruled by concessionary companies, following the example established by Leopold II of Belgium in the Congo Free State, was established by the French Minister of the colonies, Florent Guillain (1844–1915). In 1899 the French state resolved to formally divide the colony – which roughly covered the modern states of the Republic of the Congo, Gabon and Central African Republic – into 40 enormous concessionary territories totalling an area of 70,000 km² (Fig. 4).

¹³ Prosper Augouard, who was unable to visit Mbe in 1880, finally visited the Makoko in June 1885 and Stanley, who was unable to visit in 1880, visited in 1889.

¹⁴ The constitution of the Congo Railway Company as a public limited company with a capital of 25 million francs occurred on 31 July 1889. However, it would not be until 4 July 1898 that the railway was completed.

Divisions of the land occurred around the two principal centres: Brazzaville in the Republic of the Congo and Libreville in Gabon. What has been characterised as the ‘age of exploration’ (1880–98) gave way to ‘the age of exploitation’ (1898–1920). It was in this context that information about this region and its peoples, including its material culture, flooded into public and private collections in Europe and America.

1900–1920

As early as 1904, key European individuals began to protest the abuses of the concessionary system, having recognised the damage that they had already inflicted upon the indigenous cultures of the Congo Free State. In March 1904 the British journalist Edmund Morel established the international European Congo Reform Association, which was intended to investigate the abuses of the ‘red rubber’ of the Congo Free State. Roger Casement (1864–1916), British consul, humanitarian activist and Irish nationalist, published the *Casement Report* later that year, which detailed atrocities and led to widespread calls for change in Europe.

Abuses in the French Congo were considered less prevalent and did not receive the same public scrutiny at the time. Still, they were of enough concern that they were discussed in the French press and parliament during 1904–05 (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1972, 25). In 1905, as an attempt to assuage growing doubts, the French authorities felt obliged to send an inspection mission to the French Congo. The old Congo hand, Brazza, was selected to lead the mission. As the man who had so forcefully worked for the establishment of France in the region, it is perhaps a case of historic poetic justice that he should be the one to report on its destruction at the hands of Europeans.

According to both his family and popular tradition, it was the abuses he saw during this final mission that led to his death, sickened and weak, in Dakar, Senegal, on 14 September 1905. His dying words were said to have been: ‘Our Congo must not be turned into a Mongalla’ (Conan Doyle, 1909: ix). The official account of his mission, drawn up by the ministry of colonies and based on material collected by Brazza, was considered perilous to French interests – especially after the explosive impact of Casement’s recently published *Report* – and was immediately suppressed. The redacted version of this account survives – only published in 2014

– and it describes a world utterly different from that which he first encountered in 1880.¹⁵ When he first arrived in the plateau region north of the Congo River in 1880, Makoko Iloo I of the Teke people was sovereign leader over a vast region, including both banks of the Congo River in the vicinity of Congo Pool. Teke traders controlled all trade on Congo Pool (*ncouna*) and were necessary intermediaries in a vast Central African trade network. By 1905, Teke political authority in the region had been completely eroded. This was especially evident in the vicinity of Congo Pool where trade was no longer in Teke hands, but rather the hands of Kongo and Europeans, and the cities of Brazzaville and Léopoldville – French and Belgian respectively – had supplanted important Teke trading settlements.

Like Brazza, Roger Casement had also been a witness to two different Congo worlds. Casement had first worked in the Congo in 1884 for Henry Morton Stanley (1841–1904) and the AIA (African International Association), and like Brazza he returned to the region in the early twentieth century – in his case, 1903 – to bear witness to its devastation. Casement’s report had special relevance to the Teke peoples. He recorded how by 1903 the previously significant Teke people of the southern bank of Congo Pool – which he estimated at 5000 individuals – had fled to the French Congo on the northern bank ‘suddenly one night’. He understood that this was done in response to ‘an energetic [Belgian colonial] Administration which desired, above all things, progress and speedy results’. He reported elsewhere that this ‘energetic’ regime was extremely violent, and it is likely the Teke had fled to escape political oppression.

Casement noted that ‘[t]heir loss...is none the less to be deplored...for they formed...a connecting link between an incoming European commercial element and the background of would-be native suppliers’ (Casement, 2003: 50–51). Trading relationships that had linked different ethnic groups from the Pool over vast distances for centuries had been ruptured, as European colonialists ran roughshod over historic alliances and usurped the place of Teke merchants on the Pool.¹⁶

¹⁵ All copies were thought to have been destroyed. Brazza’s mortal remains were transported from Senegal to Algiers where he had lived with his wife Thérèse de Chambrun since their marriage in 1895. It was here that Brazza had collected together his papers during the last decade of his life. The documents, amounting to 72 archive boxes in total, were eventually donated to the overseas section of the National Archives in 1962. In 1965, historian Coquery-Vidrovitch uncovered in the archive the only surviving copy of Brazza’s 1905 report. It was not until 2014 that a redacted version was published under the title *Le rapport Brazza mission d’enquête du Congo*. This shows the degree to which the impact of this period of history on the peoples of Africa continues to be negotiated both in France and in the Congo into the present.

¹⁶ Today in Brazzaville, traditional Teke chiefs claim descent from this migration.

Casement was also clear that it was not only forced taxation of the concessionary system that deeply affected the daily life of indigenous peoples, but that smallpox and sleeping sickness were decimating – and in some cases annihilating – entire communities. He described how:

The population of the Lower Congo has been gradually reduced by the unchecked ravages of this, as yet, undiagnosed and incurable disease...Perhaps the most striking change observed during my journey into the interior was the great reduction observable everywhere in native life. Communities I had formerly known as large and flourishing centres of population are to-day entirely gone, or now exist in such diminished numbers as to be no longer recognizable (Casement, 2003: 50).

The years 1880–1920, in effect, mark the transformation of these cultures as they were directly incorporated into a global economy that intended to mine the region for raw materials in exchange for cheaply manufactured industrial goods. If this action by Europeans did not mark their destruction, it resulted in their loss of political autonomy and their forcible insertion into a mercenary colonial state that valued this region primarily in terms of its raw fuel for industry.

Case study: the Teke Fumu peoples north of Brazzaville

The Teke Fumu peoples, who inhabited the region to the north of the Pool, had strong links to the royal court at Mbe and were presented by Robert Hottot (1884–1939), who travelled in the region in 1906, as ‘a kind of aristocracy’ (Hottot, 1956: 33). In spite of his recognition of the age and importance of Teke Fumu culture, Hottot played an active role in their destruction through the collection of objects and accumulation of ethnographic knowledge.¹⁷

For the Teke Fumu peoples, the beginnings of French presence in this region was marked by a long period of status quo from approximately 1880–1909. When colonial expansion in this region was formalised in 1909, and forcibly implemented in the years afterwards, it led to a rebellion which was met by a crackdown between 1913 and 1920, known as the ‘guerre de l’impôt’ (‘war of tax’). During this war nearly nine-tenths of the inhabitants died of starvation and disease, according to the archival research of George Dupré and Marie Claude Dupré. The

¹⁷ This is true throughout Sub-Saharan Africa at this moment in history.

country – including the Teke Fumu populations in the vicinity of Pangala and the Teke Tsaayi populations in the vicinity of the Chaillu Mountains – was reduced from a number of bustling communities to a few desolate villages (Dupré, 1993: 409).¹⁸

European colonial sources allow us to see this as an act of genocide perpetrated by French colonial agents. In 1911, before the commencement of the *guerre de l'impôt*, the Fumu language was recorded as one of three principal Teke dialects along with Isi-bana and Iteo (Calloc'h, 1911: 1). Indeed, according to the Catholic missionary J. Calloc'h, author of the sole Teke Fumu dictionary, Fumu was so central that it 'seems to be a medium between these dialects, and practical knowledge very easily leads to the knowledge of the other two' (Calloc'h, 1911: 1). By 1953, African linguist Malcolm Guthrie declared this once vital language extinct (Guthrie, 1953: 77).¹⁹

One of the most important archives of objects and information concerning Teke Fumu religious practices – which has been central to this study – was collected by Robert Hottot, who first travelled to the region and recorded information about Teke religious practices in 1906. Sleeping sickness had already impacted the region and, following religious and therapeutic traditions outlined in later chapters, the greatest chiefs of the region commissioned artists to create large-scale figurative sculptures intended to protect the community and counter these diseases. (see p.240 for a more extended discussion).

It is clear from his unpublished notes and journals preserved at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (PRM)– and his much later published accounts – that Hottot understood the function of these works. He saw that they were, in effect, frontline responses to this current health crisis. In spite of this, he determinedly disempowered them in order to collect information about them.

¹⁸ The existence of this war, and its effects on the local population, had not even been acknowledged until the pioneering archival research of Marie Claude and George Dupré in the early 1960s (personal communication).

¹⁹ Aware of its vital importance in the region only 40 years previously, Guthrie could not quite believe that this was actually the case, and travelled to the region in 1957 determined to find speakers of the Fumu language: 'I was able to find a sandy track which led me to the village of Lifula, near the mouth of the small river of the same name, which had a population of eight people, and found that they were, in fact, one of the few remaining groups of Fumu speakers. One of them happened to be the acknowledged chief of the tribe and he explained to me that the total number of his people was now down to fifty due to serious depopulation as a result of disease' (Guthrie, 1967, 240). Fumu oral histories collected by Guthrie at this time are preserved in the SOAS Library (Archives and Special Collections PP MS 27).



Left: Fig. 12. Malali Power Figure photographed outside of its shrine. 23 September 1906, village of Mabonzo, Pangala Region, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by A. Robert Hottot (French, 1884–1939), lantern slide. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1994.62.713).

Right: Fig. 13. Malali Power Figure photographed outside of its shrine with its cloth layers removed. 23 September 1906, village of Mabonzo, Pangala Region, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by A. Robert Hottot (French, 1884–1939), lantern slide. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1994.62.714).

According to his unpublished journal for 23 September 1906, Hottot arrived in the village belonging to chief Mabonzo, which ‘consisted of about twelve huts’, and noted that many of the villagers had smallpox. It revolted him that the chief ‘like they all do [took] me by the hand’, threatening to contaminate him (PRM Hottot Papers (1/9), 101).²⁰ It was in this village that he saw the largest and most impressive figurative sculpture he had encountered so far – a standing male carved of wood: ‘I photographed a big fetish called Malali – height about one metre, the face grinning and the sex masculine! This is visible and pointed in a phenomenal way and is surrounded by cloth’ (PRM Hottot Papers (1/9), 101).

He photographed the work twice. In the first image, the sculpture is positioned directly facing the camera outside a hut, likely the shrine in which it had formerly been housed. Hanging from its shoulders and wrapped around its waist are layers of thick fabric, with a pile of cloth on the ground to the figure’s proper right which appears to have been pulled from its shoulders (Fig. 12). In the second image, the figure has been moved to a clearing and all of the fabric has been removed from the waist, and the outer layer from the shoulders so the figure stands naked. The

²⁰ See Johannes Fabian, *Out of their Minds* (2000, 7) for an analysis of the idea of proximity and contamination as a general trope in travel literature.

wooden form, with a bulbous charge at the chest, has been revealed for the camera (Fig. 13).²¹
As Hottot explained:

I wanted to photograph it, but the hut was too dark. I therefore asked Mabonzo to take the Malali *butti* outside the hut. This he refused to do, and would not in fact touch it, whereupon my companion [Albert Marion] seized it and carried it outside. The figure was clothed in ample red robes, fixed at the neck; its face bore the ritual paintings. We removed its outer garments. Marks of cracking *mpieme* appeared in the wood at the height of the stomach. I took a photograph, moved the figure to a place where it was better lit, and removed its inner garments, to get a photograph of the carving. Having taken my photograph I realised that the village, which previously had been very animated, was hushed and deserted, but we were being observed from behind the huts by a few of the villagers, who kept their distance. We re clothed the figure and returned it to its ritual place in Mabonzo's hut, and left the village. (Hottot, 1956: 33-34)

Hottot acknowledged that the taking of these photographs necessitated an act of desecration, and when he returned to the village nine days later he noted:

We were not surprised to learn that cases of smallpox had broken out in the village, but the villagers considered that we had caused it, by our unprecedented moving of the Malali *butti*, which, everyone knew, would cause something terrible to happen. They considered us to be powerful *nga*, since Malali had not harmed us. (Hottot, 1956: 34)

In destroying this shrine, spiritual authority had been transferred to Hottot and Marion, and the community had become sick as a result. The mentality which allowed Hottot and Marion to commit this act without any sense of moral culpability is explained by better understanding the broader context of how objects such as this sculpture were regarded in Europe at the time.

²¹ Hottot had these two photographs turned into lantern slides, and elaborated on how he had come to take them in the lecture he gave to the Oxford University Anthropological Society in 1933. In the published version of this lecture, he recorded that Malali was 'the principal *butti* of the *nsami* (a grade of chief) Mabonzo'. He described how it 'stood in Mabonzo's hut, in its ritual place, surrounded by other, smaller *butti*'. This elaborate assemblage of power objects must have resembled the kind of shrine Guiral viewed in 1883 belonging to chief Ntchoulou (See p.227).

Alphonse de Haulleville and E. Coart, employees of Leopold II's Congo Museum, noted that in 1906 on the Belgian side of the river in the Congo Free State 'the policy of the State of Congo is directed to remove from the fetish priests the prestige in which they are clothed'. By 'closely monitoring' their authority and 'delivering to justice' those caught 'in the act of abuse or cruel manoeuvres', the Congo people would learn 'that the power of the sorcerer in which he prides himself is illusory' (Coart and Haulleville, 1906: 168). The confiscation of objects became a certain means of achieving political control, and had been occurring on the Loango Coast from the turn of the century.²²

Hottot, even though he was not himself a colonial agent, was a product of the contemporary colonial mentality. By removing the work from its sanctuary and photographing it, he might have been seen to remove 'the prestige in which they are clothed'. In the 1910s and 1920s, individuals such as Kiener, Victor Babet and Robert Lehuard – all directly employed by the French Government in various capacities – generated major collections of Teke material culture from this region, and sought out objects that eventually ended up in French museum collections. These individuals are also the major 'primary' European sources that we have on the art traditions and cultures of the peoples of this region. By closely investigating the materials that are valuable to the Teke and by understanding the cultural values attached to, for example, the red blankets Hottot removed from the figure, or the white lines of *mpieme* that were put on the face, this thesis intends to recontextualise the objects collected through violence and intimidation, to 're clothe' them, in other words, within indigenous systems of material value.

²² See LaGamma, *Kongo: Power and Majesty* (2015, 226) for an account of the confiscation of large-scale power figures on the Loango coast.

Research Methodology

European individuals generated a vast archive of information about the peoples of West Central Africa during the period of study. This exists today in a number of different archives and public and private collections predominantly in Europe and America, referred to collectively as the ‘colonial archive.’ This study employs two major collections of objects as its point of departure. These are both situated in a wider context of information generated and objects collected contemporaneously. The first collection consists of the vast amount of material from Africa that was deposited in museums in Paris as a result of Brazza’s three missions to the region. Most of the material was collected as part of MOA (1883–85), with some material collected on his earlier missions. Such objects are understood to have been amassed within the framework of ‘exploration’. The second collection that serves as the point of departure for understanding the later period was amassed by Robert Hottot from 1906 to 1908 and is housed in various European institutions. These works are understood to have been collected during a period of active ‘exploitation’. The first goal of this study was to draw up concordances for the objects in each of these collections, which had as of yet never been done. Objects were then organised by material, in some instances following categories by which these works were amassed in the first place. Alongside the study of the objects themselves, data was gleaned from the object records of each work. This information was then compared to that contained in archival and fieldwork resources.

Exploration Collections: MOA

The aim of Brazza’s first mission was to establish ‘a commercial route into the interior of Africa’. It is helpful to think of all the objects and information he collected in these terms. The objective of his second mission was to choose the location of one or two stations that were ‘hospitable and of scientific interest’ on the Congo River, in the mode of peaceful rather than violent conquest. The objective of his third mission was overtly colonial.

The information generated at this time is primarily in the form of written documentation housed at the Archives nationales, section Outre-mer in Aix-en-Provence (ANOM), and I analysed Brazza’s notebooks for the period under study in person. I also looked at the archive more generally, as it had been amassed by Brazza himself and contains documents both authored

by and preserved by him. Thus, much of the material in the archive is deemed to be of personal value. A wide variety of material dating from roughly the same timeframe, such as correspondence by Brazza, bills, receipts and various treaties, add further nuance to his descriptions of this period. The Brazza archives also contain a wealth of unpublished documentation written by the French naturalist Léon Guiral (1858–1885), who was present in the region in the early 1880s. This has also proved to be a vital source.

Objects collected as a result of these early French missions was generally readily available in the market, or expressly commissioned by Europeans. Along with raw materials and natural samples, agents collected the material culture of different African peoples – not only the Teke, but also from peoples listed as the Apfuru, Bangui, Bangala, Bondjo, Kota, Kongo, Mobangi, Ondumbo and Yanzi to name some of the key ethnic groups. The collection serves as a summary of what might have been available to a collector in this region acquiring goods in the market by peaceful exchange rather than force.

The overall collection reveals important information about the use of different raw materials and the types of finished goods produced during a specific timeframe. The small number of religious sculptures collected reflects the fact that the peoples of this region were not giving up their most prized possessions to Europeans at this time. Of the 205 objects in this collection – currently housed at the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (MQB), of which the MOA is directly listed as the donor – there are only 10 works of figurative sculpture, and there is no reason to think that these did not come out of the region through peaceful commercial exchanges.

During this earlier period, no European could have afforded to behave like Hottot later did and simply tear sculptures from dedicated shrines – the peoples of West Central Africa were wealthy and powerful enough to resist the pillaging of their cultural heritage. This collection of works is understood as having been gathered together for the purpose of demonstrating the technological capabilities of indigenous people of the region – it therefore offers a window into the contemporary arts and technologies. Works were also purchased as trophies or souvenirs of European presence in Africa, and it was common at this time for objects to be collected from cultures across the world and brought back to Europe.

In order to more fully contextualise these objects, archival research forms an important part of this study. Scholarship on this topic that employs archival research reflects to a striking degree the colonial divisions of the past. This dissertation seeks to unite Belgian, British, French

and American archival sources on the Teke together for the first time, presenting ‘the colonial archive’ as a single source of information.

French Catholic and English Baptist missionaries followed in the steps of the explorers. The archives of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) – conserved in the Angus Library at Regent’s Park College in Oxford – include early sources about the Teke on the Pool and were consulted on two occasions. Of particular use was correspondence written by Baptist missionary Thomas J. Comber (1852–1887), which describes their visit to Congo Pool in 1881. The BMS contains important unpublished information, and several of the written accounts are augmented with maps, illustrations, photographs and drawings.

French Catholic missionaries were on the Pool by 1880. I visited the archive of the congrégation du Saint Esprit, Chevilly-Larue in Paris. The account of the Catholic missionary Prosper Augouard who visited the court of the Makoko is an important later source, containing early references to the Pool and information on Teke spiritual beliefs. His memoirs are collected together in the two-volume *28 années au Congo: lettres* (1905).



Fig. 14. Alfred Marion in Hammock carried by Porters (‘*Route de Kinimbi à Kinanga Mallié. A.M. en tipoye*’). 1906, Plateau Region, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by A. Robert Hottot (1884–1939), album black and white print, 137 x 75 mm. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1994.62.367.62).

In this thesis, objects, photographs and records amassed by Hottot dispersed across several museum collections are studied together as a whole for the first time. Information relating to the materials in Hottot's archive reveals changes in how West Central Africa was perceived by 1906 – when the major part of the collection was put together – compared to how it had been conceptualised during the time of the MOA.

Born when the MOA was still in Africa and first visiting the region of Congo Pool, in 1906, the year after Brazza's death, Hottot's life crossed between the periods of 'exploration' and 'exploitation' – he was a man of both centuries. Like Brazza, Hottot was fascinated by travel from a young age, and was introduced to objects brought back to France from across the world by his aristocratic relatives and family friends, especially his father Alfred Hottot (c.1810–1890). Indeed, it might not have been the Congo Hottot settled on exploring, travelling first to the Himalayas, Japan and China before completing the three trips to Central Africa in 1906, 1907 and 1908–09 for which he is now celebrated.

The first two of these trips were conducted in the spirit of his forebears, primarily motivated by a desire to travel and to hunt big game. Indeed, he is registered as an early 'touriste' to the French Congo (Hottot Papers 3/25 PRM), and the 22-year old Robert Hottot is photographed by his travelling companion Albert Marion on his initial 1906 trip to the Congo in the capacity of a leisured tourist, carried in a hammock by two men and holding an umbrella (Fig. 14).

It was during this first trip that Hottot amassed a significant collection of figurative sculpture, created by master Teke Fumu sculptors of the day. Close analysis of his unpublished journal – housed at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford – has revealed the extent to which these works were extracted from the region through intimidation and violence (see above pp. 17–21). This entire archive, including the unpublished journals he kept, the photographs he took and the maps he used while completing his travels, was donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum in 1994 by his son Hubert Hottot (1913–1997).

Hottot wished to have his collecting habit legitimised by a Western institution. On his third trip to Central Africa in 1908–09, he travelled in a more formal capacity, his voyage accredited by the French state as a *Mission Gratuite* and supported by the French Ministry of

Public Instruction, with the goal of collecting objects for the Natural History Museum in Paris. A *Mission Gratuite* was by invitation, but, as the name suggests, at Hottot's own expense. It appears that relations between Hottot and the ministry were strained from the beginning, and only soured on his return to France. Hottot later suggested that the objects he collected were stolen by the museum and had not been properly handled.

The 150 objects he collected on this mission are currently conserved at the MQB, and in 1923 he donated a collection of nine human skulls to the Natural History Museum, London (Philip Glover correspondence with Rob Kruszynski 26/3/2004 Hottot papers PRM). He also kept around 150 objects that he collected on his first two trips in his private collection during his lifetime. These were donated in 1954 to the British Museum, London (BM) on long-term loan, and the major works of figurative sculpture were purchased by the British Museum in 1994 with the rest of the collection transferred as a donation (Verdi, 2003: 241).

Archival information collected by Robert Hottot housed in several different institutions has been a vital source of information. I visited the Hottot collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (PRM), which includes some 800 photographs, including glass plates and prints, and his cameras and related materials (PRM 1994.62.700.1–7, 1994.62.703.1–12). Of chief interest are the 140 images, one photographic album, three journals and related ephemera generated by Hottot during his expeditions to the Congo. The three-week excursion he made north of Brazzaville in 1906 when he purchased the power figures is especially well recorded, both in his unpublished journals and related photographs. I also made several visits to the archive at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris to research objects collected both by the MOA and by Hottot.

Other significant collections

While Hottot was collecting north of the Congo River, the American anthropologist Frederick Starr (1858–1933) was south of the River in King Leopold II of Belgium's Congo Free State, collecting thousands of objects, many of them Teke, for the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Photographs taken as part of his mission by Mexican Manuel Gomez (1883–1912) – especially of professionals producing market goods on the Congo River – have been of vital importance. Several of these are reproduced here.

The German ethnologist Leo Viktor Frobenius (1873–1938) was also on the Belgian side of Congo Pool in 1906 amassing a significant archive of information about the material culture of different indigenous peoples, with 81 photographs and drawings specifically relating to the Teke peoples.

Other important collections from later in this period include a number of works collected by Robert Lehuard (active mid 20th century) in the vicinity of Brazzaville between 1924 and 1933. The work of his son, Raoul Lehuard – based on the objects and information collected by his father, a colonial agent in the vicinity of Brazzaville – is directly relevant to the Teke. Lehuard's 1974 publication *Statuaire du Stanley Pool*, and the 1996 supplementary text *Les arts Bateke: Congo-Gabon-Zaïre*, are considered important sources. Another colonial administrator for the regional capital Pangala, Kiener (active mid-twentieth century), was also present in the region in 1913, and collected a number of works that are related to the Hottot collection. These are currently conserved in *Le Musée des Arts Africains, Océaniens, Amérindiens, Marseille (MAAOA)*.

While a number of illustrations of Teke artwork and individuals were published in nineteenth century travel accounts, it was not until the turn of the twentieth century that Teke artworks were disseminated in any systematic way. A major source is the volumes of the expensively produced *Annales* – funded by the Government of the Congo state and, by extension, King Leopold II – which are dedicated to the holdings of the Royal Museum at the king's palace in Tervuren, later the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium (RMCA). The first issue appeared in October 1902 and described the ambitions of the journal as to 'further research and comparative ethnographic studies'.

The *Annales* would go on to publish several articles relevant to understanding the material culture of the Teke peoples. Analysis was primarily based on arranging objects within the museum by type, following the scientific methods of the day, and in some instances also including scientific analysis of material components as part of the analysis. These accounts were often augmented with photographs and postcards of general relevance taken in the field. Crucial to the understanding of Teke art traditions are the bulletins published on ceramics (Coart, 1907) and on raffia cloth (Loir, 1935).

Importance of fieldwork

Archival research has been given a modern framework through analysis of the field research conducted by scholars of the 1960s and 1970s. Of particular relevance is the research completed at the Teke Tio court of Mbe by Jan Vansina (1929–2017) in 1963, which he specifically employed as a means of contextualising the late nineteenth century period.

Fieldwork conducted by Marie Claude Dupré (1944–present) amongst the Teke Tsaayi in the vicinity of Djambala between 1969 and 1971 was an important source of information, which gained deeper meaning after interviewing her in person at her home in December 2016. The scholarship of geographer Gilles Sautter (1920–1998), completed in the 1960s in the Republic of the Congo, is applied here as a means of understanding the art history of the Teke. The fieldwork and photographs Dr Alphonse Lema Gwete (d.2004) completed for his PhD dissertation have proved to be the major source of information for the Teke peoples living south of the Congo River in the DRC. A visit to the University Museum in Leuven allowed me to view his dissertation (Leuven: 1978).

My own period of fieldwork was completed from February–May 2017, and December 2017–February 2018. When I set off to investigate this topic in the field I did not know if I would be received well at the court of the Makoko Auguste Nguempio (r.2004–present), let alone with such generosity and kindness. It was through the time spent at Mbe that I was able to better understand how the Teke view their history today. I interviewed Nguempio's courtiers and recorded the official history of the court as it is presented today. I also visited Ngabe and interviewed Joseph Ngantsibi (1943–present), the son of the Nga-ntsii-bi, Ngalfourou Sophie Josephine (r.c.1960–present), chief of the Livii sanctuary and in charge of designating the first vassal of the Makoko.

On a separate mission – undertaken with the director of the National Museum, Marcel Ipari, and chief of exhibitions, Emmanuel Olibi, supported by the Ministry of Arts and Culture – I travelled to Djambala, Zanaga and Lekana in the Lekoumou and Plateaux departments to conduct research into contemporary raffia weaving techniques. We were also present for and participated in a Nkita dance performance. I also witnessed a Kiebe Kiebe performance as the guest of President Denis Sassou Nguesso, organized by Lydie Pongault, cultural advisor to the President which was crucial to my understanding of nineteenth century masking traditions.

I travelled to the Republic of the Congo with the exhibition catalogue *Bateke: Peintures et sculpteurs D’Afrique Centrale* (1998–99), and images of major Teke artworks were used to initiate discussions (Fig. 15). Oral information was collected in the form of recorded interviews, and in some cases in Mbe these were conducted with the descendants of informants listed in Jan Vansina’s *Tio Kingdom of the Middle Congo* (1973). The interviews were conducted in French with the assistance of an English translator and, where necessary, information was translated in Tio and checked with the Makoko Auguste Nguempio. My sources understood my purpose as researcher and helped me with transcribing Teke words.

This field research was combined with unprecedented access to what survives of the colonial archives of French Equatorial Africa, conserved in Brazzaville at the Archives nationales du Congo. More generally, fieldwork was employed primarily to augment archival research, but it added to my knowledge both directly and intangibly by allowing me to better understand the culture and landscape, and the use of various materials on a day to day basis. I intend to develop an ongoing working relationship with the court at Mbe, and have been given a plot of land next to the river to construct a house using historic building methods.



Fig. 15. Alexandre Mpinandzi (1963–present) seated in the royal compound with courtiers of the Makoko, going through objects in the exhibition catalogue *Bateke: Peintures et sculpteurs D’Afrique Centrale* (1998–99). February 2017, Mbe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

Art history through material values

Having acknowledged the damage wrought by the creation of the colonial archive on the peoples of this region, this thesis seeks to redeploy this vast amount of information as a means of revealing the Teke viewpoint for the time frame 1880–1920, shifting the perspective from a European world view to a Teke world view. The material culture of the Teke peoples was collected as part of what has been characterised as ‘a hasty and somewhat indiscriminate scramble for Central African objects’ (Schildkrout and Keim, 1998: 4).²³ This acquisitiveness has been presented in relation to the birth of colonialism, the impact of World Fairs and commercial exhibitions on European taste, and to the founding of ethnographic museums competing for public attention (Coombes, 1994).

This thesis argues that in order to better understand the art history of the Teke peoples in particular, it is revealing to situate the collection of these objects from this one region as an outcome of the contemporaneous boom in global trade. It argues that information collected about the Teke during the period 1880-1920 was done so by men who, in spite of different personalities and avowed intentions, were primarily interested in the region as a commercial prospect. Much of the information amassed thus concerns the value of things, the potential value of things and the possibilities of ‘opening’ the region to trade.

This study is furthermore situated within the bounds of the information that is extant. Put another way, these were not men recording information about the love affairs of African men and women. What we do learn about the Teke peoples concerns their politics and economics. This information is of particular relevance, given the fact that the Teke were – at the beginning of the period of study – some of the wider region’s most successful traders.

The conceptualisation of the land and peoples of this region as a place of potential profit had an established history before the late nineteenth century. Brazza, Stanley and their contemporaries had read earlier accounts and drew upon them. Sixteenth and seventeenth century texts that described travel to Central Africa enjoyed a flurry of republication as a result of contemporary European explorations. Jean Dybowski (1856–1928), one of the second

²³ The types of objects collected are reminiscent of other collections formed throughout Europe during what has been termed the ‘Museum period’ (c.1865–1900) of archaeology and anthropology (Sturtevant, 1969; Stocking, 1989).

generation of French explorers who travelled from Libreville in Gabon towards Chad in 1891–92 on behalf of the French Government, presents this region as connected to global trade in a process of give and take. Central Africa was ‘the warehouse of all the raw materials destined to feed our industries, at the same time as the most assured outlet for the sale of manufactured goods (Dybowski, 1893: 7). Material culture was collected both to demonstrate the potential of the region as a source of raw material for industry and to better understand the tastes and desires of these potential future consumers of European merchandise. All manner of things from the region began to arrive in cities such as Paris along with raw materials such as ivory and rubber and European hunger for Central African things only intensified during the period under study.

Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), in *The Arcades Project*, cites Karl Marx in *Das Kapital* (1867) as crediting technology as playing the major role in these global changes. ‘Across the European continent, technology as a whole forms a single simultaneous action, insofar as it takes effect as *technology*; the physiognomy of the earth is from the outset transformed within the sphere of technics, and the gulf between the city and country is ultimately spanned.’ (Benjamin, 1999: 655). The global circulation of science and technology changed the ‘physiognomy’ of the earth and in this new world the distance between marketplaces was closer than ever.²⁴ All things in the world could furthermore be scientifically catalogued and brought to the market, just as the new technology of photography promised a scientific representation of the subject that was apparently unmediated and accurate. Benjamin noted how nothing was left untouched by this way of seeing until eventually science itself became self-consuming. The physiology of individuals turned to the physiology of cities, peoples, animals and eventually in on the physiologists themselves in the fanciful volume *La Physiologie des Physiologistes* (Benjamin, 1999: 808).

Nineteenth century travel literature was infused with such language of physiognomy, which led to the documentation of individuals as ‘types’. One of the earliest photographers in the region was François-Romain Thollon (1855–1896). A Parisian botanist by training, he left his

²⁴ The use of the word physiognomy here is perhaps related to phrenology, which examined the shape of the head for signs of inner character, a widely popular science in the nineteenth century that materialised out of a wish to classify and order the known universe in ‘scientific’ terms. Descriptions of the peoples in novels of this period make extensive use of the language of this pseudo-science. The hyper realistic depictions of individuals in popular painting traditions such as the pre-Raphaelite movement – hugely popular with the growing European bourgeoisie from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, who were the money behind colonial expansion – extensively used the principles in the depiction of human heads and faces (Barringer, 1998: 15).

role as assistant head of the School of Botany in the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, to work in Gabon and the Congo from 1882 for Brazza. He served as a member of Brazza's mission and sent large consignments of plants to the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris. He also made zoological collections and a number of species are named in his honour. He also donated over two hundred photographs of African individuals currently kept in the MQB and collected a large number of objects from Congo and Gabon. This way of looking at all manner of things with a 'scientific' eye, and employing the latest technologies in recording information, is typical of the way in which material from this region was collected during the period under study.



Fig. 16. Usine du Bazar du Voyage 42,rue Rochechouart Paris. Jules Chéret (1836–1932), 1872. Colour lithograph, 118.5 x 88.5 cm. Bibliothèque des Arts Décoratifs, Paris 2010 (inv. 20296).

The desire to classify in science was mirrored in the marketplace with the development of the *spécilité*, luxury goods to satisfy every demand of the growing European bourgeoisie. Exploration itself was becoming increasingly professionalised, or commodified, until there were

specialists in the arcades of Paris dedicated to creating goods for the world traveller, such as the Bazar du Voyage, established by W. Walcker in 1843, where Brazza bought his Louis Vuitton travelling trunks which he took to Congo (Fig. 16.). Everything the world had to offer was for sale in cities like Paris: ‘the whole of nature is transformed into specialities’ (Benjamin, 1999: 7).

World Fairs in Europe further served to ‘propagate the universe of commodities’. In Belgium, exhibitions such as the World Fair of Antwerp, held in 1884, included ‘specimens’ from the Congo and was visited by up to 10,000 people a day. The largest collections of ‘material’ from the region were transported to European countries with financial interests in the region. A vast amount of material from Leopold II’s Congo Free State began to be amassed in Belgium, and led to the founding collections of the Congo Museum in 1898 at Tervuren (Couttenier, 2015: 36). This museum developed out of the 1897 International Exposition of Brussels, which had a colonial section built at Tervuren where ethnographic objects were displayed alongside stuffed animals and Congolese export products (coffee, cacao and tobacco). Also included was a ‘Human Zoo’ – a copy of a village in which 60 Congolese people lived for the duration of the exhibition.

In France, as in Belgium, material collected from this region was a source of public fascination, likewise forming the basis for exhibitions and world fairs. An exhibition held in the Orangerie of the *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris which opened on 3 July 1886 displayed samples of the materials collected by the MOA. On show were objects drawn from over eighty crates including preserved mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, crustaceans, molluscs and insects along with an ethnographic collection intended to display ‘all the products of native industry’.²⁵ A masterpiece of Teke metalworking was presented as equal to a collection of butterflies. A review of the exhibition notes that a curious Parisian visitor can make a trip to the Congo in the space of an afternoon.

By 1900 Europeans had for centuries been desirous for the produce of Central Africa; first slaves (c.1650–1880); then so-called ‘legitimate goods’ such as ivory, palm oil and hardwoods (c.1850–1900); and eventually rubber (c.1890–1920). It was, however, during the period under study (1880–1920) that Europeans began to formalise modes of extraction of the raw materials from West Central Africa through direct political control and taxation, with swift and devastating consequences for the indigenous populations of the region.

²⁵ This collection of objects is currently conserved in the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris (MQB).

Revealing the indigenous perspective

The overarching question this study seeks to address is as follows: what is material *value* to the Teke from the period of 1880–1920? ‘Material’ – according to the French and English definition of the word – refers to stuff, to things that have matter or substance, to physical objects that are bulky, massive, solid and earthly in contrast to that which is immaterial, spiritual or mental. This thesis argues that European sources for the first half of the period under study (1880–1900) conceived of West Central Africa and its people precisely and solely in such terms. The region and the people existed in the European imagination as terrestrial and concrete. Because of this construction, it became a place that could be harvested for its materials without any sense of moral culpability. It is this visualisation – which arguably had its roots in the transatlantic slave trade – that eventually permitted the atrocities of the French and Belgian governments’ concessionary systems during the second half of the period under study (1900–1920).

The literature of the period gives shape to this vision of the Congo, and a number of texts were published in the 1880s and 1890s solely devoted to the materials of the Congo. A. Merlon’s *Le Congo Producteur* (Brussels, 1888) is a prime example, containing precise information about the value and potential value of materials found in the Congo, and was intended to be useful for Europeans contemplating investing there. *Le Congo au point de vue économique* (Brussels, 1885) by Alphonse-Jules Wauters (1845–1916) contains similar information, both about materials that had indigenous value within Africa and about the value of materials that could be exported. Wauters, a Belgian art historian, geographer and magazine editor, came to be one of the most influential propagandists for Belgian presence in the region. Between 1891 and 1895, Wauters was the editor of the magazine *Le Congo illustré. Voyages et travaux des Belges dans l’état indépendant du Congo*. Containing photographs, hagiographic biographies of Europeans in the Congo and articles dedicated to the value of different materials, it was intended to visualise the Congo in very clear material terms for a reader in Europe. Notable anonymous articles dedicated to jewellery, ivory, money, salt, tattoos and cloth are particularly relevant to the Teke.

The travelling experiences of Europeans also encouraged this materialist way of thinking. Negotiating the exchange of goods with their African hosts was an essential part of each encounter. Meetings had a calculable material worth in terms of the goods exchanged as ‘gifts’ or in direct payment, and some encounters were more ‘valuable’ than others.

The materials Europeans sought from this region – such as ivory and rubber – were not necessarily valuable to the indigenous people. It was the materials intended for indigenous consumption that were often the most precious to the Teke and their neighbours. This thesis will argue that in closely unpacking the values associated with these materials, the different connotations that ‘material’ has for the Teke people is revealed. We find a conceptualisation of the world where the strong distinctions drawn between the material and the immaterial in Western thought are less prevalent. In its place, there stands a vision of the world where certain charged materials demonstrate the proximity of the spiritual realm, and its interconnectedness with the world of the living. We also learn that certain materials allow for the ‘immaterial’ in Teke culture to have a ‘material’ form.

The most valuable materials to the Teke were those that above all had ‘rich symbolic potential’ (Pillsbury, 2017: 6). White clay made from the bed of the Congo River and its affluents – which may seem humble and of little value to Europeans – was one of the most valuable materials for the Teke and other peoples of West Central Africa. Beyond the inherent qualities of such materials, such as colour and texture, this kind of material was selected for its ability to incarnate or form a connection with the incorporeal. In the case of power figures – such as the example that Hottot disempowered above – an empty figurative vessel carved from wood was given spiritual efficacy through the addition of certain valuable materials thought to be particularly close to, or evocative of, the spirit realm, and its function was transformed and its status elevated. From a powerless *tege* figure it was transformed into a *butti* figure, conduit for spiritual forces.

Such a charged figure was owned and operated by the chief, demonstrating the degree to which spiritual authority in this region extended to political authority. The deployment of sacred materials in a ceremonial setting thus serves to manifest the owner of the figure’s link to the spiritual realm, and so served to increase his or her political power. This material link between spiritual and political authority is thus found not only in religious sculpture, but also in chiefly regalia.

Valuable materials were traded from market to market in West Central Africa, indicative of their generally accepted value within the broadest cultural framework. While these materials did have a monetary or market value, their true value was derived from associations with broader cultural concepts. Raffia cloth, for example, served as a currency and was accumulated as stores

of wealth, but its deployment in marriage ceremonies and destruction at funerals demonstrates that beyond a commodity it played a profoundly important social role.

Materials were important to the Teke because of their ability to convey specific ideas and make manifest relationships between the spirit realm and individuals. They also made material bonds among members of a community. Their importance lay in their intrinsic raw qualities (colour, texture, shine, rarity) but also in their potential to be transformed into something else. Materials were used to indicate social status and solidify political relationships. The value of certain materials might also demonstrate a peoples' control over the raw resources of a particular region, witnessed in the development of regional currencies.

This thesis is situated more generally as part of what has been termed the recent 'material turn' or 're-materialisation of art history and of art theory' (Lehmann, 2015: 21–25). Lehmann proposes to advance a contemporary version of Gottfried Semper's *Kunstwerden* ('Becoming of Art'), viewing a materialist approach to art as a means of 'equally considering all elements employed in art's becoming' (Lehmann, 2015: 6).

Understanding the material used by specialists in the production of material culture allows us to better decode Alfred Gell's 'enchantment of technology...the power that technical processes have of casting a spell over us so that we see the real world in an enchanted form' (Gell, 1998: 39). In Gell's sense, the enchantment of technology produces an inability to see these objects for what they are. In this study it is perhaps the horror of technology, the devastating impact of the colonial enterprise that conceals from us the perspective of the artist or the patron. Focusing on the materials valued of these peoples, allows us to break through this barrier, and reconceptualise the material culture of this region in terms of the indigenous technical processes and worldview that led to their creation.

As art historians have demonstrated for other cultures at other moments in history, values attributed to materials are cultural constructions (Pillsbury, 2018: 6). It is by understanding how a particular culture valued a material at a particular moment in history that provides us with the foundation for a shift in cultural perspective. Instead of imagining a mystical inner region of Central Africa from the perspective of the Atlantic coast, we are now able to survey this period of history from the perspective of the Teke capital of Mbe.

Furthermore, by beginning with the material we can, as James J. Gibson described in his theory of material affordances, allow for 'a reversal of the anthropocentric notion of causality, in

which idea, action, and material result neatly follow one another. Instead, the theory of affordances generates an alternative chain in which material provides the starting point for an idea and draws out certain actions.’ (Ingold, 2000: 166–68). We thus begin with the raw materials of the landscape – a vast amount of information about which is preserved in the colonial archive – and then ask to what end these raw materials were traded in various forms by the peoples living across a vast region of West Central Africa. By beginning to understand the material values of the Teke peoples so we are able to understand those of their trading partners.

A shift in perspective

The study of Teke art and cultural practices offer a local perspective on the art history of West Central Africa; an *interior* perspective that breaks the long history of approaching the art and history of this region from the direction of the Atlantic coastline.²⁶ From this altered perspective, the influence that the Teke have had on neighbouring peoples becomes more pronounced, as does the fact that the art traditions of the Teke peoples have so far been neglected in favour of those of neighbouring peoples. Art traditions from southern Gabon, especially those of the Fang and the Punu, have consistently received more scholarly attention than those of their southern Teke neighbours. A major exhibition of the art from this region, ‘Ancestral Art of Gabon from the collections of the Barbier-Mueller Museum’, held at the Barbier-Mueller Museum in Geneva in 1986, is a case in point. Art historians including Louis Perrois, Leon Siroto and Alisa LaGamma have all focused specifically on the art traditions of the peoples of southern Gabon. Indeed, a major exhibition at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris – *Les Forêts Natales: Arts d’Afrique équatoriale Atlantique* (October 2017–January 2018) – focused on the art traditions of the Fang, Kota, Tsogo and Punu. While these cultures are described as having major art traditions that inspired artists such as Picasso, Derain and Braque ‘since their discovery in the early twentieth century’, no reference is made to their Teke neighbours.²⁷

A number of important exhibitions dedicated to the Kongo peoples more directly networked with European trade of the Atlantic coast have occurred in European and American institutions at the expense of their inland Teke neighbours. Major exhibitions, such as the 1981 *Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds*, held at the National Gallery of Art and the 1993 *Astonishment and Power*, held at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., privileged the relationship between Kongo and Afro-Caribbean art traditions while failing to situate Kongo art traditions within a regional African framework. While the recent major Kongo exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Kongo Power and Majesty* (September 2015–January 2016) – which I worked on as Research Associate – went far to emphasise the degree to which ‘Kongo’ had become an overly generalised term that does not

²⁶ See <http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2015/kongo/blog/posts/the-path-they-trod> for a brief analysis of what the continent of Africa might have looked like to seventeenth-century Dutch traders (accessed 18/09/17).

²⁷ From exhibition summary (<http://www.quaibrantly.fr/fr/expositions-evenements/au-musee/expositions/details-de-levenement/e/les-forets-natales-37625/>, accessed 22/09/17, exhibition not open at time of writing).

express the number of different Kongo polities that have been active over a long period, it did not have the scope to include the art traditions of neighbouring peoples such as the Teke, even though they are referenced in the catalogue text and included on maps.

Historians of Kongo civilisation have surveyed the extent to which, before the arrival of Europeans, the region of West Central Africa had a market driven economy that included the widespread use of currency (Gray and Birmingham, 1970; Hilton, 1985; Balandier, 1968). Historians have likewise analysed the devastating impact the European transatlantic slave trade had on Kongo polities, fragmenting society by the late seventeenth century and resulting in the enslavement of millions of individuals from Central Africa – up to a third of the population of the lower Congo (Hilton, 1985; Martin, 1972; Thornton, 1983). Although the Teke are never the focus of these studies, they are always at the other end of the exchanges, providing the copper, slaves and ivory in such demand on the Atlantic coast.

Indeed, because of their distance from the coast, the Teke profited from this international trade while remaining relatively protected from its impacts. The same was true for other inner-Central African peoples such as the Ngala, as Colleen Kriger has discussed in her important work *Pride of men: ironworking in 19th century West Central Africa* (Kriger, 1999).

Research into the religious belief systems of the Kongo peoples likewise provides a crucial counterpoint to understanding how Teke practices are unique within the region, and how they share strong parallels with the beliefs of other Central African peoples. The work of Wyatt MacGaffey is based on his own intensive fieldwork in the DRC and close reading of the information collected by Swedish missionary Karl Laman at the beginning of the twentieth century, north of the Congo River and primarily among the Kongo Sundi – close westerly neighbours of the Teke. His works *Custom and Government in the Lower Congo* (1970), *Religion and Society in Central Africa* (1986), *Art and Healing of the BaKongo Commented by Themselves* (1991) and *Kongo Political Culture; The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular* (2000) go far to situate the wider regional framework within which Teke belief systems can be better understood.

MacGaffey's close analysis of the material components of the Kongo Minkisi is directly relevant to the study of the sacred significance of materials to the Teke. Research conducted by Ellen Howe into the 'Materials that Make Mangaaka' for the 2015 Kongo exhibition (LaGamma

and Howe 2015) provides further information about the religious use of materials among the Kongo that can be usefully compared to Teke practices.²⁸

The work of John M. Janzen on the Kongo market association Lemba, *Lemba, 1650–1930: A Drum of Affliction in Africa and the New World* (1983), has been especially relevant to this topic. Central to Janzen's thesis is the extent to which the Teke trade association of Nkobi was in actual fact an eastern variant of the Kongo Lemba. Once again, while the Kongo rather than the Teke is the focus of this scholar's research, the Teke represent the essential trading partners at the other end of the exchange.

This same mutually dependent relationship between the Teke and the Kongo is presented in the work of historian Phyllis Martin whose monograph *The External Trade of the Loango Coast* (1972) in part details the relationship between the Kongo kingdoms of the coast and the Teke peoples of the interior. In her later works, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville* (1995) and *Catholic Women of Congo-Brazzaville* (2009), Martin demonstrates the important role the Teke played as traders on Congo Pool and the place of the Teke in the later colonial city. Kongo scholarship, thus, has as its background the Teke peoples, and this study intends to bring the Teke to the foreground.

Literature specific to the Teke

It was not until the late 1950s that work by Congolese writers on the art and culture of the Teke peoples was published. *Liasion*, a journal published in Brazzaville, included several notable articles on Teke history and culture. 'Une adoratrice du Nkoue-Mbali' (1957) by H. Youlou-Kouya provides important information about Teke religious beliefs. B. Malbeke-Boucher's 'Ngalifourou, reine des Batekes' and M. Mapula's 'Les chefs dispaaitront-ils?' both provide essential information about the political system of the Teke. Authors such as Theophile Obenga also began to publish work on Teke history through this journal, his particular research eventually culminating in his PhD thesis on the history of the Teke peoples *Le royaume de*

²⁸ <http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2015/kongo/blog/posts/materials-that-make-mangaaka> (accessed 9/8/17).

Makoko histoire et civilisation (1973), through the Université Marien-Ngouabi (Brazzaville). I consulted one of the only extant copy there in February 2017.

During the late colonial period, the early twentieth century colonial archive first began to be re-assessed in European anthropology. In 1956, Frank Willett published ‘Teke Fetishes’, an article based on a lecture given by Robert Hottot to the Oxford University Anthropological Society on 2 February 1933. This important text is one of the earliest monographic studies of Central African art, and marks the transformation from Hottot the ‘gentleman adventurer’, who amassed an important collection of Teke Fumu sculpture in 1906, to Hottot the scholar of Teke religious belief systems as Willett presents him in the mid-twentieth century.

Around the time of African independence, a reappraisal of French colonial history by scholars in France occurred. In 1966, the French historian Henri Brunschwig (1904–1989) published *Mythes et réalités de l’impérialisme colonial français, 1871–1914* based on documents conserved in the Archives nationales, section Outre-mer in Aix-en-Provence (ANOM), including much information on trade. In the same year, he published, with Jean Glenisson, annotated versions of Brazza’s travel journals from his first voyage, released under the title *Brazza, explorateur: l’Ogooué, 1875–1879*.

This was followed in 1969 by French historian Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch (1935–present), who published an annotated selection of material from the MOA under the title *Brazza et la prise de possession du Congo: La mission de l’Ouest africain, 1883–1885*. Scholars working in Belgian archives also began to publish material from these first missions. Notable publications include *Unpublished letters of Henry Morton Stanley* (1957), followed by *The exploration diaries of H.M. Stanley, now first published from the original manuscripts* (1961) by M. Denzil and Albert Maurice. The extensive publication of early archival material at this time displays an interest in – and even a nostalgia for – this early period of exploration.

In the early 1960s, within the Republic of the Congo itself, former French colonial government institutions located in Brazzaville – notably the Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique Outre-mer (ORSTOM) – began to hire recent graduates from universities in France to work in the Congo and study colonial archives. Several notable scholars received funding and went on to publish through this institution, including Marcel Soret, who would publish his map of the different ethnic groups of the former French colonial possessions, *Afrique Centrale esquisse ethnique générale*, in 1962. The research of George Dupré on the Bembe peoples and

Pierre Bonnafé on the Kukuya plateau was likewise orchestrated through ORSTOM, and based on a combination of fieldwork and archival research. Their research is vital to understanding Teke art and culture. Research conducted by this group of scholars would reveal for the first time the devastating impact of the War of Tax (1911–19) on the Teke Tsaayi peoples of the Chaillu mountain region (Dupré, 1993).

Especially relevant to our understanding of the history of the Teke peoples is the work of the geographer Gilles Sautter, who worked in Brazzaville for ORSTOM from 1948 to 1953. Research conducted at this time would lead to his 1960 study of the geography of the Mbe plateau *Le plateau Congolais de Mbe*, and his monumental 1966 thesis *De l'Atlantique au Fleuve Congo une géographie du sous-peuplement*, which rigorously questioned why and how part of Central Africa, while not lacking in natural resources, had so few inhabitants.

The Belgian historian, linguist and anthropologist Jan Vansina (1929–2017) had long been working on Central African material, having completed his doctorate in history on the Kuba Kingdom from the Catholic University of Leuven in 1957, when he began to research Teke history. A travel grant from the Social Science Research Council (USA) allowed him to complete fieldwork in Mbe at the court of the Teke Tio Makoko in 1963, and from this research he published, ten years later in 1973, the descriptive monograph *The Tio Kingdom of the Middle Congo, 1880–1892*. This book condenses much of the thinking about this region current at the time and is still relevant today, set to be republished by Taylor & Francis in 2018.

It draws heavily on the Brazza archive, then newly available, with Vansina employing archival information as the counterbalance to his fieldwork. Indeed, in 1972 Vansina contributed to Henri Brunschwig's publication of annotated versions of Brazza's journals of his second voyage that included a detailed account of Brazza's time at Mbe under the title *Brazza explorateur. Les traités Makoko, 1880–1882*. Vansina's understanding of the Tio Kingdom was also shaped by the scholarship that was coming out of ORSTOM, in particular Sautter's understanding of the geography of the Teke plateau. For instance, Sautter had been one of the first to emphasise the important place of Congo Pool in networks of Central Africa trade, coining the phrase 'the Great Congo Commerce' that Vansina would later popularise in *Tio Kingdom*.

The scholars listed above are historians, geographers and linguists, and only a few individuals have written about the art history of the Teke peoples directly. Marie Claude Dupré published *A propos d'un masque des Téké de l'Ouest (Congo-Brazzaville)* in 1968, and always

viewed herself as working on the outside of the French academy of which the scholars above were product. Her fieldwork in the Teke Tsaayi region in the vicinity of Zanaga completed in the late 1960s and early 1970s is crucial to our understanding of Teke masquerading traditions. She also contributed important field research into the Mukisi/Nkita female therapeutic tradition (Dupré 1978). I had the honour of interviewing Marie Claude over a period of three days at her home in France in December 2016.

As previously mentioned, Raoul Leuhard's work based on the objects and information his father collected during his time as a colonial agent near Brazzaville is important, although it does over-emphasise similarities with Kongo art traditions. His 1974, the publication *Statuaire du Stanley Pool*, and the 1996 supplementary text *Les arts Bateke: Congo-Gabon-Zaire*, must nonetheless be considered important sources. The publications of art dealer Alain Lecomte, on the other hand, are based exclusively on the work of Leuhard and have only served to emphasise the casual, surface-level similarities between the Kongo and the Teke. The idiosyncratic nature of their art history and political structure has been overlooked for the sake of easy equivalences.

The Congolese scholar Alphonse Gwete Lema's *La statuaire dans la société teke morphologie et contexte culturel* is the only source that focuses solely on Teke groups in the DRC. It includes unpublished photographs taken during Lema's fieldwork in the 1970s and elucidates the relationship between the blacksmith and the carver. Lema (Leuven: 1978) and Dupré (Paris: 1981) are, to date, the only PhD dissertations to have focused solely on Teke art traditions; the figurative sculpture of the Teke peoples of the DRC and the masquerade traditions of the Teke Tsaayi bordering Gabon respectively.

To date, a Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie exhibition *Bateke: Peintures et sculpteurs D'Afrique Centrale* (1998–99) represents the first and only significant monographic museum exhibition to address the full spectrum of the Teke's material culture. The research conducted by Marie Claude Dupré and Etienne Féau – with contributions by Alphonse Gwete Lema, Bruno Pinçon and Colleen Kriger – in many ways provides the starting point for this present dissertation.

The significance of Teke culture in the Congo today



Fig. 17. Mariss Balekala Gampo, nephew of Makoko Nguempio, photographed holding a photograph of his grandfather, Makoko Nsalou. February 2017, Court of Makoko, Mbe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

Given the devastating impact of colonial history on the indigenous populations of this region, it is perhaps remarkable that a Teke court continues to thrive in Mbe. A foreigner cannot simply turn up unannounced – a formal introduction is necessary, and a ceremony must be completed on arrival which includes the presentation of a specific number of gifts. My introduction to the current Makoko was arranged through the Minister of Culture and Arts for the Republic of the Congo, Jean Omer Ntady, who set up a meeting with Alexander Mpinandzi, the cultural advisor to the current Makoko Nguempio Auguste. Mpinandzi directly contacted the Tio court on my behalf and guided me on my visit along with Aude Paul Sita (1978–present) who acted as a translator and research assistant. Daniel Lyonel Diakouka (1993–present) was our driver. I travelled with Kongo men into Teke country. So great was the reputed power of the Makoko in the spiritual realm that Sita insisted on also bringing a spiritual guardian with us; Isitwa Paramahansa Nkouka (1980–present), a third level initiate in the forest of Kindamba who was charged with the responsibility for our safety in the spiritual realm.

A Teke cultural guide is of fundamental importance, and not simply for practical reasons – without the guidance of Mpinandzi none of us would have known *where* or *how* to look. He opened both my Kongo friends' eyes and my own to the depth and complexity of Teke history. Born 29 July 1963, in the royal capital of Mbe, Mpinandzi is a trained sculptor who has completed several large scale public commissions. Over the last 10 years he has positioned himself as the facilitator between the court and the outside world in matters relating to Tio culture. He has facilitated several meetings to the court, most notably for UNESCO in 2009.

I met him on the 9 February 2017 at the Ministry of Arts and Culture in Brazzaville. Once I had explained my reason for wanting to go to Mbe he demonstrated his close connection to the court by calling the wife of the Makoko on loudspeaker in front of me. He presented my desire to go to Mbe as a wish to 'drink at the source' ('Il faut boire a la source') and described himself as the Makoko's 'son in Brazzaville'.

The meeting was arranged for 11 February. Before leaving Brazzaville, I was given a shopping list of goods to purchase, including a roll of red fabric with a value of 13,000 CFA franc (£17), a large sack of salt with a value of 4,500 CFA franc (£6), a demijohn of red wine with a value of 22,000 CFA franc (£28) and a sack of kola with a value of 2000 CFA franc (£1.5). An additional gift of 30,000 CFA franc (£40) would be expected at the court. I also gave two gifts that I had purchased in London – for his wife a ruby ring set in a silver band, and for the Makoko a bright red silk Hermès scarf from the 1970s decorated with a paisley pattern.

A visit to the court in February 2017

We arrived at the reception room of the Makoko, greeted by the sound of a trumpet made from a buffalo horn which symbolised the power of royal court. It was played by Elie Nganbara, grandson of Makoko Nsalou (r.1948–1964) and nephew of the current Makoko. The Makoko was seated on the royal throne (*likuba*) at the end of the reception room. Next to him sat his wife, the queen (see p. 207 for the process of initiation).

In his hands he held a dried piece of beef (*oussey ampa*), the symbol of his power and right to govern, and the flywhisk (*ougnah*), the sign of justice. I was later told that the *oussey ampa* is always placed in front of the *ougnah* in his hands to demonstrate that 'power comes before justice'. He continuously moved the flywhisk in order to inspire his good sense and

wisdom. I was also told how the *likuba*, covered in red fabric, must never be empty. According to tradition, there is a minister known as the Nga-Likuba (‘master of the *likuba*’) who is in charge of guarding the throne. This role is currently filled by Mariss Balekala Gampo, nephew of the Makoko and grandson of Makoko Nsalou, pictured holding a photograph of his grandfather and wearing the royal colours of red with black spots (Fig. 17). If the *likuba* is not guarded by a figure of the right standing, a more powerful spirit will take the Makoko’s place.



Fig. 18. Makoko Auguste Nguempio seated with his wife and advisors. In the foreground, the red wine, red cloth and salt brought as a gift. February 2017, Mbe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

On his head, the Makoko wore a crown made in raffia (*Ka* or *Mutiri*), created by his minister, the Royal blacksmith (also called *Mutiri*). I was under the impression that it was made of gold braid and of foreign manufacture, and it appears to be the same crown worn by previous Makoko (See for example Fig. 134). I was informed, however, that it is made in raffia and by

magic in one night by the blacksmith *Mutiri*. Attached to this crown, in a vertical position, was a large feather of a nocturnal bird found in the savannah region known in the Tio language as an *Iboubon*, likely a nightjar. In principal, the only hunter who can kill this bird is the royal hunter, Ngampo, and he must present the feather to the Makoko.

The Makoko also had on his forehead large circles in red pigment (*tula*) made from a redwood crushed with oil. This material is known generally in the wider region as *tukula* and, along with the grey of sacred ashes (*lifutu*) also worn on his face, are first given to the Makoko by the Nga-ntsii-bi at his initiation. These pigments were placed in a line down his nose, and also on his cheeks beneath his eyes. He was entirely covered by a large cape – coloured red with a leopard spot design in black and a border in white cotton – known as the *mbula a ngoh*.

Red remains the most important colour of the court, just as it was in Brazza's first account of visiting the Makoko's court in 1880. I was informed that it symbolises peace, wisdom and power, and is a colour only worn by chiefs. When the Makoko's car, with its number plate 'ROI MAKOKO', is sent on a mission in his honour it is decorated with streamers of red fabric. Red fabric is likewise chosen to decorate the catafalque of a deceased Makoko (See Fig. 98).

At court, the Makoko and his wife were presented in a universe of red and surrounded with objects that further expressed the power and wisdom of their position. Pinned to the wall behind them were two leopard skins, and on the wall between the windows on the left was the skin of a civet. On the carpet in front of them there was a lion skin, and positioned on the wall behind them was a carpet with a representation of a lion, along with another carpet that depicted an Indian tiger. All of these were in the royal colours of red and black. There was also a print of a leopard with the flags of the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Gabon, demonstrating that the power of the Makoko crossed political boundaries.

Positioned before the royal couple on the carpet were four wooden statues. The first depicted a mother breastfeeding a baby, in the tradition of Yombe mother and child figures. Next to this 'maternity' figure was a statue in wood of a standing male wearing a hat, an *onlua* and bracelets. His chest was naked and he wore only a fabric wrapper, with his hand held to his chest in a gesture that I was told is one of compassion or peace. There were also two statues that represented musicians. None of these statues would be considered great works of art, nor to have come out of a sculptural tradition especially related to the Teke peoples. Behind these statues, the

carpet was filled with objects, including pipes, horns, a bell and piles of dried leaves known as *untsa-a-ntsa* intended to calm the spirits of those present when the court is in session.

On his neck the Makoko wore a necklace called the *onlua*, even though it was a different style from the original cast entirely in copper-alloy or brass of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. See, for example, the *onlua* worn by Makoko Iloo I in the photograph taken by Jacques de Brazza in 1883 (Fig. 11). It was instead made from six leopard teeth, and is said to serve as the sign of the great power of the Makoko, equivalent to a great cat in the bush. The leopard teeth were mounted on a base of copper or brass. The necklace was inherited and has been photographed on other Makoko of the twentieth century (Figs. 134, 136, 142).

He did not wear full ceremonial dress for our meeting; the whole ensemble known as the *nguiangobou*. This is made up of a bracelet and a belt decorated with cowrie shells, and white and blue glass beads. All of these objects were said to have been given by Obu, the Teke founding hero, when he brought to the Teke the gift of culture (see p.191).

While the meeting was underway, all of the men present chewed kola nut to inspire and guide the flow of the conversation. Through the intermediation of Mpinandzi and the interpretation of Sita, the goal of my research was presented to the court. I explained that I wished to accurately describe the court as it existed in February 2017, especially focusing on history and religion. I wanted to understand the things used at the court and why they were used, and the importance of materials such as raffia, red cloth, kola nut, cowrie shells, raffia, white clay and red pigment. I wanted to learn about Nkwembali and the Nkobi shrines. Mpinandzi translated this to the courtiers in a mixture of French and Atio, the language of the Tio Teke of Mbe. The courtiers in turn transmitted this information to the Makoko in Atio. Afterwards, Mpinandzi said to Sita and me that:

His majesty has received us in the presence of the village committee, we are here in his home. He is very satisfied with our presence here and shares the impressions of the village committee. His Majesty's Makoko is the supreme authority of the Teke culture, and the depositions that people are going to make will be in accordance with his words.

After this, I did not see the Makoko again during my time at the court, although he remained a continual presence and as far as I was aware was always in his public chamber seated

on the *likuba*. My interviews were conducted in the yard outside the public chamber with his courtiers over the following week (Fig. 13). Historical points were intensely debated, especially the roles of each vassal during the process of initiation. There was a strong desire for the account to be accurate, and to right some of the perceived misrepresentations of the past. Never had history felt so vibrant and alive as in those days. It was a living presence, as material as the kola nut we chewed, the palm wine we drunk, the raffia cloth I was given and all the other materials that remained essential elements of daily life. It was here that I fully understood how, in order to truthfully represent the art history of this culture, it was necessary to begin by understanding the cultural significance attached to their most precious materials.

Research questions

The thesis is divided into four chapters. Beginning with an analysis of creative process and what it means to create, it then analyses commercial value, prestige value, and spiritual value with an analysis of the nature of reality for the Teke peoples by an examination of the values attributed to materials that are used to manifest their religious beliefs.

1. What are ‘raw materials’ to the Teke, and having established what constitutes raw matter or substance from which a thing is or may be made, what does it mean to transform a ‘raw material’ into a finished goods, objects of material culture?
2. What is the worth or quality of a materials as measured by a standard of equivalence, and consequently what is the place or function of a material within a system of other materials from which it derives its meaning?
3. What materials did the Teke esteem, what is a material’s most important, useful, desirable quality from a Teke perspective?
4. What materials are sacred to the Teke, how is the spiritual world conceived in material form?

Chapter outline

Chapter One: Teke landscapes, materials and markets

By 1880 the Teke peoples of the Pool were linchpins in a vast Central African trade network, vital participants in a global exchange of materials that had accelerated during the nineteenth century. While this enriched the Teke, it also increased competition from their African neighbours and eventually European protocolonising forces who, by 1900, successfully usurped the place of the Teke on the Pool.

While the Teke provided raw materials for export to Europe at an international level of trade, a nuanced understanding of Teke ‘material values’ is revealed through the analysis of goods produced using local materials intended for indigenous consumption. Of the raw materials available from the many ecological zones of the wider Teke region, clay, raffia, wood, animal produce and metals were the most important. Landscape is considered in terms of local political systems and regional specialisation permitting the transformation of these raw materials into finished goods with a market value. Different Teke peoples were granted a place in the market by extracting materials from their local landscape and transforming them into desirable forms. Some goods created by Teke specialists were so widely recognised as valuable that they functioned as currencies.

Each Teke community had specialists entrusted with the transformation of raw materials into the finished goods then sold at the market. The potter, the weaver and the blacksmith were the most important, and the work of each is appreciated in turn, including analysis of the process of manufacture which reveals a degree of professionalisation. Teke success in trade over centuries meant that both aspects of trading – the act of exchanging goods and the relationships the trade act signified – were important expressions of Teke cultural identity. Famed for their wealth, bargaining skills and knowledge of prices, the Teke were connected through trade to the region at large, and objects made by the Teke often had distinctive features that marked them as being of Teke origin. The high value placed on trade by the Teke is part of a belief that trade and the market were vital institutions for peace, health and prosperity; themes explored in chapter two.

Chapter Two: The life of the market

Even though the transatlantic slave trade had been banned by 1880 and replaced by the international export of ‘legitimate’ goods such as ivory, this chapter argues that slaves still remained the most valuable indigenous commodity in the Teke market place; the most valuable form of currency and ultimate store of wealth. Currency, when appreciated from a Teke perspective, is not a simple abstract sign of value but a material connection to a vast network of peoples in the broader society. The fact that the slave continued to constitute the backbone of the economic system has broader implications for understanding historic Teke concepts of value. By valuing goods in relation to lives, so markets were conceptualised in terms of valuable bodies – or blood. The most important relationships, such as marriage or trade, were likewise expressed in terms of human life. What it meant to be ‘wealthy’ when understood in these terms has implications for understanding a husband’s relationship with his wife, and the Makoko’s relationship with his network of *ngantsii*, or masters of the land. In investing an *ngantsii* to rule on his behalf and giving him the *onlua* to wear as a sign of his right to rule, the Makoko makes him his wife. Power is both to own and to distribute material goods and understanding what it means to have wealth is key to understanding political organization.

Chapter Three: prestige value; materials of dress and status

Having established that the Teke worldview held the human as the ultimate store of value, and analysed the implications of this value system, we can now turn our thinking towards more abstract notions of material value as they relate to concepts such as worth (*fwana*) or prestige. Again, the human body is of central importance, and the manner in which Teke leaders dressed and adorned themselves provides a wide range of nuanced information regarding prestige and status. Dress, as a public demonstration of the prestige and status of an individual, is furthermore a reflection of the political situation of the day. Tracking extensively documented changes in the dress of leaders during the period under study thus reflects broader geopolitical shifts in power. Illuminating contrasts are uncovered by comparing the dress of the elite of the markets around Congo Pool, who were more closely affected by the opening up of international trade from an earlier date, to the dress of the elite on the plateau, whose style of dress gives us a sense of the

Teke world before the arrival of Europeans. Imported European cloth and metal, along with finished items of clothing, enjoyed a high status that, in part, diminished over the period of study due to the mass importation of European trade goods, while materials of indigenous manufacture such as raffia cloth continue to this day to maintain a 'traditional' value. Once again, it is indigenous materials of high symbolic value that continue to be highly esteemed with their value above changes in supply, taste and fashion.

Chapter Four: The body and the creation of Teke identity

Etiological myths equate the birth of Teke culture with the gift of the *onlua*, the exquisitely worked copper alloy necklace that became an essential symbol of Teke political authority. According to oral accounts collected in Mbe, the first *onlua* was given to the Teke peoples by a force named Obu. Obu took human form and came to Earth to distribute the powers of the spiritual realm. He created the Makoko and his twelve vassals, including the royal blacksmith. Spiritual forces were shared across Teke territory, and these forces were given material form and housed in containers known as *nkobi* which had to be tended to in shrines.

In Teke religious practices – as is found among the neighbouring Kongo peoples – spiritual forces, both of nature and ancestral, may be encouraged by a specialist known as the *ngaa* to take a material presence within a specially constructed container. Containers can be anything from houses for initiation, to hats, carved sculptures and bundles of bark and cloth. Human bodies and figurative sculptures are analysed as containers for spiritual forces. Both were prepared using the same sacred materials: palm oil, white clay and red pigment. Focusing on the use of these materials reveals how and why these materials were so highly valued. The spiritual beliefs of the Teke peoples may be seen to be granted a material form in the creation of these artworks. The chapter concludes by looking at the vital role of performance in activating materials. The materials contained within the container, known as the *bonga*, were not sacred in and of themselves but had to be activated by ceremonial action, dancing and performance organized by a specialist. Materials are thus only one part of a much broader cultural expression.

Conclusion

The conclusion begins by situating this period of local history in the context of world history. This setting provides the context for an extended analysis of the Teke court during the twentieth century. The colonial period continues to be negotiated in this region today. In Mbe, fieldwork has shown that certain indigenous materials continue to be valued, and even colonial monuments have been reimagined within a Teke system of value.

Defining ‘the Teke’

A babel of different names has been recorded for the peoples who have long dominated this geographic region, and today refer to themselves as the Teke. This range reflects their distance from the coast, the number of Teke subgroups and the extent to which a combination of geographical and political factors has led to their history being written by outsiders. A variety of names is common for inland populations, and is also seen among the Chokwe further south and the Yombe to the west. In the earliest printed sources – dating to the last decade of the fifteenth century – references to the Meticas, Moteques and Mundequetes are thought to all refer to the ancestors of the peoples now called Teke.²⁹ Sixteenth and seventeenth century sources that refer to the Suquas, Angrios and the Anzique or Anziche peoples of the Anzicana Kingdom all likewise refer to the Teke.³⁰ During this timeframe, the people here have also been referred to simply as ‘Makoko’.

Today, as was the case in the nineteenth century, ‘Teke’ – like ‘Kongo’ for their neighbours – functions as a convenient overarching term for an ethnic group, within which there are many distinct subgroups. The Congolese historian Théophile Obenga (1936–present) suggests that the variety of different Teke subgroups explains why there have been so many different names given to the Teke over history. During the twentieth century, individual scholars have variously devoted their attention to and emphasised the importance of specific Teke subgroups. Agents for the MOA used a wide range of names for different peoples who would be classed as Teke, and these change from writer to writer. Hottot is the first to list their names, and includes the Sise, Bali, Teo, Fumu and Lali as the major Teke subgroups on a map based on his 1906 trip.³¹ Vansina dedicated his research of the Teke to the ethnicities of the Mbe plateau, with a particular emphasis on the Tio subgroup associated with the ruling family and the capital city, Mbe.³² During the same period, Dupré studied the masquerade traditions of the Teke Tsaayi in

²⁹ Gilles Sautter theorised that ‘Meticas’ from Dapper, ‘Mundequetes’ from Barros and the ‘Moteques’ from Tellez all recognised the singular ‘mouteke’ of the plural ‘bateke’ (Sautter, 1960: 23).

³⁰ Variations of spellings include: Ansika, Anzicana, Anguicos, Angrios, Angici, Anzichi, Ansicos, Anziquetes, Anziqueti, and Asi-Ko. Versions of this are most commonly used in Pigafetta. Théophile Obenga thinks that this is probably a European corruption of the name of a subgroup living in the Congo Pool region. Interview conducted in Brazzaville, March 2017. See also Obenga, 1968: 28.

³¹ This map, published in 1956, is based on a hand drawn sketch conserved in the Hottot collection dating from 1906.

³² According to Vansina, the term ‘Teke’ is a deformation of Te(g)e, Tsio, Tio, Teo, by which most of these populations designated themselves and especially their language (Vansina, 1973: 8). According to Van Bulk, quoted

the region of Zanaga near the border with Gabon, also including the Tege and the Kukua (Kukuya) peoples as part of the wider Teke region. In the late 1970s, the Congolese art historian Lema dedicated his dissertation to the sculpture traditions of the Teke south of Congo Pool in the DRC, and he lists the Fumbu [Fumu], Wum, Boma, Kukuya, Nzinzo, Tsaye [Tsaayi], Tegue and Ngungulu as the major Teke groups (Lema, 1978: 27). Note how even Lema's names differ from the other listed authors.

As early as 1884, Jacques de Brazza recorded the peoples in the region just north of Brazzaville as being Balali – i.e. of Kongo origin. However, he stated that they were 'mixed with Bateke blood' (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1887: 356). By 1906, Hottot had argued that these Kongo migrant populations possessed 'some Teke characteristics but not to such a marked degree', though they should still be considered as part of the broader Teke peoples. Hottot recorded that it was hard to distinguish between the various Teke subgroups and the Kongo migrant groups and 'owing to wars and migrations, [they were] in fact very much entangled' (Hottot, 1956: 26). Throughout this text, 'Teke' is used, followed by the name as it appears in the original source. For example, Teke [Anzique].

Teke and Kongo relations

The centre of Hottot's collecting and research activities was a number of villages located to the north and north-west of Brazzaville, in a vast colonial province known as Bula N'Tangou. This area, covering more than 4000 km², was also named after its regional capital, Pangala, and known as the Pangala region. Its borders were, even at the time, ill-defined, but it may be said to have begun north of Brazzaville and extended as far as the foothills that separated the Ogooué River basin from the Congo River basin. The region encompassed the upper reaches of the Niari to the west and the Alima River to the east. The population here was a mixture of Kongo and Teke peoples (Martin, 1909: 19). The Teke Fumu and the Teke Sise had historically lived in the region surrounding Brazzaville, where they had been linchpins in the trade on Congo Pool for centuries.

in Boone, Olga. 1973. *Carte ethnique de la république du Zaïre, quart Sud-Ouest*. Tervuren: Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, p.296, 'Tio' itself has also been spelt Tyo and Bateo and Atio; 'the Atyo peoples, a Utyo person, the iTyo language'.



Fig. 19. Four views of a standing male figure with attached figures (*butti*). 19th–early 20th century, inventoried 1931, Republic of the Congo. Teke peoples, wood, cloth, resin, ceramic, cowrie shell, organic materials, 29 cm. *Museum der Kulturen, Basel* (III 7131). Ex- collection: Dr. Stéphen Chauvet (1885–1950).

Not only did the arrival of Europeans threaten the position of the Teke on the Pool, but the gradual process of encroachment of farmers and traders from the Lower Congo – which had begun in the sixteenth century – only increased as new trading opportunities developed for Kongo migrants as a result of the growing European presence in the region. With trade routes to the Atlantic ever more lucrative, Kongo groups – especially the Lari and Sundi, known collectively as Balali-Bassoundi – increasingly replaced the Teke as essential middlemen in long-distance trade.³³ Thus, while numerous Fumu speakers and other Teke groups remained in this region when Hottot, Kiener and Calloc’h were present between 1906–12, it is clear that it was a period of great upheaval.

A remarkable work housed in the Museum der Kulturen Basel highlights how culturally distinct groups may have existed autonomously in the same region, whilst also coming to share fundamental beliefs (Fig. 19). The central statue is of a standing male figure that has the distinctive characteristics of a Teke work produced in the Boula N’tangou region. This is seen most clearly in the elaborate coiffure, the shape of the eyes and the nose, the distinct moustache and the cicatrisation marks on the face. The body of the figure is concealed beneath a carapace of cotton material embedded with a compound made from a variety of plant and animal material,

³³ This process has been part of several studies, notably Abraham Ndinga-Mbo, *Introduction a l’histoire des migrations au Congo* (1984); Dominique Ngoie Ngalla, *Les Kongo de la vallee du Niari* (1982); Andre Massengo ‘Connaissez-vous les Lari? Liaison 46’ (1955); Jan Vansina, *Tio Kingdom of the Middle Congo* (1973: 8–11, 303).

including feathers and elephant tail hair. Stuck into this additional material, and beneath the figure's face, is a large cowrie shell (*Cypraea tigris* L.), a striking empowerment object. A cowrie shell of this size would have been extremely rare so far inland and is unknown on other power figures from this region. It is more commonly associated with most impressive large-scale Mangaaka power figures created by the Kongo peoples of the Chiloango River region, and it was likely traded from the Loango coast (LaGamma, 2015: 261). To the Teke and their neighbouring peoples, shells had strong associations with the spirits of the ocean and were found in Nkita containers (see p.223).

Secured within this additive superstructure are additional figures. Facing to the proper right is a standing male figure showing all the characteristics of a Kongo Bembe leader, including a raised ceremonial sword in his right hand, a palm wine gourd in his left and the distinctive cicatrisation marks on the stomach. To the proper right are attached a pair of twinned standing male figures likewise facing outwards. According to a letter written by Dr Stéphen Chauvet (1885–1950), who owned the work before 1931, the twinned figures resemble the miniature portable amulets carried by the Teke.³⁴ Marie-Claude Dupré remarked that the hairstyle of each figure suggests a different Teke sub-group; one of a style related more to figures created at the Pool, the other more common seen on figures created by the Teke Boende (Dupré, 1996: 184–85).

This bringing together of figures depicting powerful rulers from different but closely related and intermingled cultural groups might have functioned as a kind of peace treaty. Dupré noted that this work might also have served to demonstrate that the Teke maintained their supremacy, at least in a symbolic manner, 'with the help of their magical weapons' in the face of migration. It was their spiritual authority, as the original inhabitants of the land that continue to bind all cultural groups in the region together. She viewed it as a 'semantic construction intended to make material an accord between peoples, close but different. A kind of peace treaty, made up of restrictive clauses' (Dupré, 1996: 184–85).

This work furthermore demonstrates that master sculptors of the region were not limited to creating sculptures that solely depicted individuals of their own culture. Rather than being an

³⁴ Described by Dr Stéphan Chauvet in a sale letter of November 1931 as 'fetiches ancestraux que les Batekes transportes sur eux dans leur sorte de musette'. The work was recorded as coming from 'the surroundings of Mbe, the Makoko residence of Tio'. Information from the object file kindly shared with me by Isabella Bozsa, Africa section, Museum der Kulturen Basel (9/7/16).

assemblage, it is believed that all of the individual sculptures that make up this work were carved by the same sculptor. This work thus demonstrates that a sculptor working in this region, at this time, might have created different power figures in culturally distinct styles depending on the demands of his client (Kiener, 1913: 21).

Languages

One of the most definitive means of determining the boundaries of what can be understood as the Teke cultural zone is through the geographical spread of the Teke languages, and it was not until the 1950s that the full range of languages had been classified by Western linguists. Hottot noted that the Fumu peoples seemed ‘to be a remnant of the primitive [Teke] tribe before it became sub-divided’, and that *fumu* is the general term for an upper class of men (Hottot, 1956: 25). Dialects, such as the Fumu recorded by J. Calloc’h, while clearly widely spoken at the turn of the century, were by then practically extinct. In 1953, the extant languages were coded Zone B70, according to Malcolm Guthrie’s classification of Bantu languages.³⁵ Included in the group are five separate tongues still spoken today: Ibalí Teke, Ngungwel, South Teke, Teke-Ebo and West Teke (Adam, 1951: 153–65). Ibalí Teke is spoken to the north, including areas of Gabon, and includes the dialects of Bali, Mosieno and Ngee. Ngungwel, including the Mpu dialect, is spoken in the plateau region. Amongst the Southern Teke, Teke Kukuya is still spoken, but Teke Fumu is now extinct. For the West Teke, Teke-Laali is extinct and Teke-Tsaayi is threatened, while Teke Tyee and Yaka (Congo) are most commonly spoken. Teke-Ebo is spoken throughout the region.³⁶

Two important early dictionaries are crucial to our understanding of the Teke during the period under study. The first, *A Vocabulary of the Kiteke, as Spoken by the Bateke (Batio) and Kindred Tribes on the Upper Congo*, was compiled by A. Sims, a medical missionary in the African Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union based in Ntamo, the Teke market town on the southern side of Congo Pool, between 1883 and 1886. It provides a list of words relating to trade and trade goods and also, given Sims’ profession, to health and healing. The dictionary records primarily Tio dialect spoken in the capital city of Mbe by a migrant population to the Pool (Sims, 1886: vi). This dictionary is read in relation to the contemporaneous Kikongo dictionary produced by Sims’ Baptist colleague Bentley, published in 1887 as the *Dictionary and Grammar of the Kongo Language, as Spoken at San Salvador*. Another early dictionary, *Vocabulaire français-Ifumu (Batéké): précédé d’éléments de grammaire*, compiled by Calloc’h

³⁵ The impact of migration both from Kikongo speaking groups and those from Gabon is demonstrated by the wider B grouping. B60 includes the Mbede, Ndumu; B50: Tsangi, Nzebi, Mbere; B40: puunu, Luumbu, Bwissi; B20: Kota, Wumvu, Ndassa. Teke languages, apart from West Teke, also form a valid node with Tende (part of B80).

³⁶ *Glottolog 2.7* edited by Hammarström, Harald & Forkel, Robert & Haspelmath, Martin & Bank, Sebastian <http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/laal1243>. Data according to Nurse & Philippson (2003).

and published in 1911, provides a list of words for the Teke dialects on the north bank of Congo Pool in the vicinity of Brazzaville. Calloc'h described the three principal dialects of the north bank as Ifumu, Isi-bana and Iteo (Itio) (Calloc'h, 1911: 1). His word list is especially useful in relation to the archive of Hottot and Robert Lehuard, who both collected artworks from this region from 1920–30.

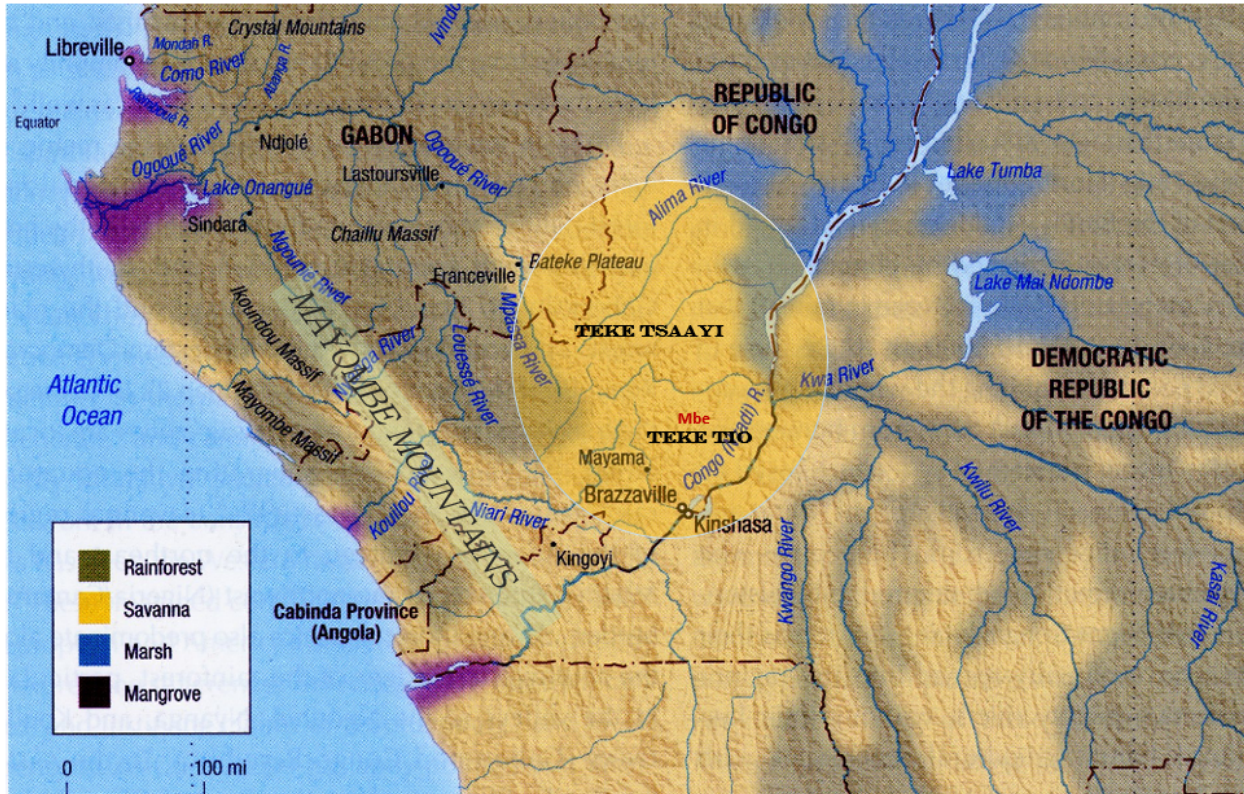


Fig. 20. Environmental map of West Central Africa with towns, rivers and mountains relevant to this study. Map adapted from LaGamma, 2008: 36, original adapted from Klieman, 2003: 37.

Chapter One: Teke landscapes, materials and markets

Introduction

Note how the Teke cultural zone (marked in yellow) includes regions of savanna, rainforest and marshland (Fig. 20). Mbe, capital of the Teke Tio heartland, is located in the plateau region. The southern border is provided by Congo Pool, where Brazzaville and Kinshasa are shown on the map. This inland region of West Central Africa is connected by the Congo River to hundreds of other cultures living across the vast area of Central Africa. Goods produced out of the riches of one landscape were traded to those where these materials were not available. The exchange of material goods, then, was a primary way in which those who came from different areas or spoke different languages communicated with each other. The exchange of goods within a shared value system thus united the peoples of this region as part of a broader society. For the various Teke peoples, clay, raffia and metal were the most significant materials for the manufacturing of objects, and different Teke groups gained access to the market by creating valuable goods from these raw materials. How each material was deployed will be briefly analysed in turn.



Fig. 21. The north-eastern side of Congo Pool showing the limestone ‘white cliffs’, a major source of the celebrated white clay of the region. January 2018, Pool Department, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

Clay

Clay was one of the most important resources of the Congo River and its tributaries. The sandstone geological substructure – especially in the vicinity of Congo Pool – combined with sand forms a brilliant white clay (*mpembe*) used by generations of riverine potters to create a fine ceramic (Fig. 21). The value of the clay, however, extends far beyond the production of ceramics and has wide-reaching applications that help to elucidate historic Teke concepts of health and beauty. This material, in a variety of forms, was traded to areas where clay could not be produced such as the sandy upland plateau region. Clay was also produced by Teke Tsaayi populations and their neighbours in the Chaillu Mountain region in northern Republic of the Congo and southern Gabon. Ceramics from this region were likewise traded south towards the plateau region where no clay exists.



Fig. 22. Raffia palm tree at the centre of a fruitier behind a Teke Tsaayi village settlement. January 2017, outskirts of Zanaga. Lekoumou Department, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

Raffia

The entire plateau region is part of the ecological zone in which the raffia palm (genus *Raphia*) flourishes. Numbering about 25 species in total, eight are found in the Teke region alone.¹ Palms are cultivated in most Teke settlements along with fruit bearing trees and plants (Fig. 22), and such ‘forests’ of plants useful to man may continue to grow long after the village itself has ceased to exist. Brazza described the phenomenon, and his relief on reaching one of these ‘human forest’ after many days trekking through the barren waterless savannah.

Throughout the Congo, materials harvested from raffia palms provide both the basics and the luxuries of civilisation (Martin, 1972; Martin, 2015). Raffia plays an important role in house manufacturing. North of the Congo River the fronds of *Raphia sese* are used for thatching, with the petioles often plaited. Strips or ‘laths’ of all lengths can easily be snapped off from the raffia palm stems and are ‘smooth as polished marble and of every thickness’ (Johnston, 1895: 729). The stem, furthermore, provides the material for fences, rafters, partitions within houses and for

¹ The most important of these to the Teke include *Raphia vinifera*, Beauv., *Raphia gentiliana*, De Wild., *Raphia laurentii*, De Wild., *Raphia sese*, De Wild., *Raphia longiflora*, G.Mann & H.Wendl. and *Raphia textilis*, Welw. *Raphia matombe*, De Wild. and *Raphia hookeri*, G.Mann & H.Wendl. found throughout southern DRC, Cabinda, Angola, Republic of the Congo and Gabon (Johnston 1895: 899).

the manufacturing of household furniture, such as beds and chairs. Because this midrib of the palm is long, light and solid it is also ideal for carrying goods such as crops, and calabashes filled with water. From the fibre of its leaves, cloth can be made by using various techniques including felting, weaving and plaiting. The fibre can be transformed into string for fishing nets and lines, bowstrings and binding for arrows, and brooms and fly-whisks can also be constructed from the fronds. Centres of raffia weaving developed among different Teke subgroups, and they were regionally acknowledged experts.



Fig. 23. The Dihese plains near Louboma, with the Mayamobe mountain range in the far distance. June 2014, Niari Department, Republic of the Congo. From Michael Robertson, Technical Report on the Congo Copper Project, 2014: 13).

Copper

The southern Niari plateau forms part of the West Congo Copper Belt which extends for over 1,300 km (800 miles) from Gabon in the northwest, through the Congo to north-eastern Angola (Fig. 1 for map; Fig. 23). Copper can only be mined in a few locations in Central Africa and the Niari plateau is the only source of copper north of the Congo River (Nikis et al. 2018: 1). The metal was exported primarily in the form of ingots, bracelets and in a currency bar known by the Teke word *ngiele*. Lead, a by-product of copper mining, was also exported from this region in the form of ingots. Mindouli and Boko Songho were the major mines of this region, and control of these mines could have historically been a source of political and economic power.

Archaeological evidence of copper smelting is abundant in the Niari region from as early as approximately 1275–1375 (Nikis et al., 2013) (Fig. 24). It is possible that Teke chiefdoms

began to centralise as a means of controlling these copper deposits during the same period. It was also around this time, or just afterwards, that the other great Central African polities – Kongo, Loango, KaKongo, Ngoyo, the Nsundi enclave and the Yombe chiefdoms – began to formalise (Herbert, 1984; Hilton, 1987; Dupré and Pinçon, 1997).

By the mid-sixteenth century, the Teke were celebrated as the major producers and traders of copper throughout Central Africa, at war with the neighbouring Kongo and Loango kingdoms over control of these valuable resources. European sources of the Loango coast suggest that the Teke were in charge of these mines in the seventeenth century, gradually ceding control to migrant Kongo populations. Rumours of their wealth and skill as warriors were discussed at the courts of these neighbouring kingdoms (see, among others, Dapper, 1676; Hilton, 1985; Martin, 1972; Pigafetta, 1591).² This area was known as Nsundi to Kongo populations of the Loango Kingdom on the coastal side of the Mayombe mountains, and further south in the Kongo Kingdom itself (Herbert, 1984). Located to the northeast of the Mayombe massif, the mines were beyond the reach of Europeans until the 1880s and continued to be managed by various African polities until the beginning of the twentieth century. Today, the difficulty of transporting metals to the coast remains the major factor limiting the exploitation of copper in this region.³

It is perhaps not by chance that the most potent symbol of a chief's political authority – until the advent of colonialism at the end of the nineteenth century – was a weighty and finely decorated collar produced from a copper alloy (Fig. 25). Note how the snake-like meandering pattern and the cross-hatching visible on this fourteenth-century archaeologically excavated currency is similar to that seen on late nineteenth-century copper alloy *onlua*, suggesting metalsmiths were working within the same patterning vocabulary for centuries. Similarities between archaeological and nineteenth-century patterning vocabularies have been recorded for the neighbouring Kongo peoples.⁴

² Archaeological data for this region is some of the most complete in sub-Saharan Africa. Regarding metallurgy, the first excavations were completed in the Mindouli region of the Republic of the Congo in the late 1980s. In the last few years, archaeological fieldwork undertaken during the dry seasons of 2013, 2014 and 2015 by Nikolas Nikis and his team have added further data.

³ See also, *Discovering the West Congolian Copper Belt*, a PDF produced by the Handa Corporation, January 2015 (accessed August 2017, <http://www.handacopper.com/i/pdf/presentation/Presentation-Jan2015.pdf>).

⁴ See LaGamma, 2015: 59



Fig. 24. Decorated copper Ngele. 13–14th century, found 2013, Makuti in the area of Mindouli, Republic of the Congo. Excavated by Nicolas Nikis.⁵



Left and below: Fig. 25. Onlua collar. 1884, Mbe, Republic of the Congo. Royal Blacksmith Ngaambiôô, Teke peoples, Tio group; copper alloy, 30.5 x 30 x 2.5 x cm, 981 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1890.18.1). Ex- collection: commissioned by Jacques de Brazza 1884 as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).



⁵ Source: <http://www.africamuseum.be/research/general/research-picture/nicolas-nikis> (accessed September 2017).



Fig. 26. The landscape of the iron-rich Teke Tsaayi region of Zanaga. February 2017, Lekoumou Department, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

Iron

Iron is found in abundance throughout the wider Teke cultural zone – much more so than copper – and production first began in the region in the third or fourth century BC (Denbow, 2014: 404). A major source was the region to the west of the Kukuya plateau, near the upper Ogooué. Areas in the vicinity of Zanaga also have a particularly high iron content and the metal had long been produced in this region, especially from certain high-quality deposits including those of Mayoko, Lebayi and Lefoutou (Dupré and Pinçon, 1997: 29) (Fig. 26). Iron produced in this region was traded over vast distances, reaching the majority of the Teke world, redistributed by Kukuya and Lali porters. Iron was also transported from regions of the Upper Alima by the Teke Tegue and the Mbochi, then passed down affluents of the Congo – the Alima, Sangha and Kasai – by Ngala boatmen. Towards the south, the Yaka of Sibiti served as intermediaries and made trade links with the Kingdom of the Kongo (Dupré and Pinçon, 1997: 56; Dupré, 1984).

Teke conceptions of land

Europeans looked at the landscapes they encountered in this region in terms of the raw materials that could be harvested for export. In order to move away from this perspective, this section now considers how the Teke themselves conceived of their various landscapes.⁶ An analysis of Teke political structures reveals the degree to which the harsh and distinctive landscape of the plateau has shaped Teke cultural identity.⁷

The plateau region

Mbe, seat of the sovereign of the Teke peoples, the Makoko, is located about 130 km (80 miles) from Congo Pool in the plateau region, and is today part of the Pool Department (Fig. 63). The plateau region, which extends from the Republic of the Congo through to southern Gabon, is the historic heartland of the Teke peoples. The environment is distinct and unforgiving; elevated, flat and forming clearly defined physical units separate from other neighbouring environments. Along with the Mbe plateau itself, there are three others – Kukuya, Djambala and Nsha – the highest of which reaches 860 metres (0.53 miles) above sea level.

While the wet season lasts from October–May and there is ostensibly no lack of water, the sandy soil – geologically part of the same substructure as the Kalahari – does not hold moisture and is not suitable for most crops, although the land may be cultivated through a process of slash-and-burn to enrich the soil with the ash. A few crops such as tobacco may be grown on the edge of the plateau, where the soil is more fertile (Sautter, 1966: 335). There are few rivers in the plateau region, and water may be several hours walk from a village site.

⁶ A conflict between indigenous construction of the landscape and those of European outsiders occurs in many cultures across the world during the period under study. See, for example, Darian-Smith et al., 1996, for an interdisciplinary study of communities in South Africa and Australia in the late nineteenth century.

⁷ The French geographer Giles Sautter's monumental 1966 study, *De l'Atlantique au Fleuve Congo une Géographie de Sous-Peuplement: République du Congo, République Gabonaise*, is a major source for understanding the relationship between the people and the landscape of this region and significantly shaped the thinking of Vansina (1973) on this topic. The relationship between culture and landscape is part of a much wider literature. See David William Cohen, *Siaya: The Historical Anthropology of an African Landscape* (East African Publishers: 1989) for a study of the Luo peoples of western Kenya and their landscape over several centuries. This is of particular relevance when understanding the Teke Tio's relationship with the harsh plateau region in relation to economy. The Luo generated 'an economy marked above all by scarcity' (Cohen, 1989: 5). For a general – and more recent – study of the interaction between humans and their environment in a broader African context see Michael Bollig, Olaf Bubenzer, *African Landscapes: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (Springer Science & Business Media: 2009).

Historically, it has been the responsibility of Teke women to walk these long distances, carrying water back home in calabashes balanced on the head (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1972: 73).

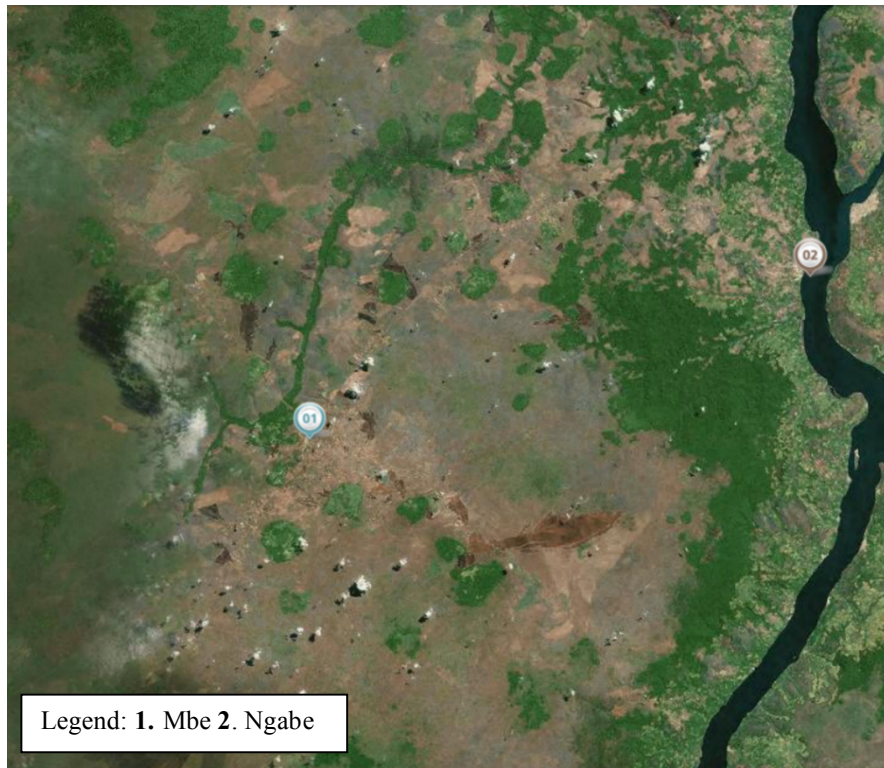


Fig. 27. Satellite image showing the plateau region surrounding Mbe and Ngabe. 2017, Republic of the Congo. Google Earth.

Some information about how the Teke people of the plateau conceived of their landscape can be ascertained from how physical space was divided among the ruling elite. As noted above, resources in the plateau were scarce, so the streams that did flow on the plateau served to break the land into different territories and access to water was strictly regulated. The Mbe plateau may be defined in Teke terms as existing between the river Nkeni to the northeast, the river Djoué to the south and the Congo River to the east. The land was divided into a series of territories known as *ntsii*. *Ntsii* were measured in terms of sacred forests (*idzwa*), seen here as vivid patches of dark green against the brown upland savannah (Fig. 27).⁸ While the woods were given names,

⁸ These islands of ‘forest’ may be the sites of former settlements or the relics of a more extensive forest cover. See James Fairhead and Melissa Leach, ‘Misreading the African Landscape: Society and Ecology in a Forest-Savanna Mosaic.’ (Cambridge University Press, 1996) for a comparative study of the forest islands in the savanna of Guinea which employs historical, social anthropological and ecological data to advance a theoretical framework for ecological anthropology. See also Nyerges, A. E. and Green, G. M., ‘The Ethnography of Landscape: GIS and Remote Sensing in the Study of Forest Change in West African Guinea Savanna.’ (2000), *American Anthropologist*, 102: 271–289, doi:10.1525/aa.2000.102.2.271 for a more recent analysis of the same region that is directly comparable to the ecological zone of the Mbe plateau.

the grassy savannah between them was empty space. A set of these *idzwa* forests – or even a single *idzwa* – formed the *ntsii* of an individual ruler, known as the *ngantsii* (*nga* meaning ‘master of’ the *ntsii*). Certain *idzwa*, such as Mbe Nkolou, were formerly settlements that were abandoned after the death of the previously reigning Makoko (Fig. 28).



Fig. 28. View of the sacred forest of Mbe Nkoulou, first capital of the Teke Kingdom, where Obu was said to have distributed the powers to the different Teke peoples. January 2018, Pool Department, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

In 1963, for example, *ngantsii* Ngampo was able to list thirty forests under his control, and this marked the bounds of his *ntsii* (Domaine du Makoko, 2009: 22). While the *ntsii* might have had a name – either of the clan of the *Ngantsii* or of the *nkira* spirit associated with this territory – the boundaries between them were only roughly determined because the savannah was not especially valuable. The village itself was a fluid construct, moving to a new location after the death of a chief, or ceasing to exist altogether (Vansina, 1973: 315). What distinguished the

Teke from their Kongo neighbours was the importance granted to these ‘masters of the land’ who, at the same time, served as vassals of the Makoko.

This hierarchical structure with the figure of the Makoko at the summit was unique to the Teke, and was the basis for political organisation. As guardian of the *ntsii*, the *ngantsii* was entitled to have a share of the produce of the land, which usually took the form of game. Among the Teke Tsaayi, the thigh of any large animal killed on his territory was required to be given to him, and if not, sanctions would fall on the guilty party. Palm wine (*malafu*), and in rare cases agricultural produce or trade goods, were also used as tribute (Dupré, 1988: 50).

A potter would likewise be expected to give a number of her pots to the *ngantsii* of the *ntsii* where her clay was sourced, in order to ensure the firing was successful and her pots did not explode during the process (Pinçon 1997: 119). Sims included a term for this tribute, (*Mulani*, which translates as the ‘chief’s share of anything’ (Sims, 1886: 154). Among the Teke Tsaayi, the Teke Tege and the Teke Tio, it was believed that the *ngantsii* was capable of desiccating the fields should these sanctions not be performed and this tribute not be paid up in full.⁹

Ngantsii were in turn the ones who ensured that the Makoko received his tribute, collecting this from lower level chiefs. At a minimum, each village was required to annually send to the Makoko the *inkoura onkoo*, a package of goods consisting of kola, tobacco, raffia cloth, European fabrics and occasionally copper *ngiele* from the mines of the southern Niari. Extra tributes were due either to the king himself or to his court on special occasions such as at the time of a death or the enthronement of a new monarch (Sautter, 1960: 37). The Makoko was credited with having the force of ultimate destruction should this payment not be made, because to not show this respect was seen as a dangerous infraction against the spiritual realm.

Thus, we may think of the landscape of the Teke heartland as being divided into a series of political units, each placed under the guardianship – or mastery – of an individual chief whose right to rule had been granted to him through an elaborate investiture ceremony conducted by the Makoko. As *ngantsii*, or ‘master of the land’, this individual had the right to distribute the wealth of his territory to his dependants, and an annual tax was sent to the Makoko. Nobody was able to take from the land without the permission of the *ngantsii* – and by extension the Makoko – for fear of upsetting forces in the spiritual realm, collectively known as the Nkwembali. For the

⁹ Dupré described the *ngantsii* master of the earth as ‘the master of productions and external relations; master of the riches that he accumulates during his lifetime and which are largely destroyed or scattered at his death’.

Teke peoples of the plateau, religious belief and the sociopolitical structure of society had at its foundation the need to manage the limited natural resources of a distinct geographic region.¹⁰

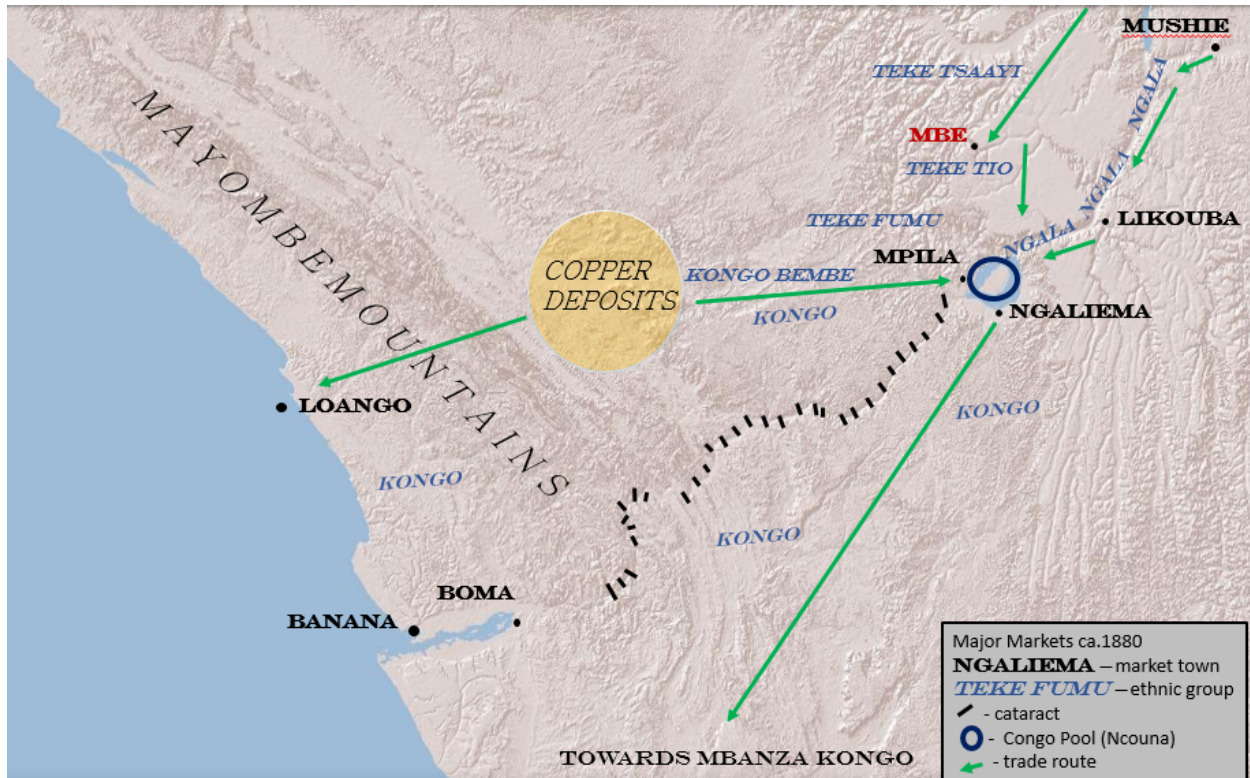


Fig. 29. Topographical map of West Central Africa with major markets and trade routes at the time of first European direct contact *c.*1880. Base map from National Geographic Map Maker.

¹⁰ This close relationship between landscape and cultural identity is one of the reasons why Mbe was suggested for inclusion as a site of UNESCO intangible world heritage.

Development of European trade

The situation outlined above represents an ideal state of governance developed out of the strengths and confines of a particular landscape. The growth of trade with Europe from the late fifteenth century onwards put increasing pressure on this indigenous system, favouring and empowering those chiefs with more direct access to the European trade of the Atlantic Ocean. The migration of Kongo peoples into the Niari region from the sixteenth century onwards – an area formerly under the control of the Teke peoples – increasingly pushed the Teke into the plateau region, where the Kongo peoples refused to live because of the harsh climate and lack of water. The rise of the riverine merchant as a result of the development of the Atlantic trade can be seen as creating significant checks on the 'traditional' power of the monarchy based on the plateau.¹¹

Geographical factors allowed the Teke to profit from the Atlantic trade whilst avoiding being directly incorporated into it from an earlier date, a fate which had befallen their Kongo neighbours. With its many islets stretching into the savannah region that surrounds Brazzaville and the vast Bateke plateau, Congo Pool (*ncouna*) became a natural gathering place for different groups and over time developed into one of the major marketplaces in Central Africa. Located some 500 km (300 miles) inland, it is not, however, navigable from the coast because of 32 cataracts which cut the river until its estuary (Fig. 29). Above the Pool, though, the river extends through the vast depression of equatorial Africa known as the Cuvette, and is navigable all the way to the Boyoma Falls, some 1700 km (1000 miles) upstream (Harms, 1981: 1). The Congo River provided the major link between the different ethnicities of this vast geographical region, none of whom could access the Atlantic coast, or vice versa, without passing through the Teke traders of Congo Pool.

The region the Teke peoples inhabited – located on early maps with remarkable geographical accuracy – can thus be thought of as a central piece in a vast West Central African

¹¹ The rise of the merchant in Europe is argued to have had the same impact on political institutions in Europe established before the development of the Atlantic Trade from 1500 onwards. See Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson, 'The rise of Europe: Atlantic trade, institutional change, and economic growth', *American economic review* 95, no. 3 (2005): 546–79.

trade network. This network stretched across the Congo River basin and reached over 2000 km north, south, east and west, covering most of Central Africa. The basins of the Kasai, Kwilu and Kwango Rivers in what is now the DRC, with links overland to the Ogooué basin in Gabon, may also be thought of as part of the same vast system (Kriger, 1999: 44).

The treacherous Mayombe mountain range proved a further barrier to direct communication between the coast and inland. Running parallel to the ocean, and in places reaching an altitude of 3000 feet, the topography offers a series of contrasting landscapes; thick forest growing along ridges, narrow valleys and the sides of steep slopes. Mountain passes were fiercely controlled by Yombe Kongo chiefs, and only the experienced trader with the right permissions could navigate and afford a crossing. To the west of this range and bordering the Atlantic, the Kongo kingdoms of Loango and its two smaller neighbours Kakongo and Ngoyo developed over time, while to the east of the Mayombe Teke culture dominated. The archaeological record of the Loango coast reveals a severely limited trade between these two kingdoms before the arrival of Europeans (Denbow, 2014: 54). Riverine Teke culture developed during this 400-year period through maintaining control over the Pool. As in the plateau region, the society of the Teke of the Pool had a close relationship with – and capitalised on – the geographical peculiarities of the region.

Upsurge in the nineteenth century

While it is clear that the Teke were active participants in international trade from the late fifteenth century onwards through the markets of the Pool, the nineteenth century marked an enormous increase in activity during what has been termed ‘the first great globalisation boom’ of approximately 1814–1914.¹² Commercial factors brought about by the end of the legal transatlantic slave trade in 1836, combined with a massive rise in the price of ivory from the 1850s onwards, led to an increased number of European travellers and traders along the Loango coast and in Angola keen to profit from the growing trade in ‘legitimate goods’, primarily ivory

¹² For a general sense of the Atlantic global economy during the ‘first great globalisation boom’, of which the Teke were a part, see the seminal O’Rourke, Kevin H., and Jeffrey Gale Williamson. 2008. *Globalization and history: the evolution of a nineteenth-century Atlantic economy*, Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, which applies the tools of open-economy economics to this, rather than closed-economy or single sector models to the period (1814–1914).

and palm oil, and rubber towards the end of the century. As noted in the introduction, these raw materials were required on a massive scale by European industry.¹³

Geographical factors, combined with the fierce trade protectionism of local chiefs such as those of the Yombe mountain region, continued to make travel inland dangerous and difficult for European traders, while conversely allowing their Central African counterparts to flourish. From the Chokwe and the Ovimbundu traders who controlled caravan routes through Angola to the Teke and Ngala in the Republic of the Congo and Gabon, Central African peoples along this latitude with a history and culture of trade, or whose skills could be transferred in order to provide for the demands of the export market, grew immensely wealthy.

Teke traders continued to dominate the markets of the Congo Pool into the last quarter of the nineteenth century, using their skill as traders to meet the demands of the European buyers. Trade links already established to the coast for the export of slaves could also function for the export of ivory, and whatever other commodities the Atlantic market required.¹⁴ The section devoted to elephant ivory in *Le Congo Producteur*, an 1889 guidebook to the valuable materials of the Congo, began: 'twenty years ago, this chapter should have opened with the words: "The most important African product is man"' (Merlin, 1889: 9). By 1880 the international slave trade had been officially banned, and the 'Great Congo Commerce' was essentially a trade in which ivory was exchanged for goods imported from Europe (Sautter, 1966: I 265–78, Vansina, 1973: 248–83). Teke traders continued to maintain firm control over the markets of Congo Pool, where they were vital middlemen between the suppliers of ivory and the goods from the coast.

Not only were they able to protect their control of the Pool from a direct European presence, but they were in control of the major overland caravan routes coming from the direction of the Upper Alima River that passed through the plateau territory. Teke traders of the Pool were therefore able to manage both the supply and sale of goods through alliances formed with their brethren on the plateau. While historically they had been a major source of slaves, a great deal of elephant ivory also reached the Pool via these overland trade routes, so the trade in slaves was directly replaced by the trade in ivory and other 'legitimate goods'.¹⁵

¹³ For a comparative analysis of the effects of these changes in a West African context for the same timeframe, see Robin Law. *From slave trade to "legitimate" commerce: the commercial transition in nineteenth-century West Africa [...]* (Cambridge: 2007).

¹⁴ Phyllis Martin has also discussed this phenomenon for the Vili traders of the Loango Kingdom.

¹⁵ There is a significant and growing literature on the effects of this trade on Africa. Edward A. Alpers (1975), Paul E Lovejoy (1983) and Joseph Calder Miller (1988) have stressed the destructive aspects of international trade on

The Teke and their Ngala neighbours

The Teke peoples were not the only ones on the Congo River who benefited from this global boom in the nineteenth century. Although they were the earliest inhabitants of this region, as trade increased with Europe so did competition with other African peoples for market control.¹⁶ The passage along the Congo River was one of the primary ways in which valuable materials were exchanged between the peoples of West Central Africa. As Stanley, in March 1877, and Brazza, in July 1878 discovered, this movement was organised by the Ngala [Bangala] peoples along the Congo River above Congo Pool. Ngala canoes were recorded in Upoto, some 1,000 km upriver from the Pool, and these boats transported goods that originated both from the Atlantic and Indian Ocean, using cowrie shells, amongst other currencies, to facilitate trade (Stanley, 1879: 301).

The Ngala shared many of the same cultural traits as their riverine Teke trading partners. They too were fishermen and traders with specialists in pottery, basketry and metalwork who made luxury commodities, intended for an elite, to be sold in the market. While Ngala was the language of trade upriver, Ngala traders learnt to speak the Tio Teke language, the *lingua franca* of trade on the Pool in the 1880s.¹⁷

European travellers of the early 1880s found Ngala traders on the river a daunting presence. The general impression they provoked was one of sheer bewilderment generated by their wealth and splendour. Bentley, who travelled upriver from the Congo Pool in 1881 into Ngala country, described them in the following terms:

indigenous African systems, emphasising the indebtedness of Africans on goods of European manufacture, broadly following the discussion set out by Walter Rodney in *How Europe underdeveloped Africa* (1981). Other scholars have stressed the opportunities presented to African traders through access to these international markets. The work of Andrew Roberts on the Bemba is of particular relevance here, as is the work of Achim Von Oppen (1993) on market production by African individuals in the Zambezi and Upper Kasai, which directly relates to the traders of the inner Central African region and allows us to situate the Teke as part of a broader moment in history. As T. Ranger (1983:118–29) and de Moraes Farias and Barber (1990) convincingly argued, even if there was a clear power imbalance, encounters between these two supposedly distinct points of view were always dynamic, much more so than the conventional dichotomy allows.

¹⁶ Accounts from the Kongo peoples suggest that competition for market control of the Pool had begun from the first moment of contact.

¹⁷ Like the Teke, the Ngala were known by a variety of names. Boubangui and Apfuru are two of the key names recorded by the MOA. Peoples variously referred to as the Apfuru, Abanho, Bubangi, Baloi and Bayansi were sometimes called Boubangi. Phyllis Martin (1972: 127).

Their canoes were beautifully cut, their paddles ornamented with a neat pattern and bound with brass wire, their spears and knives wonderfully wrought and well finished; their hair was arranged in an elaborate mass of plaits; and their palm-fibre cloth neatly fringed and made up. There was nothing slovenly, or carelessly or ill made. (Bentley, 1900: I 464)

This description emphasises, above all, order and control of their environment, and reflects the degree to which the Ngala managed the trade of goods along the River above the Pool. Ngala canoes – 15 metres long by 80–90 centimetres wide – would be piled up to a metre high with trade goods destined for sale in Teke markets at Congo Pool where they would then be carried overland to the coast (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1970: 444). The captain would have stood on a platform at the back beneath a multi-coloured umbrella, the latest desirable trade import, replacing the indigenously woven mat that had previously provided shade.

Oral histories recorded by members of the MOA between 1883–85 indicate that the Ngala were relatively new participants in this riverine trade and had only been present in the region for the last two generations, since the first quarter of the nineteenth century. This movement of people demonstrates how the growing European demand for the raw materials of this region empowered different populations (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1970: 105).¹⁸

Even in the 1880s, the Ngala were still in a process of expansion. Conflicts between the newly powerful Ngala and the traditional Teke overlords of the Pool were almost inevitable as each strove for market control. In the living memory of some of Léon Guiral's informants, the Ngala had tried to break through 'the exorbitant monopoly of the Batékés' on the Pool by force only to be soundly defeated' (Guiral, 1889: 245).¹⁹

The Makoko – though resident at Mbe on the plateau and therefore only indirectly involved in the politics of the river – was said to have 'supported' these wars. In his public audience chamber, there hung 'a paddle adorned with copper; it was a trophy of the last war [...] against the Ngala [Aban-Ho]' (Guiral, 1889: 295). Around 80 individuals were said to have been killed on both sides during this battle. As a result of this war, it was agreed that the Ngala would

¹⁸ 'The grandfather of the reigning Makoko would have stopped their invasion,' notes Ponel to Dufourcq, June 30, 1885, (MOA-VII.)

¹⁹ Such a fate had befallen the Kongo in the 1560s (Pigafetta, 1881: 21).

be the ‘chiefs of the water’ while the Teke would be ‘chiefs of the land’, allowing Teke and Ngala traders to charge each other enormous sums for breaking infractions (Merlon, 1889: 25).

As a general rule, however, successful trade necessitated close working relationships between the Teke and the Ngala and ensured that smooth business relations were more important than overall market control. Many Teke and Ngala traders were furthermore linked to each other through bonds of blood-brotherhood and marriage alliances, which further cemented ties between different clans and even ethnic groups.

At the Pool, Teke and Ngala populations had borrowed so much from each other’s culture that Sir Harry Johnston in 1883 had difficulty distinguishing between them. Their clothing and housing were similar and they spoke Ngala upriver and Tio at the Pool, switching between these languages freely (Johnston, 1884: 311). In some villages on the banks of the river there were even mixed Teke and Ngala populations, just as it was common to find Teke villages on the Pool mixed with Kongo populations (Guiral, 1889: 282–83).

This chapter will now focus on what goods were being transported to the Teke markets of the Pool by Ngala canoe, or overland along historic Teke caravan routes. While the populations of this region provided raw materials for export to Europe at a macro level of trade, at a micro level there were specialists in the manufacture of goods made from indigenous materials intended for local and regional consumption. Having situated the people of this region in relation to landscape and outlined the nature of trade in this region as it developed between 1483 and 1880, this chapter will now return to notions of Teke material value, especially in relation to the goods sold in the marketplace and therefore accorded a clear ‘market value’.

Specialists in the manufacture of trade goods

While the Teke were master traders of the region, they were also celebrated for the creation of goods for local consumption out of the resources of the many distinct landscapes where different communities lived. A wide array of local products was exchanged between markets intended for indigenous consumption, and their variety demonstrates what materials had indigenous market value. The market thus serves as a ‘faithful mirror, reflecting in a few hours all the characteristics of the indigenous life: it is the place of meetings, talks, dances, of “religious scenes”, while at the same time being the center of commercial transactions covering all the products of the region’s cultures, art and industry’ (Lebeuf, 1956: 91). The individuals associated with Brazza’s missions purchased a wide variety of material at these markets, many of which are conserved at the MQB. Comparing these objects with written documentation of the same period allows us to recreate a ‘mirror’ of the materials that had market value at this time.²⁰ In order to establish what goods were available in each market and why they were valuable, it is first necessary to look at the different landscapes of the vast Teke cultural zone in terms of regional specialisation.

Regional specialisation

Farming activities were essentially identical from the north to the south of the Teke cultural zone; an area defined by the same seasonal divisions, crops and techniques. The only people distinguished from the others by their economic mode of life is the riverine Teke. Their economic system was characterised by a clear division of labour between men and women. The men practised fishing or specialised labour such as smithing, while the women engaged in basketry and the manufacturing of pottery. Both produced goods intended for domestic use and trade. The Teke of the river regularly exchanged their products (fish and utensils) for the crops (cassava, bananas, tobacco) of the Teke farmers of the plateau.²¹

²⁰ It is striking that the degree to which many of these materials continue to have a market value in the Congo today.

²¹ Leme noted that the major subgroups of the Teke of the riverine landscape were the Bale, the Mfinu, the Humb, the Tswaar and the Bobaan. The Ngenge were the major continental farmers.



Fig. 30. Bowl. 19th century, inventoried 1889, Congo River. Ngala [Apfuru] peoples, ceramic, 8.5 x 21.5 x 21.5 cm, 353 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1889.131.45). Ex- collection: collected by Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza and Attilio Peçile as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).

A number of vessels made from *mpieme*, with surface decoration in red and black pigment, were collected by the Italian naturalist Attilio Peçile as part of the MOA. They are currently preserved in the MQB in Paris along with other works collected as part of this mission and are classic examples of the ceramics produced in the vicinity of Congo Pool by female Teke and Ngala potters. Some of the earliest examples are very simple and were likely basic items of trade (Fig. 30). Above, the potter has allowed the whiteness of the clay to serve as the primary aesthetic function. Two plates collected by the MOA use black and red pigment as surface decoration, one of which is illustrated below (Fig. 31).



Fig. 31. Dish. 19th century, Congo River, inventoried 1896. Ngala [Apfuru] peoples, ceramic, 7 x 26.5 x 26.5 cm, 1018 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1896.28.70). Ex- collection: collected as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).

Four fine ‘bottles’ (three illustrated below) were also collected as part of the MOA (Figs. 32–34). While the modelling of the neck of each vessel differs, the height is almost identical – varying from 28.5 to 34.5 centimetres – suggesting that the potter was following a standard model and most likely using a mould (see p.96 for more on the pottery making process). The similarities found across the group indicate that it is certainly possible these vessels were made by the same potter and even as part of the same batch. Two plain bowls collected give a sense of the foundational element that was then built upon.



Left: Fig. 32. Bottle. 19th century, Congo Pool, inventoried 1889. Teke peoples, ceramic, 34.5 x 22 x 22 cm, 884 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1889.131.44).

Centre: Fig. 33. Bottle. 19th century, Congo Pool, inventoried 1889. Teke peoples, ceramic, 28.5 x 20.2 x 20.2 cm, 923 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1889.131.42).

Right: Fig. 34. Bottle. Teke peoples, Congo Pool. 19th century, inventoried 1889. Ceramic, 34.2 x 20 x 20 cm, 827 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1889.131.41).

Surface decoration has been added in grooves that run around the vessel, and in some places these grooves have been finished with a line of red pigment forming a striking contrast to the natural white of the clay. White clay and red pigment defines the aesthetic of these ceramics, and likely increased their allure as trade commodities. Described as ‘bottles’, the form – characterised by a rounded bottom with a narrowing neck that flares towards the opening – is

typical of this region, and one of a number of standard types produced by Teke potters. A group of the standard forms was collected from the late nineteenth century onward by Belgian agents and published as early as 1906 in the RMCA journal (Fig. 35).

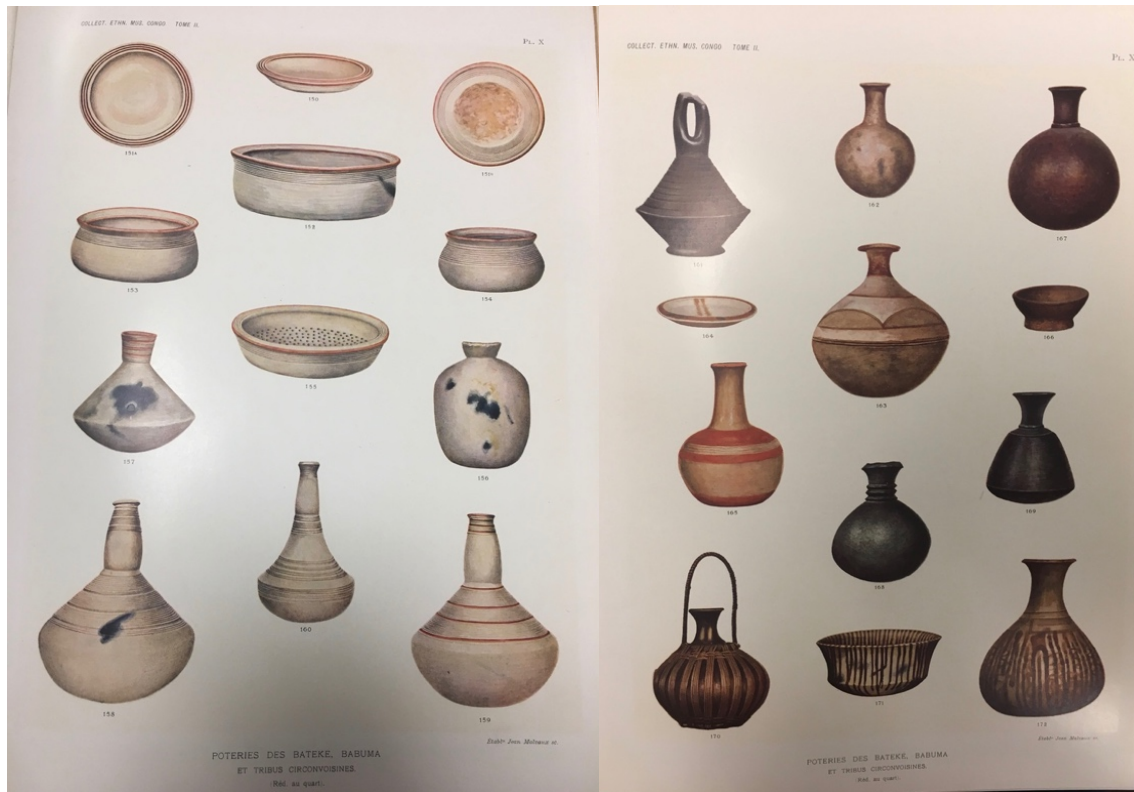


Fig. 35. Pottery of the Teke, Buma and neighbouring peoples ('Poteries des Bateke, Babuma et Tribus Circonvoisines'). Coloured Engraving. From Coart and de Hauleville (1907), Pl. XI.

Attilio Pectile records that, like their Teke neighbours, the Ngala [Apfuru] men worked in trade and fishing. Similarly, the women – especially older women – made pottery to be used in the home and as items of trade, so everyone in the community worked towards providing for the market (Zorzi, 1940: 451). Ngala potters produced 'pottery of all shapes and sizes (pots, flat canoes, plates, oil lamps, pipes, etc.)'. Potters, who were always female, used the 'special clay of the place', mixing it with 'sherds of old pots' (Zorzi, 1940: 451).²² Pectile was amazed by the symmetry of the work produced and noted that it was all done by hand with only a wooden

²² Out of which bricks were beginning to be produced for the construction of the European-style buildings of the nascent capital city of Brazzaville.

spatula as a tool, creating works with an ‘elegance and strength that could rival with some pottery of Europe’. This comment suggests the professionalisation of these skills allows employees to ‘mass’ produce ceramic vessels for trade. This specialisation and professionalisation in the creation of commodities was recorded in market towns throughout the region that became celebrated for certain goods (Zorzi, 1940: 451).

Ceramics were exchanged along with other products of the Congo River environment including mats, paddles, nets, harpoons and dried fish. Market towns likely also had resident blacksmiths producing knives in iron and copper along with weavers producing cloth in raffia that also served as items of trade.

Likouba was celebrated regionally for producing ‘an enormous quantity of very popular mats’ (Zorzi, 1940: 451). These were described as ‘very useful mat[s], two to three meters long, two inches [in] width, made of palm bark, of a non-woven fabric’ (Van Overbergh, 1907: 210). To make these mats, fibres were removed from the petioles of the leaves of *Raffia vinifera*. These may have been soaked to make them pliable (Van Overbergh, 1907: 210). The town of Mushie [Musye] was the place to buy red powder camwood (known in Kikongo at *tukula* and in Tio as *tula*), rubber, dried fish and ivory, all of which came from the Fimi and Kasai rivers, as far inland as Lake Mai-Ndombe.²³ A trader bound for the Congo Pool would exchange these items for currencies; namely salt, raffia, European cloth, indigenously produced copper *ngiele* and brass *mitako* (Stanley, 1885: I 420).

²³ Canoes arriving here had the standard items of trade recorded at several sites along this stretch of the Congo River: ‘great pots of beer aboard, heaps of dried fish, crockery from Uyanzi they had been on a trading expedition, and were returning to Musye. Red powder, and rubber and fish, with ivory, are the principal products of these people, according to my guide, who has traded often with Gankabi, who, in her turn, has obtained most of her trade with the villages near the entrance to the lake’ (Stanley, 1885: I 420).



Fig. 36. Baboma Net-Sellers at Chumbiri. 1906–07, Chumbiri, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Manuel Gomez (1883–1912), Published in Frederick Starr (1912), Plate XXIX.

Smoked fish was recorded as being one of the principal products in the markets of the Congo Pool. When Henry Morton Stanley first arrived, he described the Teke as ‘generally scattered over these sandy dunes of the Stanley Pool attending to their nets and fish snares’ (Stanley, 1878: II 327). He later recalled how, on the southern tip of the Buma Island which divides the Pool, they erected ‘little grass huts to dry their fish’, which was then traded inland to all the Teke villages of the plateau where it was considered the greatest delicacy (Stanley, 1885: I 396). It appears that fishing, along with trading, was the primary activity of Teke men at the Pool, where they perfected their skills over their lives.

In the early 1880s, H.H. Johnston described how ‘the little Ba-Teke boys fish from the banks with prettily-made rods, lines, and floats. Then there are the most ingenious basket-work traps of every size, and it is with these that the majority of the fish were caught. The mouth of every narrow bay would be netted, so that the fish in the dry season could not escape, but would fall easy victims to omnivorous man’ (Johnston, 1884: 427).

In 1905–06, above Congo Pool, Starr and Gomez photographed ‘net traders’ who specialised in the production of goods used by riverine peoples. Starr draws our attention to ‘the well-made nets, for which these inlanders find a ready market among the riverine Bobangi [Ngala]’ (Starr, 1912, 21) (Fig. 36). The MOA acquired two examples of fishing nets from the Ngala [Apfuru] (Figs. 37–38). An example collected by Joseph Cholet before 1891 also makes

use of locally produced ceramic fishing weights. Clay of the land and fibre from the raffia palm have been ingeniously and elegantly transformed to catch the fish of the river.



Left: Fig. 37. Fishing net. Late 19th century, above Congo Pool, inventoried 1891. Ngala [Apfuru] peoples, vegetable fibres, wood, 88 x 125 x 4.4 cm, 342 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1891.31.45).

Right: Fig. 38. Fishing net. Late 19th century, above Congo Pool, inventoried 1891. Ngala [Apfuru] peoples, vegetable fibres, wood, ceramic, 69 x 54 x 10 cm, 2786 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1891.37.2 Af).

North of the Congo River, several species of the raffia palm were abundant and many Teke groups became specialists in the weaving of raffia cloth which could then be used as currency in the market. As Brazza travelled across the plateau in 1880, he noted how certain Teke subgroups were celebrated for the manufacturing of raffia cloth. He noted that ‘the people here Teke [Sese] make much cloth of the country in which they trade. I saw bales packed in hide and ready for portorage’ (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1972: 17). He also recorded that the Teke [Adouma] and the Kukuya were all known regionally as manufacturers. Using raffia palm as their raw material they produced cloth, oil, ‘very beautiful’ mats and ‘native cloths made of palm leaves’ (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1887: 302).

He noted that the Teke [Angingiki or Angingialli] made ‘beautiful’ cloths, including some that were dyed (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1972: 31). However, the Kukuya were the only peoples to have planted orchards of raffia palm and who were thus able to produce cloth on a large scale. Brazza, when entering certain Kukuya villages, noted the location of a number of weaving workshops where palm trees were stripped of all their leaves to make fibres for cloth which was then traded south in the Congo Pool. Oil and palm wine (*malafu*) was also produced from the raffia palm and served as an important commodity in the market.

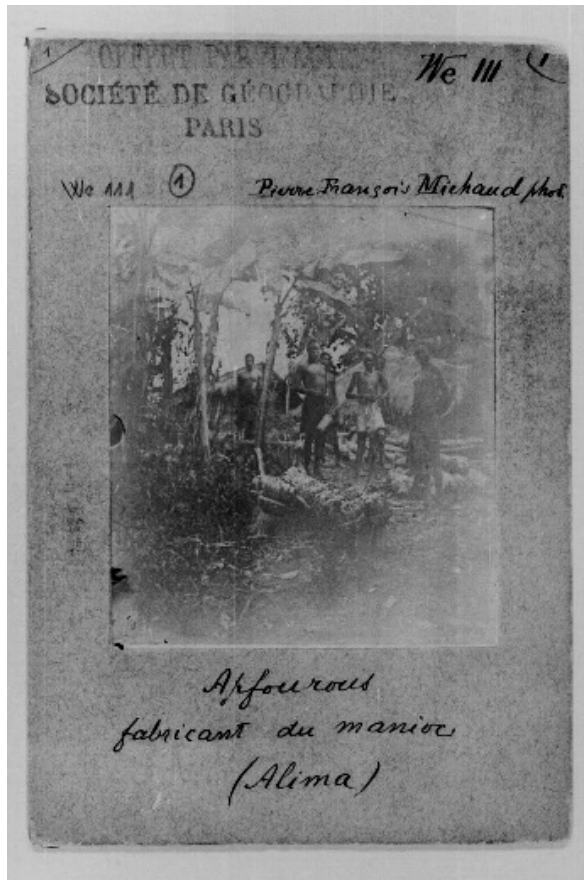


Fig. 39. Ngala [Apfourou] Manioc preparations ('Apfourous fabricant du manioc (Alima)'. 1886–87, Alima River, Republic of Congo. Photograph by Pierre François Michaud (1856–19xx). Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Société de Géographie, SGE SG WE-111.

It is already evident from this survey of goods on offer in the market that one of the most significant local trades was in foodstuffs. Beyond dried fish, manioc (or cassava) had been a staple of the Central African diet since it was imported from Brazil in the sixteenth century. The basin of the Alima River was the centre of manioc production for the Congo Pool. In 1885, members of the MOA counted sixty establishments along the Alima River that existed exclusively for the preparation of manioc. Ngala [Bouabanghi] traders would buy prepared manioc in great quantities – in the form of bundles wrapped in leaves – for ‘paltry’ prices from the Teke and the Kongo Mbochi of the interior and transport these bundles downriver. The scale of the trade was astonishing. During the dry season (which lasted from February to August) it was estimated that 40 tonnes of manioc were exported downriver to Likouba every day, and then onto the markets of the Pool. Ponel noted in a report prepared by the MOA how it was ‘a curious spectacle to see these convoys of ten, fifteen, twenty canoes loaded at two or three centimetres from the water’s edge, descend the river, letting themselves go by, gently, without jolts, or

blows, directed only by a man and a child, [the child] seated at the front [for balance], the other at the rear' (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1970: 458).

P.F. Michaud photographed Ngala [Apfuru] peoples on the banks of the Alima with their bundles of manioc ready for transport between 1886–87.²⁴ The wrapped package of manioc was the ideal commodity: easy to handle, stack in a boat and transport to villages downriver (Fig. 39). High prices could also be achieved, for crops were not grown on the Pool. European visitors were continually scandalised by the high prices demanded for basic foodstuffs by traders.²⁵

Like manioc, tobacco (*Nicotina tabacum*) grows readily in much of the lower Congo, and the Teke peoples of the Alima were known regionally for the production of a particularly highly sought-after variety. This was presented at market in the form of a tightly bound sausage, bought at the rate of twelve centimetres for one *mitako* in the market of Loukoléla in 1883. Loukoléla was the last market the tobacco reached before entering the central markets of the Pool, earning it the inaccurate regional denomination of 'tobacco from Loukoléla' (Merlon, 1889: 113). A sample of tobacco in this form was collected by the MOA and is described as 'Liamba' (Fig. 40).



Fig. 40. Package of tobacco ('Liamba'). Late 19th century, Alima River, Cuvette Region, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1891. Teke peoples; Tege group, tobacco leaves and bark, 26 x 7.9 x 7.9 cm, 114 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1891.31.49). Ex- collection: collected by Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza and Attilio Peçile as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–85).

The Teke also became expert in the manufacturing of smoking equipment. Tobacco was smoked in small pipes of clay with copper piping worked by the blacksmith. The bowl, made in clay and also by the blacksmith, usually had a shallow chamber and was connected to a short stem made from copper. Archaeological excavations have uncovered a number of unused clay pipes of various designs at Mafamba, near Ngabe, on the north bank of the Congo River. These

²⁴ 178 of his photographs are viewable online: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b7702103s> (accessed Sept 2017).

²⁵ It continues to be traded to the capital city in exactly the same format; wrapped in banana leaves. On the route north, cars can be seen coming into Brazzaville weighed down with bundles of manioc, a contemporary variation of a canoe.

finds suggest this was a production centre or an entrepôt for redistributing the pipes in the region and that clay pipes were a longstanding item of trade in this region (de Maret, 1982; de Maret and Stainier, 1999). An example of a clay pipe bowl collected by the MOA takes the form of a man's head, with features that are identifiable as Teke, including parallel lines of cicatrisation marks (Fig. 114). This head is reminiscent of the figurative sculpture of Teke blacksmiths in wood (see p.105 for more information on the Teke sculptor).

Both men and women smoked tobacco, but the smoking of tobacco was associated especially with leisure and so with the elite in society. At the Pool, Teke blacksmiths were celebrated for creating long and highly decorated pipes, often in a combination of copper, brass and iron (Figs. 40–41). Teke blacksmiths were renowned for manufacturing 'pipes, necklaces and copper bracelets [...] their pipes reach formidable dimensions. There are some whose pipes do not exceed eighty centimetres, but there are others which are two or three meters in length' (Guiral, 1889: 240). These long pipes were more a sign of luxury and leisure – of the wealth and importance of the smoker – than of practical purpose. A number of these pipes were collected by Brazza, considered both by him and by Teke patrons as masterpieces of the market.

Fine metalwork appears to have been the luxury good for which the Teke were best known regionally. According to Guiral, 'the truly original industry of the Batékés is the chasing industry. They are the goldsmiths of the upper Congo. But copper [...] replaces gold'. We can think of this skill set once again as relating to the historic control of the Teke over the copper mines of the southern Niari. Because of their success as professional traders, only the Teke could afford to bring 'luxury items to the market' (Guiral, 1889: 241). Indeed, the finished goods of Teke manufacture reflected their success as traders, and their position as aristocrats at the Pool.

The specialisation of craft produced goods intended to be of the utmost desirability and thus achieve the highest regional commercial value. The Teke of the 1880s produced iron axe heads for themselves that were celebrated regionally for the thinness of their blades, which made them, according to Guiral, 'very dangerous weapons'. He illustrated an example in his published account, along with examples of other known Teke ironwork including arrow heads and knife blades (Fig. 42). A similar example of an axe illustrated by Guiral was collected as part of the MOA (71.1886.79.10.1–2) (Fig. 43). The form is reduced to its essential, most archaic components, comparable to Neolithic stone axes uncovered in this region. The wooden handle is intended to provide grip to the hand and to support the finely crafted blade. There is none of the

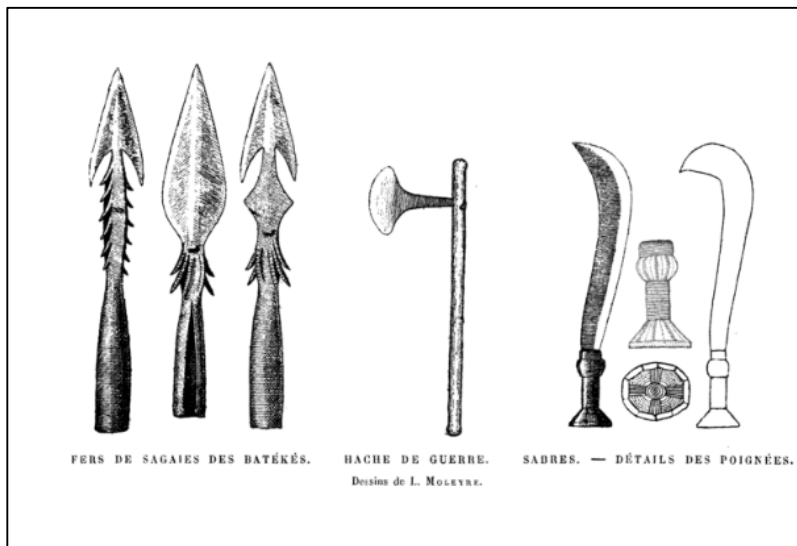
embellishment or surface decoration seen on ceremonial Teke weapons – the Teke axe blade was a desirable and valuable commodity in the market because it was a functional tool, used as a weapon and for hunting (see p.148 for some less useful blades). Such thin axe blades were also used as adzes, essential for Ngala and Teke wood carvers and in the manufacture of wooden boats (Vansina, 1973: 40).²⁶

²⁶ An interesting example is an axe house in the MQB that is functional, but has been rendered useless as a tool and transformed into a prestige/magico-religious object through the addition of basketry (Lehuard: 1974, 40).



Left: Fig. 41. Pipe. Late 19th century, Congo, inventoried 1889. Teke peoples, copper, brass, iron, 52 x 11 x 45 cm, 290 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1889.131.74.1–2).

Right: Fig. 42. Pipe. Late 19th century, Congo [accessioned as Ondumbo peoples, Gabon], inventoried 1886. Teke peoples, wood, iron, brass, copper, 59 x 10 x 6 cm, 831 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1886.79.25). Ex- collection: collected by Jacques Savorgnan de Brazza and Attilio Peçile as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).



Left: Fig. 43. Types of Teke metalwork. Engraving. From Léon Guiral, *Le Congo Français du Gabon à Brazzaville* (1889), 160–61.

Right: Fig. 44. Axe. Late 19th century, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1886. Teke peoples, iron, wood, 57.7 x 21.5 x 3.6 cm, 828 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1886.79.10.1–2)
Ex- collection: collected by Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza and Attilio Peçile as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).

The professional potter, weaver and blacksmith/sculptor

Sources from the 1880s reveal that the transformation of raw materials into finished goods was completed by specialist artisans in Teke society; the smith (*motsulu*), potter (*umbuo andzuo*) and weaver (*untwibi iko*) (Sims, 1886: 134, 102, 174).²⁷ A high value was placed on the work produced by these individuals, and the most renowned of these had close connections with the court at Mbe.

It was these men and women who knew the techniques required to transform raw clay into fine pottery; raffia leaf fibre into exquisite textiles and basketry; iron and copper ore into tools, weapons and jewellery; and wood into sculptures recognised as ‘Teke’ across a vast region. They were masters of skills passed down to them by their ancestors, the ones responsible for creating ‘icons’ of Teke culture.

Potter (umbuo andzuo)



Fig. 45. Woman Making Pottery, Ikoko. 1906–07, Ikoko, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Manuel Gomez (1883–1912). Published in Frederick Starr (1912), Plate XLIV.

²⁷ Unless otherwise stated, Teke terminology is taken from Sims, A. *A Vocabulary of the Kiteke, as Spoken by the Bateke Batio and Kindred Tribes on the Upper Congo: By A. Sims. Kiteke-English*. Gilbert and Rivington, 1888.

Not every neighbourhood in the wider Teke region had a potter, because pottery could only be manufactured in areas where clay was available. Potters were thus only found in Teke villages along the Congo River to the south of the sandy plateau region, and in the region of the Chaillu Mountains bordering Gabon to the north. In villages where clay was readily available, however, there would usually be a potter. Sims recorded that a potter in the region of Congo Pool in the 1880s was known as the *umbuo andzuo*, and the place where pottery was made was known as the *ifuna* (Sims, 1886: 102).²⁸ The potter had a defined status within society – a profession with a title and a definable place of work. As was common in much of sub-Saharan Africa, and true for neighbouring groups along the Congo River, potters in Teke society were women.²⁹

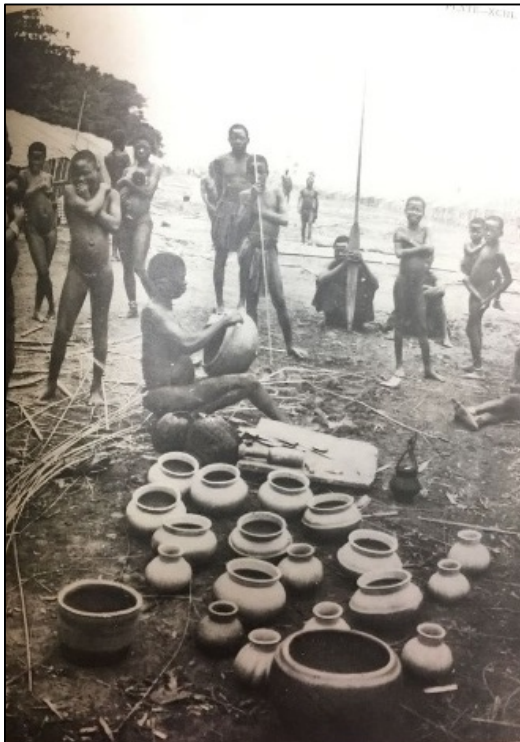


Fig. 46. Pottery Making, Basoko. 1906–07, Basoko, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Manuel Gomez (1883–1912). Published in Frederick Starr (1912), Plate XCIII

American anthropologist and collector Frederick Starr (1858–1933) and his Mexican companion Manuel Gomez (1883–1912) photographed several different potters along the Congo River between 1905 and 1906. In some of these images, the potter is presented seated with her

²⁸ There are no similar words in Calloc'h, J. *Vocabulaire français-ifumu (batéké)* (1911), likely reflecting the lack of clay deposits in the sandy Teke Fumu region far from riverine sources of clay.

²⁹ Other than the production of clay pipes and tools relating to forging, such as the ceramic nozzles for bellows. Coart, E., and A. de Hauleville. "Notes Analytiques sur les Collections Ethnographiques du Musée du Congo: la céramique". Brussels [Belgium]: Musée du Congo Belge (1907): 3–30 lists some exceptions.

ceramics, surrounded by young women and other individuals, presumably family members (Fig. 46). In other instances, such as in a photograph of a female potter at Ikoko, she is presented as working alone (Fig. 45.). A potter tended to work alone, however she may have been supported by younger women and children in preparing her materials and the eventual firing of pots, they may have also helped in the extraction and transportation of clay and in the preparation of her pigments (Pinçon 1997: 119). Potters do not appear to have formed a distinct social category in Teke society, any woman could become a potter should she have had a desire to learn the skill. Amongst the Teke Tsaayi of the 1980s, it was considered a game for children to copy their elders, and this was how the skillset was initially handed down the generations. The inheritance of skills, moreover, was not restricted to certain families (Pinçon, 1997: 119).

The work of a potter was always a secondary activity. A woman could never be a full-time potter because of her extensive household, culinary and agricultural duties. The creation of pots was practised in the time between other activities and the output was thus necessarily low (Pinçon, 1997: 119). Even in Mpila, one of the greatest Teke marketplaces on the Pool and a centre for the production of pottery in the early 1880s, descriptions of women as they exist in the archive occur only in relation to the number of wives belonging to the chief (see for example Dybowski, 1893: 73). This bias is reflected in the number of prohibitions associated with the practice intended to ensure the cleanliness of the source material, whereby the clay was metaphorically associated with the female body. Amongst the Teke Tsaayi, men were forbidden from visiting sites of extraction so that the clay might remain pure. Female potters, throughout the process of manufacture, could only work when in a physical state considered 'clean'.³⁰

Such restrictions were also found in the wider region. Among the Punu peoples to the northeast of Gabon, potters were expressly forbidden from visiting extraction sites soon after sexual intercourse. Amongst the Lali, pregnant women were forbidden from accessing firing pyres.³¹ In the villages of Douakani and Mouetche in the 1980s, Teke Tsaayi potters were not allowed to work during their menstruation (Pinçon, 1997: 136). Restrictions surrounding the selection of clay sources have been well documented amongst several African peoples that list

³⁰ For instance, certain people were systematically kept aside from the extraction site or the places where the potters stored and manipulated the clay: men if the craft was practised by women, women in other contexts, uninitiated people, members of other social groups than the potters, little girls or boys, pregnant women, menstruating women, twins, warriors, etc.

³¹ Recorded by Pinçon amongst the Lali of Mbouma Ndzi.

similar prohibitions.³² Notable studies have been completed among the Koma Nedra in the Cameroon.³³ These rules and regulations suggest the importance of pottery in these communities, and the determination of those in charge to ensuring its continuation. They also suggest that certain acts potters engaged in were understood to make them especially vulnerable and in need of societal protection.

Pottery process and tools

As is common throughout sub-Saharan Africa, before work could begin the clay had to be prepared so that organic matter was removed and the material was of a regular consistency. Fieldwork conducted in Mpila in the 1950s suggested some potters may have mixed the clay with the earth from termite mounds or the powdered sherds of broken pottery to improve plasticity and make the clay more suitable for work (Vanden Bossche, 1953: 10). The same process of preparation was recorded amongst Ngala potters on the Alima by the MOA (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1970: 145). Once the clay had been processed from its raw state, Teke potters used moulds in their manufacturing of ceramic vessels. The potter kneaded the clay into a pellet ‘which they flatten[ed] into a regular plate of the desired thickness. This plate [was] then applied to a kind of hollow mould and meticulously packed over the entire surface.’ Sections of the pot were then carefully detached from this mould and skilfully attached to each other, with the welds being concealed through the use of slip. This process allowed for the creation of vases of ‘perfect regularity and smoothness’ ready for the market (Coart, 1907: 33).

In a description of pottery making in Basoko, Starr described how ‘[t]he entire outfit of the potter’ consisted of a ‘board, pounder, scrapers [and] polishers’. All of these tools are visible in a photograph taken by Gomez (Fig. 45). Starr noted that the clay pots were ‘often smeared, while hot, with copal to give them luster’, and in this photograph the female potter can be seen ‘smoothing a bowl’. Also visible ‘near the board is a characteristic little oil jar, made of pottery and encased in pretty close-fitting basketry covering’ (Starr, 1912: 33). The form of the basket is

³²For example, see Arua, I., and O. K. Oyeoku. ‘Clays and Afikpo pottery in south-eastern Nigeria.’ *Nigerian Field* 47, no. 1–3 (1982): 27–38; Herbich, Ingrid, and Michael Dietler. ‘Aspects of the ceramic system of the Luo of Kenya.’ *Töpferei-und Keramikforschung* 2 (1991): 105–135.

³³Gosselain, Olivier P. ‘Poterie, société et histoire chez les Koma Ndera du Cameroun (Pottery, Society and History among the Koma Ndera (Cameroon)).’ *Cahiers d’études africaines* (1999): 73–105.

similar to that of the ceramics and reminds us that women were responsible for the manufacturing of both ceramics and basketry in many riverine communities. A basket in the shape of a ceramic bottle collected as part of the MOA shows the proximity of these traditions mastered by Teke women (Fig. 47).



Fig. 47. Small bottle-shaped basket. Late 19th century, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1889. Teke peoples, vegetable fibre, 4.6 x 7 x 7 cm, 27 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1889.131.103). Ex- collection: collected by Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza and Attilio Peçile as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).



Fig. 48. Pottery Firing, Yakusu. 1906–07, Yakusu, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Manuel Gomez (1883–1912). Published in Frederick Starr (1912), Plate CXIV.

Surface decoration was only completed once the vessel had dried. Both incised lines and painted decoration may have been used to complement one another. The incised lines, made with a stick, often consisted of bands of parallel lines running around the vessel. This technique was used throughout the wider region and is found in pottery of the Lower Congo more generally (Coart, 1907: 36). A pigment commonly found painted onto the surface was iron oxide, a major

source of which was in the vicinity of Kinshasa. A number of pigments obtained from vegetable materials were used as decoration. This was particularly the case with a pigment known as *kolokoto*, which was said to be manufactured from the tree species *Bridelia ferruginea* Benth. The bark of this tree – which also has medicinal properties – was boiled and rubbed on the pottery to produce a dark red, almost purplish hue (Institut d'études Centrafricaines, 1950: 105). A yellow ochre has also been recorded but was rarely used. The surface of the pot was then made glossy by polishing with a pebble, which also helped to incorporate the pigment into the body of the object.

Once the ceramics were decorated they were fired. According to Pinçon's research in the Chaillu Mountain region, groups of potters combined forces for the firing of pots with several women pooling their production to maximise fuel used (Fig. 48). In the Congo Pool region, a slightly different process to the stacked pyres illustrated here was recorded, which allowed for upwards of 200 objects to be fired at one time. The potter began by spreading a thick layer of grass over the pottery, which was then kept burning for four or five hours. Once the fire had stopped burning, the pottery was sorted. Pottery that came into contact with the flame might be shot with a distinctive black trail, and the final colour of the ceramic body varied from grey to a brilliant white. The ceramic might have bluish tone as a result of mild fumigation, or as a result of the presence of charred organic matter in the clay (Coart, 1907: 35). At this point, a number of pots had to be given to the *ngantsii* ('master of the land') as a form of tribute. This tribute might then have been offered as a payment to the *nkira* spirits of the land who had given the potter the raw materials, ensuring that the spiritual forces were satisfied with this action.



Fig. 49. Stages in preparing raffia fibres for weaving. February 2017, near Zanaga, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

Weaver (untwibi iko)

The raffia palm grew throughout the wider Teke cultural region and, in 1880, practically every Teke village had at least one weaver – possibly several – each of whom was able to transform leaves into cloth. Teke weavers, like their Kongo counterparts, were always male. The role of the weaver in Teke society is inscribed into his name in very literal terms. In 1911, Calloc’h noted that ‘to weave’ in Fumu is *buma*, and the weaver was known as the *i-mbuma biko*, which literally translates to ‘the maker of cloth’ (Calloc’h, 1911: 333). Among the Teke Tsaayi of the 1950s, the weaver was similarly known as the *wačuko*, ‘the maker of garments’ – *waču* meaning ‘do’, *eko* meaning ‘garments’. Although most men were expected to have the ability to weave, the profession was respectable and given a relatively high place in society (Masson-Detourbet, 1957: 68).

Weaving skills were often passed down through a family. A weaver would have had as his apprentice a close male relative, perhaps his younger brother, son or nephew, and this remains the case today. In learning to weave, the younger man watches the elder throughout the process, and his main work is as an assistant is the preparation of raffia fibres for weaving. Teke raffia cloth usually consists of a balanced plain weave, where patterns are introduced through coloured weft threads. The assistant to the master weaver demonstrated the process to me in February 2017 at his home in the vicinity of Zanaga. He showed me how, once the raffia fibres are dry,

they are pulled apart by hand into thinner threads, then separated into groups and dyed the desired colours. These batches of thread are then tied into a support in the order in which they will be woven and are further thinned out using a tool (Fig. 49). Women might historically also have assisted at this point too. Women are recorded as being in charge of dyeing the raffia fibres, just as they helped the potter in preparing pigments for the decoration of pots. In some instances, the same dyes might have been used on cloth as on ceramics, especially organic dyes, but today the dyes used are all synthetic and mainly of Chinese import.

Due to the hereditary mode of transmission, certain families were strongly associated with weaving and celebrated for their textiles. According to Masson-Detourbet, the Banzinzio, a subgroup of the Teke Tio located between the Lefini and Ngamboma rivers to the north of Mbe were historically the families in charge of making cloth for the Makoko and a weaver from one of their families would have had a formal role at court. This figure was not as important as the Royal Blacksmith Ngaambiôô, who was one of the Makoko's twelve vassals, but he was nonetheless a notable figure (Masson-Detourbet, 1957: 68 fn.1). Today, the highest quality of raffia cloth is reserved for the Makoko alone, suggesting that certain weaving families may still have links to the court.

The weaving process and tools

A Teke Tsaayi weaver of the 1950s was recorded as singing repetitive songs to invoke his ancestors to help guide his weaving (Masson-Detourbet, 1957: 73). Indeed, the Teke weaver, while completing a textile, may be understood as having been in a form of trance with the spiritual realm. Before beginning, he would position a figurative statue in wood under the lowest bar of the loom. This statue was a representation of his own ancestor: 'his ancestor' literally – the man who taught him to weave – or 'his ancestor' in a more general sense – the mythic ancestor who brought weaving into his family line. The ancestor figure was activated by its placement, and the weaver likely also spat kola nuts or palm wine onto the figure or rubbed it with palm oil. Once these ceremonial actions were completed, the weaver was thus supported by powerful ancestors who guided his work and who he spoke to in the form of song and rhymes.

Weavers were forbidden from working on the day of *mpika* (the holy day dedicated to the Nkwembali that occurred one day in four) and at night, suggesting once again that the process of

transforming raw leaf fibre into cloth involved some form of communication with the spiritual realm that made the practitioner vulnerable to predation (Dupré, 1995: 45). These ancestors were given a material form through the statue figure and called upon to protect the weaver.



*Fig. 50. Ishogo Loom and Shuttle. Engraving. From Paul Du Chaillu, *A Journey to Ashango-Land, and Further Penetration into Equatorial Africa* (1867), 290–91.*

Today, the weaver works alone in his house, or in the company of a sole apprentice, but historically, weavers of the Teke Tsaayi, Teke Lali and Teke Kukua did their work in public. Weaving was a social act where men would come together to chat and smoke while the cloth took shape (Dupré, 1995: 45). Between 1863 and 1865, the French-American traveller, zoologist and anthropologist Paul Belloni Du Chaillu (1831–1903) travelled to southern Gabon. His account of the journey, *A Journey to Ashango-Land, and Further Penetration into Equatorial Africa* (1867), contains a detailed description of the professional weaving establishments of the Ishongo peoples, located just north of the wider Teke region, in southern Gabon. Du Chaillu described in particular raffia textile production, and its vibrant hub of activity where many

weavers worked together. The main street of the village of Mokengs had a number of *ouandjas* ('houses without walls'), each of which contained 'four or five looms, with the weavers seated before them weaving the cloth' (Du Chaillu, 1867: 290).

An illustration included in Du Chaillu's account depicts one of these weavers at a single heddle loom (Fig. 50). It is of the same type as the examples collected by the MOA from roughly the same area with a cloth still in the process of manufacture (Fig. 51). It is also the same as the functioning loom documented in the Congo in 2017. The description of the cloth made by these professionals is strikingly similar to that produced by Teke weavers in the vicinity of Lekana and Djambala. Du Chaillu described *bongos* as being 'very often striped, and sometimes made even in check patterns'. This pattern was achieved by 'their dyeing some of the threads of the warp, or both warp and woof [weft] with various simple colours; the dyes are all made of decoctions of different kinds of wood, except for black, when a kind of iron ore is used' (Du Chaillu, 1867: 290). This is once again comparable to the pigment used in ceramics.



Fig. 51. Loom. 19th century, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo and Gabon, inventoried 1896. Teke peoples [?], wood, raffia, 59 x 104 x 11 cm. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1896.52.1) Ex- collection: collected as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).

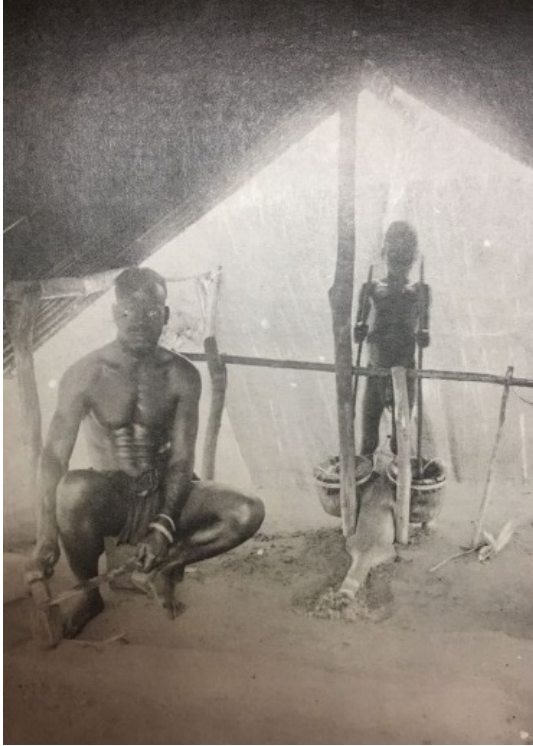


Fig. 52. *Upoto Smithy*. 1906–07, Upoto, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Manuel Gomez (1883–1912). Published in Frederick Starr (1912), Plate XLIV.

Blacksmith (motsulu)

Of all the specialists, the blacksmith (*motsulu* or *mutsuli*) was the most highly regarded. To be a smith was considered a status as much as an occupation (Vansina, 1973: 123).³⁴ The blacksmith, like the weaver, was defined by the transformative role he brought about with material. He was known as the *mutswii u wootsolo* ('the one who works the metal'). His position in society, however, was not limited to this role. Léon Guiral noted that the smith was generally one of the most important men of the village and often the village chief. Guiral befriended a 'skilled blacksmith...among the most renowned' named Apillé, who was also a chief. He learnt that Apillé had been taught by and inherited his tools from his father (Guiral, 1889: 161). Guiral's friendship with Apillé, as a European, indicates that he was the public representative of the village and, indeed, the Teke blacksmith was historically a public figure. His forge (*nzo e tsula* or *ku baful biloo*) was one of the central gathering places for the male elite of the village. In the *leboo*, a courtyard area at the entrance, men met to exchange conversation and drink palm wine

³⁴ It was not, however, a caste according to Vansina (1973: 142).

(*malafu*) together. The *motsulu* worked in public and was said to have felt encouraged when he was observed (Lema, 1978: 212–13).

Because his work was so highly regarded in Teke communities and he devoted a large portion of his time to it, smithing was often his primary means of subsistence. Smiths – particularly those skilled in the manufacture of certain specific forms such as double bells (see p.119) – may have worked as itinerant craftsmen, travelling from village to village selling the small number of goods that they could carry and working directly on commission. Ponel (a member of the MOA) described how a travelling blacksmith would come into Mbochi villages of the Lower Alima, carrying the tools of his trade along with a ‘few pieces of soft iron’ (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1970: 313). Ponel made it clear that it was the valuable, inherited tools – and the skills that went with them – that were the essential attributes of the smith, while the raw iron that he worked with was a readily available item of trade.

Based in the Lower Alima region in 1885, Ponel further recorded that ‘the trade of a blacksmith is a kind of priesthood transmitted from father to son’ (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1970: 313). Ponel’s suggestion that smithing was a ‘kind of priesthood’ demonstrates his awareness of the fact that the creative process of the smith was so valued that it was considered to have a spiritual dimension. Fernand Delisle, having been in the region of the Teke Tsaayi people, wrote: ‘in all villages, blacksmiths, who are very important and considered men, often heads of tribes or villages, are also dreaded fetishists.’ Again, the smith is credited with both a political and spiritual role in society (Delisle, 1885: 465–73). According to Lema, in certain Teke regions the blacksmith either assisted or altogether replaced the religious specialist of a community – known as the *ngaa* (*nkhum*) – in the celebration of the rites dedicated to local *nkira* spirits (see p.201 for an extended analysis of the role of the blacksmith).

Sculptor (muwa)



Fig. 53. Unnamed young man next to several sculpted figures, about to work the bellow ('Assis sur un long fauteuil et a cote de plusieurs oeuvres acheeves un garçon s'apprete a actionner le soufflet de forge'). c.1978, Ngwo, Engankar, Maluku, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Gwete Lema (d.2004). Published in Gwete Lema (1978), fig. 4.8.

For the Teke, the specialist who sculpted in wood was called the *muwa*, and his role was defined literally as *muwa a biteo* ('sculptor of statues') or *uwe waa biteo* ('the one who sculpts statues') (Lema, 1978: 211). Like the weaver, the sculptor was male, and his role was defined by the finished goods that he produced. Like weavers too, sculptors were not part of a caste or class set apart from other members of society. According to Gwete Lema's field research in the Boundiende district of the DRC in the late 1970s, in which he interviewed two sculptors and photographed them at work, 'they eat, dress like anybody in the community, and marry the woman of their choice' (Lema, 1978: 214). Unlike weavers, potters and smiths, Vansina went so far as to say that sculptors were only 'semi-specialists' (Vansina, 1973: 139). Robert Hottot claimed that 'anyone may carve [statues]', and recorded that in one village the carving was done by the *ngaa* and chief of the village (Hottot, 1956: 26).

To say that any man in a Teke community could sculpt is the same as saying that any man in a Teke community could weave. All men were expected to have these skills, but only a select number of them became professionals. There were thus two types of wood carvers in Teke communities: the amateurs and the professionals. Amateur carvers found business in areas that

were far away from the workshops of professional sculptors, and they might have been called upon to ‘rapidly shape a statuette to satisfy an immediate cultural need’. This was known to happen especially for the carving of small portable charms that an individual might require, for example, at the outset of a journey. Lema understood this to be the reason why, in a number of European museum collections, ‘we sometimes see very mediocre figurines, characterised by a total lack of aesthetic knowledge on the part of the sculptor’ (Lema, 1978: 214). The output of the professional sculptor may not have been immediately definable, in the way that a weaver or potter’s work was, because the sculptor was also often the blacksmith. This skilled craftsman not only produced all of the necessary iron tools for a sculptor’s work, but, for many blacksmiths in Teke communities, they sculpted wood at the same time.

An apprentice to the blacksmith sculptor might have acquired skills in carving and forging at the same time. As mentioned before, his training consisted predominantly of observing the master craftsman at work. The apprentice was also tasked with basic chores, such as cutting and preparing the trunks of trees that served as raw material for the forge, and he may have been asked to hold tools for the blacksmith sculptor while he worked. The apprentice would also have been expected to assist at the forge – collecting the wood and coal, lighting the fire and working the bellows. Once the master was satisfied with the work the apprentice had produced, he gave to his teacher, by way of payment, three pieces of raffia cloth, along with one chicken and three kola nuts. These objects were intended as an offering to *muwe*, the religious charm of the blacksmith-sculptor. By making this offering, the charm was now supposed to help the young sculptor with his work in the early days of his career. Significantly, the pupil was only considered an accomplished sculptor when he himself became the owner of a *muwe*, and this process could take several years (Lema, 1978: 214). A close relationship existed between the apprentice and a known spiritual force during his apprenticeship period and throughout his entire career.



Fig. 54. Sitting between the forge bellows and the metal anvil, the sculptor-blacksmith, Nsien Mukoko, deepens, using a chisel, the figure's facial hair line ('Assis entre le soufflet de forge et l'enclume métallique, Nsien Mukoko approfondit, à l'aide d'une ciseau, la ligne de cheveux faciale du personnage.'). c.1978, Ngwo, Engankar, Maluku, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Gwete Lema (d.2004). Published in Gwete Lema (1978), fig. 4.4.

Process and tools

Blacksmithing tools, though simple, were costly, and a blacksmith would have inherited them from his father. Vansina noted that these tools may have been passed down to a daughter, who in turn would pass them down to her son. If this occurred, it was up to the ancestor *inkwii* to teach the son the art of smithing in his dreams (Vansina, 1973: 162). The main tools associated with the forge were the bellows (*mishao*), the anvil (*andzuunu*), the large hammer (*nzuun*) and the small hammers (*mityen*). The bellows were made from a very light wood that was also used to make drums. The two or four hide membranes (*mabye*; the singular word *bye* means 'breast')

were from the jackal or the *nzuli* gazelle – skins selected for their flexibility. To direct the draft to the fireplace, membranes were operated with a small wooden rod attached to the centre. A clay pipe (*nke*) separated the fire from the wooden body of the bellows. Starr described the process as follows:

The bellows consist of a wooden block cut to form two wooden air bowls and a tube; the air bowls are covered with skins, to the middle of which are attached the lower ends of two sticks; the wooden tube from the air bowls is covered at the end with a pottery tube which carries the blast of air to the fire. (Starr, 1912: 30)

An example of this type of bellow, described as the ‘Guineo-Congolese forest type’, was collected as part of the MOA (Fig. 55). The blow pipes are said to have been ‘drilled with red hot iron’ (Object card MQB 71.1884.37.36). In the examples photographed by Lema south of the Congo, the bellows have four hide covered compartments (Figs. 53–54).

The anvil was made from a block of stone of any shape, provided it had a surface that could be worked on, or a mass of iron (Lema, 1978: 216–18). An anvil-shaped object could serve as a currency across the wider region (see p. 117). Gomez photographed a blacksmith in Upoto (Fig. 52.). His workshop was an open structure housing his ‘bellows and simple outfit – a block of iron or steel set in the ground for the anvil, hammer etc.’. He was described as ‘beating a knife while his boy puffs the bellows’ (Starr: 1912, 29).



Fig. 55. Bellows. 19th century, Upper Ogooué, Gabon, inventoried 1884. Adouma peoples, wood, 50 x 30.5 x 12.7 cm. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1884.37.36). Ex- collection: collected by Mr Thollon and D. Schwebisch as part of the Mission de l’Ouest Africain (1883–1885).

Markets

Markets above Congo Pool

The goods created by these specialists would then be transported to the market. In West Central Africa in 1880, markets were usually located at natural geographic points of confluence, with upriver markets, in effect, functioning as satellite markets to those surrounding the Pool (for a general map of the major markets, see Fig. 29). One of the major upriver markets south of the Congo River was Mushie, located where the Fimi and the Kasai rivers meet in the present-day Plateaux District of the Mai-Ndombe Province, DRC (Stanley, 1885: II 422). Stanley approvingly noted that, in choosing such a prime location, ‘the first founder of the community must have possessed an eye to business’ (Stanley, 1885: II 420).

On the north bank of the Congo River, above the Pool, European sources reveal that the two major upriver markets were at Bonga, where the Alima joins the Sangha, and Likouba, where the Alima joins the Congo – once again, natural points of confluence. The resident populations on the north bank, in the vicinity of the Alima, were the Kongo Mbochi, who lived in mixed villages with the Teke peoples. The village of Likouba itself was under the chieftainship of an Ngala [Apfuru] chief. As was the case in Mushie, valuable goods from the upper Congo were collected here and acquired by Ngala traders on market day for currency. These goods were then transported onwards to the Teke markets of the Pool, a 15-day journey downriver (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1970: 470–71).

Markets around Congo Pool

Of all the natural confluence points, Congo Pool was the most significant and conclusive: free passage for boats along the Congo ended here, and the river was cut by dramatic rapids all the way to its estuary. In 1880 the Teke were in possession of both banks of the river at Congo Pool, and were thus the ‘obligatory intermediaries between the sellers from above and the purchasers from below’ (Dupont, 1889: 139). The Ngala transported goods to markets under Teke control. Here, the purchasers were Kongo traders including the Zombo and Vili, who then transported the goods overland to the coast in caravans (Jeannest, 1886: 55–63). Guiral noted that there were

daily markets at different points around the Pool, a unique trademark of the region. Lasting half the day, all the goods were displayed ‘spread out on the ground and in the open air’. Both the inhabitants of the Pool and European visitors were absolutely dependent on these markets for foodstuffs, and Guiral wrote: ‘it is very important to get the goods you need from the market because once the sale is over, everything disappears.’ As Guiral’s comment suggests, the trade of goods was a highly formalised process, and once one market was over, goods would then be transported to other markets in the surrounding region, ensuring that all populations were served (Guiral, 1889: 212).



Fig. 56. Nsona Market, Near Ngungu, 1906–07, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Manuel Gomez (1883–1912). Published in Frederick Starr (1912), Plate III.

Markets between Congo Pool and the coast

Between the Pool and the coast, the institution of the market was controlled by the Kongo peoples. Throughout Kikongo speaking country, markets were held every four or eight days – major markets every eight days, and minor markets for the exchange of foodstuffs every four. The Kongo week consisted of four days: Nkandu, Konzo, Nkenge and Nsona were the names given to them in the cataract region (Bentley, 1900: II 399). Stanley noted that, as Guiral discovered on the Pool, markets moved from village to village, meaning that the indigenous peoples of different districts were ‘well supplied with almost all they [required] without the

trouble and danger of proceeding to the coast' (Stanley, 1878: 358).³⁵ Manuel Gomez and Frederick Starr, in Nsona, near Ngunu, in roughly the same region, photographed a Kongo market some thirty years later, and goods were displayed outside in the same way Guiral described (Fig. 56). Packs of cassava wrapped in banana leaves packed into baskets are visible. In his account, Starr wrote: 'Women bring *their* produce' to the market, particularly cassava. Men sell 'cloth and guns; fowls and eggs' (Starr, 1912: 14). Other goods, such as salt and *tula*, were carried to the market and protected from the elements in wooden or earthenware containers also visible in the image.



Fig. 57. Group of Teke people at a market ('Ngalinza', 'Mupani', 'Imvu' and 'Ngoro' are names of hairstyles, each with an arrow pointing to a particular person). 1906, Plateau Region, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by A. Robert Hottot (1884–1939), print black and white, 145 x 90 mm. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1994.62.384.2).

North of Brazzaville, in the Teke Fumu region in 1906, Hottot photographed one of these regular markets (Fig. 57). In the image, it is possible to see a number of women and children who have brought goods to sell at the market in the form of long baskets that were carried on the head, known as *mutette*. Goods were also carried to market wrapped in imported European cloth. Hottot recorded the names of different hairstyles in pencil at the top of the image, and this makes it clear that the market was a place where different Teke subgroups – each made immediately clear by these elaborate hairstyles and cicatrization marks – gathered to trade their goods (see p.215 for an expanded account of cicatrization).

³⁵ Stanley reckoned that 'by this mode of traffic a keg of powder landed at Funta, Ambriz, Ambrizette, or Kinsembo, [required] about five years to reach Ngala traders above the Pool'. (Stanley, 1878: 360).

Conclusion

Trade and cultural identity

At the time of first direct European contact in 1880, the Teke peoples of West Central Africa were in possession of both banks of the River at the Congo Pool. In markets located on the Pool controlled by the Teke, products of the Upper River were exchanged for European merchandise that had been carried from the Atlantic coast overland by Kongo caravans (Jeannest, 1883: 55–63). At a regional level, the production of goods for export – whether by miners, hunters or craftsmen – assumed an unprecedented importance as European demand for the raw materials of Central Africa grew, while individuals, and in some cases whole communities, adopted the role of professional merchants and profited from the trade (Gray and Birmingham, 1970).

Fierce trade competition between different African traders and polities to dominate this trade, combined with a number of geographical factors that severely limited ready access from the Atlantic, meant that although they had been familiar with European goods from at least the sixteenth century, the Teke remained relatively isolated from Western influence until 1877, when they came to the attention of the Welsh-American journalist Henry Morton Stanley (1841–1904).

The first European accounts based on direct experience in this region noted that the Teke were widely celebrated as traders. Their success as traders appears to have been an important part of their cultural identity, as conceptualised by foreign visitors to the region and through the eyes of neighbouring groups.³⁶ The Kikongo word ‘Teke’ itself was first recorded by Stanley in 1877 as the name of an important market in the vicinity of Congo Pool rather than a people, suggesting that as the name travelled upriver the people were equated with the marketplace they presided over. Baptist missionary William Holman Bentley, one of the first Europeans on the Congo Pool in the early 1880s, claimed – almost certainly erroneously – that “‘Teke’ is derived from the Kikongo word “‘Teka” which means “to buy” just as “‘Tio” in the Tio language means “to buy””, which Bentley employs to demonstrate that the Teke’s relationship with their neighbours was constructed on trade relations.

³⁶ See Arhin Kwame’s study into the ‘transit trade’ along the northern borders of Asante in north central Ghana, conducted by itinerant traders, under the political protection of the Asante, for a comparative study of trade as a form of cultural identity. *West African traders in Ghana in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (London: Longman, 1979).

There appears to have been different kinds of Teke traders, depending on whether they lived on the plateau or nearer the Pool. Around the Pool and in its vicinity, Teke traders were established in villages where they kept storehouses of goods, much like their Ngala and Kongo neighbours and competitors. Teke traders of the plateau had a much more itinerant lifestyle and were compared to the Hausa traders of Nigeria, for there were no markets on the plateau itself. On the plateau, the Teke trader was a ‘peddler’ who went:

from village to village to sell his own products or to resell those he bought further north [...] Free, independent, patient and silent [...] The Bateke trader loves the discussion and he will bargain for whole days before deciding to buy or sell [...] He does not frequent the noisy Bakongo markets where transactions must be carried out on a fixed day in a relatively short space of time. (Lebeuf, 1956: 100)

According to this account, for the Teke trader of the plateau trade was a way of life. Bargaining and negotiation was a social act that could not be rushed and was in itself a pleasure. Trade was presented as an individual’s primary profession, and the manner in which goods were exchanged served as an explication for his worldview that was distinct from that of his Kongo neighbours.

In various accounts of the Pool, the act of trade was presented as a performance; the skill of the Teke trader was to get the best deal by harnessing a deep knowledge of the price and market value of goods. European commentators from the late nineteenth century through to the early twentieth century agreed that bargaining, and the slow process of reaching an agreement on price, were typical characteristics of how the Teke conducted trade (See, for example, Dupont, 1889: 139).

Trade was the profession of many of the most financially successful Teke men of the period and the Baptist missionary Thomas J. Comber (1852–1887) provides an early and representative demonstration of how Europeans responded to their wealth. He records how the ‘people in consequence of their ivory trade [were] surfeit with fine cloth, and even small boys [had] their store of brass rods etc.’ (BMA H/12/I/X). Comber’s travelling companion Bentley also noted that the people were so rich that they had a surplus of trade cloth, and ‘were able to keep their wives in laziness; scarcely any ground was cultivated, they

produced nothing' (Bentley, 1900: II 19). Europeans were both astonished and threatened by the wealth Teke traders had amassed through trade and consistently noted that trading was, above everything else, their primary skill and occupation. Signifiers of Teke identity, such as cicatrization marks, were added as embellishments to objects which were then traded throughout the region (Fig. 58). Through these widely disseminated trade goods, Teke cultural identity was given material form.



Fig. 58. Anthropomorphic pipe bowl. Late 19th century, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1891. Teke peoples, ceramic, 9 x 7.5 x 4.5 cm, 136 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1891.31.46) Ex- collection: collected by Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza and Attilio Peçile as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).

Chapter Two: the life of the market

Introduction

During the period under study, traders and trading peoples grew in economic and political significance because of developments in international markets. Slaves were one of the principal exports of the Teke [Anzique] peoples to Europeans recorded by Duarte Lopes in the 1580s (Hutchinson, 1880: 26), but by 1880 the international sale of slaves had been banned.¹ Around the same time, the amount of ivory demanded by European trade began to grow year on year. The export of ivory directly replaced the export of slaves. The transition was achieved with ‘a remarkable smoothness, owing to the resiliency of a system which carried many commodities’ (Vansina, 1973: 250). The same phenomenon among Vili traders of the Loango coast on the Atlantic side of the trade has also been noted (Martin, 1972: 29).

The ivory trade became an increasingly standardised process as European industry and technology advanced, and the prices of goods became ever-more fixed and closely bound to European markets. In 1815 it took around 7 months to sail from Antwerp to the mouth of the Congo River, but, for example, by 1885 it only took only 17 and a half days for the steamship *The Léopoldville* to travel from Banana to Antwerp. Tusks could conceivably make their way from a market on Congo Pool to a market in Europe within a few months. On 30 July 1889 the first public sale of ivory occurred in Antwerp, consisting of 1,139 tusks weighing 15,000 kilograms that had been brought directly from the Congo Free State by the steamers *Africa* and *Benguela*. The tusks were sold to ‘buyers from all parts of Europe’ at an average price of 27–28

¹ While the movement in Europe to abolish slavery had begun with the British Abolition of Slavery Act of 1807, it was not until 1878 that Portugal officially banned slavery in all of its colonial possessions due to mounting pressure in Europe. On 5 May 1888 Pope Leo XIII made an address to the bishops of Brazil – the encyclical *In Plurimis* – on the abolition of the slave trade, and in July of that year Cardinal Lavignerie began his anti-slavery tour in various capitals of Europe (Carlen, 1990: II 159).

francs per kilogram (Appleton, 1889: vol.37, 159).² As the century progressed, the peoples of Central Africa were ever-more closely bound in a global trade, affected by fluctuations in the global market and aware of the international value of their goods. The peoples of inner Central Africa who were able to provide ivory for this trade – such as Teke and Ngala traders in the vicinity of Congo Pool, and Chokwe and Ovimbundu traders further south in Angola – grew immensely wealthy as a result (von Oppen, 1993: 63).

While ivory replaced the sale of slaves as the primary commodity exported from this region during the early part of the period under study, this chapter argues that indigenous systems of value continued to place a high value on ‘the slave’. Investigating the important role that the slave continued to serve in the Central African marketplace as the ultimate standard of value allows us to more clearly interpret Teke material values. In order to address the importance of the slave in Central African marketplaces as a store of value, this chapter begins by interpreting indigenous currencies. Over time, indigenous currencies were replaced by European manufactured currencies – raw materials for use in European industry were exchanged for the finished products of European industry – and economic and political power shifted to Europe.

² Appletons’ Annual Cyclopædia and Register of Important Events...: Embracing Political, Military, and Ecclesiastical Affairs; Public Documents; Biography, Statistics, Commerce, Finance, Literature, Science, Agriculture, and Mechanical Industry. V.[1]–15, 1861–75; V.16–35 (new Ser., V.1–20) 1876–95; V.36–42 (3d. Ser., V.1–7) 1896–1902, Volume 29.

Functioning of the market



Fig. 59. Cloth (*tchulu*). Late 19th century, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1891. Teke or Ngala [Apfuru] peoples, raffia fibre, 69 x 90 cm, 138 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1891.31.36).

Ex- collection: collected by Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza and Attilio Peçile, Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).

Fig. 60. Cloth (*kevota* or *nzuona*). Late 19th century, Alima River, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1891. Teke or Achicounda [Teke Tege] peoples, raffia fibre, 88 x 177 cm, 128 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1891.31.35).

Ex- collection: collected by Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza and Attilio Peçile, Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).

Currency

When Europeans first began to arrive on the Central African coast from the late fifteenth century onwards, they recorded the wide use of money and a number of different regional varieties. The most commonly used were shells (known as *lumache* or *nzimbu*), recognised as the ‘ready money’ of the Kongo region. *Nzimbu* shells were harvested from rivers in northern Angola under the control of the Kingdom of Kongo – known as the ‘treasury of the Kingdom of the Kongo’ (Battell, 1901: 96). A currency made from raffia cloth known on the coast as *libongo* was also widely used (see Martin, 2015: 59–60 on raffia cloth; Thornton, 2015: 88 on *nzimbu*).

As the German sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918) asserted a century ago, during the period under study money was ‘a symbol of our interdependence, locating its value in the trust that comes from membership in society’. Money, along ‘with language, was the most important vehicle for... collective sharing’ (Hart, 2005: 31). The production of currencies, in other words,

gave different communities a place in the same society, connecting them all in an intricate web of communally constructed significances.³

The vast number of different cultures in Central Africa – many creating currencies out of the wealth of their own resources – led to what Jane Guyer famously defined as a ‘bewildering jungle’ of different forms that constituted ‘one of the most complex examples of noncapitalist monies in the world’ (Guyer, 1993: 243). While Guyer was writing about the iron currencies in the Upper Congo region, among the Teke peoples we can likewise find a number of distinct currencies in use at the time of the first European presence in the 1880s.

For the Teke, the major currencies were produced from raffia and metal. Raffia cloth continued to serve as a major currency throughout the nineteenth century, taking different forms depending on the requirements of different regions. Amongst certain Kongo groups, strips of cloth bound together in book form were used as currency (Picton and Mack, 1989: 89). An example of one of these preserved at the RMCA contains 82 pieces of cloth stitched together (Loir, 1935: 59). In the cataract region, there was a unit of value known as *Mbadi* or *Mbari* (Mahieu, 1924, 13), constructed from a sheaf or bundle of woven fabrics of palm-raffia or pineapple. This currency was also found among the Songo and Tetela peoples of the DRC.

For the Teke, there were two standard forms of cloth that functioned as currency. The first was considered a basic unit and is known today as a *tchulu*. This consists of a simple square measuring roughly 40 x 40 cm, with the edges left unfinished as cut from the loom. Such a piece of cloth might have served as an introductory gift to set in motion other transactions. Brazza noted that a piece of cloth of this kind was sent ahead to a chief to respectfully announce the arrival of a group of travellers (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1972: 17). It was also used to pay dancers after a performance, along with goods such as palm wine, and even for minor purchases in the market (Guyer, 1999: 45). An example was collected by the MOA (Fig. 59).

A second standard piece of raffia cloth was usually left undyed and made up of twelve pieces stitched together in three rows of four (Fig. 60). The cloth is photographed folded in half. Amongst the Tsaayi, these cloths were known as *kevota*, and amongst the Kukua as *nzuona*. This larger piece of cloth was put into circulation for major exchanges; ‘matrimonial compensations, fines, and blood payments’. They were also used for purchasing slaves, with one slave being

³ See Geertz, 1975, for this famous interpretation of culture: ‘[M]an is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun’ (1975 a: 5).

worth up to 48 pieces of cloth (Guyer, 1999: 45). For raffia cloth to be treated as currency it had to maintain its form and resist transformation into something else such as clothing. The cloth had to be new, carefully folded and sometimes sewn shut – the moment the cloth was worn it was no longer a currency and could not be exchanged as such (Guyer, 1999: 45). What distinguishes a currency from other commodities in the market is its symbolic value, and H.H. Johnston noted how raffia cloth served as an ‘artificial currency’, because it had ‘practically...no value at all, but [was] simply a token; for some of the smallest and oldest of the grass mats [...] became in time a useless bundle of tangled hay’ (Johnston, 1910: II 790).

Metal currency

The Teke in particular were celebrated for their copper and iron currencies and their finished metalwork, which was traded across the wider region. According to Andrew Battell, who lived on the Loango coast in the early seventeenth century, ‘Mococke’ [Makoko] was ‘a great store of iron, and palm-cloth, and elephants’ teeth’ (Battell, 1901: 52). A centre for the production of iron developed in the region of mount Lekoumou, near Gabon, amongst the Teke Tsaayi. Controlling mines gave the Teke and their Kongo neighbours an economic and political significance which spread far beyond their own ethnic homeland as a result of trade. Those who possessed the purest iron ores were able to produce the best tools and weapons, not solely for local use but also as objects of trade (Oliver and Atmore, 2001: 162).

Iron was produced and exported by the metal-working peoples of the Chaillu mountains and the region of the Teke Tsaayi in the form of bars and bracelets, as well as their own manufactured iron objects; in particular their distinctive anvils, hammers and adzes.⁴ Iron objects of a widely recognised form were used as currency, such as the tools of the blacksmith. The ‘nail-shaped’ anvil was collected from a number of different peoples across West Central Africa and functioned both as a tool and as a currency. Such objects were traded as far south as Angola (Dupré and Pinçon, 1997: 50).

⁴ Salt, that came from the coast, was also used as a form of imported currency.

Double clapperless bells

Jane Guyer argued that by the end of the nineteenth century in Equatorial Africa, currencies ‘mediated a great variety of transactions [...] not simply to do with [the] acquisition of material or demographic wealth, but to do with valuing people’s qualitatively different dimensions, in a process in which the production, capture, ownership, distribution and destruction of “things” figured in crucial ways’ (Guyer, 1993: 246). The use of double clapperless bells in this region can perhaps be understood in these terms. Stanley’s first mention of this instrument occurs some way upriver from the Pool in Urangi. He recorded how ‘at 5 p.m. the great chief of Urangi made his presence known by sounding his double iron gong. This gong consisted of two long iron bell-shaped instruments, connected above by an iron handle, which, when beaten...produced very agreeable musical sounds’. Stanley included an illustration of one of these bells in his published account (Stanley, 1878: II 289) (Fig. 61). Likely of Teke origin, in the double bell we can see how material, form and function come together to create an object that is several things at once: a widely appreciated instrument, an expression of political control and a form of currency.

Made from forged iron, clapperless bells were usually struck with a wooden stick; their tone was changed by striking near the open end or in the centre, or was muffled by pressing the bells against the player’s body or the ground. Techniques producing tonal variety could be performed in rapid succession, giving the bell pattern a melodic as well as rhythmic character. Next to drums, bells were the most frequently used instruments. The sound of the bells, with their penetrating timbre, could be heard above the dense drum beat. It could be struck in different ways in order to convey messages by reproducing the tones of the spoken language. Beyond instruments, as Stanley noted above, their use was an expression of a ruler’s political authority. One of the principal items of regalia associated with the office of ‘chief’ or king was the ‘royal bell’ (Vansina, 1969: 187–97).

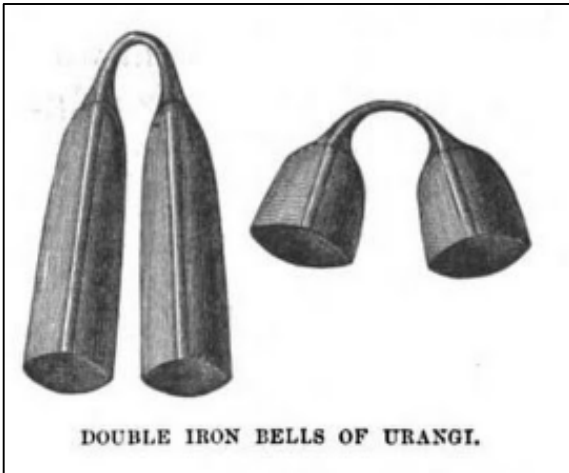


Fig. 61. Double Iron Bells of Urangi. Engraving. From Henry Morton Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent* (1878) II, 289.

References to double bells likewise occur in Brazza's published account. Before he met the Makoko for the first time on the afternoon of 30 August 1880, his Teke guide Ossiah knocked 'on the double bells of the palace to warn the court of our preparations' (Savorgan de Brazza, 1887: 156). Two examples were collected by Attilio Peçile and Brazza as part of the MOA and are currently preserved in the MQB in Paris. Made from hammered sheet iron with contiguous edges and a rounded base joined together, the top is wrapped with rattan or basketry, as seen in the example illustrated (Fig. 62).

The creation of these bells was complicated and required specialist knowledge that only a few blacksmiths in the whole of West Central Africa attained (Kriger, 1999: 141).⁵ Specialist blacksmiths guarded their knowledge, and Colleen Kriger recorded that a blacksmith in the Ngiri region travelled approximately 100 kilometres to learn how to make these bells (Kriger, 1999: 141). Brazza's account confirms that certain blacksmiths were known throughout the region for their ability to manufacture such objects (Brunschwig, 1977: 23).

The use of these bells continues through to the present day. Robert Hottot collected two examples on his 1908 museum supported *Mission Gratuite* to Chad. The first example is very simple and is almost in abstracted form. In these examples, the body of the bell has been constructed by folding a sheet of iron rather than by welding the sides, and the rods extending from the crown of each bell form a circular arc that has been joined by welding. Hottot's note, preserved with the bell, states that it was 'currency used by the "M'baghai" to procure a woman', indicating that such objects were important elements of bridewealth payments (71.1908.16.106

⁵ Kriger based on analysis of RMCA inv. 14072–3255, 141.

MQB object card). The second bell collected from the same peoples was clearly primarily an instrument, demonstrated by its attached baton (Fig. 63). The top is wrapped with knotted rattan and the beater is made out of wood stripped of bark, attached to the bell by a cord. These two examples reveal that double bells thus served a dual purpose and might have been sold in the market both as a musical instrument and as a currency. The complicated nature of their manufacture did not prevent them from being made in large quantities (Kriger, 1999: 141). To illustrate this, below we can see a group of identical abstracted double bell forms that served primarily as currency (Fig. 64).

An indigenous form of currency, therefore, might have derived its meaning from wide use and prestigious associations, such as the link between the bell and its use at the royal court. It might have been functional, but it is possible that it had been transformed into an object that was entirely symbolic in value. A blurring of categories of value is seen in this ‘magic belt’ collected by Brazza, where a miniature single clapperless bell is tied to a leather belt with other ‘fetishes’ (bell, bones adorned with copper) (Fig. 65). On this belt, all of these materials of a known value are miniaturised and attributed a medicinal or protective functions.



Upper left: Fig. 62. Double Bell. Late 19th century, West Central Africa, inventoried 1891. Unrecorded West Central African peoples, iron, basketry, 43 x 30 x 5.5 cm, 1279 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1889.131.6). Ex- collection: collected by Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza and Attilio Peçile as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).

Upper centre: Fig. 63. Double Bell. Late 19th– early 20th century, Lobaye prefecture, Central African Republic, inventoried 1908. Ngbaka peoples, iron, wood, rattan, plant fibres, 39.5 x 24.5 x 8.7 cm, 1159 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1908.16.3). Ex- collection: collected by A. Robert Hottot in 1908.

Upper right: Fig. 64. Group of five Double Bells. Late 19th– early 20th century, Central Africa. Unrecorded Central African peoples, iron, 23.5 x 14 x 5.5 cm, 643 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (75.12528.2-6). Ex- collection: Mrs Cureau de Bailha.

Bottom left: Fig. 65. Magic belt. Late 19th– early 20th century, Gabon. Ondumbo peoples, leather, bone, metal, 35 x 10 x 2 cm, 48 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1891.31.26). Ex- collection: collected by Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza and Attilio Peçile as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).

Value in transformation: copper and raffia

The currency form might have been fixed or standardised through the addition of basketry that bound a number of pieces of currency into a larger unit. A celebrated example collected among the Mbochi peoples north of Congo Pool is made up of ten *ngiele* bars that have been wrapped around into circles and bound together with sticks of wood and tree bark (Fig. 66). While each individual copper bar would have served as a unit of value in the market, the addition of the wood and bark superstructure fixed a number of units together and prevented any further transformation. However, the use of the organic materials wood and bark demonstrates that this fixing is not so permanent that it cannot be undone if the *ngiele* are required to *function* as currency rather than to *symbolise* currency. Grouping units together in this way may also have served a functional purpose of facilitating acts of trade.

This symbolic and practical action of binding a number of pieces of metal currency together is found throughout West Central Africa and as far north as southern Cameroon. The currency (*Bikié*) of the Pahouin peoples of Gabon also shows the same idea of binding metalwork units (Figs. 67–69). These pieces were specifically intended to serve as money for bridewealth payments. The binding not only transforms and secures the function, but also serves to designate a certain number of units and facilitates exchange.



Fig. 66. Currency. Late 19th– early 20th century, Alima River, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1938. Mbochi peoples, copper alloy, vegetable fibres, 5.4 x 19.3 x 8.3 cm, 758 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1938.166.15).



Top left: Fig. 67. Money (Bikié). Mid- to late 19th century, Gabon, inventoried 1930. Pahouin peoples, iron and basket weaving, 13.3 x 4.3 x 4.3 cm, 23 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1930.41.158).

Top centre: Fig. 68. Money (Bikié). Mid- to late 19th century, Gabon, inventoried 1930. Pahouin peoples, iron and basket weaving, 14.2 x 3.8 x 4.6 cm, 18 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1930.41.150).

Top right: Fig. 69. Money (Bikié). Mid- to late 19th century, Gabon, inventoried 1930. Pahouin peoples, iron and basket weaving, 14.5 x 8 x 3.8 cm, 28 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1930.41.156).



Bottom: Fig. 70. Money (Bitchie). 19th– 20th century, Kellé district, Cuvette region, Congo, inventoried 1964. Djem peoples, iron, vegetable fibres, 15.5 x 13.5 x 7 cm, 170 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1964.6.17).

The so-called *Bitchie* currency (likely a variant spelling of *Bikié* above) of the Djem peoples – an ethnic group living in southern Cameroon, northern Equatorial Guinea and northern Gabon – is composed of packs of 50 iron rods (Fig. 70). These are assembled five by five in a packet surrounded by a basketry rod and woven fibre. The stems are made by folding the metal and end with a roughly rectangular head. This larger currency unit can therefore be broken up as necessary. As in the example noted above, these are recorded as being used particularly in the settlement of the dowry, and the binding of the form may be a symbolic gesture indicating the permanence of the alliance.

While the form of the currency might be maintained, currencies – both in raffia and in metal – sometimes underwent further transformation at the hands of specialists. Iron could be melted down and worked into the form of finished goods such as double bells and axe heads, which in turn were of such a generally recognised form in high demand that they themselves served as forms of currencies. Currencies in this sense were still in the process of transformation as they moved from consumer to consumer through markets.

A bar of raw metal in the form of an ingot was a functional, portable form, easily transportable from marketplace to marketplace until it reached the skilled hands of a specialist blacksmith. A blacksmith might then have transformed the ingot into a clapperless double bell or an anvil. The value of the bell or the anvil was multiple times that of its constituent raw material. This value lay in the combination of its material, the process of transformation associated with the high skill of an individual craftsman and its function. It might then have served as an item of prestige, a currency, or both.

The development of regionally specific currencies over centuries allowed different groups, even within Teke society, to ‘preserve control over their means of exchange’ (Guyer, 1999: 39). It furthermore gave each of these ethnic groups a clear place at the market. Different groups within the Teke cultural zone thus produced their own currencies. The Teke of the Niari Basin produced the *ngiele* and the Kukua used shells imported from the north-east as well as iron arm-rings. The metal-working peoples of the Chaillu mountains used salt that came from the coast as a form of imported currency as well as their own manufactured iron objects, including distinctive anvils, hammers and adzes. As Brazza pointed out, there were regional variations in the production of cloth, with different Teke peoples producing their own styles of cloth and providing their own classification and system of names. Professionals who were able to make

these valuable materials were accorded a high status.

Slaves as a symbol of interdependence

The slave was the most valuable commodity in the market and all goods in the could thus be valued against the life of a slave. The English Baptist missionary William Holman Bentley (1855–1905) recorded that in markets on the banks of the Pool in the early 1880s, the main currency was a brass rod ‘one-seventh of an inch in diameter and thirty inches long’ known as *mitako* (Bentley, 1900: I 464). Imported from Europe as a replacement to the indigenously mined copper *ngiele*, the *mitako* had a high purchasing power: a single *mitako* could buy enough manioc to last a man 24 hours and was worth almost a litre of palm wine. A large fish could be purchased for four *mitako* (Bentley, 1900: II 401). During the same period, at the other end of the scale, the Senegalese sergeant Malamine Kamara (mid-nineteenth century–1886) purchased his house from the Teke village chief for 300 bars of copper in 1881 (ANOM 16 PA/II/2). Malamine noted that he, in turn, had been offered a young woman as a slave for 460 bars (Guiral, 1889: 231).

Guiral noted that the value of a human being in these markets depended on various factors such as sex, age and physical development (Guiral, 1889: 170). MOA sources from later in the 1880s reveal that in the markets of Bonga and Likouba – two major Ngala markets upriver from the Congo Pool on the Alima – a male slave ‘of ordinary strength’ cost between ‘four to five hundred bars’ and a woman ‘from two to four hundred’ (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1970: 470–71). The value of a person varied from 200 *mitako* to upward of 1,200, averaging around 5-600 (Janzen, 1983: 36). At the same time, in these markets two brass *mitako* would purchase a chicken, a branch of medium-sized bananas or a basket of cassava. Two *mitako* was likewise roughly the cost of locally manufactured goods such as a mat. A hierarchy of the commercial value of goods can be established through the extraction of these values from various accounts, positioning an enslaved human at the top, worth in material terms a certain number of chickens, fish, mats, branches of bananas or baskets of cassava, with currencies streamlining his or her exchange.⁶

⁶ The only items which exceeded slaves in price were boats, at around one thousand *mitako*, and huge quantities of ivory (Stanley, 1879: II 336).

In the early 1880s, Guiral recorded that the ‘only truly important trade of the Batekes, and the only one they [did] on a large scale, is the slave trade’ (Guiral, 1889: 169). For centuries this had been the case. According to the English slaver James Barbot, who was present at the mouth of the Congo River in 1700, the majority of slaves came to the coast from the markets of the Pombo (the Kongo name for Congo Pool). The markets there were known to be controlled by the ‘great *Makoko*’, whose kingdom was located ‘beyond *Congo*, lying northward of the *Zair*’ (Barbot, 1746: 514). In the capital city of Monsol there was:

A great market of slaves, whither the Portuguese of Loango send their Pombeiros with merchandise, who sometimes tarry out two years; when at last, having bought some slaves, elephants teeth and copper, they make the new-bought slaves carry all on their head to Loango; so they are at no charges to bring their biggest teeth or copper out of the country. (Barbot, 1746: 514)

These trade routes were still active in 1880 and slaves might still have been expected to carry other goods of value. Guiral had been witness to both sides of the exchange and was struck by the continued importance of this trade, even though the transatlantic slave trade had been internationally outlawed. Present in the upper Alima River in August 1882, Guiral recorded how it was during the height of the dry season – around July to August, when it was easiest to walk – that several hundred slaves would be brought together by the Teke-Tege slavers to form a caravan.⁷ After performing ‘various ceremonies to assure the caravan [had] the protection of the fetishes, they [left], armed in war, in the direction of the south’ (Guiral, 1889: 169). The vulnerability and value of this human cargo during this journey, which took on average 20–30 days, is reflected in the fact that they travel as if into battle with weapons to protect them from attack, both in the living and the spiritual realm.

Both ‘slave’ and ‘currency’ denote stores of value against which goods were exchanged. It has been argued that slaves fitted into this local system of exchange because they were ‘the natural resource’ of the plateau region where there were no other marketable resources (Sautter,

⁷ The direction corresponds with Lopes’s assertion in the *Relatione* that the Teke (Anzique) sold their own people into slavery and also those from Nubia, presented on the map in the account, in a north-easterly direction from the Anzique Kingdom, which corresponds with the direction of the Alima River from the Pool.

1969: 36–37). The Teke region appears to have been a source of slaves from the beginning of the trade, and it appears that it was not uncommon for the Teke to enslave their own people. ‘Teke’ came to be known as a category of slave in Columbia as early as the 1560s, and later in the seventeenth century as a special class of slave in Brazil; the ‘Ansiku’ (Janzen, 1982: 60).⁸ It has also been argued that due to the lack of markets and marketable goods at the plateau, the chiefs living there – with the Makoko at the head – could only draw indirect profit from the markets of the Pool through taxation. Selling slaves thus provided the sole means by which chiefs of the plateau could gain direct profit.

Indeed, the innumerable ways in which a freeman or woman could be sold into slavery suggests that slavery was a societal norm for the Teke. Breaking customary laws, such as by stealing or committing adultery, could lead to enslavement. Punitive missions, like those directed against villages who had failed to pay their annual tax to the Makoko, may have also served as an excuse for enslavement (Sautter, 1969: 36–37). The way in which trade was conducted was also structured to encourage debt and bonds of alliance: ‘Charges were trumped up on all sides, so that fines of slaves could be imposed, and weak, impoverished families had to sell their junior members, when their slaves were exhausted’ (Bentley, 1900: 43). The relative ease with which an individual could fall into a position of slavery was made clear by the different kinds of slaves and the hierarchy of enslavement that existed. As suggested by Guiral, ‘slave’ is a multifaceted term, and there were different kinds of slave: a ‘slave-boy’ (*umbura*) was less important than a ‘bondslave’ (*ntsua*), who was less important than a ‘wealthy slave’ (*koro*) (Sims, 1888: 132).

Furthermore, the Makoko and the chiefs below him exercised strict control over the sale of slaves; a further sign of its vital importance to the local economy. No one was permitted to sell a slave without going through the local chief of the land, the *Ngantsii*. The price obtained for the slave was divided into three parts: one for the Makoko, another for the chief and the third for the owner of the slave (Sautter, 1969: 36–37). Once the slave had reached the Pool, a fee (*bunganga*) had to be paid to the trader who would sell the slave onwards through a middleman agent. This figure was known as the *ntsuo* and this was his professional role in the marketplace, suggesting the degree to which the market was highly developed (Sims, 1888: 84).⁹

⁸ It seems that the earliest slaves were captured in battle by their Kongo neighbours.

⁹ Also the word for a copper piece (Sims, 1888: 28).

Even after the transatlantic slave trade had been banned, slaves continued to be transported from Teke controlled markets at Congo Pool to major Kongo markets nearer the coast, such as that of Lembelwa, 40 km (25 miles) north of San Salvador, capital of the Kingdom of Kongo. The process of taxation on the head of a slave continued from market to market. Sadi-kia-mbanza – chief of Manzi, halfway between Vivi and Isangila – paid, in 1881, an annual tax of five slaves to his superior chiefs at N’sanda, who in turn paid a slave tribute to the chiefs of Boma on the Atlantic coast (Bentley, 1900: II 43). The price of the slave consequently rose as the individual moved from market to market; a long chain of individuals profited from the exchange and were bound to each other through an intricate web of alliance that stretched across West Central Africa. No other commodity could be sold and resold seemingly without end in this manner, binding together peoples through debts of exchange. It was the slave, then, who linked the peoples of the plateau to those of the Pool and those of the Pool to the coast, providing essential connections across the wider Teke cultural universe and beyond. The slave was there for a currency because the slave established links between different groups across a vast region, forging social bonds and ties. As late as 1891, Jacques de Uzès recorded, in the village of Likouba, that ‘the natives do here, clandestinely, of course, trade slaves and exchange them for ivory tips and barrettes [*mitako*]. A strong and vigorous man is worth, we are told, from a thousand to twelve hundred barrettes, about one hundred and fifty francs’ (Uzès, 1894: 118).

Markets as living institutions

Throughout West Central Africa, villages came alive on market day. In the early twentieth century the colonial administrator of the Djoué region noted that, in the Fiote [Vili] language of the Kongo peoples, the market was referred to as *Nzandu*. In its generic sense, this means ‘neutral place’, ‘place of equality’, ‘place of rest’ or ‘place of enjoyment and attraction’ (Lebeuf, 1956: 51). Personal violence was strictly prohibited on market day and if it did occur, severe punishments would be dealt out. To catch a debtor or pay off any old grudge on market day was punishable by death in many districts. The bearing of weapons to the market was also strictly forbidden (Bentley, 1900: II 399).

If a human body was the most valuable commodity in the region, it follows that the most significant trade alliances were marked by the exchange of human blood. Each Ngala trader was ‘the blood brother’ of the Teke trader that he visited regularly at the Pool. Blood-brotherhoods endured throughout life and even after death, when a trader’s business partners visited his grave and left cloth, both as a token of respect and to forge links with his family members (see p.186). Stanley’s awareness of the importance of this tradition developed and altered as he descended the Congo River in 1877. Initially, he conceived the blood-brotherhood as ‘a pledge of good-will and peace’, noting that ‘we made blood-brotherhood with them [in order that] there should be no trouble’ (Stanley, 1878: 146, 154, 178). Indeed, it was Stanley who, on several occasions, persuaded other traders on the Congo to enter into this alliance with him, and constructed a ceremony of his own imagining around the exchange of blood (Stanley, 1878: 188).¹⁰ In Stanley’s eyes, blood could be exchanged like any other currency, along with ‘shells and a few pieces of cloth’ (Stanley, 1878: 237). It was a simple act in his mind used to facilitate trade.

Stanley’s vision of what a blood-brotherhood actually meant darkened during the encounters he had at the Congo Pool. Where it had once stood for peace, he went on to describe it as nothing more than a ‘beastly cannibalistic ceremony’ (Stanley, 1878: 286). His revulsion marks a shift in the balance of power. Blood brotherhood was no longer his initiative, but rather an act that was ‘much sought after’ by Ngala and Teke traders, who competed for his blood. He

¹⁰ After battling with the chief of Vinya-Njara and capturing their canoes, Stanley agreed a peace settlement: ‘if they came with two canoes with their chiefs, two canoes with our chiefs should meet them in mid-stream, and make blood-brotherhood; and that on that condition some of their canoes should be restored, and we would purchase the rest’ (Stanley, 1878: 188).

recorded how ‘[a]fter an incision was made in each arm, both brothers bent their heads, and the aborigine was observed to suck with the greatest fervour, whether for love of blood or excess of friendship it would be difficult to say’. Stanley went on to note that ‘[h]aving discovered our liberality [with our own blood], they became arrant beggars, and difficult to satisfy’ (Stanley, 1878: 286). His liberality with his own blood made him vulnerable. His change in tone perhaps reflects the fact that, from the Pool onward, for a Teke, Ngala or Kongo trader, entering into blood-brotherhood with another individual was one of the most serious bonds that person could make. It was an alliance that was conceptualised in terms of marriage, which Stanley misunderstood in terms of greed, hunger and cannibalism.

Agreements made between traders, such as those made with Brazza and Stanley, were the foundations of exchanges in the marketplace. Teke and Ngala blood brothers may have been separated for many years, but this did not invalidate the terms of their alliance which lasted for life. Jacques Marie Géraud de Crussol, duc d’Uzès (1868–1893) recorded how, in 1882 in Brazzaville, the colonial administrator Albert Dolisie was about to commit to a blood exchange with an unnamed Teke chief who, at the moment of execution, is said to have told him: ‘You are young; I am old, and as I shall soon die, make the exchange with my son and successor.’ He suggested this because those who were in blood friendships would closely follow each other to the grave (de Crussol Uzès, 1894: 133). The alliance had the standing of a family tie. The two individuals became ‘volunteer brothers’ and the ceremony was conducted by a religious specialist, so it had weight in the spiritual realm. It was also a means of securing trading relationships in this world. Uzès recorded a wealthy chief of the market town of Likouba as having approximately 110 scars on his arms. Alliances of this kind were vital, for they not only cemented bonds between individuals but also bound together their clans, connecting people through living alliances across the entire sweep of the Congo basin.

Such partnerships were supported by a host of customary market laws intended to ensure that markets were places of peace. One reason that marketplaces were guarded so seriously was that the lack of a central government or army in this region meant conflict had to be resolved by local communities, though mechanisms inscribed in the market laws (Janzen, 1983: 6). A peaceful and regulated marketplace was thus essential to the functioning of society. The market was therefore conceived of in terms of life and death; literally in terms of human blood. Indeed, if market laws were broken, payment was expected in human blood or its equivalent in

commodities. Edward Dupont recounted how a Yanzi Kongo trader, who had travelled to the Teke Poolside market of Kintamo to trade in ivory, quarrelled with one of his canoe companions in the village of M'foa near Brazzaville and killed him. Because this had occurred on a market day, the assassin was immediately seized and executed. No one disputed or made claims against the execution on the day of the market itself because to do so would be to break customary law. In the days afterwards, however, the Yanzi traders returned to M'foa and paid the Teke chief in charge of the market between five and six hundred *mitako* for the blood spilt by one of their traders into the territory of village (Dupont, 1889: 257). As noted above, this was exactly how much a slave was worth in *mitako*. A literal transformation of the murdered man into his worth in currency had been enacted. A deal had been struck, balance had been restored and peace had returned to the revived market (Dupont, 1889: 257).¹¹

According to Bentley, markets in this sense were considered living institutions. Violence could kill a market altogether:

Markets were 'killed,' sometimes permanently. To 'revive' a 'dead' market, there must be an assemblage of the local magnates; a pig or pigs must be furnished by the town to which the market belongs, and slaughtered, and divided up among the towns represented. Whenever possible, the culprit who caused the disturbance, or his substitute, if a wealthy man, [was] buried or burned alive [...] his skull [was] fixed up on a post in the marketplace, to 'strengthen the law'. (Bentley, 1900: II 399)

While Bentley was almost certainly exaggerating here, the details that he provided are revealing. In these markets, the 'pig' was the largest unit in this social currency and was considered the appropriate unit of recompense for human bloodshed in a quarrel – and continued to be until at least the 1980s, according to Janzen. Pigs were reserved for major rituals, in which their exchange constituted a sign of reconciliation or obligation met between clans (Janzen, 1983: 53). Valuable commodities such as 'the pig' could come to have an abstract value. In 1915, mention was made of a 'pig of five baskets of raphia cloth' in Lemba's initiation in the Mboko Nsongo region (Janzen, 1983: 53). The commodities of the market were valued once again against blood, and the most valuable was a human life which might have taken the symbolic form of a pig.

¹¹ Dupont valued 5–600 *mitako* at 75–90 francs, giving us a value for a human life in European terms.

Valuable lives were thus the backbone of this economic system, indicating why slaves were traded even though the international export of slaves no longer occurred. The process of a trade exchange demonstrates the degree to which slaves served as a store of value. In the 1880s, an Ngala canoe would enter the waters of the Pool packed high with ivory and other commodities. It would then be met by representatives of Teke traders who acted as the ‘real customs officers’ of the Pool. If the Ngala trader had a Teke blood-brother, he would be sought at this point (Merlon, 1888: 27). Surveying the goods on offer, the Teke trader would then decide whether he would buy the boatload or not. If he decided to go ahead with the deal, he would give the Ngala merchant a deposit of currency. By accepting this payment, the Ngala trader agreed to deal with no other traders at the Pool. All the ivory would then be transported to the Teke trader’s storehouse. The process of bargaining then commenced in the privacy of the Teke trader’s home and once the price had been set, the Teke trader became the owner of the ivory. He would then dispose of it, either to the Kongo traders who would carry it overland to the coast, or directly to European traders based at the Pool as the century progressed.

Slaves remained a store of value against this exchange of ivory during the selling process, which may have lasted for several months. During this time, the Ngala trader would live as a guest in his Teke trading partner’s house, and remained there until all the goods necessary to liquidate the debt had been collected. The value of the initial deposit was deducted from the agreed price and the deal was then complete (Merlon, 1888: 27). Such a system of trade was structured to encourage debt and if, for whatever reason, something went wrong – the payment took too long to complete, for example, or a buyer could not be found for the price agreed – the seller, who remained in the Teke village, had the right to seize some slaves belonging to his debtor and hold them ransom until his ivory had been liquidated. When this occurred, the slaves taken as ransom were attached by a chain to the foot to one of the Ngala trader’s henchmen. A slave also would have had his neck held tight in a wooden superstructure and was pushed forward by his captor using an instrument known in European accounts as a ‘slave fork’ (Merlon, 1888: 28).

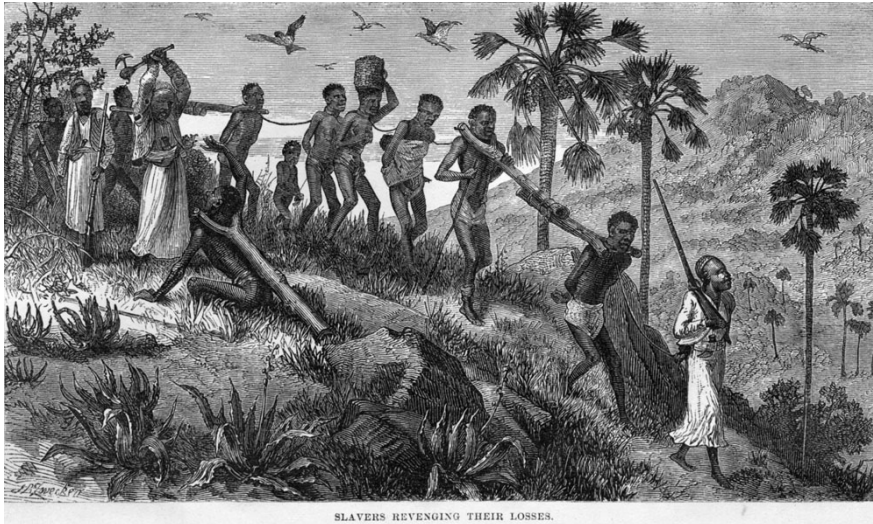


Fig. 71. *Slavers Revenging Their Losses*. Engraving. From David Livingstone, *Last journals of David Livingstone in Central Africa* (1874). General Research Division, The New York Public Library. New York Public Library Digital Collections.



Fig. 72. *The Slave Fork...The Slave Fork in Use*. Engraving. From William Holman Bentley, *Pioneering on the Congo* (1900) II, 254.

The use of this ‘slave fork’ fascinated European visitors to the Pool in the 1880s, who depicted it and discussed it at length in their various accounts. One of the earliest depictions is an engraving published in the *Last journals of David Livingstone in Central Africa* (1874) which was often republished (Fig. 71). Bentley included an illustration in his account (Fig. 72). With the wooden fork bound around the neck, this tool served the primary function of transforming a man or woman publicly into a commodity. In the case of the Ngala-Teke trade exchange described above, the slave was then literally held against the ivory until the exchange was complete. The act, reminiscent of the binding of metal currency with wickerwork into a fixed amount, publicly displayed that the slave belonged to the Ngala trader until the Teke trader had paid his debt.

Such alliances, once marked by the exchange of blood, had a material reality. While European governments might have debated the validity of the treaties signed between Brazza and the Makoko in the years following his 1880 visit and leading up to the Berlin Conference in 1885, the material reality of the alliances he made with various Teke chiefs continued to exist on the Pool. Their reality was made clear by the reception given to those European visitors who travelled to the Pool in Brazza's footsteps. The first to do so were the English Baptist missionaries, who arrived and wished to establish a missionary station on the north bank of the Pool in February 1881. Among them was Thomas Comber, and his archive reveals that the bonds of alliance between Brazza and the Teke chiefs were so strong that establishing a missionary station there was impossible (10411 BMA). The missionaries were unable to procure supplies at the market and were forced to retreat to the southern bank of the Pool, where they established their mission station under the support of Stanley (Comber, 1883: 687).¹²

Prosper Augouard (1852–1921), a French missionary of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit who arrived on the Pool soon after the return of Stanley in January 1882, also found that he was not welcomed by Teke traders who were in alliance with Brazza, or Brazza's representative at the Pool, Malamine Kamara. Like his Baptist contemporaries, Augouard was unable to purchase goods in the market, and out of hunger he was forced to retreat (Augouard, 1936: 447–61).

¹² The 'violence' shown to them by Teke chiefs led them to write a furious letter of complaint to Brazza. Indeed, their refusal to trade colours how the Baptists report them. The proceedings of the Royal Geographical society for 1882 noted that 'the Bateke have the appearance of decided savages, their cheeks (chief and people alike) being seamed with long scars, their eye-brows shaved, eye-lashes plucked out, and a circlet of red and yellow pigment surrounding each eye' (proceedings of the Royal Geographic Society Volume 4 (1883–84), 687).

Introduction of European currencies

European traders adopted indigenous currencies for their trade. Raffia *libongo* was widely used by the Portuguese in seventeenth-century Angola as money. It was especially valuable in dryer southern areas where raffia palm did not grow (Martin, 2015: 59–60). Europeans also soon introduced their own versions of these currencies – glass beads from Venice as a replacement for shell and European manufactured cloth as a replacement to indigenous raffia cloth (see Mahieu, 1924 for a summary). This introduction of European currencies took market control away from the peoples of Central Africa.

By 1880, European goods had for centuries been a staple of trade. By 1890, the indigenously produced copper *ngiele* were entirely replaced by brass *mitakos* as the standard currency at the Pool, and copper mining soon ceased (Guyer, 1999: 40). It took Stanley and his men a month to descend the river from Congo Pool to the coast, passing the 32 cataracts, and by April 1877 they arrived in the region controlled by the Kongo Babwende [Bwende] peoples, whom Stanley described as ‘exceeding friendly, even more so than the amiable Bateke [Teke]’ (Stanley, 1878: 358). European goods were much more easily accessible in the markets here: ‘gunpowder was abundant with them, and every male capable of carrying a gun possessed one, often more’ (Stanley, 1878: 358). The use of indigenously produced ceramics such as those produced by the Teke upriver had been replaced by European imports: ‘Delftware and British crockery were also observed in their hands, such as plates, mugs, shallow dishes, wash-basins, galvanized iron spoons, Birmingham cutlery, and other articles of European manufacture’ (Stanley, 1878: 358). All of these goods had been ‘obtained through the native markets’, which were ‘held in an open space between each district’ (Stanley, 1878: 358).

European goods were used as currency for local exchanges:

European salt, gun powder, guns, cloth, crockery, glass, and iron ware [...] are bartered for produce such as ground-nuts, palm-oil, palm-nuts, palm-wine, cassava bread and tubers, yams, maize, sugar cane, beans, native earthenware, onions, lemons, bananas, guavas, sweet limes, pine-apples, black pigs, goats, fowls, eggs, ivory, and a few slaves, who are generally Bateke or Northern Basundi. (Stanley, 1878: 358)

European cloth was so abundant that it almost lost its value: ‘for naturally the nearer we approached civilization cloth became cheaper in value, until finally a fowl cost 4 yards of our thick sheeting!’ (Stanley, 1878: 360). Goods, especially manufactured items from Europe that had long had a high market value, crashed in price as they became more readily accessible. In a sense, Stanley was looking into the marketplace of the near future. It would not be long before the markets of Congo Pool were flooded with European goods in a comparable way.¹³

The impact that this had on the local economy was profound. While there was still some mining activity in the 1880s, by the early twentieth century mining had stopped altogether. The Swedish missionary Karl Laman reported that ‘a number of the old miners had died, while others had become too old to work in the pits’ (Laman, 1953: 123). Sleeping sickness appeared to be especially severe in the vicinity of Mboko-Songho between 1906–09, and ‘spread along local caravan routes’ (Martin, 1909: 88). The Guerre de l’impôt (War of Tax) between 1911–13 further undermined Teke control in this region and devastated local populations (Dupré, 1993: 409). It was not long before Central African marketplaces were places where European currencies were exchanged for other European currencies, European cloth for European brass or glass beads, with regional populations cut out of the exchange and rendered powerless. By 1924 the use of raffia had generally been replaced by brass rods (*mitakos*) and European cloth. (Mahieu, 1924: 16).

¹³ It is a truism that the further a material travels from its source of origin, the more valuable it becomes. Visitors to Congo Pool in the 1880s were generally stunned by the price of food because it had to be imported. The account of Edward Dupont is a standard. He noted that because crops were not planted around the Pool, prices of imported food were very high. Dupont was further shocked that the Teke sold loaves of manioc that would have cost two *mitako* upstream for eight *mitako*, which he gave as having a value of one franc 20 centimes, ‘at least eight times the value of this food’ (Dupont, 1889: 213). The Baptist missionary Comber similarly noted in his diary for 29 October 1882 that the ‘food at Stanley Pool [was] difficult to obtain’ and ‘very dear’. He blamed this on the number of itinerant traders including the Kongo Banyanzi and the large numbers of Zanzibaris trading on the Pool. He estimated that everything was two or three times as much as in San Salvador [Mbanza Kongo], the capital city of the Kingdom of the Kongo (BMA H/12/I/X).

Marriage alliances as trade deals

In Kikongo, markets are referred to as *nzandu*, suggesting a living institution of peace, but in the Teke language they are called *nkana*. The root of the word ‘*kana*’ refers to an area of a village or a neighbourhood, to offspring, family and tribe (Sims, 1888: 44, 88, 91 163, 170). The word thus denotes a specific location where people from the same clan gather together. These familial associations help us to make sense of the fact that blood-brotherhood and initiation rites necessary to join prestigious trade associations – such as Nkobi among the Teke, and Lemba among the Kongo – were conceived of in terms of marriage. Indeed, political links between the Makoko and his *ngaantsii* were likewise conceived of in terms of the bonds of marriage.

If slaves were the foundation of the Teke economy, marriage was the cornerstone of Teke society. The residential group of a village was structured around marriage, for marriages guaranteed the continuity of matrilineages and thus of society. Marriages furthermore constituted a material link between individuals and between groups (Lema, 1978: 64). The alliance of marriage was marked through the exchange of a number of goods of recognised commercial value and like any other exchange in the market, the deal was not complete until both parties were satisfied.

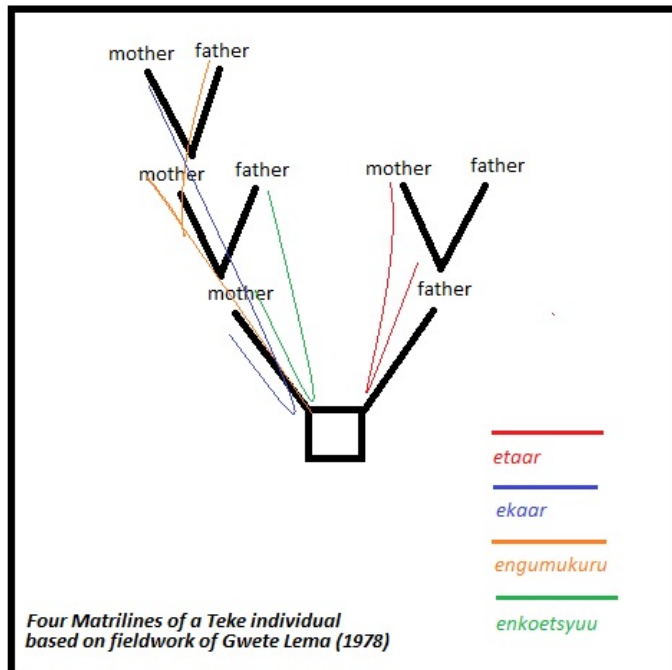


Fig. 73. Four matrilineages of a Teke individual based on the fieldwork of Gwete Lema (1978).

According to the fieldwork of Gwete Lema based on Teke populations living south of the Congo in the DRC, the social organisation of the Teke is based on unilineal descent, exclusively through female ancestors (matrilineal). It is through this descent structure that an individual historically gained a sense of origin, the rights to inheritance, political succession and, in certain regions at least, landed property (Lema, 1978: 64). An individual member of society was understood to descend from four matrilineages: the matrilineage of the father (*etaar*), that of the father of the mother (*enkoetsyuu*), that of the father of the mother of the mother (*engumukuru*) and the individual's own matriline (*ekaar*). These four lines of descent together ensured the protection and filiation of an individual into society (Fig. 73). These descent groups engendered many rights and duties, and the relationship of an individual to these groups is thought of in terms of 'witchcraft that can mark the individual wherever he goes' (Lema, 1978: 80). These clan structures were more permanent than villages or nuclear families; ephemeral groups that disappeared upon the death of certain members along with the village structure itself.

In Teke society, historically there were three forms of marriage: monogamous, polygynous and levirate. Polygynous marriages were the prerogative of chiefs, but all of these types of marriage might have been used to serve a dual purpose. If the *endogenous* approach was taken, the individual married within the local polity and settlement. Such a marriage might be close enough to consist of a matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, but was never within the clan. This kind of union served to shore up the powerbase of the clan, building up its following and keeping its own people together by retaining slaves and dependent clans in the same locality. It was used as a strategy to centralise power, wealth and offices of authority.

If the *exogenous* approach was taken, the individual married between polities and settlements. Such a marriage might have been as close as a patrilineal cross-cousin marriage, or it may have involved marriage between different ethnic groups. Such marriages were used to forge alliances employed to maintain peace and commerce across a vast region. Such *exogenous* marriages furthermore resisted isolating the community by cutting it off from trade and exchange partners (Janzen, 1983: 42). A survey of the north bank region reveals that both of these approaches to political organisation through marriage were taken by Teke chiefs (Janzen, 1983: 42). A polygynous chief was likely to have wives of both kinds, ensuring both his local and regional authority.

The ceremonial stages that marked a marriage had regional variations. However, fundamentally the same process occurred, whereby commercial goods were exchanged between various groups until an agreement had been reached and the marriage between two individuals was ordained. According to a number of different sources, the Teke marriage consisted of three phases: the declaration of the betrothal (also known as the distribution of the drink), the delivery of the clothes and the clothing of the wife.¹⁴

Historically among the Teke Fumu, the betrothal of two young people officially began at the moment when the sum of money given by the suitor to the different clan groups of the woman was accepted. By accepting this payment, the family of the potential bride was forbidden from seeking a husband elsewhere. This initial payment is reminiscent of the down payment made for the trade of a large amount of ivory, as it established the two parties as having commenced the process of negotiation that might take months to complete but could not be broken.

As recorded by Leme in the 1970s, in today's Teke society the suitor gives the money – which historically might have taken the form of a variety of metal and raffia currencies – to his potential bride, and she has the right to present this to her father if she so chooses.¹⁵ Should she do so, and should the father then accept the payment, he sends his daughter with a portion of this money successively to the *enkoetsyuu*, the *engumukuru* and the *ekaar*. If all these groups accept the share of money presented to them, the marriage becomes official.

The next step involves a second payment where the fiancé will offer drink and another sum of money to the young woman's parents. In the majority of cases, the young man will be accompanied by a member of the group who is in charge of providing him with the dowry, and this representative might also take charge of the distribution of these goods independently of the suitor. This stage is called *osomo mu manzo ma bako* or *owaa maa*. The two expressions mean 'entering the homes of parents-in-law' and 'giving drink' respectively, and this step involves visiting the different kinship groups of the girl to announce the engagement. Each time he does

¹⁴ This account is drawn from different Teke ethnic groups, the information collected from 1950–2003 and compared with field research conducted in 2017 in the Lekana region.

¹⁵ In 2003, in the vicinity of Lekana, the family of the suitor would have been in charge of arranging 'the presentation' with his finance. According to our informant Ngami Alphonse: 'On this occasion, the parents of the suitor provided a 10-litre calabash of palm wine, 10 squares of raffia (*ntsulu*), a small basket of cola (*ngulu ma bili*) and package of traditional salt from the banana (*mufufu*), or a traditional salt derived from the efflorescence of the oil palm (*mieeba*).'

so, the fiancé or his delegate brings drink, tobacco and money to show his wealth. The precise quantity of these goods is not fixed and will be determined by the fiancée. Indeed, the correct judging of this amount is a sign of his character and skill in trade negotiations. Along with selecting the right value of goods to bring to the exchange, the young man will also spend a few days with his future in-laws to show his worth.

The delivery of clothes (*owaa biko*) marks the commencement of the final stage. Here, the suitor gives to his bride a variety of money, clothes, blankets and other accessories. In recent times, these have been presented in a suitcase. The suitor also offers a quantity of drink, and while the amount is not fixed, the intention is to avoid the impression of poverty. In handing over these items, the suitor is again accompanied by a representative of the lineage who provided him with the dowry. At this point, the father of the young woman prepares a feast of drink and meat in order to make his future son-in-law welcome.

The final stage is the dressing of the woman, known as the *okuru biko*. The ceremony culminates in the wrapping of the woman in several layers of cloth. In the example recorded by Lema in the DRC in the late 1970s, in the corner of this cloth there was placed three hundred units of currency known as the *nkam turu*. This constituted the part of the dowry which belonged to the patrilineal and ancillary ancestors of the betrothed daughter. In the case of divorce, so long as long as the *nkam turu* is not restored, the union is not dissolved, and the wife will always be considered as married (Lema, 1978: 68).

This system puts the woman under pressure from her husband, her husband's family and from all the major lineages of her own clan to perform. The dowry, which is paid for her by her husband, along with the *Nkam Turu*, seals the alliance. The dowry represents in material terms the fact that two families have come together to guarantee the solidity of the marriage. In the case of divorce, the woman must reimburse the spouse. The system thus keeps women in a state of obedience and poverty. The wife, whose property is little and income very small, furthermore has to share her material gains with her husband, and if she spends all of the dowry she is forever bound in the marriage. (Dupré, 1978: 57). The dressing of the body of a man's new wife in rich fabrics is reminiscent of the mortuary practices conducted for a deceased chief, and so we can perhaps understand this as a related form of the distribution of wealth.

Conclusion

In the neighbouring Kongo society, wealth was measured not merely in the form of material possessions but rather in terms of the number of one's dependants. To reflect the value placed on human capital in the form of wives, children, clients and slaves, historians have come to use the term *mbongo bantu*, or 'wealth in people'.¹⁶

For the Teke Tio, 'wealth' is defined by Sims as '*ndzi iloo*' (Sims, 1888: 85, 138, 174). Looking at these two terms separately: '*ndzi*' refers to both 'money' and 'goods', while '*iloo*' means 'large', also indicating degree or intensity.¹⁷ 'To spend' is *yala ndzi*, and 'to share out' is *yala tana*. The verb *yala* on its own means to 'govern', 'to rule over' and also to 'unfold' and 'to set' (Sims, 1888: 92, 126 139, 147, 168, 179). We begin to get the sense that a rich man (*mupfuli*) in Teke society is one who has the power both to accumulate and to dissipate the goods in his possession. We see this demonstrated in marriage and funerary ceremonies, and in investiture ceremonies orchestrated by the Makoko for the creation of an *ngantsi* ('master of the land'). The major relationships that these exchanges indicate are expressed in terms of marriage and trade partnership, allowing the Teke peoples to maintain a sense of cultural identity over a vast geographic region.

During the period under study, the Teke finally relinquished market control in this region. While they remained in charge of the markets of Congo Pool until about 1890, Kongo traders, working closely with Europeans at the coast, came to replace them in markets located in European settlements, especially Brazzaville and Kinshasa. It would not be until the turn of the twentieth century that the position of both was usurped by the completion of the railway line that connected the Pool to the coast in 1898. Indigenous forms of currency were almost completely replaced by European ones by 1920. Mbe, which was formerly linked to the Pool via caravan routes, was no longer significant and became – in economic and political terms - a regional backwater. Even by 1880, tensions between the increasingly wealthy traders of the Pool and the spiritual leader were making clear distinctions between commercial value and more abstract

¹⁶ Jane I. Guyer and Samuel M. Eno Belingo, 'Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa' in *The Journal of African History*, vol.36, no.1 (1995: 91). Wyatt MacGaffey, *The conceptual challenge of the particular* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000: 216).

¹⁷ The phrase 'very dark', for example, is *mpibi iloo* (Sims, 1888: 32, 73).

notions of value linked to prestige and esteem, that shall be explored in further detail in the following chapter.



Fig. 74. Engraving by Johann Israel de Bry (1564–1609) and Johann Theodor de Bry (1561–1623), *Hammock Bearers* from Duarte Lopes and Filippo Pigafetta, *Vera descriptio regni Africani: quod tam ab incolis quam Lusitanis Congus appellate* (*A Report of the Kingdom of Congo.*) (Frankfurt: Johann Israel and Johann Theodor de Bry, 1598), pl. 1.

Chapter Three: prestige value; materials of dress and status

Introduction

The transformation of commercially valuable materials into items of dress and bodily adornment confers onto them a new series of values that relate to esteem, prestige and worth. Interpreting the dress of the Teke is a means of better understanding how such abstract concepts were understood and given a material form. More generally, clothing is understood to reflect the politics of the day.¹ The vital importance of clothing as a means of self and cultural expression is suggested by the fact that, across the sources analysed, information conserved about Teke dress and adornment is some of the most extensive. This is certainly a result of the fact that much of the information employed was written by outsiders who did not speak the Teke language, and who wrote about only what they could see. It also appears that the dress and adornment of the Teke was remarkable and a vital expression of Teke cultural identity.

According to Duarte Lopes, by the 1580s the Teke [Anzique] of the Pool were known by their Kongo neighbours for their elaborate dress. Bringing slaves, ivory, copper and raffia cloth to the market of the Pool, they would take in return from Kongo traders essential goods such as salt from the coast, but also *lumache* shell, desiring ‘a larger kind...found in the island of St. Thomas’. Lopes was clear that this shell was not used as a currency by the Teke, but it was specifically transformed into ‘ornaments and charms’ to be worn (Pigafetta, 1881: 29). Imported European silks and velvets were also major imports: ‘The nobles wear silk and other garments...also velvet caps from Portugal.’ Along with these imported cloths, the Teke were widely celebrated for their own raffia cloth which was traded across a vast region. In this early account we can immediately see that the dress of the elite is a combination of the finest local (raffia), regional (shell) and international (silk) materials worn in combination. The suggestion is

¹ For an extended analysis of politics and dress in twentieth-century Africa, see Allman, Jean Marie, ed. *Fashioning Africa: power and the politics of dress*. Indiana University Press, 2004.

that these materials were also worn in excess: ‘The women are entirely covered from head to foot...The noble ladies, and those who are able, wear certain mantles, which are wrapped round the head, leaving the face free’ (Pigafetta, 1881: 29). It is clear that on the Pool, prestige and status was derived from owning materials that demonstrated a mastery over trade from the local to international level.

From Functional to Symbolic

Above all, the Teke of the 1580s were known in the wider region as great warriors, while their metalsmiths were celebrated for their astonishing creations. The most detailed and lengthy information contained in the *Relatione*, in the section devoted to the Anzique, refers to their skill in manufacturing weapons.² Lopes noted how Alvaro I of the Kongo (r.1568–1587) maintained ‘a guard of the [Teke] Anzichi...who [stood] around his palace armed with the weapons already mentioned’ (Pigafetta, 1881: 110). The close detail that Lopes provided suggests that perhaps he was able to generate this information by talking with these guards and closely studying their weapons.

Alvaro I’s selection of Teke warriors as his private guard further indicates the extent to which they were considered elite warriors at the Kongo court, and to have them as his guard was the ultimate status symbol. Beyond the mere functionality of their armaments as impressive weapons, Lopes stressed the ‘wonderful workmanship’ of Teke smiths that was unrivalled in the area. He recorded, for example, that the Teke made ‘short bows covered with serpent’s skins of diverse colours, being of such wonderful workmanship as to seem made of one piece’ (Pigafetta, 1881: 26–7). The Teke blacksmith was presented as producing objects of such fine work that they seemed of another world.

Lopes described in detail one distinctive Teke weapon, ‘a sort of poleaxe of curious shape, the handle being half the length of the blade’. He noted that it was functional: ‘At the lower end is a knob by which to hold it securely in the hand...at one end it has a sharp edge like a hatchet, in the form of a half-circle, and at the other a hammer’ (Pigafetta, 1881: 26–7). To a reader in 1591, this would have represented an innovative, advanced piece of technology, combining many functions in one. He went on to elaborate how it was even used as a shield: ‘In

² This account represents some of the earliest and most detailed descriptions of works of African art.

fighting, they defend themselves from enemy arrows with this weapon instead of a shield, and turn it every way with such readiness that they ward off the shafts aimed at them.’ In this vivid description, the weapon can be imagined in use. Beyond its pure functionality, Lopes noted that the weapon was also visually impressive: ‘covered with...snake skin... [t]he head shines brightly, being fastened with copper pins in the wood.’ Once again, the suggestion is that this ‘wonderfully’ made snakeskin-covered weapon decorated with shining copper pins was produced by a powerful civilisation that could not be reached by Europeans.³

In a 1625 illustration, later included in the Dutch edition of this text, the weapon is shown dramatically raised above the central figure’s head, while a second example is used by the ‘cannibal butcher’ to the right (Fig. 74). By the time this engraving was made, objects of African material culture were present in European *wunderkammer* and missionary collections. The illustration is so accurate that one wonders if the illustrators were not working from the description alone, but had seen an actual example.

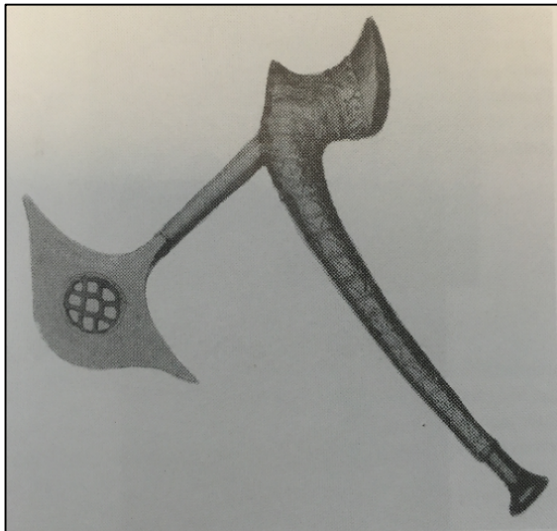


Fig. 75. Ceremonial axe, formerly in the collection of the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde in Dresden. From Meyer and Ulhe, (1885), pl.1, fig.8.

One of the earliest axes described by Lopes that resembled the weapon, and depicted in the De Bry engraving, was first inventoried in 1717. No longer extant – likely destroyed in the Second World War – this work was formerly in the collection of the Staatliches Museum für

³ Lopes suggested that this civilisation could in some way have been linked to the land of Prester John, and access to the Teke region might have allowed for Europeans to reach this mythical kingdom.

Völkerkunde in Dresden. An image of this work was first published in 1885, and this serves as the only surviving record (Fig. 75). From this alone it is possible to determine that the wooden handle was covered in a surface layer of metal, possibly brass or copper, and decorated with a complex repousse design of geometric patterning. The crescent shaped axe head appears to have had an addition of a different metal at its centre. While the form can be found throughout Africa, the technique of cladding the handle in brass and adding a second metal as a decorative addition to the blade is commonly found amongst the Teke peoples' metalwork. It displays exactly the kind of elaborate work described in the *Relatione* and is seen in examples of prestige axes of the nineteenth century.

While we must be careful of blindly accepting the details of Lopes' report – he was never able to travel to the region directly – much of the information does have a bearing on nineteenth-century accounts.⁴ The tension in Teke weaponry between function and aesthetic seen in these earlier examples continued into the late nineteenth century, when Teke weapons began to be collected in earnest on Congo Pool. The 'power' of the weapon, as Lopes suggested, is a combination of these different visual and functional elements.

From functional to symbolic

By the 1880s, such a weapon had an important ceremonial function at the Teke court and very closely resembled the example contained in the De Bry illustration, described in detail by Lopes. An impressive example, housed in the RMCA, was collected by Albert Maesen in 1953 from the chief of the village of Issio in the DRC, in the vicinity of Congo Pool (Fig. 76). The chief who owned it was recorded as having worn it 'on his left shoulder'. Close analysis reveals that it is a functional axe, a weapon as dangerous as the one outlined by Guiral (see p.92, fig.43). The extensive decoration shows, however, that it was also intended as a showpiece. The blade is larger than in the previous examples, and the crescent form more exaggerated. The base of the handle is wrapped with thick copper wire.

⁴ Lopes was attempting to show that the Teke were a ready market for these imported goods at the Pool, the end of a major Kongo trade route.



Left: Fig. 76. Ceremonial weapon of the chief of Issio. 19th– 20th century, Inkisi Village, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Teke peoples, wood, iron, copper alloy, 35 cm. Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium (EO.1953.74.1776). Ex- collection: Albert Maesen in the field in 1953.

Right: Fig. 77. Ceremonial weapon. 19th– 20th century, Kinshasa, Congo Pool, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Teke peoples, wood, iron, copper alloy, brass, 34.5 cm. Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium (EO.1949.68.2). Ex- collection: Acquired from Elias Hendrik in 1949.

Around Congo Pool – particularly in the vicinity of Kinshasa on the south bank – a tradition developed in which the top of the handle was carved into the shape of a human head, showing the distinctive parallel lines of Teke cicatrisation (Fig. 77–79). In two other examples, the blade likewise comes out of the mouth of a head that is noticeably ‘Teke’, as seen in the parallel striated lines of the cicatrisation marks and the rounded hairstyle at the back of the head, and the entire surface of the wood is decorated with sheets of tacked on metal (Figs. 78–79). Imported brass tacks were also added to decorate the surface, reminiscent of the ‘copper pins’ described by Lopes. It is possible that the visual appearance of these weapons was entirely unchanged – or at least evoked – the celebrated weapons recorded by Lopes in the late sixteenth

century.⁵ Such axes were symbols of Teke cultural identity and served a clear function as symbols of office.



Left: Fig. 78. Ceremonial Weapon. 19th– 20th century, Kinshasa, Congo Pool, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Teke peoples, wood, iron, copper alloy, 24 x 35 x 20.8 cm. Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium (EO.0.0.32791). Ex- collection: Donated by Jassin in 1931.

Right: Fig. 79. Ceremonial Weapon. 19th– 20th century, Congo Pool, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Teke peoples, wood, iron, copper alloy, 42 x 30.6 x 6.2 cm. Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium (EO.0.0.33174). Ex- collection: Donated by Gaston Armand Ghislain Verschaffel in 1913.

One of the most impressive of this kind of ceremonial axe was donated to the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, in 1913 and collected by Gaston Armand Ghislain Verschaffel near Kinshasa (Fig. 79). The handle of the axe has been carved to resemble a standing male figure and the surface is decorated with different types of sheet metal; copper around the head, brass around the torso and lead at the base. The handle has furthermore been

⁵ Given that the Teke historically appear to have controlled the copper deposits of the Niari River basin, it's easy to wonder if the decorative flash of the copper pins served as a shorthand to evoke Teke dominion.

studded with brass pins – not only does this evoke the visual appearance of weapons outlined by Lopes, but also fits this object into a regional lexicon of prestige value, as brass tacks were used throughout the region. The variety of different metals compounds its symbolic force, emphasising its ceremonial intent. The Makoko was recorded as holding a sceptre decorated with a combination of copper and brass, so this combination of metals was likely a symbol of the highest prestige (Guiral, 1889: 290). The fine quality of the whole work – both the blade and the carved handle – displays the great skill of the Teke sculptor blacksmith.



AXE OF AUTHORITY BELONGING TO
A BA-TEKE CHIEF.

Left: Fig. 80. Axe of authority belonging to a Ba-Teke chief. Engraving. From Johnston (1884), 435.



Right: Fig. 81. Axe. Late 19th century, inventoried 1889, West Central Africa. Teke peoples, copper, wood, 30.5 x 21.3 x 4.3 cm, 500 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1889.131.105). Ex- collection: collected by Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza and Attilio Peçile as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).

Certain ceremonial axes pushed aesthetics to such a degree that the object could no longer conceivably function as a weapon. Like iron currency forms in Central Africa that shrunk or enlarged a well-known tool until it was no longer usable as a tool, decorative elements on

Teke ceremonial axes transformed an axe into the symbol of an axe. Harry Johnston included an illustration of a ceremonial axe, apparently based on the example that was owned by Makoko – although this claim, while often made, can seldom be verified (Fig. 80). Johnston noted that it functioned as ‘a sceptre, or sign of authority’ and differed ‘from the ordinary chopper form of the tool in daily use, and is purely a ceremonial weapon, being quite blunt at the edges, and useless for cutting’ (Johnston, 1884: 435). In another example, collected by the MOA, the axe blade is made from copper instead of iron, indicating a purely ceremonial function (Fig. 81).

Chiefly dress



Fig. 82. Portrait of an unnamed Ngantsii. Photograph by Zambelli (1905) RMCA (3216). Published in Lehuard (1996) 185.

A number of photographs taken in the early twentieth century show Teke chiefs in full ceremonial dress. In 1905 an unnamed Teke chief of the land (*Ngantsii*) was pictured holding one these axes along with a complex of other materials, including the brass or copper alloy *onlua* that will be addressed in the rest of this chapter (Fig. 82). Even though research has yet to reveal this man's name or where he lived, his clothing tells us a great deal about him. The photograph shows him holding, with the blade facing upwards, a ceremonial axe, the base and head of which are richly covered in brass tacks.

On his head he wears a feathered crown, his face painted with a mixture of white clay and a redwood paste. Around his wrists are bracelets, also made out of a copper alloy, that are part of the complex along with the *onlua*, suggesting ancestral rights to leadership and possible membership of a trade association such as Lemba or Nkobi. Around his neck the *onlua*, demonstrates he is an *ngantsii* or chief of the land who has been invested with his authority by the Makoko himself. Worn with this are other necklaces made out of beads and lion or leopard teeth. These would have served as amulets, drawing his authority close to these culturally recognised power animals. The ceremonial axe, like the other examples described, has a crescent-shaped blade. A package of material has been strapped to the main shaft, possibly a form of *butti*, indicating that the axe was charged by a religious practitioner or *ngaa* and turned into a container for powerful spiritual forces that would protect the chief and, by extension, his community.

The prestige of wearing raffia cloth

The chief in this image wears layers of indigenously woven raffia cloth around his waist. In 1890, according to Albert Dolisie (1856–1899) who was Lieutenant Governor of French Congo at this time, the major symbols of Teke political leadership were the *onlua*, the two bracelets and a pagne of raffia cloth (Dolisie, 1927: 44). In spite of the introduction of fashionable European trade cloth for a decade, it is clear that cloth made of raffia palm continued to have a high value

through the period under study. Indeed, as its importance as a currency diminished, it served more as an item of prestige.

The status of raffia cloth was likely linked to its long use by the peoples of this region and the regionally acknowledged mastery of Teke weavers in producing it. Lopes recorded that ‘beyond the Kingdom of Loango...the people called Anzique...make linen cloths from the palm-tree in various forms and colours; and also silk stuffs’ (Pigafetta, 1881: 26). These cloths were ‘very light’ with the ‘the quality of resisting water’, and so durable that they were traded to the Portuguese colony in Angola where they were used by Europeans as tent cloths (Pigafetta, 1881: 30). Indeed, the prestige value of raffia cloth for the Teke continues to this day because of these ancient associations.

Brazza noted that raffia fibre was the basis of most indigenous Teke costume (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1887: 145). There were different qualities of cloth woven on the plateau; some pieces were ‘coarse’, ‘true cloth of the country’ and scarcely the ‘size of an ordinary handkerchief’ (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1887: 287). Basic pieces of cloth of this kind could be used as a form of currency as described in the previous chapter (see p.117). At the other end of the scale, the finest cloth was practically diaphanous, extremely expensive and only worn by the elite. Brazza compared these pieces of fine cloth to ‘the veils of Turkish women...all the more transparent in that they occupy a higher rank in the social hierarchy’. He described the Makoko as wearing ‘a large and beautiful loincloth covering his whole body, except arms and shoulders’ (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1887: 145).

Léon Guiral, like Brazza, noted how raffia cloth was the basis of most clothing and might be worn alongside imported cloth. He recorded how ‘at the Pool, around the factories, the rich Bateke draped themselves in large and ample clothes, a loincloth of the country, woven with palm fibre, symbol of their affluence’ (Guiral, 1889: 290). The emphasis was on volume and excess, and raffia cloth maintained its value in spite of cheaper imports. A typical cloth made from raffia palm leaf was the *ndzu anna* or *ndzu atieeri*. Such a piece of cloth would have been made up of individually woven squares of raffia fabric that had been sewn together in three or four rows. According to Guiral, the stitching was sometimes done with a thorn, but mostly with a needle ‘well made with a flattened eye’. The thread used was either palm thread or a special black thread, *kwoli*, that was extracted from the crown of raffia palms (Guiral, 1889: 145).

Each row had a fringe on its lower sides, so when worn this would hang over the attached cloth as is visible in Fig. 81. This cloth would usually be woven with threads of two different colours, creating a chequered pattern. The finest cloth was reserved for the Makoko and created especially for him by a family of weavers in the vicinity of the Lefini. No one else was permitted to wear this cloth, and today there remains a level of cloth reserved for the Makoko alone. Guiral likewise described Teke chiefs as wearing ‘magnificent fabric made of very supple and very fine palm fibre’ (Guiral, 1889: 239). He noted that the cloth was ‘woven with palm-thread, about a meter and a half long, and eighty centimetres wide’. The cloth was worn ‘in the form of a petticoat descending to the knees’ and held in place by a hide belt (Guiral, 1889: 149). He also noted that the Makoko wore on his head ‘a small cap [made of raffia] well cut and embroidered by a Bateke needle’ (Guiral, 1889: 290).

Even in the Pool region between 1914–15, where imported cloth had seemingly long replaced indigenously woven fabrics, raffia continued to have a prestige value. J. Maes described seeing the chief of Kapanda, who had ‘purchased his grand dress in raffia fibres from a Bateke chief of [French] Congo at the rate of 5 francs per piece of cloth’. It was made up of 42 separate pieces, each of which would have individually served as a piece of currency. Maes noted that ‘he was very proud of it, [and] obstinately refused to give it to us even at a price higher than the indigenous value’ (Maes, 1930: 394).

Maes noted that ‘for him, as for other indigenous people, this large pagne in raffia fibres [was] an indication not of his power, not of his social rank, but of his fortune and his wealth’. He noted that ‘other natives who we met draped in raffia cloth attributed to it an analogous signification. They are less clothing than luxury objects that they exhibit at all the great ceremonies of the community’ (Maes, 1930: 402). Raffia cloth, then, was shown to continue to have both real value – it was expensive and therefore demonstrated wealth – and prestige value. The value of wearing raffia cloth was thus the continuation of an unbroken tradition that by the 1580s had already been mastered by Teke weavers. Already, by 1914, wearing raffia may have been seen as a ‘traditional’ act that looked back to a pre-European past. As the practicality of the material faded away due to its general replacement by cheap European cotton imports, so its symbolic value increased. This was true for other items of prestige value used by Teke leaders of the 1880s, such as ceremonial axes, that had gone through a similar process of transformation from functional objects to ones of status.

Power animals and raffia

Chiefs might adorn their raffia cloth wrappers with ‘the skins of small mammals’ (Guiral, 1889: 151). Animal hides were more than just ornaments and were often from animals that had connotations of power. This combination of fine raffia palm with animal hide had a high prestige value, because wearing this combination of materials was restricted to only the most powerful in society. As recorded amongst the Teke and the neighbouring Kongo peoples, the hides of animals with cultural connotations that the wearer wished to take on as his own attributes were worn over these raffia skirts as aprons.

In the west and north of the Congo region, skins of the genet (*Genetta genetta*) or the golden cat (*Caracal aurata*) were often worn by both chief and priest. A goat or small antelope’s skin was also commonly worn. Johnston wrote that ‘the very striking black and white pelt of the Colobus monkey crops up again and again, and is often used by medicine-men for their adornments’ (Johnston, 1910: 597). Amongst the Kongo peoples, aprons made of the skin of black and white Colobus monkeys (*Colobus angolensis*, P. Sclater) have been recorded, and the fur was also used to empower figurative sculptures (Johnston, 1910: 597). The primary animals of the Makoko, though, were the lion and the leopard. At court he was described as being seated on a leopard skin, which had royal associations. Today, images of these cats are central to the display of his authority at court.

Dress on the Pool

Historical background

Rumour of the wealth and elaborate dress of the Teke leaders of the Pool made it all the way to the Kongo court – some 200 kilometres to the south of the River – suggesting that the Teke of the Pool – or *Pombo*, as the market was known to the Kongo – were truly an impressive sight, and regionally celebrated for their dress.⁶ Lopes reported that in the 1580s the Teke [Anzique] dressed as follows:

Men of the lower class are naked above the waist, wearing nothing on their head... The nobles wear silk and other garments, and on the head small red and black caps, also velvet caps from Portugal, as well as others used in the country, and all are envious of being well dressed as far as they are able. (Pigafetta, 1881: 30)

This description correlates with descriptions of how people dressed in the Pool settlements of the late nineteenth century. Lopes described a clear disparity between the clothing of the wealthy elite – a rich display of the finest imported European cloth, including imported velvet – to that of their slaves, whose lowly status was reflected in their simple dress, consisting often of just a loincloth. This contrast is useful, reminding us that at its most essential level, dress is a statement of status in society. In a culture which placed such importance on trade and the trader, the wearing of European cloth and other goods of European manufacture became a demonstration of an individual's professional success.

On the Loango coast, from the 1880s onward, Kongo sculptors of ivory tusks delighted in using the depiction of dress as a means of contrasting the positioning of different individuals in society. A sculptor might have juxtaposed figures from the wealthy Kongo elite, often wearing imported European clothes, with those of slaves who were naked but for a simple wrapper in European cotton – and often even chained around their throats and ankles. The surface of the tusk was carved with an intricate and lively frieze, showing different scenes where figures are in

⁶ Kings of Kongo and Loango were shown to incorporate a number of imported European goods into their state dress for the same period.

action. In this example, well dressed individuals – one of whom wears chequered trousers and holds a gun – complete a trade deal, while below them a man naked but for his wrapper flails as he is grabbed by both arms. The artist’s positioning of different vignettes along the vertical axis suggests a wry commentary on the impact of European trade in the region in the late nineteenth century (Fig. 83).⁷



Fig. 83. Receptacle with figurative relief and stopper. 1880–1890, Loango region, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Kongo peoples, Vili group, ivory, 17.1 x 5.1 x 5.7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1993.382a, b). Gift of Marcia and Irwin Hersey, 1993.

⁷ See James Green object web label for MMA inv.316796 for more information on this particular work. See also Z.S. Strother (2016) for the most recent and complete analysis of these works.

Use of imported currency

The first European visitors to Congo Pool in the 1880s were astonished by the rich dress of the Teke traders on the Pool and their dependants. Similarly, Alexandre Delcommune reported in the *Congo Illustré* of 1892 how ‘at the Pool, around the factories, the rich Bateke draped themselves in large and ample clothes, symbols of their ease’ (*Congo Illustré*, 1882: I Fasc XVI). The Duchesse of Uzès included a watercolour of a rich Teke woman by the French illustrator Riou in the account of her son’s travels, and this demonstrates the generous use of European cloth in the creation of garments (Fig. 84). Jean Dybowski, who was also on the Pool in 1892, included an illustration in his account based on a photograph that shows the same style of dressing. Layers of European cloth are piled onto the body and hang off one shoulder, while the waist is engulfed with layers of fabric (Fig. 85).



*Left: Fig. 84. Portrait of a Teke woman ('Femme bateke d'après une photographie'). c.1892, Congo Pool. From Jean Dybowski, *La Route du Chad*, (1893), 75.*

*Right: Fig. 85. Rich Teke Woman of Congo Pool ('Bateke Riche'). c.1892, Congo Pool. Drawing by Édouard Riou (1833–1900). From Jacques de Uzès, *Le voyage de mon fils au Congo* (1894), 90.*

Clearly, it was important that the wealthy chiefs of the Pool dressed lavishly in order to demonstrate their importance, and this had an effect on European visitors. After meeting the Teke chief Ngaliema there in November 1881, Stanley described him as being ‘dressed splendidly...with a flowing silk robe, under-vest of silk, cotton underclothes, with an outer dress of silk’. He was struck by the number of layers of European cloth that Ngaliema had fashioned into dress, and the different types of cloth he wore. Yellow, blue and crimson were the colours that stood out most to Stanley. Augmenting this cloth was jewellery. His ‘arms were almost completely covered with polished brass rings, over which were heavy brass wristlets and armlets. His ankles were adorned with red copper rings, which must have weighed 10 lbs. each’ (Stanley, 1885: II 364). This outfit is all about excess, sheer volume and, given the value of cloth as actual currency, it likewise expressed his wealth in actual terms. We can understand Ngaliema’s body as being encased in the two most important trade goods of the Pool – cloth and metal.

Perhaps, from a Teke perspective of the market place, to see Ngaliema’s dress was to see money; a refashioning of the major currencies of the day into high-status clothing. European visitors to the Pool certainly seemed to have interpreted his dress in this way. Stanley employed Ngaliema’s clothing as a point of departure for then describing the extent to which he was a truly wealthy man. He noted that in one storehouse alone, Ngaliema was recorded as having about 150 tusks of ivory, mostly large tusks weighing 50 to 90 lbs each. In another he had ‘piles of silk, velvet, rugs, bales of blanket cloth, glassware, crockery, gunpowder, and stacks of brass rods’. Stanley estimated that his wealth in ivory alone must have amounted to £1800, and estimated his entire wealth at £8000 in marketable goods (Stanley, 1885: II 364). This would just about make him a millionaire in today’s terms, and Ngaliema was one of several powerful Teke chiefs who had amassed such a storehouse of valuable goods on the Pool at this time.⁸

The layers of cloth and metal worn by Ngaliema had a particular biographical resonance, proving to the world that through his success as a trader his status had changed from the ‘runaway slave’ to that of a major – and increasingly powerful – chief (Stanley, 1885: II 362). As Johnston described Ngaliema’s life history in 1883, he ‘began life as a slave to a Bateke chief,

⁸ According to the Office for National Statistics’ composite price index, pound sterling experienced an average inflation rate of 3.70% per year. Prices in 2017 are 11986.6% higher than prices in 1885. In other words, £8,000 in 1885 is equivalent in purchasing power to £966,926.62 in 2017, a difference of £958,926.62 over 132 years. The inflation rate in 2017 was 2.53%. Source: <http://www.in2013dollars.com/1885-GBP-in-2017?amount=8000> accessed 7/7/2017.

bought for one [brass] plate!'. However, 'he was astute in commerce and so enriched himself' until he became one of the most important chiefs on the Pool, courted by Europeans keen for his influence (Johnston, 1910: I 177). His choice of dress materials – of a high status because they were imported and so gained through successful trade – demonstrated his capabilities as an astute trader, wealthy enough that he could afford to use these materials as clothing rather than currency.

By 1880 markets of Congo Pool were already closely bound to European markets. Ngaliema was aware of the international value of the goods that he traded in and he refused to settle for poorer substitutes. It was Ngaliema, a major chief of the south bank of the Pool, that Stanley had to strike a deal with in order to establish his trading settlement. Much to Stanley's annoyance, Ngaliema would not be bought off with cheap goods, magic tricks, mirrors, fireworks or charm, which Brazza had relied upon while travelling across the plateau only the year previously.⁹ With such stores of wealth at his disposal and his ivory tusks with a clear market value in Antwerp, keenly aware of the power of his position at the very epicentre of the vast Congo River trading network, the goods Ngaliema required in order to grant Stanley a plot of land would have been valuable in London or the arcades of Paris.

In order to 'purchase his best influence', Stanley had to be 'supplied with goods much superior in quality to any that [he] had as yet seen on the Congo'. In order to acquire these, he sent his right-hand man Lieutenant Walcke to Luanda in Angola 'with cash and bills amounting to £500, to purchase silks, velvets, fine flannel and crimson cloth' intended for Ngaliema. When those arrived at the Pool, Ngaliema selected:

Silks, satins, velvets, gold and silver lace, fine shawls, military and livery coats, a splendid gold-embroidered coat, jewellery, glass clasps, long brass chains, a figured table-cloth, fifteen other pieces of fine cloth, a japanned tin box with a Chubb lock, robes, hand and sleigh bells, swords, and cutlery, a large mirror, a fine coat, a hand-bell, a knife, a pair of brass anklets for his child. (Stanley, 1885: I 307)

⁹ Brazza was famous throughout the region for his magic tricks and bizarre behaviour. According to Stanley's account, when he first met Brazza at Vivi, his messenger, Lutete Kuna, described Brazza as a 'tall white man' who 'kept on firing at the trees with a gun that shoots many times'. He asked: 'Now, Bula Matari, tell me why do white men shoot at trees? Is it to kill the bad spirits?' (Stanley, 1885: I 231). Through these gestures, Brazza developed a reputation as a spiritual authority. Finding his actions unreasonable, Lutete Kuna wondered if he must have authority in the spiritual realm.

He also selected something Stanley described as ‘a boat robe’. This was ‘worth £8 in London, *my private property*’ (Stanley, 1885: I 307). His knowledge of the value of European manufactured goods put him on an equal footing with Stanley, who had to bow and bend to satisfy him, and buying his influence had a real cost.

Stanley was not the only traveller who was surprised by the fact that there were no bargains to be had on the Congo Pool. It was clearly an expensive place to live and operate, as indeed it is today. Visitors to the Congo Pool in the 1880s were generally stunned by the price of food, and the account of Edward Dupont is a standard. He noted that because crops were not planted around the Pool, prices of imported food were very high. Dupont was further shocked that the Teke sold loaves of manioc that would have cost two *mitako* upstream for eight *mitako*, which he gave as having a value of one franc twenty centimes, ‘at least eight times the value of this food’ (Dupont, 1889: 213). The Baptist missionary Comber similarly noted in his diary for 29 October 1882 that the ‘[f]ood at Stanley Pool [was] difficult to obtain’ and ‘very dear’. He blamed this on the number of itinerant traders – including the Kongo Banyanzi and the large numbers of Zanzibaris – trading on the Pool. He estimated that everything was ‘two or three times as much as in Saint Salvador, the capital city of the Kingdom of the Kongo (BMA H/12/I/X).

Indigenous signifiers of authority

Stanley, through the exchange of these goods, came to better understand the local economy. When they finally reached a trade agreement, Ngaliema presented Stanley with an object of indigenous manufacture and equivalent value in return for the European goods described above. This was one of the ultimate symbols of authority for both the Kongo and Teke peoples; a staff or sceptre. ‘Ngalyema surrendered to me his sceptre, which consisted of a long staff, banded profusely with brass, and decorated with coils of brass wire, which was to be carried by me, and shown to all men as a sign that I was the brother of Ngalyema of Ntamo!’ (Stanley, 1885: I 307).

The staff was intended to be a symbol to other African chiefs that Stanley’s position had been recognised and that he had the status of a high-ranking chief. While Stanley described the exchange in terms of victory with Ngaliema surrendering his sceptre to him, in accepting the

staff Stanley agreed be Ngaliema's brother, which put him on an equal footing. Drawing on their own respective histories, Stanley and Ngaliema found goods that were of equivalent value and that satisfied in material terms their sense of their own status.¹⁰ Once a balance had been achieved, they further marked their alliance through ceremonial action. Their arms were cut – presumably by a religious specialist – their blood was mixed, and they rubbed salt into the wounds. Stanley was, both as a man and as the goods that he carried, thus embedded within a local system of value (see p. 131 on blood brotherhood). In turn, local signifiers of political power were given new meanings that reflected the presence of Europeans on the Pool, and Stanley was transformed into a chief in terms that were true of for the Teke peoples.



Left: Fig. 86. Staff finial; kneeling female figure. 19th century [documented c.1891], Banana region, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Kongo peoples, ivory, 16 cm. Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, University of East Anglia (UEA252).

Right: Fig. 87. Portrait of Chief Nemlão. c.1890, Banana region, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Unknown photographer. From Congo Illustré, 1892. Image Source: RAAI.

¹⁰ Negotiations of this kind occurred between European and African leaders across the region during this period. In the place of a shared language, material goods became a clear means of determining value, and certain chiefs were more valuable in material goods than others.

Kongo parallels

Among the Kongo peoples, the finial of such a staff of honour often depicted a female figure. An example, now in the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts at the University of East Anglia, features a kneeling female figure with hands clasped below her chin (Fig. 86). Several photographs show this work when it was part of its original staff of office held by the chief of Nemlão, a village near the European trading settlement of Banana. During the third quarter of the nineteenth century, Banana was the first port of call for Europeans travelling by boat from the Atlantic Ocean to the Congo River. It was consequently the primary location where European trade goods were offloaded to warehouses. In 1880 a Catholic mission was established farther up the mouth of the river, at Boma. Chief Nemlão (c.1788–1888) was a regional paramount chief who had positioned himself to profit from proximity to these nodes of international trade and grew rich as a result. Born in Saint-Antoine, on the southern bank of the section of the Congo River controlled by the Portuguese, he relocated to establish several villages with advantageous access to Boma. Charles Jeannest described an encounter with Nemlão at Banana on 1 July 1869:

On his head he wore a barrette or cap reserved for the chiefs, and they will not remove it even before the European. The one he wore was adorned with the claws of panthers and lined with shark's teeth; around his neck and arms were...necklaces and bracelets, he had on his feet silver rings. His dress consisted of a large scarlet cloak, fastened at the shoulders and floating. A loincloth of yellow silk girded his loins and almost fell to his ankles. From his belt was attached a feline pelt and bells that tinkled when he walked. These ornaments still serve as distinctive emblems for chiefs. (Charles Jeannest, 1883: 14; cited in LaGamma, 2015: 211)

A mixture of imported and local signifiers of importance are found in his clothing. Jeannest was struck by both the colour and the volume of the European cloth worn. In two photographs of Nemlão, taken twenty years later, it is clear that his staff – the shaft of which was densely covered with brass upholstery tacks – was wielded deliberately as a signature attribute. In an image of Nemlão, taken by an unknown photographer and published in the journal *Le Congo illustré* in 1892, he wears a top hat with a feather and a European military jacket, as well

as beaded necklaces and a rosary around his neck (Fig. 87). The nudity of the female figure on the staff finial is in stark contrast to the wealth of his own dress, and her posture might be read as a state of submission or subservience. The female figure, however, is depicted wearing a *mpu* cap of leadership, indicating that she represents a figure of authority.¹¹ This symbol is likely a reference to the Kongo notion of ‘wealth in people’.

Power dressing

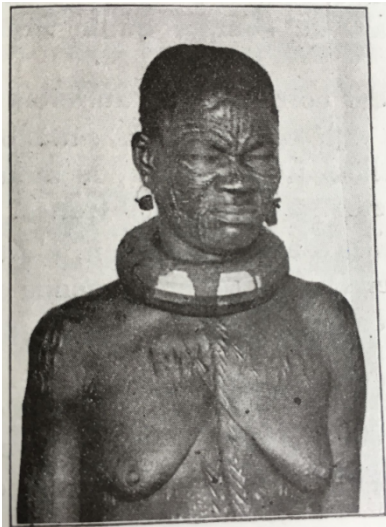
The weighty jewellery made from melted-down copper and brass currency worn by women in many communities along the Congo River may be understood as being part of a related dialogue between a display of personal authority and a display of subservience to a male leader. The transformation of trade goods – whether imported or indigenously produced – into symbols of wealth was found among other ethnic groups along the Congo River in the 1880s. Above Congo Pool in 1885, members of the MOA recorded that the success of an Apfuru trader was measured in terms of wealth. Wealth was defined not only by a store of trade goods such as that belonging to Ngaliema, but the wealthiest chief was the one who had ‘the most slaves’, which were the most valuable commodity in the market (see Chapter Two).

‘Slaves’ here denotes actual slaves, while also functioning as a general term for a leader’s dependants. The wife of an Apfuru chief was made to ‘wear generally around their neck a massive collar of yellow copper [*cuivre jaune*] weighing between 26–33 lbs (12–15 kg)’ (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1970: 463). Neighbouring Wangata women were likewise recorded as wearing brass necklaces weighing 7–8 kg and 3–4 kg of brass on their legs (Mahieu, 1924: 32). We might think of these women both as slaves and dependants. Indeed, the binding of a human neck with a weight of metal currency might recall the slave fork, or indeed directly recall the slave chain which involved wearing a heavy band of metal around the neck.

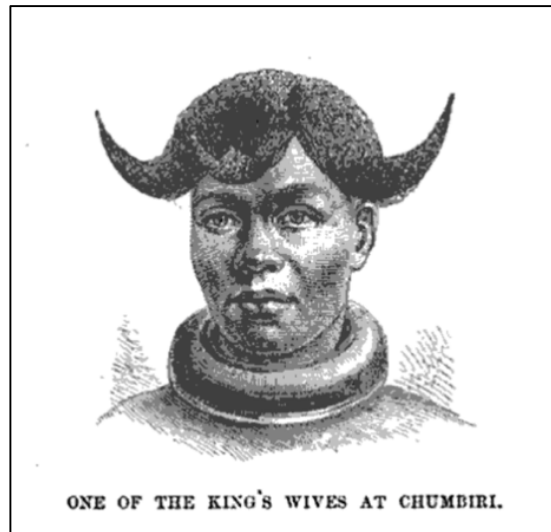
Before 1924, a woman from Upoto was photographed wearing a collar estimated at 15 kg (Fig. 88). Further upriver in the village of Ngete, in May 1882, Stanley recorded Yanzi women wearing heavy brass collars weighing between 4.5–27 kg around their necks, and equally massive leglets and armllets (Stanley, 1878: II 428). Stanley included an illustration of one of

¹¹ See Alisa LaGamma, ‘Kongo Female Power’ (2015: 161–221) for an extended analysis of the iconography of these staff finials in relation to female authority.

these women from the vicinity of Upoto – some five days by canoe upriver from the Pool – reportedly one of the wives of Chief Chumbiri. Stanley himself made the link between this form of dress and slavery by describing these women as ‘slaves of fashion’ and noted that they wore up to 13.6 kg of brass ‘soldered permanently around the neck’, displaying that they were the favourite wives of the chief (Stanley, 1878: II 319) (Fig. 89).



Above left: Fig. 88. Portrait of a woman wearing a brass necklace Early 20th century, Upoto region, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Unknown photographer. Published in Alfred Mahieu, *Numismatique du Congo 1485–1924* (1924) 33.



Above right: Fig. 89. One of the King's wives at Chumbiri. Engraving. From Henry Morton Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent* (1878) II, 319.



Fig. 90. Slaves in a Congo market. 1888, Chumbiri region, Congo Pool, Republic of the Congo. Photograph. Google images. Image source unlocated.

Such jewellery was likely made from melted down *mitako* and might have served directly as a currency. The use of such necklaces as currency was recorded especially amongst the Buma peoples, where necklaces served ‘as monetary standards for the purchase of ivory and slaves’ (Congo Illustré, 1893: 162). A necklace purchased by the MOA was recorded as being used as currency, marking the crossover in function between jewellery and actual wealth (Fig. 91). According to the object card, the bracelet served ‘as currency in Upper Sanga and Manbere, under the name of Midjoko, value: 3 francs’ (MQB Object Record 71.1896.28.75). A second bracelet collected by the MOA from the same region weighs over 1 kg (Fig. 91).

The combined impact of the metal currency and the enslaved female body became potent representations of the chief’s wealth. The literal function did not escape Stanley. He recorded that Chumbiri had forty wives and wrote:

I made a rough calculation, and I estimated that his wives bore about their necks until death at least 800 lbs of brass; his daughters - he had six - 120 lbs; his favourite female slaves about 200 lbs. Add 6 lbs of brass wire to each wife and daughter for arm and leg ornaments, and one is astonished to discover that Chumbiri possesses a portable store of 1396 lbs [633kg] of brass. (Stanley, 1878: II 320)

Photographs and illustrations of women wearing these heavy collars, often bare chested, are reminiscent of the images of chained slaves carved into ivory tusks on the Loango coast and of the slave fork (see Figs. 71, 72 and 83). Through the addition of these metal necklaces the female body is quite literally commodified, and the violence of this act is absolutely explicit. When Stanley asked what happened to a wife’s necklace after her death, Chumbiri indicated with a hand gesture that her head was cut off to remove the necklace: ‘significantly he drew his finger across his throat’ (Stanley, 1878: II 320).



Left: Fig. 91. Bracelet. Late 19th century, Alima River, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1891. Teke or Ngala peoples, brass, 2.5 x 11 x 11.2 cm, 1011 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1896.28.21).
Ex- collection: collected as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).

Right: Fig. 92. Bracelet (*Midjoko*) with monetary function. Late 19th century, upper Sangha River, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1891. Ngala peoples [?], brass, 7.5 x 3.5 cm 325 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1896.28.75).
Ex- collection: collected as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).

Politics of dress

The arrival of Stanley to the Pool in 1877, and the other Europeans who followed immediately behind him, quickly brought about enormous change in trading patterns. Protected from direct Atlantic trade to a large degree before this point, the markets of the Congo Pool were soon flooded with European goods as the indigenous population engaged in more direct trade. The dress of traders who benefited from this opening up of the region appears to have reflected their better access these to valuable imported materials. Comparing Stanley's account of life on Congo Pool from 1877 to his account of 1881–82 – only five years later – reveals how the fortunes of individuals chiefs had changed. The Teke town of Mswata, for example, on the north bank of Congo Pool, had by May 1882 'greatly grown' since March 1877, and now had about 1500 inhabitants (Stanley, 1885: I 511). Chief Mankoneh [Nga Nkuma], who was one of the first Teke chiefs Stanley met on the Pool in 1877, appeared to have grown rich.¹² Stanley noted that he 'was so splendid in his dress and state ornaments that his aspect was very different from that of the stalwart chief of the fishermen he appeared to be four years previously' (Stanley, 1885: I 296). Mankoneh, in a courtly display, used trade goods of clear value that had been transformed into prestige items to demonstrate in material terms his new found power and political authority on the Pool.

As in the style of dressing of Ngaliema, and the Kongo chief Nemlão at the mouth of the Congo, Mankoneh [Nga Nkuma] wore clothing constructed from a number of local and international signifiers of wealth that can be interpreted on a number of levels. His attributes of leadership were of a regionally standard variety, their meaning evident to Ngala, Kongo or European traders, and indeed reminiscent of those employed by the Makoko himself. Stanley described him as seated on an imported 'rug which had the picture of a horse on it', on a 'large crimson bolster' with his feet placed on a 'leopard skin...spread over the rug' (Stanley, 1885: I 296). This crimson bolster is very much like the *likuba* royal seat that was one of the major symbols of the Makoko's authority (see p. 46). The courtly use of the colour red and leopard skin

¹² Baptist missionaries, who arrived on the Pool in early 1881, corrected Stanley's rendering of the name of this chief: 'The town of Ibiu we found to be very near to the position given by Mr. Stanley as Mankoneh's town. We asked about Mankoneh, and the people said, as though understanding a bad pronunciation of the correct name, "Oh, yes - Nga Nkuma; it is over there," pointing a little way inland from where we were. Nkuma is the name of the Pool, and the Nga is about equal to "Dom." (This, pronounced quickly and indistinctly, could easily be made into Mkuma or M'an'koneh).' August 1st, 1881, The Missionary Herald.

was likewise associated with the highest levels of leadership, and other chiefs are known to have presented themselves in a very similar fashion throughout the region. An impressive display of red serge, and the use of leopard and lion skins, was also recorded at the Makoko's court in 1880 by Brazza.

On his head, Mankoneh [Nga Nkuma] wore 'a thick round cap of knit wool, into which a native artist [had] worked colours of red, yellow, blue, and white twist' (Stanley, 1885: I 297). This was either made out of raffia fibre and was misidentified by Stanley, or he wore a hat of imported manufacture. His neck was 'encircled by a collar of many-coiled fine brass wire, out of which [projected] four long spikes of wood... [which turned out to be] elephant tail-hairs bound in bundles of, perhaps, two dozen' (Stanley, 1885: I 296). This necklace is constructed from materials with clear and ancient power associations, however, it is also a product of its moment of creation. While leopard skin and elephant hair had been regionally recognised symbols of chiefly authority for centuries, the brass wire – likely made from melted down *mitako* – was a European replacement to the indigenously mined copper *ngiele* and likely a product of contemporary international trade. This necklace was worn with fashionable, contemporarily valuable European cloth – such as the cloth printed with the image of a horse – and '[h]is robe [was] a tartan check of large red and green squares, [whereby] his under-cloth [was] a bright-patterned print' (Stanley, 1885: I 296). Both the cloth and brass *mitako* would have been gained through trade; emblematic of his newly acquired wealth.

When Stanley met him in 1877, Mankoneh's clothes were not mentioned at all. It was only stated that he was 'simple' and 'genial', the 'chief of the Bateke fishermen' (Stanley, 1878: II 329). While Stanley had caught him by surprise, going about his daily business and not in a formal, ceremonial setting, it is likely that in his position as 'chief of the Teke fisherman' he was in the ideal position to grow rich from the opening up of trade. Fishing boats could just as easily carry ivory and rubber as the international demand for these materials grew. Like Nemlão, whose village was located near the growing settlement of Banana which allowed him to benefit from growing trade earlier in the nineteenth century, the location of Mankoneh's village near Mpila on the north (French) side of the Pool – a growing trade capital under the control of Teke lords, neighbouring the new settlement of Brazzaville – allowed his material wealth to grow with the market and was reflected in his new clothes.

Dress on the plateau

During the 1880s there appears to have been distinct changes in how people dressed, reflecting the more general availability and reduction in price of European goods. These changes in dress also reflect the shift in political power from its historic location – the Makoko’s court in the plateau – to the Pool, where the future French and Belgian colonial capitals were established. This shift provoked the diminution of historic bonds of allegiance between the Pool and the plateau, and appears to have led to the relaxing of the strict dress codes of previous generations. Savorgnan de Brazza, as the first European to visit the Makoko’s court at Mbe in 1880, bore witness to – and directly caused – these political shifts to occur.

For the Teke – and many other Central African peoples – the wearing of objects made out of copper was historically restricted to a specific social class because the material was valuable and associated with status (Herbert, 1984: 242). Emil Torday noted that amongst the Kuba peoples in the early twentieth century it remained the case that only members of the royal family and representatives of the smiths were allowed to wear hatpins of brass, while only certain notables were allowed to wear hatpins of red copper (Torday, 1925: 156, 179–80, 192). Chavannes made a distinction between wealth and status generally in the Lower Congo, and noted that ‘the number and size of the [brass] anklets which a woman [was] entitled to wear [depended] not only on the prosperity of her husband but also on his rank and birth’ (Chavannes, 1937: 390; cited in Herbert, 1984: 244). When Brazza first made his way across the Teke plateau in the summer of 1880, entering the territory of the Makoko from a north-westerly direction, he came to bear witness to an important Teke tradition involving the wearing of astonishingly refined collars (*onlua*) made out of copper alloy, closely associated with social status and the wielding of political power. (see Figs.25, 82, 93).

After reaching the banks of the Lefini, the northern boundary of the Teke Tio heartland, on 30 July 1880 Brazza met chief Ngampey (also spelt Ngampéré) for the first time. His description of this encounter in his journal began laconically: ‘Small village. Important chief.’ As his awareness of the importance of Ngampey grew, he returned to his journal and elaborated further, writing that he was ‘young, thin and [he wore] a pagne of cloth in blue “molleton” and another in red serge that [covered] his shoulders’. That European trade cloth was worn this far inland was notable to Brazza, for it demonstrated the far reach of European trade. He went on to

record that Ngampey wore his hair in ‘twists’ (*tortillon*) and had cicatrisation marks on his face. Most significantly, ‘the chief wore on his neck a massive copper necklace, sign of his capacity as a chief of a territory’ (de Brazza, 1972: 29). It was seeing a chief wearing an *onlua* for the first time that allowed Brazza to understand he had arrived in a new political domain.

Brazza would soon learn that the *onlua* denoted the chief’s status as an *ngantsii*, or master of the land, and from this encounter onward it served as a tool that was absolutely crucial in his attempt to decode the nuances of the local political landscape. According to his journals, it was on the following day, 31 July 1880, that he learnt that Ngampey had received his investiture – and thus his right to wear the *onlua* – from a great chief in the south called ‘Macoko [*sic*]’. Ngampey informed Brazza that Makoko was very tall, strong and could only be approached on the knees.¹³ Brazza learnt that chiefs, like Ngampey, were given authority to rule over specific territories, having received their investiture from Makoko in a ceremony that concluded with him ‘placing on the neck [of the chief] a large weighty neck collar that must no longer removed’ (de Brazza, 1972: 30). Once this ceremony was complete, Ngampey had been transformed into an *nga ntsii* or ‘master of the land’. It was only chiefs of this status who had the right to wear such collars, which granted them control to rule over specific territories or *ntsii*.

Brazza eventually arrived in the vicinity of Mbe, the Makoko’s capital city, on 28 August 1880. The first detail he recorded in his hastily written journal description of Makoko Iloo I was that he wore ‘the large copper necklace, as [did] his first wife’. Iloo also wore ‘a large fabric pagne and big bracelets on his feet and arms’. Brazza described the clothing of the Makoko’s wife, Ngassa, as being virtually the same as the Makoko’s – along with the collar, she wore the same feather in her hair, the same anklets and the same copper bracelets on her wrists and forearms (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1972: 62). Evaluating the *onlua* in local terms, we can immediately determine that because she had the right to wear one, she too was considered a ‘master of the land’ and thus wielded political power.

The extent to which this is the case was revealed to Brazza during the 25 days he and his men were at the Makoko’s court. After their first meeting, Brazza and his men were given a large meal of manioc, maize and pistachio by Ngassa. It emerged that she was the keeper of food, and it was her who would be in charge of handing over the provisions to Brazza and his men while

¹³ The word ‘*iloo*’ means ‘large’ according to Sims. It is also used in phrases that suggest intensity: ‘*mpibi iloo*’ meaning ‘very dark’, or ‘*ndzi iloo*’ meaning ‘wealthy’ (Sims, 1881: 32, 73, 174).

he was a guest of the Makoko. In his unpublished account, Léon Guiral, who visited the court a few years later, described her as ‘a very brave woman’. Brazza added ‘and very clever’ in the margin of the text (ANOM PA/16(II)/2).¹⁴

‘Ngassa’ is a title that, according to Jan Vansina’s research in the 1960s, meant ‘owner of millet (or corn)’. Ngassa was thus ceremonially charged with conserving the fertility of the fields – hence she was the one in charge of food supplies. As the *onlua* suggests, she also served an important political function at court, chairing the Royal Court of Justice with the chief vassal of the Makoko, Ngaliano, who served as a prime minister (Lebeuf, 1960: 53). Brazza recorded that it was Ngassa who, wearing the *onlua*, met visitors and hosted receptions, while the Makoko preserved ‘etiquette like a Louis XIV’ (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1972: 62).

Understanding her role at court gives us a richer understanding of the indigenous significance of these collars. According to the courtiers in Mbe in 2017, Ngassa is a title that is earned through initiation. An Ngassa of the Makoko begins as one of the wives of the king and, by surviving the *Lissee* initiation ceremony with her husband, earns the right to the title and to wear the *onlua*.



Fig. 93. Portrait of Ngassa, Queen of Makoko Iloo I, in the Royal Compound. (‘La regina Ngassa, moglie di Makoko’). 1884, Mbe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Jacques de Brazza (1859–1888). Published in Elio Zorzi and Attilio Peçile, *Al Congo con Brazzà: viaggi di due esploratori italiani nel carteggio e nel "Giornale" inediti di Attilio Peçile (1883–1886)* (1940), 448–49.

¹⁴ Brazza corrected and commented on Guiral’s account of his journey to the Makoko’s court in the margin.

Courtiers at Mbe in 2017 made clear, on looking at the photograph above, that in wearing the collar the Ngassa was of equivalent power to the Makoko – more powerful even than the first vassal. She was thus able to rule on the Makoko’s behalf, decide in matters of justice and distribute any gifts at court. Descriptions and photographs of the Makoko and Ngassa taken in 1884 give us a sense of their equivalent powers – a sense of physical doubling, even – suggested through their identical dress and bodily adornment. In two photographs taken of the Ngassa and the Makoko by Jacques de Brazza, presumably at the same time, she is presented in front of the royal compound wearing a raffia cloth tied around her breasts, and around her neck is the brilliantly shining *onlua* (Fig. 93).¹⁵

As Brazza travelled through the heartland of the Teke region in 1880, it was clear that the *onlua* demonstrated that a chief’s authority was bound to – and dependent on – that of the sovereign leader who granted him the right to wear the collar. Thus, while an individual ‘master of the land’ may have been relatively autonomous, he still owed his authority to the Makoko and this gave him a much greater regional authority. This system of governance may have developed as a response to the harsh climate of the plateau region, where, because resources were limited, chiefs had to rule territories at great distances from each other (Sautter, 1960).

Both Albert Dolisie and Charles de Chavannes, who were witness to an investiture ceremony, recorded that an essential part of the investiture process of a chief involved said chief publicly claiming to be ‘the wife of the Makoko’. The Makoko could therefore exist as a figure of sacred authority, his day-to-day entirely circumscribed by ritual action, while his ‘wives’ – both literal and metaphorical – wielded actual political authority on his behalf, allowing for the authority of the Makoko to be felt across the vast Teke territory.

The form of governance as described above is the ideal state. By the time Brazza arrived in 1880 the political landscape was already changing; the wealth of the Pool had become so great that the power of the Makoko was being tested. Newly wealthy chiefs such as Ngaliema, who had been born a slave, had amassed such fortunes on Congo Pool that they could cover their arms in layers and layers of copper and brass bracelets, outdoing the Makoko in terms of material excess. They could even afford to have slaves wear these symbols for them. Stanley – to his own political end no doubt – recorded chiefs of the Pool openly denouncing the authority of the Makoko. The Teke chief Mankoneh, described above in his lavish clothes, claimed that the

¹⁵ According to Raoul Lehuard, this type of double layered *onlua* is known as *ikorwa* (Lehuard, 1996: 153).

Makoko was not as powerful as Brazza suggested, that there were few people and no trade goods in Mbe and advised Stanley not to travel there (Stanley, 1885: I 296).

Indeed, while Brazza was determined to stress the power of the Makoko – for France’s claim to the region rested upon the treaty signed with him – he recorded evidence to suggest that Makoko Iloo’s authority was on the wane. It appears that young and ambitious leaders who strove to have power could pay high fees to be invested with the right to wear the *onlua*. In his journal entry of 6 September 1880, Brazza recorded the arrival of a young chief named Nganscumo at the court, who had ‘the air of great intelligence’ and who carried before him ‘not a spear, but a fetish staff from the top of which [floated] egret feathers’. Along with this staff, he wore the copper-alloy *onlua* said to have been made by the ‘brother of Makoko’. In exchange for the right to wear the *onlua*, Brazza recorded that Nganscumo had given the Makoko ‘the son of his brother’ as a slave. (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1972: 64). In terms of the markets of the Pool, the right to wear an *onlua* cost the life of a man, the most valuable commodity of the market (worth about 600–1000 *mitako* see p.133). Even if the tradition may be understood to have been in decline, and Nganscumo bought his way into chieftaincy, the right to wear an *onlua* still came at a hefty price. The ‘son of his brother’ would have also been Nganscumo’s heir, so in giving him as a gift to the Makoko he was forging a familial bond of alliance.

Even within Mbe itself, the Makoko shared his political power with other chiefs beyond his wife and his own vassals. According to Brazza’s journal kept at the time and in later published accounts, there was a young chief who was not a ‘master of the land’ and thus did not have the right to wear the *onlua*, but appears to have offered an alternative basis of authority to the Makoko. His name was Mpocontaba and Brazza’s recognition of his importance is indicated by the scale of the illustration accorded to him in his later published account (Fig. 94). Brazza described him as ‘a strapping man, who does not have great collar but is, it seems a great chief...followed by all his people’ (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1972: 59).



Fig. 94. Mpocontaba, First Vassal of the Makoko ('M'Pohontaba Premier Vassal de Makoko'). Engraving. From Savorgnan de Brazza, *Conférences et Lettres de P. Savorgnan de Brazza* (1887), 236.

On 30 August 1880, the day after his arrival, Brazza was taken to see him by a Makoko anxious that Brazza would suitably impress. The Makoko requested that Brazza wore his naval uniform and they marched to Mpocontaba's court side by side, the Makoko followed by his wives, Brazza followed by his own men carrying the French flag. Brazza was struck by Mpocontaba's wealth when they reached his court, and described him as being seated on a dais with a large crimson blanket and cushions arranged for himself, Brazza and the Makoko (de Brazza, 1972: 59). The whole dais was covered by a large canopy made from eight pieces of red serge (a twilled woollen or worsted fabric) large enough to shelter the whole group from the sun.

As Brazza had found the day previously at the Makoko's own court, before they could begin speaking a ceremony unfolded that demonstrated the precise delineations of power through objects and gestures. He noted that, as a 'sign of vassalage' to the Makoko, Mpocontaba placed 'his sceptre beside that of the [Makoko]; the point of his ceremonial spear facing behind him'. Both were attended to by the same ritual priest, or *ngaa*, who had served the Makoko. Brazza noted that he wore a different, much less ornate costume, perhaps appropriate to Mpocontaba's rank, including a 'hat made with the claws of lions' (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1972: 59).

The sense that the Makoko only had a fragile hold on power is indeed demonstrated by the pressure that he was put under by Mpocontaba after Brazza left the region in 1880, and

before he came back with the treaty signed in 1884. Lieutenant Walcke, the man who was sent by Stanley to purchase goods for Ngaliema, travelled to Mbe in December 1882. He attempted to sign his own treaty with the Makoko on behalf of Leopold II of Belgium that would invalidate the one signed by Brazza in September 1880, ratified by the French government only a month before. He failed to achieve this goal, however, and the Makoko remained loyal to the original treaty signed with Brazza.

While the Makoko refused to sign, Walcke did manage to sign a treaty with Mpocontaba who offered himself up as an alternative figure of authority. Rumours even made their way to France that the Makoko was dead and Mpocontaba had replaced him. If the Makoko's authority was in decline – along with the significance of the tradition of the *onlua* – it was shortly thereafter bolstered by the French and then altogether co-opted.

When Brazza returned in 1884, the ceremony of investiture for an *ngantsii* was appropriated to demonstrate that powerful chiefs had pledged allegiance to the Makoko and, by extension, France. This was arranged not by the Makoko, but by Malamine Kamara, Brazza's Senegalese deputy in the region while he returned to France. Mpocontaba and other chiefs loyal to him who had signed the competing treaty with Walcke were forced to swear allegiance to the Makoko on their knees, and were thereafter granted the right to wear the *onlua* (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1887: 232). Charles de Chavannes was a witness to Mpocontaba's investiture, which occurred on 18 May 1883, along with that of four other chiefs.

He described how the occasion began with the profession of 'many statements of loyalty', followed by the 'enthronement ritual' itself. Mpocontaba, 'installed on a special throne for the occasion, declared that he was the wife of Makoko (expression of submission), that the earth was Makoko and that he had given those of N'Couna [Brazzaville] to the Commander'. He swore he would 'not hesitate to make war against anyone who does not bow to this statement'. Chavannes noted: 'This simple, ingenuous way of appropriating a rite suitable to the circumstances indicate how the black sergeant [Malamine] was a valuable agent and driving force behind a long-term task of which the ceremony was happy and formal conclusion.' Once it was complete, they 'swore on the fetishes and the spirits of their father's allegiance to the French flag'. The ceremony of investiture that formerly marked the investiture of a 'chief of the land' had now been fully co-opted to demonstrate loyalty to France (Chavannes, 1936: 159–60).

It was during this second visit that Jacques de Brazza, Savorgnan de Brazza's brother, commissioned an *onlua* at the royal blacksmith. Much like the staff given to Ngaliema, it situated Brazza's status within a local value system. Flat and oval in shape, it was intended to be an 'exact replica' of the Makoko's and the Ngassa's own *onlua*. The outer perimeter was made of 17 rounded extenuations, each mirrored by a recessed facet on the inner perimeter, which were said to represent the number of territories under the command of the Makoko (Lehuard, 1996: 153) (Fig. 25). Much of the surface of the face was subsequently engraved with extensive geometric patterns in grids and half-moons. Visual analysis of the back reveals that it was hammered, and at regular intervals there are hammer marks towards the inner edge of the ring. This was most likely done to create the tapering shape of the collar.¹⁶ As payment for his work, the royal blacksmith requested from Brazza a dog and a goat. Payment to a blacksmith would usually have been done in more conventional currencies, and it is likely that these animals were to be ritually sacrificed by the blacksmith to the spiritual forces who would guide his creative process (see p. 201 on the importance of the blacksmith). This payment suggests that the *onlua* commissioned by Brazza was 'the real deal', imbued with the authority of the Makoko (see p. 276 on the copy of this collar).

Relations between the Pool and the plateau

It is clear that power relations were changing on the Pool and this was exerting new pressure on historic bonds of allegiance.¹⁷ In the early 1880s, the Makoko's authority as the 'sovereign head' of the Teke was real on Congo Pool, even though he lived in Mbe, some 130 km (80 miles) away. His presence was felt through representatives such as his 'masters of the land', and it was these men who ensured that the Makoko was paid an annual tax.

According to Albert Dolisie – a member of the MOA and, from 1890, resident administrator in Brazzaville – political relations between Mbe and the Pool were structured in the following way between 1880–1891: On 'each bank' of the Congo Pool, the Makoko had 'a great

¹⁶ According to a conservator's report written at the time, a reproduction of this object was made by the MQB. See Masarovic, Stefan 'Rapport de Realisation D'une Reproduction du Collier "de Chef Makoko" Musee du Quai Branly, Paris' (2009).

¹⁷ The riches of commerce, for example, instigated bridewealth inflation, historically fixed in the Teke Tsaayi region according to Dupré (1999).

leader representing his authority' (Dolisie, 1927: 45). On the northern side of the river – the Mbe side – representing the riverine border of the Teke heartland, chief Ngia [N'Guia] ruled. He lived in M'Foa, a small village on the edge of the river, in the vicinity of what would become Brazzaville (Dolisie, 1927: 44). Ngia was responsible for gathering tribute for the Makoko on the Pool. It is clear, however, that his own power was great. In a letter of 1885, Dolisie described him as '...Guia the famous chief who would be the suzerain or the friend of the Makoko' (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1970: 339). This description of him as suzerain suggests that he may in fact have been more powerful than the Makoko, This might be explained by the fact that he played an important role in the initiation procedure of a new Makoko, and thus was, in his own way, a 'king maker' (Vansina, 1973: 379). A member of the MOA, Edouard Ponel, described him in a letter of February 1886 as 'N'Guia Comonguir, their great chief, who with Makoko shared power in the Bateke countries' (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1970: 340). It seems that power relations between these two figures were ambiguous, and Ponel compared their positions to the Pope and the emperor in Europe. He noted that their names were equally respected, and, for the French, each would make a good ally (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1970: 339).

On the southern bank, where Stanley had signed his treaty with Ngaliema that would lead to the formation of the Congo Free State, the Makoko had as his representative Tchoulou. He was said to have been the first Teke to have moved to live on the southern bank as a representative of the Makoko (Johnston, 1884: 188). Tchoulou lived in a village between Kinshasa and Kindolo near Ngaliema's village of Ntamo.

Around 1885, Ngia – the Makoko's representative on the north bank – died and the Makoko did not immediately name a successor. His death thus created a power vacuum. Tchoulou, along with all his people, crossed the Pool in the middle of the night to the northern side 'to seek asylum, before pledging all his people to respect the French authorities'. The French duly granted them some territory in front of Mpila. In commemoration of Sergeant Malamine, to whom Tchoulou had given in marriage one of his daughters, the village was to be called Malamina. It is clear that by this time Tchoulou had a long relationship with the French. Indeed, he had met with Brazza as early as 1880.



Fig. 95. Bankoa, chief of the Bateke. Early twentieth century (postmarked 26 June 1920) Postcard, 14 x 9 cm. Holly W. Ross Postcard Collection.

Sometime after this, chief Bankoa, who had been chief of Ntamo along with Ngaliema when Stanley first arrived on the Pool in 1877, also crossed the river hoping to seek asylum on the north bank, leaving Ngaliema as the sole ruler of Ntamo. Bankoa, like Ngaliema, was rich and powerful in his own right through trade, and perhaps saw an opportunity to lay claim to the northern bank after Ngia's death (Fig. 95). Indeed, Dolisie noted that he 'only allowed him asylum on condition that he would publicly acknowledge that he was the vassal of Tchoulou' (Dolisie, 1927: 45).

It is clear then, given the French presence in the region, and based on a treaty signed with the Makoko, that these early French colonial agents were interested in maintaining and shoring up the authority of traditional figures on the Pool who owed their position to the Makoko.¹⁸ They

¹⁸ Dolisie described why he thought Bankoa was selected: 'N'Gaéko was dead, I believe. N'Gaékala was too poor to be a grand chief. N'Gafoula lived in Manyanga-N'Taba, upstream of M'Pila, too far to exercise authority at Congo Pool. All these circumstances helped to establish the authority of Bankoa; but, this authority, he can hold it only from the Administrator of Brazzaville.' It is possible that N'Gafoula is the Mankoneh [Nga Nkuma] of Stanley's account.

were thus playing into the politics of the Pool that reflected international politics: the French making alliances with the Makoko and his representatives, rather than the newly wealthy traders of the Pool with whom Stanley was more likely to side (Coquilhat, 1888: 98). These contrary forces began to cement themselves on their respective sides of the Pool in the growing settlements of Brazzaville and Léopoldville.

According to Dolisie, the Makoko, ‘fearing that by establishing Tchoulou on the [north] bank [would] create difficulties between natives, then decided to name the successor to N’guia’. Instead of choosing a Teke chief, he ‘sent the nomination of a great Bateke leader to the [colonial] administrator. His envoys carried to him the collar, two bracelets and a loincloth of a great chief, and they assembled all the leaders of the region Batékés in a solemn palaver’ (Dolisie, 1927: 45). Once they had ‘examined the inscriptions of the new collar and having seen that it was the copy of that of the Mokoko [*sic*] himself’ they knelt ‘before the Administrator, asked him for the laying on of hands and indulged successively in a symbolic dance in which they expressed that they were “his women”’. Dolisie noted that it was for this reason that from this day onwards the residence of the administrator was known as *Etilele m’pou Mokoko*, which he translates as the ‘house of the white Makoko’. Interestingly, Bankoa is photographed wearing an *onlua*, suggesting that he too served as a representative of the Makoko on the Pool (Fig. 94). Bankoa established the village of Mpila next to Brazzaville and became enormously wealthy through trade, so was a worthy ally to the French and to the Makoko. As with Ngaliema’s gift of a staff to Stanley, indigenous traditions were employed to legitimise European presence in the region.



Fig. 96. Profile portrait of Makoko Iloo I ('Makoko D'Après une photographie faite par M. Jacques de Brazza'). From *Le Matin*, 1 February 1883.

Afterlives of the Onlua

The Makoko, in handing over to Dolisie the traditional symbols of leadership, designated the French Government as his representatives on the Congo Pool, as chief Ngia and other 'masters of the land' had been before their arrival. This gives us a sense of how the Makoko understood the French presence there, and the significance of the treaty he had signed. Indeed, the demographic and economic heartland of the Kingdom had always been the Pool, so it is likely that such tensions had long existed and were only exacerbated by the development of international trade.¹⁹ It still remained the case that status was acquired by a wealthy chief of the Pool through being designated by the Makoko, as can be seen in the example of Bankoa. As Dolisie noted, this designation took the form of 'the collar, two bracelets and a loincloth of a great chief' (Dolisie, 1927: 50). The Makoko handed these over, it appears, to the chiefs on the Pool most likely to

¹⁹ Vansina estimated that the number of Teke on the Pool in 1880 probably was around 10,000.

shore up his authority. Chief Ngia had worn them as the Makoko's representative, and afterwards it had to be a French colonial agent.

While the political and religious significance of these collars was steadily being undermined in the Congo, in Europe the *onlua* very soon became one of the most famous symbols of Africa in France. An image of one was first published in the centre of the front page of *Le Matin* on the 1 February 1883 (Fig. 96). The collar commissioned by Jacques de Brazza was displayed in Paris on 3 July 1886 in the Jardin des Plantes, and it caught the imagination of the French public. The newspaper *Le Temps* for 3 July 1886 entitled 'Le Congo au Jardin des Plantes' gave it special attention, describing the work as a 'reproduction of the royal necklace [that] Makoko had made for his friend Brazza'. The reviewer incorrectly recorded that it weighed 16 kg when in reality it weighed just under 1kg, and this led him to suggest that 'you have to be strong to aspire to elegance on the banks of the Congo'. He also imagined that the king 'must sometimes remove his jewellery with pleasure' (*Le Temps*, 1886: 3 July 1886).

The *onlua* became a popular souvenir for Europeans who visited Congo Pool, and this explains the vast number of these items in European and American museums, including the example in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the examples in the AMNH; a number of which were collected by Frederick Starr on the Pool between 1905–06, the rest donated by the Belgian Government in 1907. Visitors to the Teke Tio court continued to commission copies into the early twentieth century, including Prosper Augouard when he visited Mbe in June 1885. This was subsequently donated to the Musée de Troyes, where it is currently housed.

In 1892 the Duke of Uzès wrote to his mother: 'I am going to send you a package where there are two bracelets made in Mpila, a village a few kilometres from Brazzaville, and which were sold to me by the manufacturer in person. I also include another bracelet, called "Makoko bracelet".' He noted that this bracelet was 'used by the French administrators of Brazzaville to be recognised, and to give them authority in the palaver' (Uzès, 1894: 90). Bankoa was the chief of Mpila, and this suggests that the collar he was photographed wearing might not have been made by the royal blacksmith, but by his own blacksmith. Indeed, perhaps somewhat ironically, it was

Ngaliema's village that became celebrated as the best place for a foreigner to buy one of these 'Makoko collars' (Mathieu, 1924: 90).²⁰



Fig. 97. The Chief of Ndolo's catafalque ('Grand ballot d'étoffes entourant le cadaver d'un chef Bateke.'). 1913, village of Ndolo, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photograph by J. Maes.

²⁰ As described in Mathieu's account, by the end of the nineteenth century: 'The village of Ngaliema, near Léopoldville, was reputed for spears, knives, bracelets, and especially the brass and copper necklaces which they melted and decorated are finely chiselled and present a work of real interest, when we think that they are the product of a primitive population... The Ba-teke chiefs wear this necklace on their neck. It is the emblem of their dignity' (Mathieu, 1924: 90).

Mortuary practices

It was true of a Teke chief that nothing in his life became him like leaving it, and several Europeans wrote about the extraordinary funerary catafalques of Teke chiefs from the 1880s onward. They entered European accounts as they were intended to be seen: extravagant public displays of an individual's accumulated wealth and status in material form over his lifetime. Of all the prestigious items that Ngaliema requested from Stanley, the most important was his own specially commissioned coffin, made to his own requirements out of a black sheet iron (Vansina, 1973: 207).

What happened to a body after death was a reflection of one's wealth, age and status in life. Slaves, paupers and murderers may have been thrown into the river or bushes. Unless they came from a noble family, women and children may have been buried, with very little ceremony (Johnston, 1884: 658). Guiral recorded Teke Tio mortuary practices on the death of a nobleman's child. Teke chief Nhango's nephew, 'a very young child', died on the day he arrived in his village. Guiral witnessed the child's body subsequently being 'embalmed'. He described how the first step was to cover the corpse with 'aromatic plants' and then it was 'coated with palm oil', after which the body was wrapped tightly 'in broad, dry banana leaves'. This 'package' was then 'sprinkled with earth' and 'rolled in several mats until the whole assumed a cylindrical shape'. This was kept in the corner of the chief's hut for several weeks so that family members could come and pay their respects before interment. Carved wooden 'fetishes' were placed surrounding the wrapped corpse, and the burial itself was done at night 'with much mystery' (Guiral, 1889: 175).

A more important individual may have had their body placed in a specially constructed catafalque. In this case, soon after death, the body was positioned in a crouching position before rigor mortis set in. It was then tightly bound in layers of cloth belonging to the deceased. This bundle was then positioned on a round support made from wood or wickerwork. A copper plate was positioned on the head and a second support was positioned over this. The whole was then wrapped with dry banana leaves and tightly bound with cloth until this filled the diameter of the top and bottom supports. Cloth walls were then sewn into place. Cloth belonging to the deceased was then wrapped around this structure until his entire store had been used. It would be a source of shame to have a small shroud, so an individual prepared for his funeral over his life.

Among the Teke Tsaayi in the nineteenth century there was one particular type of cloth known as *muta*, imported from the Tege, that was used only as a funeral shroud. Chiefs would store this until their death (Dupré, 1999: 46). While raffia cloth continued to be used by the Teke of the Pool for funerary shrouds, the vast stores of European trade cloth amassed in storehouses were used to serve a similar funerary purpose. While the owner was alive, the cloth in these storehouses was used as a currency ‘to make food purchases and expand their business’ (Congo Illustré, July 1892: 123). At death, the vast majority of the cloth was reserved for the funeral display and then buried with its owner (Maes, 1930: 403).

The catafalque of a chief may have been presented in a dedicated structure open to the public for months before actual interment. During this time, the cloth that he had personally gathered over his life was augmented by his kin who, when visiting the body, gave further pieces that were then sewn onto the catafalque (Mathieu, 1928: 120). The body was finally interred when the appropriate ‘gifts of the dead’, or *kura*, had been collected and presented to the deceased (Calloc’h, 1911: 150). The site of the corpse thus became a place for the re-establishment of familial, social and business alliances. On the Pool, and also for the Teke Tsaayi, the volume of the funeral bale depended on the number of ‘commercial partners’ of the deceased. These individuals arrived over a period of months to recognise the heir and make clear their intention of maintaining the chain of exchanges (Dupré, 1999: 46).

A major difference between individual catafalques was therefore their size; the more important the individual, the greater amount of cloth he would have gathered in his lifetime and the more people who would come to attach further cloth to his catafalque. The scale of certain bales was astonishing. Mathieu claims to have seen a catafalque that included up to 9000 pieces of raffia cloth, was six feet high and necessitated the removal of the front wall of the house to be moved for final interment. (Mathieu, 1928: 120). Maes visited one of these in Ndolo, a Teke village not far from Kinshasa, where he saw the corpse concealed within a gigantic ballot of cloth that measured no less than 2.78 m in diameter and 2.92 m in height (Fig. 97). This was likely wrapped in red cloth. The funeral catafalque of an important chief might eventually have been so heavy that 30–40 people had to carry it (Maes, 1930: 403).



Fig. 98. The Catafalque of Makoko Pierre Wawa. October 2004, Ngabe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Maurice Omvini (born c.1950).

Such funerary traditions were found in the wider area, notably among the Kongo peoples – especially the Bembe and the Yombe – where displays of an individual’s wealth were central to the preparation of the body after death and before the funeral. In the case of the death of an important chief or the Makoko himself, this catafalque was positioned within an additional structure known as the *ndzo ancweli*. This wickerwork structure was covered in cloth and paraded before final interment (Fig. 98). The structure would be covered with a bright red cloth – a symbol of the royal court since at least the nineteenth century – onto which a lion was printed. This cloth is reminiscent of the cloth recorded by Brazza in the village of chief Mankohne in 1877, described as a ‘rug which had the picture of a horse on it’ in crimson (Stanley, 1885: I 296). The Makoko has cloths of the same kind displayed at the court today, suggesting that there are consistencies in the way in which power is displayed in death over the twentieth century.

Conclusion

For the Teke, dress was an important political statement. Historically, to see an *onlua* on the neck of a chief was to see an entire political and religious system that stretched across a vast territory. A shining *onlua* lit up a universe of connections that linked the individual chief back to the Makoko, and from the Makoko to the spiritual realm. Over the period under study, changes in dress reflected the increased European presence in the region.

Chapter Four: the body and the creation of Teke identity

Introduction

This final chapter turns to analyse the material values of the Teke peoples as an expression of spiritual belief. For many Central African societies, the birth of culture is equated with the introduction of skills that permit mankind to create the refined goods that have market and prestige value, as outlined in previous chapters. Such skills in creation are ultimately believed to have their genesis in the spiritual realm. For the Teke, the arts of pottery, weaving, woodworking and metalworking were gifts from the Nkwembali; the combined force of natural and ancestral spirits to whom one day in four was dedicated in worship. It is proximity to the Nkwembali that grants the Makoko his political power. While the Teke Tio of the plateau of the late nineteenth century were not as wealthy as their riverine counterparts and increasingly severed from the Atlantic trade, they maintained spiritual wealth through the worship of *nkobi*; bark containers that held, in material form, the awesome power of the spiritual realm. Over time, however, even *nkobi* themselves became trade items, allowing the newly wealthy traders of the pool and river to legitimise their material wealth independently of the ‘traditional’ authority of the plateau. Religion, politics and money came together in the creation of these ‘super charms’ which condensed and contained the materials most significant to the people of this region. These containers were perceived to be of ultimate value, and still are in the vicinity of Mbe.

Oral histories and introduction of smithing technologies

In several myths of origin – recorded at different times and among different Central African peoples – it is specifically stated that the introduction of pottery, weaving and smithing marks the beginning of known history. While details might differ enormously depending on the time and place in which these stories were told, the vital significance of these specialised crafts as the basis for an organised society recurs time and again.¹

The current myth of origin for the Teke Tio peoples, as recorded in the capital of Mbe in February 2017, falls into this long and well documented tradition. As stated to me by the Makoko's courtiers, the Teke were present in this region of Central Africa long before their own political structure was put in place – this only occurred with the arrival of the legendary figure Obu. I was told by the nephew of the present Makoko Mariss Balekala Gampo during an interview that 'before Obu, nobody knows the history of the kingdom, but we know that it existed'.² The establishment of political order took material form in the *onlua* – the previously described necklace of worked copper or brass – along with all the other symbols of prestige such as the *ka* hat and the royal flywhisk, 'gifts' from the spiritual realm to the living peoples. Activating these objects granted the Makoko the spiritual authority to exercise political rule. Some of these objects are still worn by the Makoko today, and are understood to form a material link to the spiritual realm through the figure of Obu.

Obu brought to man not the raw materials but the finished masterworks, and so the gift of culture. He furthermore put a political system in place – twelve vassals with the Makoko at the head – and so granted the Teke cultural autonomy. The Teke peoples were now able rule for

¹ Several scholars have warned that we must engage with these tales cautiously. Dupré pointed out the ambiguity of the introduction of metalwork (Dupré and Pinçon, 1997). Pierre de Maret (1985) likewise advised against literal interpretation. Whilst being careful not to overstate the prevalence of these myths, nor to oversimplify, decontextualise or dehistoricise them temporally or culturally, specific accounts can nonetheless provide useful regional context both to better understand the primacy of the blacksmith at the Teke court and why he remains a recognised figure today, even though smithing is no longer practised. For the geographical extension of these myths, see Pierre de Maret, 'The Smith's myth and the Origin of Leadership in Central Africa' (1985); MacGaffey, 1986: 23; Vansina, 1973: 444, 467; 1990: 5. Among the Bushoong peoples of the DRC, tradition records that King Mbop Pelyeeng had been a smith, which was why he used an anvil as the emblem of his reign. Myeel, said to be 'the best blacksmith there ever was', was an unsuccessful contender to the throne. According to Kriger, the emblem is damaged. Kriger, 1999: 168. John Mack has recently traced references to baskets in the 33 myths collected by Luc de Heusch (T.A. Heslop Basketry *forthcoming*).

² This interview was conducted in front of the other courtiers, and can be therefore be deemed to be a history sanctioned by the current Makoko. The details were checked during a follow up visit to Mbe in January 2018. See p.289 for the list the list of collaborators in Mbe.

themselves, provided they still continued to respect the source of their political authority through regular worship of the Nkwembali. This meant tending to shrines that housed the powers of the spirit realm as distributed by Obu, contained in *nkobi* boxes in dedicated sanctuaries.

Nkobi are boxes made from bark which contain materials that are bound to the spiritual forces of a particular *ntsii* or territory. These *nkobi* are housed in sanctuaries which are attended to by guardians such as Norbert Nbinombino, photographed here in front of the Libvii sanctuary in Mbe (Fig. 99). According to the Teke poet and scholar Eugénie Mouayini Opou, it is still the case that ‘by invoking the Nkwembali, men allude to a moral and political philosophy whose main concern is to establish order among the inhabitants of the Kingdom’ (Domaine, 2009: 4). In this conceptualisation, politics is an expression of religious belief.



Fig. 99. Norbert Nbinombino, guardian of the *Libvii* Nkobi shrine in the courtyard of the Makoko's residence. February 2017, Mbe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

While Obu came from the spiritual realm and so represents a powerful spiritual force, he took human form and travelled from village to village across the plateau to distribute his powers. By taking human form, he may also be understood as fitting into the Central African tradition of the hero figure.³ In the twelve etiological narratives, recorded by Marie Claude Dupré in the late 1960s among the Teke Tsaayi, the acquisition of professional manufacturing skills is associated with the arrival of named heroes. One of these heroes, Mukaga, was credited in several accounts for introducing skills in weaving raffia to the forest region of the Teke Tsaayi, from the savannah region of the Teke Tio. Metallurgy was also ascribed to him, but in a less clear-cut fashion.

In one account – told by Maurice Tséké, a judge in the customary court of Mossendjo, to Dupré in January 1966 – Mukaga was described as ‘the father of the Batéké, the first of the Batéké’, for it was he who first showed his people ‘how to prepare raffia for weaving’. Having invented raffia cloth, Mukaga went on to invent the forge ‘to make axes and to cut down the plantations’ (Dupré, 1998: 109–40). The acquisition of these skills arrived in multiple stages, reflecting the actual history of the Teke Tsaayi who migrated from the sandy upland plateau region of Mbe, allegedly to escape the constraints of a Makoko who had grown too powerful, likely in the early sixteenth century (Dupré, 1998: 109–40).

Indeed, the story might reflect actual historical events. It is probable that it was the Teke Tsaayi who introduced the technique of raffia weaving to their forest-dwelling neighbours, who had formerly dressed in beaten bark cloth. Weaving in raffia was thus a symbol of the cultural superiority of the Tio migrants from the savannah.⁴ Because raffia weaving was superior to indigenous techniques, weaving in raffia was thus a technique of political control, a symbol of modernity and associated with the ruling elite (Dupré, 1998 109–40).

In other Central African myths of origin, new techniques of specialised manufacture were likewise introduced by individual heroes or rulers and are associated with their period of rule. The Hungarian anthropologist Emil Torday (1875–1931) recorded amongst the Kuba-Bushoong a similar history to that recorded by Dupré among the Teke Tsaayi. Torday described how it was the heir-presumptive to the throne – the future king Shamba Bolongongo (Shyaam, according to

³ The Kingdom of Kongo, for example, was believed to have been founded by the arrival of a hero figure – the hunter Ntinu Lukeni – in the 1300s. See John Thornton, ‘The origins and early history of the Kingdom of Kongo, c.1350–1550’. *The international journal of African historical studies* 34, no. 1 (2001): 89–120.

⁴ Raffia cloth continued to play an important role with respect to ‘social regulation’ in Teke Tsaayi culture through the 1960s, with squares of raffia cloth remaining the primary element of bridewealth payments. This continues in a small way among the Teke Tsaayi in the region of Zanaga today, but has practically ceased to happen.

Vansina) – who introduced raffia weaving to his people, having learnt the technique among the Pende peoples to the west. Cloth made of raffia fibre, as in the Teke Tsaayi region, hereafter replaced the use of bark cloth except for specific religious functions. The introduction of the use of palm oil and palm wine – other major products of the raffia palm – were also attributed to him (Torday, 1925: 204).

Torday made the astute observation that ‘it is not usual with people to give credit to others for their own inventions if there is no very good reason for it’ (Torday, 1925: 206–07). This suggests that there was a prestige value associated with the acquisition of skills from neighbouring peoples already masters of the craft (Torday & Joyce, 1911: 26), what economists refer to as the KUJ or ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ effect.⁵ A transference of power occurs with the acquisition of a new craft derived from an elite source, granting a culture a competitive space in the market and so leading to the growth of the economy.⁶ All of these elements combined to increase the value of the goods produced out of new materials using novel techniques.

The blacksmith king: a regional interpretation

We might also think on a broader scale that like a potter, weaver or smith, Obu transformed a raw material – the Teke people – into a finished product, fashioning, as it were, the entire body politic. His story relates to that of the ‘blacksmith king’, often linked to the founding of a polity and common across a vast swathe of Central Africa. Comparing this story to others provides useful regional context for understanding why the blacksmith was so strongly associated with Teke kingship, and why the creative process of the smith was understood to be such a potent force.

The neighbouring Kongo peoples have several myths of origin that involve blacksmiths, and some of the earliest recorded. One account, for example, recorded by Capuchin missionaries in 1710, directly stated that the founder of the Kongo Kingdom was a ‘wise and skilful blacksmith’ (Thornton, 2004: 32–37, 93–94). To the west of the Teke region, a Vili account of

⁵ See, for example, Boris Gershman on the role of envy in economic growth. ‘The two sides of envy.’ *Journal of Economic Growth* 19, no. 4 (2014): 407–438.

⁶ There was also a value attached to the acquisition of goods and ideas that were exotic and had travelled from a distant place. The first carver of the Teke Tsaayi mask was recorded as having travelled a long distance south to return as a hero with this newfound knowledge (Dupré, 1968).

the founding of the Loango Kingdom held that it was a ‘brotherhood’ of smiths from Ngoyo who travelled to the coast and founded the kingdom there (Martin in LaGamma, 2015: 56). In northern Angola, the Capuchin missionary Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi da Montecuccolo recorded that the Ndongo Kingdom was founded by a blacksmith. This myth was published posthumously in Bologna in 1687, in the work *Istorica Descrizione de tre regni Congo, Matamba et Angola* (Cavazzi, 1687: 290–91).

An extended version of this account appeared in the manuscript version of Cavazzi’s text, as transcribed and translated by historian John Thornton:

There had come from the Kingdom of Congo a black man named Angola Mussuri who was related to the King of Congo, [and] practised the Art of a blacksmith, and who with the skill [and] industry of his hands [and] the sweat of his brow had accumulated many goods...his Art being much esteemed...because of the novelty of the arrows, Spears, Surrusine, [and] other Arms which he made...because he was the first to make these Arms, they madly affirmed that he spoke with the God called Zampungu or Zambi, [and] now they say Zambiapungu which means the same as God, and that he had taught him the art. He had therefore accumulated much of the land’s currency, which is pieces of cloth woven from grass called libonghi...⁷

This account has many parallels to those already described. Smithing is said to have been introduced to a people by a named hero figure who acquired the skill from a neighbouring and more powerful kingdom. It is stated that the smith was related to the king of the Congo, just as the Teke royal blacksmith was a close relative of the Makoko. Through skill, hard work and inventiveness, he gained a wide reputation and was able to become wealthy and acquire goods, especially in the form of ‘the land’s currency’ which Cavazzi described as raffia cloth.

Cavazzi noted that the blacksmith learnt these skills from a god called ‘Zampungu or Zambi, [and] now they say Zambiapungu’. In his analysis of this text, Thornton noted that *Nzambi Mpungo* means in Kikongo ‘highest nzambi’, while ‘nzambi’ is a general term for

⁷ <http://www.bu.edu/afam/faculty/john-thornton/cavazzi-missione-evangelica-2/book-2-chapter-1/> (accessed 7/717).

spirits.⁸ According to the published account, he learnt the skill from an ‘idol’. Thornton glossed ‘idol’ here as referring to a territorial spirit.⁹ In other words, the hero figure Angola Mussuri acquired the knowledge from both ancestral and nature spirits – the combined force of the spirit realm, known to the Teke as the Nkwembali.

The commonality of these myths raises the question of the relations between the Tio, Kongo and Loango kingdoms (Vansina, 1973: 442–43). Archaeologist Pierre de Maret offered two hypotheses: either the Teke ideology of kingship was the earliest influence on the other two, or kingship was closely linked with smithing due to the strong link between political power and metallurgy. The origin of the king-smith can be ultimately traced to real historical events, as Dupré suggested is the case with the Teke Tsaayi (Maret, 1985: 72).

Belgian anthropologist Luc de Heusch’s conclusion – having analysed the cycle of 33 myths found in variant forms amongst Kuba, Luba and Lunda peoples – was that the myths were part of a ‘common mythological system developed in the Congolese savannah’ and that, as Maret pointed out, the similarities between them were historical in origin: ‘the Congolese myths [were] exchanged like merchandise’ (de Heusch, 1982: 247). This would seem to be in keeping with the history of these different polities intimately connected to one another through trade and migration for thousands of years. The magical transformation of raw materials into goods that could be worn – or sold in the market – is presented as the cornerstone of civilisation for the people of Central Africa in these oral histories.

⁸ See also MacGaffey, ‘Cosmology’, p. 7–9. Thornton noted that this term was ‘widely used in both Kikongo and Kimbundu catechismal literature to mean “God” in the Christian sense’.

⁹ John Thornton (see Book 1, 90–93 and note 222). *Istorica Descrizione*, Book 2, note 126.

The importance of the smith at the Teke court

The fundamental cultural significance of the smith is demonstrated by the fact that he was often shown to have a close connection with the ruling elite – not only for the Teke, but for many peoples in the Congo basin as outlined above.¹⁰ The manner in which the blacksmith's skills were passed down from each generation was closely guarded and managed. Before the twentieth century, all men of the royal lineage of the Kuba-Bushoong, for instance, were supposedly trained in the art of smithing. One king, Mbop Pelyeeng, was said to have been a smith himself (Heusch, 1956: 105).¹¹ While there would have been several weavers in Mbe during the reign of Iloo I, there would have been only one smith who was closely associated with the royal court (Vansina, 1973: 140). Indeed, as noted above, one of the twelve vassals named by Obu was the royal blacksmith, who had the title Ngaambiôô (Vansina, 1973: 141). Royal anvils, a sacred fire and the second title of the kingdom – *ngandzuunu*, (*nga andzuunu*, 'master of the anvils') – further demonstrate how closely the Makoko was, and still is, associated with the master of this important technology (Janzen, 1982: 59).

The tools of the blacksmith thus come to serve as a key emblem of royal identity. The Makoko, for instance, was described by Brazza as wearing a raffia hat (*ka*) held in place 'by an iron pin into which are embedded two very long feathers'. The *ka* is said to have been made by the blacksmith in one night, and the hairpin was in the shape of a miniature anvil.¹² The feathers were said to be the long tail feathers of a bird found in the savannah region, known as *Iboubon*, likely a nightjar. This bird was believed to be nocturnal, its appearance in a village at night usually considered a sign of impending bad fortune. By wearing the feather, the Makoko demonstrated that he was powerful at night, even when others were powerless. Iron was known to be smelted at night and in great secrecy (Delisle, 1885: 465–73). All of these elements combined stress the strong links between the Makoko and the smith, and in turn reveal that proficiency in metallurgy was believed to be a product of close collaboration with spiritual forces.

¹⁰ See, for example, the summary in Luc de Heusch, 'Le symbolisme du forgeron en Afrique' (1956) and François Neyt, *Traditional Art and History of Zaire*, 1981: 105.

¹¹ The emblem he chose to signify his reign was an anvil, as is indicated by the carved commemorative statue of him that was kept in the royal compound that was collected by Emil Torday and is conserved in the British Museum.

¹² A similar hairpin is worn by the Bushoong elite in the DRC.

Based in the Lower Alima region in 1885, Ponel (a member of the MOA) noted that ‘the trade of a blacksmith is a kind of priesthood which is transmitted from father to son’ (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1970: 313). Ponel’s suggestion that smithing was a ‘kind of priesthood’ demonstrates he was aware that the creative process of the blacksmith was so valued that it was considered to have a spiritual source. Fernand Delisle noted how, further north in the region of the Teke Tsaayi people, ‘in all villages, blacksmiths, who are very important and considered men, often heads of tribes or villages, are also dreaded fetishists’ (Delisle, 1885: 465–73). Again, the smith is credited with both a political and spiritual role in the maintenance of society.

According to the fieldwork of Alphonse Lema Gwete conducted among the Teke peoples of the DRC in the 1970s, in certain Teke communities the blacksmith either assisted or altogether replaced the religious specialist of a community known as the *ngaa* (or *nkhum*) in the celebration of the rites dedicated to local *nkira* spirits. The blacksmith was able to perform this function because the profession was associated with mastery over a particular protective charm known as *muwe*. Mastery over this charm granted the blacksmith the sole authority to treat certain types of diseases (Lema, 1978: 211). When a blacksmith became the true master of the *muwe* charm, he was known as the *ngaamuwe* (*ngaa muwe*), which literally translates to ‘master of the *muwe*’. A blacksmith of this level had the right to wear copper bracelets, insignia historically reserved for chiefs and certain notables (Lema, 1978: 211). It is for these reasons that the blacksmith was one of the principal figures at the Makoko’s court and one of the major officiants in both the Makoko’s investiture and funerary ceremonies.

In a letter of 27 May 1884 from Jacques de Brazza to his parents, writing from the court of Mbe, he described at length meeting the royal smith and his commissioning of jewellery from him. The importance of his position at court is evident. His workshop was within the royal compound and J. de Brazza described him as the ‘crown jeweller’, likening him to a ‘Marchesini’ of the Royal House in France – in other words, a jeweller who produced objects of the highest quality intended for an aristocratic elite (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1884: 351–52). It appeared that the smith and the Makoko were related. He was described by one chief as ‘the brother of Makoko’, and while this is highly improbable – such a close familial connection between the Makoko and his vassal would have been forbidden according to Teke rules of succession – it is possible their parents were from the same wider clan (Vansina, 1973: 64).

Access to his workshop was highly circumscribed. J. de Brazza noted that he was only able to commission jewellery from him – including the famous *onlua* discussed on pp.155-180) – with the express permission of the Makoko. This had to have been arranged by his brother Pierre, who had by this date developed a long relationship of trust with the court.¹³ The role of the blacksmith was traditionally given to the vassal Ngaambiôô, and it is likely that this was who Jacques de Brazza met. As payment for his work, the royal blacksmith requested from Brazza a dog and a goat. Payment to a blacksmith would usually be done in more conventional currencies (such as the raffia currency described in the Kongo account above) and it is likely that these animals were to be ritually sacrificed by the blacksmith to the spiritual forces who would guide his creative process, such as the *muwe* charm described by Leme.



Fig. 100. Forge bellows (*nkomb*) with a sculptural element of a female face. 19th century, Gabon, inventoried 1949. Fang peoples, wood, brass, 56.2 x 28 x 18 cm. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1949.20.5). Ex-collection: Miss Arsandaux.

The blacksmith was understood to be a figure who, like the Makoko, mediated between this world and the spirit world, and it was through the spirit realm that he gained his creative force. This may be one reason why throughout Central and West Africa the work of the blacksmith may also metaphorically have been linked to the biological act of giving birth

¹³ ‘C’est sur la demande expresse de Pierre et avec la permission de Makoko que le bijoutier me fera ce collier.’ (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1887: 351–52).

(Herbert, 1993: 32–39, 132–33).¹⁴ According to Leme, each hide membrane of the bellows was referred to as a breast (*bye*) and thus one of the essential tools of the forge was directly associated with the female body. We find regional resonances of this metaphorical association among the Fang peoples of southern Gabon where bellows were even constructed to include a female head as a decorative element (Fig. 100). As was the case among the Teke, blacksmiths among the Fang were often also sculptors (Object card MQB 71.1949.20.5). In Loango, amongst the Kongo peoples, furnaces were likewise constructed in the shape of women, once again creating a clear association between forging metal and giving birth (Denbow, 1999: 414–16; 1986: 178–79).¹⁵ These ideas tie in with the several Central African myths of origin of the blacksmith described above – along with other specialists – as being credited with the birth of an advanced society.

¹⁴ See, for example, Patrick R. McNaughton, *The Mande blacksmiths: knowledge, power, and art in West Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 1993). See also Wyatt MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa: the BaKongo of Lower Zaire*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

¹⁵ James Denbow, 'Heart and soul: glimpses of ideology and cosmology in the iconography of tombstones from the Loango Coast of Central Africa,' *Journal of American Folklore*, 112, no. 445 (1999): 414–16. *Bakongo of Lower Zaire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 178–79.

The blacksmith and the making of the Makoko

Not only was the blacksmith accorded a high status at court, but in many Central African cultures he also played a crucial role during the investiture of a new chief. Amongst the eastern Kongo peoples, neighbours of the Teke, Joseph Mertens' 1943 study of the investiture rituals for hereditary chiefs serves as an illuminating comparative account. Based on accounts collected by Catholic missionaries in the 1920s and his own field research, Mertens determined that these initiation rites were led almost exclusively by the blacksmith (*ngangula* in Kikongo).¹⁶

The *ngangula* was charged with revealing the insignia of leadership to the future chief after the death of the incumbent. This included revealing to him the contents of the 'basket of the ancestors' (*lukobi lu bukulu*). Inside this basket were the relics of the ancestors (*bilwi*), the ancestral bracelets (*nlunga*) and a variety of other materials drawn from the animal, plant and mineral kingdoms charged with great potency (Mertens, 1943: 20).¹⁷ The relics and jewellery were said to have been wrapped in red cloth, and it was the *ngangula* who had collected and prepared them for placement in the basket along with the other materials.

Made from iron, the *nlunga* bracelets would formerly have been worn by a previous crowned chief on the left wrist. Each bracelet in the basket had belonged to a specific ruler, whose name was known and whose ancestral force could be called upon by the new ruler.¹⁸ The blacksmith would select one of these bracelets for the candidate to wear, and his chieftainship would henceforth be associated with the personality and legacy of that individual ruler (Mertens, 1943: 23–24). The Teke peoples likewise had a box that was guarded by the blacksmith during the process of investiture for the Makoko, and resembled in key respects that of the more easterly Kikongo. The contents of this basket will be analysed in detail below.

The Makoko as a cultural creation

Arguably, the most important finished product of Teke culture was – and still is – the Makoko himself. Nineteenth-century sources clearly demonstrate the extent to which the Makoko was an

¹⁶ The *ngangula* is also known as the *nga lufu*, which means literally 'operator of the forge' (*lufu*) (Janzen, 1983: 45).

¹⁷ Underneath the bracelets was white powder ('*mpemba*'), parts of palm branches, palm leaves and antelope dung (Mertens, 1943: 20).

¹⁸ Of the different baskets that Mertens studied, he found between eight and twelve bracelets, each of which belonged to a named individual.

object of Teke culture, his entire life regulated by strict and elaborate ritual action.¹⁹ Brazza, in his attempts to understand the nature of the Makoko's authority in his first days at court, noted how he preserved 'etiquette like Louis XIV' (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1887: 63).

While Brazza's intention was to demonstrate that the Makoko's life was controlled by courtly manners, rules and regulations like those one might have encountered at Versailles, he was wrong to compare the Makoko to the French monarch because the Makoko did not inherit his position.²⁰ Instead, he was elected to the role through a sophisticated process of initiation that transformed him from a man into 'the Makoko', an initiation ceremony so extreme and dangerous that he would afterwards be different from the rest of humanity and permanently transformed. This process was managed by the twelve *ankouobi* (vassals of the royal court), each of whom performed specialist roles in the creation of a new Makoko.

Brazza's comments make it clear that in 1880, at the Makoko's court, the emphasis was on the display of the Makoko as a ritual object, rather than of his wealth. This distinguished the Makoko from contemporaneous Teke chiefs of the Pool who displayed their authority through vast stores of trade goods and elaborate dress. While Makoko Iloo I certainly displayed his dependants and trade cloth as a sign of wealth and status, he could not compete with the millionaires of the Congo River (see p. 167 for an extended discussion). It did not take Brazza long, however, to understand that the Makoko was different from the other chiefs he had met. In the description of his first meeting with the Makoko, recorded in his journals, Brazza described how the Makoko's physical person is protected and surrounded by his dependents. The Makoko came to his public visiting chamber preceded by his vassals: 'Finally, preceded by his wives, Makoko [appeared]. Iloo was seated on a large 'serge' carpet, four metres across, made up of blue and red squares, upon which a lion skin was positioned. He was followed by 'four children' whom Brazza understood to be page boys. They carried 'on their shoulders, folded, a piece of red serge cloth'. Like Brazza himself, 'the head of the pages' wore a European uniform, 'but the back [was] placed on the chest and it [was] buttoned on his back.' The Makoko was at the centre of an elaborate courtly display.

¹⁹ The same might be said of a high-ranking blacksmith among the Kongo peoples whose life would have been similarly circumscribed by restrictions (Janzen, 1983: 45).

²⁰ Brazza's comments also fall into the category of the kind of humour that is common across travel accounts of the period. False comparisons to European icons of civilisation were intended to denigrate the African subject. He also, for example, described arriving in the 'Tuileries de Makoko' (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1887: 63).

After the children, the *ngaa*, whom Brazza described as the ‘feticheur’, appeared and he would perform a central function in the procession. Brazza was evidently dazzled by the *ngaa* and gave more details about his costume and person than for any other participant in the ceremony. The *ngaa*, in effect, was a resplendent symbol of the Makoko's spiritual power. Brazza noted that it was the first time he had seen a feticheur so fantastically dressed, and he listed the different elements of clothing in extensive detail; he noted that he appeared to drag his feet because they were so overloaded with strings of cowrie shells, that he was also wearing 15 to 20 strings of cowrie shells around his neck and a necklace made out of lion teeth. On his head the *ngaa* wore a hat made of ‘feathers and elephant tail hair’ and a ‘belt made of tiger skin [likely leopard or civet] and, as a buckle, two large seashells joined with a knife’. In his later published account, Brazza added the detail that he held a ‘fetish shield’ in his left hand and in his right hand ‘a late Medieval sword’ (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1887: 53).

A ceremony unfolded orchestrated by the *ngaa* before they began speaking that demonstrated how the Makoko’s authority lay in his close connection to the spiritual realm, and that the Makoko was, above all else, an object of religious devotion. Moreover, in the days that Brazza spent at the court he became aware that this spiritual authority granted him real power. He could make the force of the Nkwembali materialise through his command of the natural world by invoking thunder, hail storms or lightning strikes, he could order a swarm of bees or packs of lions to descend upon an enemy.²¹ Brazza made the unqualified statement in his journals that if the Makoko were to hit someone with his sacred staff, the person would immediately die (Brunschwig, 1965: 28). We can think of the staff that Stanley gave to Ngaliema as a poor imitation of the Makoko’s original (see p.164).

Subsequent European visitors to the court all recognised the spiritual nature of Iloo’s power. The French naturalist Léon Guiral, who came to the court not long after Brazza in 1881, specifically stated that the Makoko did not ‘have temporal power’ but was rather ‘[t]he great fetish, the spiritual leader and, if you may forgive the expression, the Pope of the Bateke!’ Catholic missionary Prosper Augouard, who visited the Makoko’s court in 1884, likewise noted that the Makoko was an ‘indisputable authority over a vast extent of country, but his

²¹ The Makoko was also attributed with the ability to destroy using the forces of nature during Vansina’s research in Mbe in the 1960s, and during my own fieldwork in 2017 and 2018.

authority...[consisted] mainly in fetishes' (Augouard, 1905: 201–02). Charles de Chavannes described the Makoko as 'the most powerful fetish of the Teke' (Chavannes, 1936: 74).²²

Making Makoko

Accounts of the 1880s do not relate the process by which Makoko Iloo I came to power, but a wealth of data regarding the investiture of a new monarch can be found in twentieth-century descriptions. I also discussed the process of investiture at length at the court in Mbe in February 2017 and again in January 2018. By comparing and contrasting these various accounts, rich in detail, the roles played by specialists in fashioning this cultural creation – in transforming a 'raw man' into a religious leader – can be traced. Strong links are apparent between the creation of the Makoko and the manufacture of other finished goods of Teke culture, and this is demonstrated especially by the important role played by the blacksmith – both in the initiation process itself and in the manufacture of the Makoko's emblems of leadership in metal and in carved wood.

i) *Oushion ounko*; 'trapping of the king'

The first stage of the kingship initiation ceremony is known as the *oushion ounko*, which translates literally as the 'trapping of the king'. This occurs only once the body of the previous Makoko has been interred; usually about two to three months after the death. At this moment a rigorous and long-established selection process is put in motion, whereby the twelve vassals of the Makoko, the *ankouobi*, come together to select a new ruler.

Each of the vassals performs a specific role in the selection of the future Makoko and the enthronement. He has learnt this from his father, or in the case of the female Nga-ntsii-bi, from her mother down a direct line of descent. These positions and the roles and requirements attached

²² These early pre-Berlin Conference sources must be treated with caution because they reflect French political interests in the region. The importance of the Makoko had to be emphasised as much as possible because it legitimised the Brazza-Makoko treaty. Belgian sources looked at the same accounts and constructed a very different portrait of the Makoko's power. A 1943 biographical account of Makoko Iloo I by the Belgian author M. Coosemans is summative of the Belgian perspective: 'Makoko pretended to be king of the Bateke, when in fact he was only a little wambudu chief ruling over Mbé just as Gamankano ruled over Maliwa, Nchouvila over Kinshasa, Ingia on Mfoa, Gambiélé on Kimpoko, Ngaliema on Kintamo: Nevertheless, Makoko exerted a great influence in the region because he was rich; he had more men and more guns than his neighbours, and was even recognised as a feticheur' (M. Coostemans, 'Makoko', Inst. roy. colon. belge Biographie Coloniale Belge, T. I, 1948, col. 640–44).

to them are handed down in much the same way that other specialised craft skills such as weaving were passed down the generations.

In selecting a new Makoko, the *ankouobi* cannot choose a candidate to whom they are directly related (Opou, 2005: 14). The inheritance of their roles is thus distinct from the figure of the Makoko himself. Like a potter, weaver or smith, the *ankouobi* must be sure to select their raw material carefully. They must find a man who is of good character, who is humble and moral and who is descended from one of six branches of the clan of Mbe. Marcel Ibalico named these Impio, Isou, Onzala, Impan, Inkoui and Onkonsan. These branches are said to correspond to the original founding clans (*kana*) of the Teke peoples (Ibalico, 1956:29). The candidate, known as the *kila mpu*, must already be married but cannot have adult children.

Both human and spiritual forces play an important role in the making of this major decision. According to Théophile Obenga's account, the *ankouobi* eventually reach their decision through the guidance of ancestral forces who make their voices heard through the vassals, who serve as their living agents. The ancestors eventually communicate their final wish and the vassals come together in Mbe to designate (*swolo*) he who shall be 'raised to the dignity' (*imfumu*) of Makoko. Because of the role of the ancestral forces, and because of the defined human channels through which these forces speak, reaching an agreement as to who should be the new leader should not 'give rise to armed opposition, for voters [act] only according to principles and procedures bequeathed to them by the ancestors for the well-being (*ineo*) of the people' (Obenga, 1969: 36). We can see here the interplay between creative spiritual forces and human agents, as described in oral histories relating to the introduction of technical advancements in weaving and metalwork.

Once the vassals have reached a unanimous decision the process of *oushion ounko* begins, and it is fondly recalled by the courtiers today as something of a sport.²³ The head vassal, Ngalion, who functions as a kind of prime minister, calls together a number of vassals. They then go to the house of the candidate (*kila mpu*) and kidnap him and his wife in the middle of the night. They are taken hostage and stripped of all their material possessions so that they are 'naked', and then transported to Ngabe, on the banks of the Congo – the seat of the Nga-ntsii-bi – as prisoners.

²³ The courtiers remember fondly trapping the current Makoko and his wife at three in the morning when they were both fast asleep. It is not clear if all candidates are necessarily happy to have this honour thrust upon them.

After the death of the previous Makoko, the Nga-ntsii-bi – as the guardian of the most important Nkwembali shrine – temporarily receives the power of the former Makoko. His power rests with her from the moment of death until it is handed over to the new candidate during the process of investiture. For this to happen, the candidate must enter ritual seclusion with the Nga-ntsii-bi who imparts the wisdom of the Nkwembali to the candidate over an extended period. Each of the *ankouobi* will then travel to Ngabe to transfer a parcel of knowledge passed down to him from his father who once performed the same role. The source of this knowledge is the figure of Obu. The royal smith, Ngaambiôô, likewise hands over some of the secret knowledge of smithing at this point and assists the Nga-ntsii-bi. His major role occurs later on in the initiation process.

The candidate is married to a new wife – known as the Waafitieere – who is a relative of the Nga-ntsii-bi and serves as ‘his spiritual wife’ for the ceremony. The ceremony is finally complete when the Nga-ntsii-bi is satisfied that she has initiated the future Makoko with a thorough understanding of the Nkwembali and the guardianship of the Nkobi shrine. The completion of the ceremony is marked by his reappearance from seclusion, where he is publicly covered with a blanket (*nka*) (Fig. 101). This is the final act in the enthronement ritual, and means that he is now the new Makoko. The Makoko and the Nga-ntsii-bi complete a public dance, witnessed by the whole village who then celebrate. The Makoko is now no longer the man he was formerly, and he has begun the process of transformation. He can now act as a conduit for the Teke people between the material and the spiritual world and serve as their leader. He then travels to Mbe where he establishes himself in the court of the former Makoko. Historically, he would have founded his own settlement.



Fig. 101. Ngalifourou completes the investiture of Makoko Auguste Nguempio by covering him with the *nka* blanket ('La Reine Ngalifourou en pleine investiture de sa Majeste Auguste Nguempio'), 16th October 2004, Ngabe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Maurice Omvini (born c.1950).

In the public square of Mbe (*mbali infumu*) the Makoko's sacred wife, the Waafitieere, is charged with proclaiming (*bira liere*) the name of the new sovereign. She presents him to the *nkira*, to 'the forces of rivers, fountains and woods' (Obenga, 1969: 36). Material representations of these are contained in the Nkobi shrine located in the courtyard (Fig. 99). He is now the master of this Nkobi. While the selection of the new Makoko is ordained by the ancestors (*inkwii*) and follows established human channels as outlined above, the Makoko still has a long way to go before he is fully accepted by the forces of the spiritual realm. For this to happen, he must go through a second – and much more dangerous – process of initiation known as the *Ousson lisse*.

ii) *Ousson lisse*

Historically, in order to gain 'power without limits', the Makoko had to, at a moment of his choosing, submit to a second round of initiation known as the *Ousson lisse*. This was so dangerous that it was described as a 'sacrifice'. It was not obligatory for him to immediately

complete this initiation ceremony, but it was necessary if he wished to have the greatest spiritual authority possible and to be of ultimate service to his people. It is clear, for reasons described below, that Iloo I and his successor Iloo II (r.1892–1899), both passed through the *Ousson lisse*. Several Makoko who ruled in the twentieth century resisted the ceremony altogether because of the dangers presented by the ‘weights and pressures’ of supernatural powers, and the knowledge that if the Nkwembali rejected a Makoko’s right to rule, he would surely soon die (Opou, 2005: 28).²⁴

On the appointed day, the Makoko went into hiding and the first vassal, Ngalion, was sent with his assistant, Mwangaw, to hunt him down. When they did, they beat him violently – some accounts say that they even broke his limbs – and they carried him to a purpose-built structure placed in the forest near Ngabe known as the *nzo mfula*, where he had to remain for nine days.²⁵ The initial ‘trapping of the king’ was re-enacted and, once again, the twelve *ankouobi* performed specific roles. Ngandzio was in charge of building the *nzo mfula* enclosure. The vassal Ngampo was in charge of constructing the kitchen where meals would be prepared for the Makoko while he was in seclusion. The food was prepared by the Waafitieere who brought it to him daily. The cooking fire in this kitchen was placed between three anvils, which likens the process of preparing his food to the smith’s working of metal (Vansina, 1973: 379).

The Makoko was permitted to bring his own wife into the *Ousson lisse*, provided she was his ‘favourite’ and someone deemed worthy of the honour. It is likely she would have been the same woman captured alongside him at the beginning of the *Oushion ounko*; ‘trapping of the king’ ceremony. Along with the Makoko, she was transformed during the process into Ngassa, a role which gave her the right to wear the *onlua* and granted her equal authority to her husband in roles of politics and justice (see p.176). It is clear from photographs that Makoko Iloo I and Iloo II both entered the *lisse* with their wives, who consequently gained the right to wear the *onlua* and all it signifies. Indeed, the current Nga-ntsii-bi is a direct descendent of the Ngassa of

²⁴ Rumours recorded in Mbe in February 2017 stated that Makoko Wawa (r.1993–1998) was found out to be ‘a fetishist’ through this process and soon died as a result. Refusal to go through the *Ousson lisse* was the official reason for the dethroning of Makoko Ntaslou in 1963. After a number of years, it is obligatory to go through the *Ousson lisse*. Rumours at the Teke court described how this process was forced upon Makoko Wawa, who then subsequently died. The current Makoko has not passed through the *Ousson lisse*, according to interviews conducted in Ngabe in January. 2018.

²⁵ Who was responsible for what changes according to different accounts, and likely reflects the power struggles between various individuals of the day. Even between January 2017 and January 2018 there were variations in the accounts.

Makoko Iloo II, the celebrated Queen Ngalifourou (1864–1956), so the closely guarded knowledge of what truly occurred during this process goes in a direct hereditary line back to the reign of Iloo I.

Inside the *Ousson lisse*, the Makoko was required to sit on the royal seat, the *likuba*, at all times. One of his youngest sons was allowed to enter the enclosure and sit on the *likuba* when the Makoko needed, for example, to relieve himself. It was imperative, however, that this seat was occupied at all times.²⁶ During the process of seclusion the Makoko would be introduced to a number of sacred objects that served to legitimise him and educate him about his role. Here, the royal smith came to play his most significant function. It was he who both lit the royal fire at the moment the candidate went into ritual seclusion and forged the *onlua*, flywhisk, sceptre and other jewellery that became the Makoko's primary symbols of leadership. Each day the king was in seclusion, the royal smith was said to steep his iron tools in water, and he sprinkled this water over the king. He also lay a red blanket over the fire and directed the smoke towards the house to fumigate the king and his wife, strengthening them.



Fig. 102. Bracelet. 19th century, Mbe, Pool region, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 2012. Teke peoples, Tio group, copper alloy, 16.5 x 8.5 cm. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (70.2012.13.1). Ex- collection: Collected by Robert Lehuard in the vicinity of Brazzaville, 1920–30.

²⁶ This remains the case at the court today. If the Makoko stands up, a close male relative – currently Mariss Balekala Gampo – must sit in his place.

Each day that they were in the *lissee*, the king and his wife were presented with the content of the basket of royal charms, reminiscent of the tradition recorded among the eastern Kongo. During the first few days the most innocuous objects were shown to them, such as an upper arm bracelet (*ndzal ankori*), a bracelet for the wrist and a ring (*libia*), all of which were made out of a copper alloy. Each of these objects had been made by the royal blacksmith and inherited from the previous Makoko. In order to pass through the process, the Makoko was required to understand the importance of each object. This information was related to him by the blacksmith, working in communication with the spiritual realm.

A fine example of an upper arm bracelet, conserved at the MQB, was collected by Robert Lehuard in the vicinity of the Pool in the 1920s (Fig. 102). According to his son Raoul Lehuard, these bracelets were known as *wara* or *onlua andan*, and, as described above, were primary symbols of royal authority. According to an interview conducted by Lehuard with Makoko Gaston Ngouayoulou (r.1998–2004), the Makoko was said to have ‘rolled down the bracelet before beginning a trip. If the object [returned] to him, it [was] because the augurs [were] favourable’ (Lehuard, 1996: 163). According to Lehuard, each of the spirals contains ‘ideograms representing all the land’s *ntsii* (forests, plateau and streams) that were under the authority of the *onkoo* [Makoko]’. While these details have not been verified, this analysis supports the notion that such objects were intended to encode a lesson; one that might be revealed to the candidate during the initiation process. This example was said to have been the property of the ‘Makoko of Mbe’. While many works in metal are falsely attributed to the royal workshop, the quality of this example certainly suggests it was made by a highly skilled blacksmith, possibly the royal blacksmith himself.



Fig. 103. Bracelet. 1884, Mbe, Pool region, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1896. Royal Blacksmith Ngaambiôô, Teke peoples, Tio group, copper alloy, 12.2 x 9 x 10 cm, 225 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1896.28.11).

Ex- collection: commissioned by Jacques de Brazza in 1884 as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–85).

The Makoko and the Ngassa were said to fight against the spiritual forces imbued in these objects and could only wear them once the forces had been subdued to their will (Vansina, 1973: 380). The MOA collected a number of objects said to have been made by the royal blacksmith, including a collection of bracelets and rings. A particularly striking example is a bracelet with a centrepiece in the same oval-shape displayed on the royal collar. (Fig. 103). Likely commissioned by Jacques de Brazza when he commissioned the *onlua* collar, this shape has been interpreted as representing the house of ritual seclusion (*nzo mfula*) in which the *Ousson lisse* occurs. This shape has also been interpreted as representing the form of a canoe, and so celebratory of Teke spiritual authority and wealth gained through trade.

If the objects presented to the Makoko and his wife by the blacksmith did not kill them by the third day, it meant that the combined forces of the Nkwembali – both the royal ancestors (*inkwii*) and the nature spirits (*nkira*) who ‘hovered over’ the *Ousson lisse* during the process of initiation – had accepted him as ruler (Vansina, 1973: 381) Thus, on the sixth day, he received the *onlua* collar for which, it was alleged, he had to condemn to death 'by witchcraft' twelve of his kin (one for each point on the collar). On this same day he was exposed to the *ano* rings, which destroyed his virility. He was also given the *ka* hat with the iron hat pin that resembled a miniature anvil. On the eighth day – the day before he was allowed to exit the *nzo mfula* – he was made to eat human flesh. This was brought to him by the Nga-ntsii-bi and prepared for him by the Waafitieere, though it is unclear whose flesh was eaten. While the king ate, the Ngassa was not allowed to move, and the Makoko was forbidden to turn towards her. When he had eaten his fill, he said ‘wooloolooloo!’ The way in which he ate and the manner in which he said these

words showed to the Nga-ntsii-bi what kind of ruler he would be, and whether he would last in the office (Vansina, 1973: 381).²⁷

In Vansina's eyes, this act of cannibalism was the magical act that separated the Makoko from mortal men. The process transformed him at the most essential level.²⁸ In making the Makoko impotent, the initiation process likewise ensured that descent continued through the same established channels at the hands of specialists, and did not follow a biological line of succession. That cannibalism was a central part of the initiation process was known to the wider community, and is still acknowledged today. This initiation ceremony relates to other kinds of transformative initiation ceremonies in Equatorial Africa, in which the greatest taboos of society must be broken in order for a state of spiritual perfection to be achieved.

Incest – whether literal or metaphorical – was recorded as being a part of several Central African kingship rites of investiture and is also referenced in the myths of origin for many Central African dynasties.²⁹ Cannibalism and incest in Africa have long been a fascination of Western scholars and there is an extensive literature that allows us to better understand their function. Initiation can be understood in terms of transgression, following ideas set out by the French sociologist David Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) in the late nineteenth century. Having ‘transgressed a taboo’, the individual steps out of society and is no longer held by societal norms or rules.³⁰ Arnold van Gennep's *Les rites de passage* (1909) emphasised the extent to which initiation is a ritual death and rebirth. Through this lens we can see the Makoko dying as a man to be reborn as a religious leader. In this sense, the Makoko is bound closely to the blacksmith, whose creative act is likewise linked to giving birth (Maret, 1947: 178–79).³¹ The blacksmith is

²⁷ This is based on the account of the Ngansibi from 1963 recorded by Jan Vansina. The fact that it is public knowledge may be the origin of the persistent rumour of Teke cannibalism, such as that found in Pigafetta's *Relatione* of 1591. The precise details were confirmed with the son of the Nga-ntsii-bi in January 2018. This act of cannibalism is the reason why the current Makoko has not gone through this process.

²⁸ See, for example, Luc de Heusch, Luc. 'Essais sur le Symbolisme de l'inceste' (Brussels 1958); Luc de Heusch, *Le Pouvoir et le Sacré* (1962).

²⁹ See Makarius, Laura. 'Du Roi Magique au "roi Divin"' *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 25, no. 3 (1970): 668–98 for a list of cultures where incest is said to occur as part of kingship rituals.

³⁰ 'Whoever transgresses that law (of exogamy), he writes and places himself in the situation of a murderer. He has come into contact with blood, and the fearful qualities of blood have passed on to him. He has become a menace to himself as well as to others. He has transgressed a taboo' (Durkheim 1897: 50 cited in Makarius, Laura. 'The Magic of Transgression', *Anthropos* 69, no. 3/4 (1974): 537–52.

³¹ Pierre de Maret, as already noted by Baumann and Westermann (1947), considered it as one of the characteristics of their so-called matriarchal Central Bantu region. Furnaces were ornamented with breasts and considered as a parturient woman. This practice was reported among the Luba, Ruund, Chokwe, Luchazi, Rotse, Shona, and Karanga in Rwanda. As shown by de Heusch (1982: 382–586), pregnancy was generally assimilated with cooking. Eugenia W. Herbert, *Iron, Gender, and Power: Rituals of Transformation in African Societies* (Bloomington IN:

also the carver of figurative sculptures – he carves men in wood, and also makes the Makoko is his living masterpiece.

It is not insignificant that neighbouring Kongo polities configured their leaders in comparable ways. According to Wyatt MacGaffey, the Manikongo (King of Kongo) was understood to be the most important *nkisi* in his domain. As such, he was ‘directly linked with the forces affecting his prosperity’. Like the Makoko he controlled the weather, and his titles included *Nzambi a Mpungu*, meaning ‘superior to all other *nzambi* [spirits]’ (MacGaffey, 1986:196). A Kongo priest *nganga* (pl. *banganga*) likewise carried out his duties with the assistance of his wife who had been consecrated with him during the same process of initiation, similar to how the Makoko and his wife were initiated together.

Historically, in the Kingdom of Loango, the Maloango (King of Loango) was considered to be the supreme *nganga* of the kingdom and had to go through an elaborate initiation ritual. In order to become the Maloango, he had to be recognised as the *nganga mvumbi*, the ‘Keeper of the Spirits’. Titles such as *ntotela* (‘Supreme Ruler’) and *ntinu* (‘Supreme Judge’) further explicated how his role was imagined. As with the Makoko, the process of investiture lasted over several years, resulting in a gradual accumulation of esoteric knowledge. The *nganga mvumbi* was treated as the presumptive heir and provisional ruler – although with circumscribed powers – and had to wait seven years to confirm his suitability before his actual investiture by the paramount *bunsi* (priest) (Martin, in LaGamma, 2015: 267). Interpreted at a regional level, it is clear that the way in which a leader was perceived in the Kingdoms of Loango, Kongo and Teke reflects a worldview where the spiritual realm, through the tools of culture, can be given a material form. Through ceremonial action a human being can be transformed into a vessel for these powerful forces on earth.

Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 32–39, 132–33; Wyatt MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa: the Bakongo of Lower Zaire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 178–79.

Perfecting mankind

In Teke culture, the creation of objects and the creation of man is understood to reflect the desire to manufacture something that is perfect or whole (*mutšina*). The creation of a whole or perfect aesthetic that was demonstratively ‘Teke’ was important to a culture spread across such a vast geographic region, built on a foundation of trade and exchange in natural resources. The tradition of Teke cicatrization and elaborate hairstyling is understood in these terms; perfecting the raw human body until, ultimately, it is a 'Teke body', a product of Teke culture.

Rituals of transformation were not for the king alone but were part of a wider expression of Teke cultural identity. Individuals with specialised skills were also called upon to transform all bodies of value from their raw or ‘natural’ state into one perfected by the tools of culture. One of the most distinctive ways in which this was done was through the addition of cicatrization marks. Lopes recorded, as early as the 1580s, that one of the customs of the Teke [Anzique] was ‘for every child, both male and female, to be marked on the face with various devices cut with a knife, nobles and common people bearing the same marks’ (Lopes, 1881: 28). European travellers of the 1880s onwards recorded the tradition obsessively in their accounts. They were struck, above all, by these marks and the elaborate hairstyles of the Teke. Even for a European visitor who could not speak any of the Teke languages, it was instantly possible to tell a Teke individual apart by visual appearance alone.

An important function of these bodily transformations was the visual expression of cultural identity. A Teke trader could always be distinguished as Teke regardless of how far he travelled. On approaching Congo Pool for the first time in 1880, from the capital of the Kingdom of Kongo, San Salvador (Mbanza Kongo), the missionary William Holman Bentley recorded:

One of the Zombo traders we had met in a town a little beyond Manyanga came up to us. The Teke tribal mark showed that he had been born in these parts, and perhaps sold as a slave. He could speak Teke and Kongo languages. He had with him some Kongo speaking men. We remembered having seen each other before. He was passing through San Salvador with a trading party. (Bentley, 1900: I 344)

The distinctive cicatrization marks on his face, even though he had travelled widely in the region and spoke several languages, immediately situated him culturally and geographically, and this facilitated his role as a trader.

H. H. Johnston noted that these marks were 'principally tribal in character. Thus, the Bateke [were] always distinguished by five or six striated lines across the cheek-bone' (Johnston, 1884: 286). This style of cicatrization marks: designs of long parallel lines running from the temples to the chin, were the prerogative of the Teke Tio of the plateau, and historically of the Teke Fumu. In Mbe in 2017, older citizens still bore these distinctive marks on their faces. Historically, striated lines served to distinguish the Teke of the capital from the Teke of other regions, such as northern Bateke who were known as the 'unscratched Teke' because they did not bear these marks (Sautter, 1960: 11). Images taken by Hottot at the marketplace show the degree to which cicatrization marks were part of the visual landscape, and a useful tool in places where individuals from across the vast Teke region came together to exchange goods (Fig.103). Bentley made similar distinctions. The Teke Lali in the vicinity of Congo Pool had 'for their tribal mark a series of curved cicatrices, at an even distance apart, from the top of the head to the lower jaw-bone' (Bentley, 1900: I 458). These varied from individual to individual: 'some are narrow, many are cleverly cut, others are coarse and few, but all are cut.' The wife of chief Ngoma had 'an elaborate neat tattoo of a lace-like pattern' over her shoulders (Bentley, 1900: II 151).

Brazza likewise used them as an identification tool, and in his journals he made several references to them. When he met Makoko Iloo I, his opening description made reference to them: 'he is quite tall, and wears the tattoo marks of the Bateke [Teke Tio] and Aboma [Teke peoples of this area]' (Brunschwig, 1965: 22). He noted elsewhere: 'the tatouage of the [Aboma] are straight lines on the temples, the forehead on the nose' (Brunschwig, 1965: 31). These marks were identifiers not just for Brazza, but for the people he met. He noted that the Abanho men that he was with recognised the marks of a trader called Calixte, and said that he was a man from the 'country of the Ngombe Rapids upriver' (Brunschwig, 1965: 37). The Teke Fumu of the Pool, it appears, had similar marks to those in Mbe. Hottot noted that for the Teke Fumu the scars varied in number and were from 1 to 4 mm wide:

They are more or less parallel and run from the upper part of the temples, or even from the scalp, down the sides of the face. The forehead, nose, and chin are left unscarred, but on special occasions these areas are covered with pigment. (Hottot, 1956: 25)



Fig. 104. Profile of a Teke Fumu woman near Gambali, showing cicatrization marks ('BAS-Congo – Batéké woman near the village of Gambali'). 22 March 1908, Plateau Region, Republic of the Congo. A. Robert Hottot (French, 1884–1939), stereo glass, 107 x 44 mm. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1994.62.19).

Beyond a cultural identifier, cicatrization was also associated with the elite – it was expensive, and its completion meant that the body was worthy of the undertaking (Opou, 2005: 57). The operation was performed on the body of young men and women as part of a process of initiation from childhood to adulthood. Hottot noted that scarification took place at about four or five years of age. He photographed the cicatrization marks of a young Teke Fumu woman on 22 March 1908, near the village of Gambali (Fig. 104). He recorded that she wore the hairstyle of someone who was unmarried, suggesting that cicatrization occurred during the period of maturation. J. de Brazza met three 'young boys' on Congo Pool in 1883, one of whom had a 'recent tattoo on his shoulder' which was not yet fully healed (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1889: 366). This indicates to us that the process was gradual, and the marks were added over time. The

process itself was important but likely also a necessity, as a body needs time to heal and form a visible scar, achieved through cutting and re-cutting the flesh.³²

Cicatrization and transformation

We can gain some sense of the intention of cicatrization by analysing the tools and specialists involved. The Teke Fumu word used for these marks literally means incision (*bina*, pl. *ma, mabina*). The word was defined by Calloc'h as a 'razor', and more specifically as a 'lancet' (Calloc'h, 1911: 241). It thus denotes both the cut itself and the tool used in performing the operation. The lancet is a tool that has a specific use both in surgery and in metallurgy; in the English language it is defined as an 'iron bar used for tapping a melting furnace' and also as a 'surgical instrument of various forms usually with two edges and a point like a lance, used for bleeding, opening abscesses, etc'.³³ Given that Calloc'h also referred to *bina* as a razor, perhaps he used 'lancet' here to evoke these other meanings involving surgery and blacksmithing. The confluence of ideas relating to healing and metallurgy seems more than mere chance. Iron, a valuable trade commodity, was transformed from its raw state into a sharp-edged tool for which the Teke were regionally renowned. This tool was then used to cut lines into the skin of a person that henceforth defined the individual as culturally 'Teke'.

Hottot noted that for the Teke Fumu: 'the word *mabina* seems to belong to a special language, i.e. that of ritual or of a secret society, since the Teke apply it only to themselves, whereas any other tribal mark, applying to non-Teke people, is called *nsere*' (Hottot, 1956: 30). The very term used for these marks, *mabina*, then, evokes a ceremony of initiation into adulthood. A child (*mwn-na*) went through changes in status, reflected in the different names given to it as it grew up.³⁴ A child existed somewhere between the worlds of the living and the dead, in a 'raw' or 'natural' state. and only achieved 'real birth' through the addition of the *mabina* marks:

³² For Kongo neighbours of the Teke, cicatrization plays a similar role and is a major decorative feature in several art traditions. See, for example, the use of cicatrization on the figurative sculptures of the Yombe peoples in Alisa LaGamma's *Kongo: Power and Majesty*, p. 202.

³³ 'lancet, n.'. OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/105422?redirectedFrom=lancet> (accessed 22 September 2017).

³⁴ These names were included in Calloc'h's 1911 dictionary, suggesting the process was well recognised. A new-born child was called an *I-le* (pl. *bi*). Until the age of five, a young boy was known as *nga-libagi*.

[Cicatrization marks] entitle him to a status in society and his group name is changed. A boy between the ages of 5 and 10 will then be known as *mu-ke mu-ke*.³⁵ At around the age of twelve he is known as *mu-bwia*, or *mwa-na balaga*. By this stage his transformation, through the addition of *mabina* should be complete and he is able to participate in and with his tribal group. (Hottot, 1956: 30)

For a girl, the addition of *mabina* also signified maturation and indicated that she might now be considered ready to marry.

A myth of origin, recorded by Raoul Lehuard among the Teke Tsaayi of the Komono region, sheds further light on this practice. Once again, the blacksmith plays an important role. The hero figure Mubie, who is described as a ‘young hunter, and occasional warrior’, left the savannah region of the Teke Tio ‘in search of game and fertile lands, where the people of the village could live better’. After several days of wandering, tired and worn out, he realised that he was lost. ‘He was also [by then] covered with wounds caused by the *bankhime* [the *nkhime* being a climbing plant whose leaves possess sharp darts like razors and which mark the surface of the skin with superficial but painful cuts that take a long time to close].’ When Mubie eventually returned, having located new sources of game, the men and women of his village ‘both in order to satisfy the hero who had just found a new one for them, and to strengthen their identity, wanted their faces to bear the same marks called *mbandjuala* [among the Teke Tsaayi]’ (Lehuard, 1996: 55). The man who proved to be the most gifted to complete this task was, of course, the blacksmith, for he had the necessary tools. The blacksmith would go on to transmit his knowledge to his assistants who subsequently handed them down to the next generation.

Another version of the myth describes how:

Mubie, hero and hunter of leopards, had his face marked by the blacksmith of the village with fine and multiple markings: like the whiskers of the animal inhabited by a spirit of nature [*nkira*] and who communicated to Mubie the strength to beat his enemies. Since

³⁵ There is some discrepancy between Hottot’s and Calloc’h’s terms here. For Hottot, *nga-libagi* is the name for the child after the process of cicatrization and for Calloc’h it is the name for the child before. Calloc’h’s definition has been inserted into Hottot’s conceptualisation.

then, the leopard is considered to possess the spirit of Mubie so that each of the elements (fangs, claws, skin, etc.) is part of royal regalia. (Lehuard, 1996: 55)

The role of the blacksmith as a creative force and the leopard as a power symbol are conflated here in the description of the cicatrization marks, which are said to represent leopard whiskers. By carving these marks onto Mubie's face he is metaphorically associated with the leopard.³⁶ *Mabina* are thus part of a wider practice of perfecting and protecting the body.

Hairstyles and palm oil

Cicatrization did not occur in isolation, but was part of a wider transformation of the human body into a cultural object. The Duke of Uzès, like other Europeans of the time, was fascinated by the elaborate hairstyles of Teke men and women, and noted that they formed 'with their hair and even their scalp from an early age a kind of circular rim around the head, shaped like a very round crown'. This style of hairdressing was well documented in the nineteenth century among the Teke Fumu and Teke Tio, and has been employed as a means of understanding which Teke peoples were responsible for creating different styles of figurative sculpture.³⁷ In a ghostly photograph of the court at Mbe, taken by Jacques de Brazza in 1884, these hairstyles are visible. Notice also the shining *onlua* of the Makoko and the skin of his courtiers glistening with palm oil (Fig. 105–106).

³⁶ This story also relates to Guiral's descriptions of hunting practices. When a group of hunters managed to kill an animal, it was butchered on the spot. The man who discovered the game, or who put the hunters on the trail, would be awarded the teeth or skin of the animal if symbolically significant, or the horns in the case of an antelope (Guiral, 1889: 154). 'One removes from any dead animal the teeth, claws and skin, and the person who wears these objects have nothing to fear (according to the Batékés) from living animals of the same species' (Guiral, 1889: 178).

³⁷ Raoul Lehuard employed the different hairstyles depicted on Teke figures as a means of attributing works to the art traditions of neighbouring peoples in the vicinity of Congo Pool.



Figs. 105 & 106. Pierre Savorgnan of Brazza handing over the treaty with France to King Makoko ("Pietro Savorgnan di Brazzà consegna a re Makoko il trattato con la Francia"). Vicinity of Mbe, 1884. Jacques de Brazza (1859–1888), 160 x 115 mm (excluding mount). Archivio Storico Capitolino, Archivio Savorgnan di Brazzà, Rome, 017; 019.

Near the historic capital of Mbe in N'ganchou, Uzès recorded another type of hairstyle: 'They are still Batékés with more or less extraordinary hairstyles. I have noticed one whose head was shaved, except in the vicinity of the centre line where his hair was a tuft similar in all respects to the fire helmet of the Restoration' (de Crussol Uzès: 1894, 104). An illustration of these hairstyles was included in his account (Fig. 107). For travellers to the region such as the Duke of Uzès, the combination of rich cloth, brass jewellery, elaborate and distinctive hairstyles and cicatrization marks made it clear that they were no longer in Kongo controlled territory and that the Teke were charge of the markets and trade routes to the Pool.

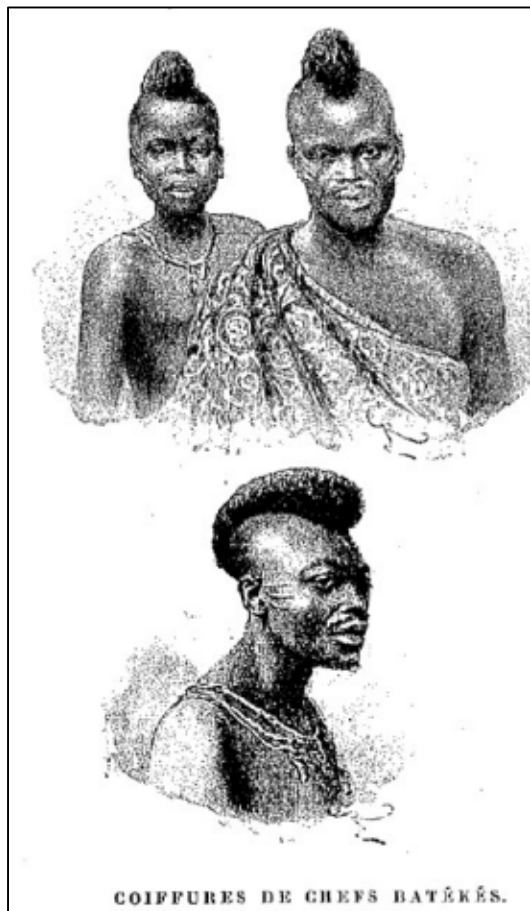


Fig. 107. Hairstyles of Teke chiefs ('Coiffures de Chefs Batekes'). Drawing by Édouard Riou (1833–1900), from Jacques Uzès, *Le voyage de mon fils au Congo* (1894), 90.

The skin of the body was also covered in a number of different materials including palm oil, camwood (*tula*) and white clay (*phemba*). Brazza recorded that the Teke of the plateau covered their bodies in palm oil, often mixed with *tula* (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1887: 301). Guiral

suggested that this was done to beautify and protect the body against sun and insects, and hypothesised that this tradition may have developed because of the scarcity of water in the plateau region.³⁸ The oil and *tula* furthermore coloured the raffia cloth, jewellery and other items of bodily adornment in a layer of oily red. Raffia cloth thus took on colour the more it was worn and may eventually have become black with use. The trader Elso Dusseljé described this, around 1910 and among the Teke Tege: '[the] colour of the loincloth is of a dirty black of palm oil, of the red paint of which they rub the body on certain occasions, of smoke, [etc.]' (Dusseljé, 1910: 38). In this sense, the raffia cloth worn by an individual was intimately interwoven with the life and death of its wearer.

Palm oil was, in a sense, the material that brought all the disparate elements of dress together. It is clear from several accounts that palm oil glistening on the body was a major visual feature of the Teke court. Guiral was struck each time he visited the court of the Makoko by the women of the court who had 'brought to their toilet the greatest care'. He noted that their 'arms and their legs shone with bracelets of copper' and that they had 'spread the freshest palm-oil on their bodies'. The sheen of oil on the skin complemented the gold and red coloured copper alloy metal in his description (Guiral, 1889: 291). Palm oil – also a product of the raffia palm along with raffia cloth – suggests a form of material cohesion or unity on the body.

Tula would also have been used extensively on the skin during this period. *Tula* is a bright red pigment composed of the ground heartwood fibre of one or more redwoods indigenous to Central Africa (LaGamma, 2015: 48, 165, 173, 294).³⁹ Historically it was used and traded throughout Central Africa, from the Kuba peoples of the DRC to the Kongo peoples of the Loango Coast. When mixed with palm oil it was used for skin care, bodily adornment and dyes. Its use was recorded in Lopes' notes in the 1580s, where it is described as *tavilla*: 'the natives [mix] the powder with palm oil, and [anoint] the entire body to preserve themselves in health' (Pigafetta, 1881: 112).

³⁸ Indeed, in the wider Congo region palm oil was rubbed on the body, but often this was only done in ceremonial situations. In the region between the Lulua and the Kasai, for example, palm oil was ritually applied to the bodies of male initiates by the ritual specialist (Johnston, 1884: 667). According to Grenfell, the Babangi people, when in mourning, rubbed soot from their cooking pots into their skin, mixed into an adhesive paste with palm oil. On the Loango coast female initiates rubbed the oil into their bodies during initiation rites.

³⁹ According to Ellen G. Howe this wood was most likely '*Pterocarpus soyauxii* Taub. (commercially known as African padauk), or *Pterocarpus tinctorius* Welw. The trees, as well as the powder obtained from them, are most often called *tukula*. Another reported redwood pigment source is *Baphia nitida* Afzel. ex Lodd., also known as camwood' (LaGamma, 2015: 261).



Fig. 108. Woman Making Tula. 1906–07, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Manuel Gomez (1883–1912). Published in Frederick Starr (1912), Plate VIII.

In several Central African cultures, the use of *tula* is strongly associated with the female body. Among the Kongo peoples it was worn by women during initiation rites and was associated with power, fusion or mediation. Among the Teke Tsaayi, *tula* continues to be used extensively in the female therapeutic tradition known as *Mukissi* or *Nkita*. A *Nkita* initiate will wear *tula* on her body and it forms an important element in *Nkita* bundles that are kept within the house of initiation. We can see a clear link between this substance's application on the physical body and its deployment as a medicine for healing purposes.

In 1906, Frederick Starr recorded the making of *tula* by Teke women of the Pool (Fig. 108). He noted that, in this image, the woman kneels on a mat to grind the redwood into powder. This position was customary for such labour. Once crushed and mixed with oil, it was sold in the 'form of cakes, shaped by a small basket or a wooden mould' and then 'heavily smeared over the body' (Starr, 1912: 15). Starr also recorded that 'manufacturing the [*tula*] *ngula*...[occupied] such a large place' in the daily life of women and in itself required the manufacturing of '[a] fairly large sum of [ceramic] containers' (Coart and de Hauleville, 1907: 3–30). It appears that,

along with pottery, the production of *tula* was considered women's labour.⁴⁰ H. H. Johnston described *tula* as 'used to a great extent for colouring their nails, and often their bodies and clothes, with a warm tinge of red' (Johnston, 1884: 211).

The bodies of sacred objects were covered with the same materials and were, in effect, treated like human bodies. Hottot noted that *tula* was used in preparing figurative containers to receive their *bonga*, their empowering matter that gave them their force. The *nga* would first anoint the carved wood with *tula* and a white chalk, *mpieme*. By dressing the carved figure as if it were human through the use of these materials, the statue was instantly bound with the living human body.⁴¹ This chapter now turns to an in-depth analysis of the empowerment of such containers as a means of giving spiritual forces a material form.

⁴⁰ At the market in Brazzaville in January 2018, two types of *tula* could be purchased; a version made from clay, and the more expensive version made from wood.

⁴¹ The Teke smith was likewise recorded using a mixture of palm oil and crushed coal on the heads of knives to bring out the brilliance of the cutting edge, and to hide any defects in the workpiece (Guiral, 1889: 168).

The Container

Of all the French travellers connected with Brazza's expeditions of the 1880s who spent time at the Makoko's court, it was Guiral who was most determined to understand Teke 'fetishes', which today we would term 'power' or 'accumulative' sculptures.⁴² His archive contains extensive references to them, and close analysis of both his published and unpublished accounts allows us to gain a better understanding of what these authors meant when using the term 'fetish' at this time. Guiral noted that fetishes were employed by the Teke peoples to negotiate 'the solemn circumstances of life: at the time of circumcision and marriage, [and] at the time of departure for an important expedition' (Guiral, 1889: 177). Fetishes were tools that could be used to bring about rain and to make sure that natural events worked in a supplicant's favour. They were used to protect the human body at dangerous moments when travelling and hunting, or to guard a newborn child from the effects of an attack in the spiritual realm by figures glossed in European understanding as 'witches'. From Guiral's accounts, it is possible to conclude that fetishes were meant to secure the health of an individual and were also used at the broadest level by society to maintain law and order, as displayed by the notion of the Makoko as a fetish object (Guiral, 1889: 169–70, 176–78).



Fig. 109. Power Object ('Fetish bundle') 1905–1906, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, acquired 1910. Teke peoples, horn, feather, cord, pigment, 27.1 x 9 cm. The American Museum of Natural History. Ex-collection: Frederick Starr, 1906.

⁴² There is an extensive literature relating to the word 'fetish'. For a point of introduction see, Willaim Pietz, 'The problem of the fetish, I.' *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9, no. 1 (1985): 5–17. See also Wyatt MacGaffey, 'African objects and the idea of fetish.' *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 25, no. 1 (1994): 123–31 for a continuation of this discussion in a Kongo context.

Guiral noted that every person was likely to have several ‘domestic fetishes’ to protect their own person and that of their immediate family. The most popular kind was an antelope horn filled with magical substances, including feathers and animal skin known collectively as *bonga* (*bilongo* in Kikongo). Frederick Starr collected a number of such domestic fetishes in 1905–06, including a horn filled with sacred matter and feathers that relates to Guiral’s description (Fig. 109). According to Starr’s field notes, it was used as a ‘rain destroyer’. He acquired it from a Teke man who used it when he wanted fair weather: ‘if rain threatens he makes passes with it toward the clouds repeating formulas and the sky clears and he makes his journey happily’ (AMNH Starr Catalog No: 90.0/ 6419 Field No: 209). This corresponds with Guiral’s description of such an object being used: ‘to keep away the rain, the Teke shake aloft their antelope horns, and spit in the direction of threatening clouds’ (Guiral, 1889: 183).⁴³

Guiral, and later Starr, recorded that fetishes were also made by consecrating baskets or ceramic vessels with charged materials. Frederick Starr again collected several examples of such ‘bundles’, which he described as being used for divinatory purposes. In his field notes from December 1905 he described how one of the men who was selling him fetishes demonstrated how they were used:

[He] had a piece of [...] seed pod which he used as a rattle and a horn of a goat filled with fetish material and suspended by a cord. Squatting down on the ground he first breathed smoke over his fetich [*sic*] horn. Then he repeated his formula, holding the horn pendant before him and rattling the rattle. The fetich to be tested was on the ground before him. At first the horn hung motionless but presently began to swing. As it began to move he apparently asked it questions. According to its movements he rendered his verdict. (AMNH Starr Field Notes: 124–25)

⁴³ Guiral also took delight in watching such objects fail to work. He noted, with regard to the antelope horn fetish, that ‘If no rain comes, they run to the town boasting of their success; but if a few drops of water come down, they cease to shake their talisman, under the pretext that they have tired arms, and thus give the storm permission to come’. In another example he described how: ‘[At] about five o’clock, a violent storm approaching us; the head of my Batékés a beautiful wave his antelope horn, which is, according to him, a great fetish to ward off the rain, it happens anyway, and we’re all soaked’ (Guiral, 1889: 183).

Music, words and ceremonial action come together to activate the empowered horn. Along with ‘bundles’, such fetishes might also have taken the shape of human figures carved in wood. Shrines housing groups of such objects belonged to – and were intended for the benefit of – the entire community. The chief of a village would be the guardian of such shrines. Guiral noted that age and wealth were important factors in determining the power of a chief, but it was spiritual authority that the Teke recognised as the ultimate force. This authority was gained – or rather, displayed – through the guardianship of the community’s fetish figures, and so spiritual authority became a form of prestige (Guiral, 1889: 178).

Guiral described how a chief’s fetishes were housed in groups in a designated location; either within the chief’s hut itself or in a separate dedicated structure. On one occasion, Guiral described how, while smoking his pipe near the ‘fetish sanctuary’ belonging to Chief Ntchoulou, he was warned that the fetish would be made sick if it smelled smoke:

I put away my pipe ruefully and began to examine the interesting deity. About a metre in height, it was carved from roughly hewn wood and wore the loincloth of the Batéké; the face was tattooed; glass simulated the eyes; a hole marked ears and a horizontal opening the mouth; legs were massive and straight. Finally, one could see, despite the long folds of the loincloth, the idol of Ntchoulou belonged to the male gender. Around this fetish, secondary deities were grouped, about ten in number. All were made of wood; and some were carved with such care and taste to make the great fetish jealous. Ntchoulou sitting in the middle of his hut on a leopard skin, seemed impressed with the importance of his role. (Guiral, 1889: 254)

It is clear from this description that the sculpted figure represented a Teke personage of considerable importance. Dressed as a chief and wearing the accoutrements of leadership, the figure was presented in an intentional way within the structure, grouped with other figurative sculptures. Guiral presented Ntchoulou as the guardian of this collection of empowered objects, charged with maintaining the shrine and making sure that it was respectfully guarded from outside influence – no smoking allowed! The figure was granted a personality and was consulted

as if the power of an ancestor had been given material form through its construction and consecration.⁴⁴

Such collections of carved figures intended for the good of the whole village would have been common throughout the region and were indeed the necessary attributes of a powerful Teke chief. A chief was the ruler of the community, but only by the grace of the Nkwembali who granted him the right to rule. This tradition continued through the early twentieth century. Hottot recorded that in 1906, among the Teke Fumu, collections of such figures were maintained in the huts of chiefs in an area known as the *nzo a backwe*. This was usually located in the corner of the hut, separated from the rest of the room by a board running diagonally across the floor from wall to wall, marking off a triangular area. Figures would be positioned behind this bar and were made to stand in the soft earth – not on mats – quite near the hearth, along with a number of coiled baskets which also contained consecrated material (Hottot, 1956: 33). It was just such a sanctuary that Hottot desecrated in his pursuit of ethnographic knowledge (see p.21.)

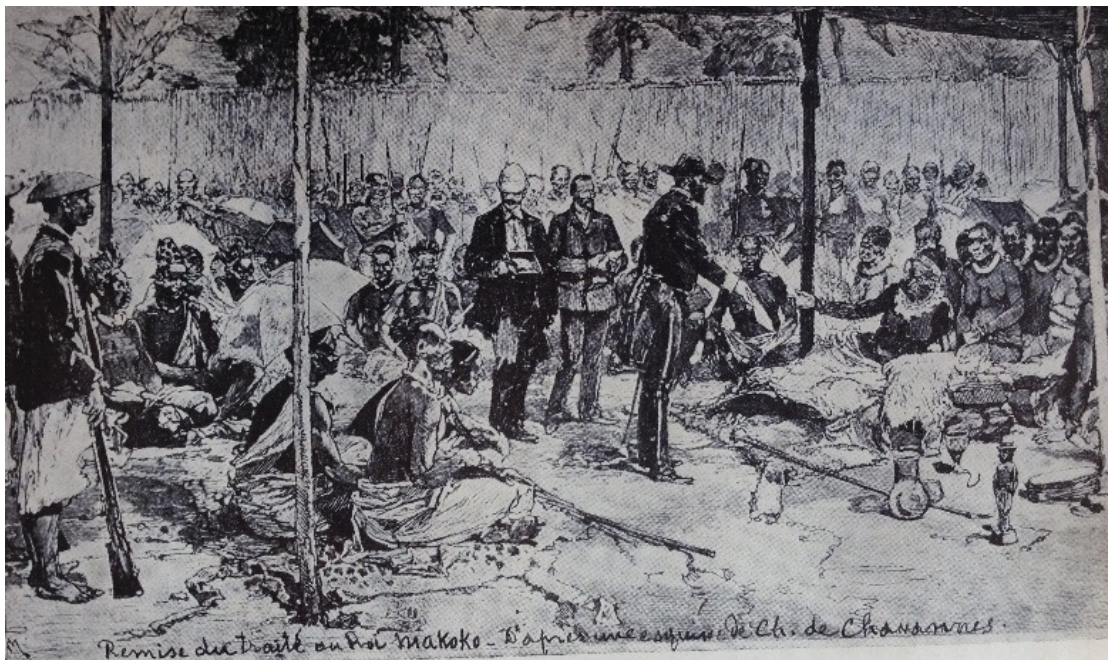


Fig. 110. *Delivery of the Treaty to Makoko Iloo I* ('Remise du Traite au Roi Makoko'). After a sketch by Charles de Chavannes (1853–1940). Painting by Édouard Riou (1833–1900).

⁴⁴ The idea of such objects being granted personhood is also found in Kongo religious practices. See, for example, Wyatt MacGaffey, 'The Personhood of Ritual Objects: Kongo "Minkisi"'. *Etnofoor* 1 (1990): 45–61. Community *mankishi* among the Songye peoples were often named and also believed to have personhood. See Dunja Hersak, 'Reviewing power, process, and statement: the case of Songye figures'. *African arts* 43, no. 2 (2010): 38–51.

The Makoko himself maintained such a sanctuary within the royal complex. His quarters were divided into a public and private sphere. The public reception room, where guests such as Brazza and Guiral would have been received, housed a number of fetish figures. Guiral noted that when he met with the Makoko Iloo I and the Ngassa, there stood ‘in front of the royal couple, a wooden Batéké fetish’ (Guiral, 1889: 289). A sketch of the public rooms of the Makoko by Charles de Chavannes included a depiction of such carved figures along with a collection of European trade goods (Fig. 110). A statuette in the form of a standing figure wearing a hat is positioned to the right.⁴⁵ Carved figurative sculptures formed part of the public display, both at the court of the Makoko in 2017 and at the court of the Nga-ntsii-bi in 2018 (Fig. 18).

The Makoko also had a private hut where he slept each night which no one else could enter without permission. This hut also served as the sanctuary of ‘the great Batéké fetish’, said to be an omnipotent force (Guiral, 1889: 289). This private space contained and protected both his own physical person at its most vulnerable state, while sleeping, alongside such collections of power objects. Considered especially open or receptive to the spiritual realm, this container was fiercely guarded through the invocation of powerful ancestral forces by religious practitioners on behalf of the Makoko. In his journals, Brazza described a ceremony he witnessed at dusk:

[T]he men of the Makoko go into his hut and then they beat the iron bell and then they sound the fetish horn of the chief and then they whistle with the antelope horn that is beside the fetish that is always at the door of the chief’s hut. Then the chief rattles the wooden bells on which he always first spits kola nuts and a sip of wine palm, calling the ancestors to come to warm their bodies overnight in the fire of his hut. (Savorgnan de Brazza, 1972: 27.)

Materials (kola, palm wine) and containers (sculpted in wood, antelope horns packed with material) are used with music (iron bells, wooden bells, whistles) and ritual action (spitting) to call in the protection of ancestral forces during the night when the Makoko is most vulnerable to spiritual predation. It is clear from this brief description that many elements and materials must

⁴⁵ We can be fairly certain that these figures were present. However, we are less secure of the accuracy of this depiction drawn up from a sketch of Chavannes by the celebrated illustrator Édouard Riou (1833–1900), who had never been to Africa and whose style has been described as ‘romantic realism’ (Marucci, 1956: 18).

be brought together for such a ceremony to come to pass and for spiritual forces to take material form.

Whether by force or by persuasion, Guiral gained access to this private chamber. Expecting to find ‘the famous Batéké fetish’ a ‘more voluminous and more horrible idol’ than any he had so far seen, he wrote of his ‘real disappointment’ when the Makoko showed him instead ‘animal skins, gourds, and wooden statuettes, similar in all respects to what [he] had seen from most leaders’ (Guiral, 1889: 295). What Guiral failed to notice is that it was the Makoko himself who was the greatest fetish of the Teke, with these public and private groupings of empowered objects only supplementary to his own force. Precisely in the same way that the carved statues in his control were a product of specialist labour and ceremonial action, so he too was a creation specifically intended for the health and prosperity of the greater community.



Fig. 111. Journal entry for 26 September 1880. Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza (1852–1905). (16 PA II/5 ANOM). Photograph by the author, May 2016.

According to several nineteenth-century accounts, figurative containers (variously described as ‘idols’ and ‘fetishes’) were a ubiquitous part of political discussion and decision making among Teke chiefs of the plateau. Brazza sketched one of these figures in the margin of

his September 1880 journal (Fig. 110). An example collected during the MOA – one of the earliest Teke figurative containers recorded – depicts a male and female figure standing back to back; the double head conjoined by a single coiffure that culminates in a point (Fig. 112). The scale of the work suggests that it was intended to be portable. The short round neck extends out into narrow shoulders and arms that hang straight down, and these are folded over the stomach in a style characteristic of such containers. The thick legs, bent slightly, have rounded knees that terminate in small feet.



Fig. 112. Four views of a standing Janus-form figure. 19th century, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1896. Teke or Kamba peoples, wood, resin, earth, cotton, glass, organic materials, 27 x 10 x 5.5 cm. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1896.51.1) Ex-collection: Collected by a member of the Mission de l'Ouest africain (1883–85).

A belt, strapped around the waist, is made from two different pieces of cloth; a rough red cotton serge of European manufacture and an indigenously woven cloth made from raffia fibre. The faces of the figures are almost identical and have close parallel cicatrisation marks (*mabina*)

that run down the temples and to the jaw line. The profiles of the faces meld into the overall mass of the head. The almond-shaped eyes are filled with a white material – likely *mpieme* kaolin – and the ears are filled with a greyish substance that is thought to be layers of palm oil, built up over years of application (Dupré, 1996: 136). On the male side, the chin ends in a small pointed beard. On the female side, a piece of quartz and a piece of glass have been worked into the surface. Such layers on the surface of the wood were applied to the work over time during ceremonies of invocation. These layers include traces of red pigment – probably *tula*, which is especially visible in the hollow space between the arms – white kaolin and a black material that is likely derived from the accumulated layers of palm oil and dirt.

Edouard Ponel, a French officer who was a member of the MOA and later served in the Ubangi River basin, was present in the plateau region in 1885. He recorded that the use of such sculptures was commonplace when Teke chiefs debated important matters, and their invocation was often linked with drinking rituals where kola and palm wine would be spat onto the figure. Ponel described how, before the Teke chief spoke, ‘he [took] an ebony fetish, [placed] it between his knees and [sprinkled] it with palm wine’. Throughout ‘the palaver’ the chief would continue to tap the figure and pour wine on it to encourage the ancestor it represented to play an active role in the decision-making process. Ponel recorded that the chief’s fetish during this particular meeting had ‘two faces like Janus’, so it is likely that it resembled the double-headed figure collected by the MOA in the same region. In fact, it is quite possible that the sculpture described is the one collected (Dupré, 1996: 136). The double head, as was common in Central Africa, was utilised to suggest that the figure could ‘see’ both in this world and in the world of the ancestors.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ An example of a double headed container is seen in the canine Kongo *Kozo* Nkisi (LaGamma, 2015: 233).

A case study in the use of figurative containers: Teke Fumu in 1906

While Brazza and his contemporaries recorded the use of such figurative sculpture in political discussions, Hottot's work provides us with uniquely detailed information about the process that created the larger-scale sculpted wooden containers of the Teke Fumu and Sise peoples in the Bula N'Tangou region, north of Brazzaville, that were intended to be part of a shrine complex as outlined above. Hottot collected a number of these figurative containers from several villages in the same neighbourhood, all of which are currently housed at the British Museum (BM). The figures he collected were in various stages of empowerment, allowing us to gain a better sense of the process of transformation. The most celebrated example was collected in the village of Luoko on 26 September 1906, according to his unpublished diary. In this journal, Hottot recorded how his travel companion A. Marion 'brought out of the chief's house an amazing fetish, squatting, the [pose] tense and wonderful' (Hottot, 1906: 105). The sculpture belonged to the chief of the village, named Mipako, and was housed in his hut along with a number of other works.

This work is now considered one of the masterpieces of Teke sculpture and shows the level to which these figures could be elaborate and sophisticated structures while continuing to serve their intended function as containers (Fig. 115). The sculptor presented the male figure seated on the ground with his hands resting on his raised knees. While the body is angled slightly forward into a crouching position, the long thick neck is vertical, culminating in an oversized head surmounted by an impressive coiffure of a style documented amongst the Teke Fumu elite. The rounded face is decorated with parallel lines that represent cicatrisation marks and the eyes are augmented with white porcelain buttons of European manufacture. The figure has a striking wedge-shaped beard. The beard, hair and sections of the coiffure have been burnt to create a contrast in colour between these areas and the light colour of wood.⁴⁷

Hottot noted that he was indebted to the owner of this work, Mipako, for much of the information he received (Fig. 113). He described Mipako as both 'a famous fetish man (*manganga*)' and as the 'headman (*ngaunga*) of Kinda village' (Hottot, 1956: 26). Mipako's talents were multiple. Much like a blacksmith, his political and spiritual authority were

⁴⁷ This sculpture has been extensively published. For example, see William Fagg, 'The Tribal Image', BM 1970 no.35; John Mack, 'Saved! 100 years of the NACF' (1995), pp.122–23.

understood to be a combined force. Hottot also credited him as being a medicine man and a wood carver. He noted that Mipako received his training in these various skills through initiation into the Bumu secret society.⁴⁸ There, he was taught how to ‘confer on the fetishes their “medicine” or magico-religious power (*bonga*)’ for the health of the community in his charge. Hottot was clear that the value of this work lay not in the sculpted container (‘anyone may carve them’) but rather in Mipako’s understanding of the spiritual efficacy of different materials. He ‘was paid in proportion to the power with which he endowed the fetish’ (Hottot, 1956: 26). He endowed the container, in other words, with secret knowledge that had been passed down to him through initiation.

Just as the status of an individual changed as he or she grew up and advanced through initiation ceremonies, so a figurative container went through a process of evolution in which it grew more potent displayed through changes in name. An empty container that had not been endowed with its *bonga* was called a *tege* figure. One that had its *bonga* in place was called a *butti*. The seated male figure in the BM is empty of its *bonga* and so may be classed as a *tege*. Its lack of use is visible in the empty rectangular chest cavity and the minimal surface accretions. Hottot photographed the work on the day he first saw it, and the photographer’s shadow looms into view (Fig. 114). Facing him is an individual holding a stringed instrument in his lap – seated on a mat before the same hut in front of which Mipako was photographed – who is identified as a ‘Sundi Musician’⁴⁹. Two sculptures are placed on the mat next to him. The sculpture housed in the BM is the smaller of the two figures to the left.⁵⁰ Comparison of these two works suggests that the figure at the centre had its *bonga* in place, meaning that when Hottot took this photograph it was ritually empowered. The empty rectangular cavity visible in stomach of the smaller figure to the left makes it a *tege* figure, a ‘fetish intended to have *bonga* but lacking it’.⁵¹

A seated male figure in the same style, conserved at the MBQ, is a useful point of comparison to the BM example (Fig. 116). The posture of the figure is directly comparable; the work depicts a male figure seated on the ground with his hands placed on his raised knees.

⁴⁸ I have not been able to locate any more information about this society beyond this reference.

⁴⁹ The instrument held by the musician, described above and photographed again in 1908, was also acquired by Hottot at this time and is currently in the collection of the BM (Af1995, 07.2).

⁵⁰ The location of the larger figure at the centre has not been determined.

⁵¹ This perhaps explains why Hottot was only able to acquire the one sole work from this group.

Unlike the BM example, however, this work has its *bonga* in place, visible in the surface encrustations that cover the wood and in the fabric wrap that surrounds the stomach, presumably concealing material housed in a rectangular cavity. It may be considered a *butti* version of the *tege* in the BM, and was likely carved by the same sculptor or as part of the same atelier.⁵²

The pins that have been beaten into the forearms and the forehead were likely also added during ceremonies of invocation, intended to increase the potency of the figure, or perhaps evoke the wearing of copper and brass jewellery.⁵³ The tradition is well known in the Kongo and is found throughout equatorial Africa. Among the Luba peoples of the DRC, for instance, figures have similar nails or pins which hold ‘medicines’ in place in the body of the sculpture (J. Mack, personal communication, 7 August 2017).

It is clear that these figures are intended to represent powerful leaders in Teke society. Mipako is dressed like a power figure – or the power figure is dressed like Mipako. In the photograph by Hottot, he stands looking directly at the camera wearing a fabric skirt, with fabric wrapped around his shoulders. On his left forearm he wears a copper bracelet, and he appears to use his hand to hold the fabric in place. The type of fabric and its arrangement is similar to that photographed on the monumental Malali power figure a few days prior (Figs. 12–13). Mipako has a full beard, and he wears a headdress made of long black feathers (Fig. 113).⁵⁴

The artist has represented many of the physical characteristics of Mipako in the sculpture, albeit in essential terms. As Hottot noted, Mipako’s ‘thick beard was quite exceptional... The fetishes, too, have ample beards, a sign of their excellence and... one of their sacred characteristics’ (Hottot, 1956: 25).⁵⁵ While not all are portraits of individual chiefs, *butti* figures distil the most symbolically charged attributes of power in their representations of male leadership. This tradition is not unique to the Teke of this period and is also found amongst the Kongo peoples of the Loango coast, particularly in their depictions of large-scale standing male power figures, such as *Mangaaka*, which are empowered through the addition of a beard composed from clay, palm wine, animal hide and hair, raffia fibre and resin (LaGamma, 2015: 261–62). The addition of the white European eyes served a similar purpose. Given their presence

⁵² This has been called the Boula N’tangou style (Marie Claude Dupré, 1996: 146).

⁵³ Just as the European manufactured buttons are ‘not intended as an embellishment so much as to enhance its mystic power’. Hottot recorded the use of such buttons as personal amulets.

⁵⁴ The MOA collected a very similar example, conserved in the MQB.

⁵⁵ Stanley reported that the Makoko’s beard, when unrolled, was six feet in length.

on an empty *tege* figure, it is clear that they were essential elements of both the aesthetic and function of the sculpture figure.⁵⁶



Fig. 113. Portrait of Chief Mipako (Mipako, headman (ngaunga) of Kinda village and fetish man (maganga) of repute, wearing feather head-dress used in ritual ceremonies in which a drum is beaten). 26 September 1906, Louoko or Kinda village, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by A. Robert Hottot (1884–1939). Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1994.62.712).



Fig. 114. Teke figurative containers posed next to a Sundi musician (Sise fetishes, Kinda village, the musician is a Sundi, not a Teke). 26 September 1906, Louoko or Kinda village, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by A. Robert Hottot (1884–1939). Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1994.62.711).

⁵⁶ On Kongo figurative power figures, the eye socket may serve as a container for *bonga*.



Fig. 115. Three views of a seated male figure (*tege*). 19th– early 20th century, village of Luoko, Bula N’Tangou region, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1906. Teke peoples, Sisse group, wood, glass, metal (brass), 46 x 14 x 19 cm. British Museum, London (Af 1995,06.1).

Ex-collection: Collected by Robert Hottot in the village of Luoko, 26th September 1906.



Fig. 116. Three views of a seated male figure (*butti*). 19th– early 20th century, Bula N’Tangou region, Republic of the Congo. Teke peoples, Sisse group, wood, glass, brass tacks, buttons, fabric, rope, organic materials, 38.4 x 11.5 x 13.5 cm. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (70.1998.7.1).

Ex- collection: Robert Lehuard from the vicinity of Brazzaville, 1920–30.

Non-figurative containers

Along with the figurative containers described above, Hottot also collected three baskets that were likely used by an *ngaa* as containers for *bonga* (Fig. 117). The first is a coiled basket made out of plant fibre and attributed to either the Teke or Sundi peoples. It was described by Hottot as an ‘amulet’ (Af1995, 07.24.a-b object record card). It has a separate bell-shaped lid terminating in a central cylindrical handle. The outer surface of both the basket and lid is covered with a red pigment – *tula* – the presence of which suggests that it had been employed in a ceremonial context. The basket is empty, and the central section of base is missing. The basket was said to have been ‘originally used for containing ashes’, a vitally significant material associated with the spiritual realm (see below). While the contents are missing, the material accretion on the surface of the basket suggests a religious function.

The second basket, attributed to the Teke peoples, is said to have been ‘smeared with camwood [*tula*]’. With a base that is roughly rectangular in shape, the basket narrows to form a cylindrical neck at the top (Fig. 118). The coiled rim has been bound with additional fibre to reinforce the structure. Internally, the basket has a separate oval section, with a base that is crushed and damaged. The collector recorded that it was ‘used as an amulet for “ritual” substances’ (Af1995, 07.17 object record card). The presence of an additional container within the container suggests that different materials might have been housed in different compartments. A similar tradition is found with Kongo power figures (LaGamma, 2015: 261, 264). In both of these instances, the empowering material has been removed from the baskets, rendering them empty and ineffective, bearing only the traces of former use.



Left: Fig. 117. A collection of baskets used to contain sacred materials. 1906, Republic of the Congo. Teke Fumu. Photograph by A. Robert Hottot. Source: Hottot (1956), fig. 2.

Right: Fig 118. Container for sacred materials (‘Bassoundi Fetiche?’). Early 20th century, Boula N’Tangou region, Republic of the Congo. Kongo peoples, Sundi group. Ex- collection: Robert Hottot, collected September 1906.

Containers and physical healing

It becomes clear that different kinds of containers housed *bonga* intended for different spiritual forces. Figurative containers were intended for important ancestors; non-figurative containers such as baskets were likely intended as vessels for *nkira* spirits of the natural world. Large-scale containers, and collections of different containers housed in a chief’s *nzo*, would address the most pressing concerns of the day.

In 1906 there was a public health crisis – sleeping sickness (*Human African trypanosomiasis*) and smallpox devastated the populations of the Kongo and Teke Fumu north of Brazzaville in the first decades of the twentieth century. The French government sponsored a mission to assess its impact, which was undertaken between 1906–08 (Martin, 1909). Kiener – the colonial administrator for the regional capital Pangala – was present in the region in 1913 and noted that the most common reason for commissioning ‘a fetish statuette’ amongst the neighbouring Kongo Sundi was ‘in the case of a violent death, a death caused by smallpox, or a death...attributed to sleeping sickness’ (Kiener, 1913: 21–27).



Fig. 119. Ologhi ceremony ('Congo français. Région: Bas-Congo; tribu: Batéké – ouest de la rivière Alima. cérémonie: ologhi. 1907'). 1907, Alima River region, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by A. Robert Hottot (French, 1884–1939), print black and white, 107 x 44 mm. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1994.62.383.3).

This vision of the spiritual realm having a material presence appears to have strongly impacted how the human body was conceived and how these diseases were understood. The stomach and abdomen were locations where evil spirits that caused death and disease might take physical form. Prosper Augouard, who had long been established in the region and whom Hottot met with in 1906, travelled to the Alima river in 1899. Here he witnessed the performance of the *ologhi* ceremony amongst the Teke peoples of the Alima River. He recorded that this ceremony was conducted on all bodies after death and involved an autopsy in which the organs of the body were removed and laid to the side. The *ologhi* fetish would then be sought out by the *ngaa*, and he understood it to be 'an outgrowth of flesh that lies beneath the heart and that normally is in neither man nor woman' (Augouard, 1899: 19). If this was not found, regular funerary procedures could occur. If it was found, however, then the body would be 'torn into a thousand pieces' by 'close family members'.⁵⁷

Hottot photographed an *ologhi* ceremony in 1906 on the Alima River, in the same region where Augouard had been. In this image, the corpse, in a raffia cloth wrapper, is laid out on the

⁵⁷ Augouard hired a local missionary to obtain for him an *ologhi* which he intended to 'keep...carefully in alcohol, after taking detailed information on the position, shape, colour and the existence of this protrusion, which was seen in men as in women, but that does not exist at all in general'. He was determined to ascertain exactly what it was, and if it was a disease that could be cured by Western medicine (Augouard, 1899: 19).

ground with the intestines put to the side (Fig. 119). In his understanding, *ologhi* was only conducted if the death was believed to have been caused by a sorcerer (*balongi*) who had sent these spirits into a person. The autopsy of the body was intended to ‘search for the evil spirit in the body of the dead’.

Kiener recorded a similar conceptualisation of illness among the Kongo Sundi in the vicinity of Pangala in 1913. When a death occurred, the Sundi gathered in a palaver in the market to investigate the cause of the death. If this was attributed to the spirit of a previously deceased member of the village believed to have ‘thrown bad luck’, a sculptor was commissioned to make a figure that represented this ancestor. While Kiener noted that in each case the preparations and the attendant ceremonies differed significantly, an *ngaa* of Teke origin was always preferred to perform the ceremony. The ancestral force had to be placated in order to bring balance and restore health to the community. The placement of the *bonga* in the trunk of the sculpture symbolically positioned medicine in the site of the body believed to be most vulnerable to spiritual attack, where it would hunt out these evil spirits.⁵⁸

Having witnessed the *ologhi* ceremony, Augouard, in a letter to his brother, complained that the Teke were ‘materialists in excess’ (‘sont des matérialistes à outrance’). Attempting to understand Teke spiritual beliefs so that he might convert them to Catholicism, Augouard came to realise the degree to which abstract concepts such as fortune and disease were understood to have a real material form, which made it hard, in his eyes, to express the intangible spirituality of Christianity (Augouard, 1899: 18). From Augouard’s perspective, the materialism of the Teke prevented spiritual development. To the Teke, materials could provide the gateway to the spiritual realm.

⁵⁸ The stomach cavity was considered the most potent site of empowerment on many power figures from different traditions throughout Central Africa, notably amongst the Kongo peoples of the Chiloango River region, whose large scale *Mangaaka* power figures contain a primary cavity at the stomach. See LaGamma, 2015: 253, 261.



Fig. 120. Nkita 'bundle' and its contents. 20th century, Zanaga, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1940. Teke Tsaayi peoples, raffia, iron, organic materials, stone, animal hide and hair. National Museums of World Culture, Världskulturmuseerna, Stockholm, Sweden (2015.0001). Ex-collection: collected by Jakob and Märta Bjerhagen c.1940.

The contained

The container protects and conceals a form of ‘secret knowledge’ that is not accessible to the uninitiated. ‘Knowledge’, in this sense, is given a material form that must be housed. Known as *bonga* among the Teke Fumu and *bilongo* among the Kongo, this material consists of a compound of different materials collected together by the *ngaa*, or a religious specialist, drawing on the animal, vegetable and mineral worlds. The precise ingredients of the composition are invariably restricted to their creator alone.

Hottot noted that among the Teke Fumu, such a variety of substances were used in the construction of the *bonga* that it was impossible to classify them all. The materials may have had metaphorical as well as pharmaceutical properties. Significant materials include relics from important individuals such as ‘beard bristles or the hair of venerated persons...the hair of an albino...’ (Hottot, 1956: 30). Animal parts were also often included to create what Hottot defined as ‘sympathetic magic’: ‘thus leopards are strong, so their claws, whiskers, liver and dung are used, and these, with the skin, being a mark of rank, are reserved for chiefs’ (Hottot, 1956: 30). In other words, elements from the animal world worn as public signifiers of power and prestige may also have had an important place as an element of the concealed force of the *bonga*. Among the Kongo, feathers, especially of raptors, were both worn as a headdress and included in *bilongo*, because ‘spiritual’ forces were associated with birds (MacGaffey, 2000: 86).

Each container was intended to bring about a specific action such as to ensure success in ‘hunting, in trading, in acquiring wives or slaves, in short success in all transactions for the increase of property’ (Hottot, 1956: 30). Among the Kongo, nineteenth-century European visitors to the Loango coast were struck by the degree to which Kongo practitioners were highly practical, and could create a medicine specific to whatever problem arose, specifically in relation to trade (LaGamma, 2015: 55).

Among the Teke Fumu, the *ngaa* thus usually possessed several *bonga*, one of which was especially renowned for its great efficacy. It might have been inherited from a former *ngaa*, and mastery over it gave him spiritual authority. In this sense, *bonga* ‘[participated] immediately in the *real existence* and in the uncontested power of countless generations of ancestors’ (Hottot, 1956: 29, emphasis my own). In terms of what had a material existence in this world view, the

ngaa is ‘merely a necessary agent’, whereas it is the *bonga* that possesses an essential material reality that may span several individual lives. The reality of the spiritual world to the Teke is seen in a *butti* figure: ‘A *butti* is not only the representation of a particular deceased person, but is of the very substance of that person, actually is that person. Each *butti* therefore has a name, as a man has. It may be that of a male ancestor, or of a renowned chief’ (Hottot, 1956: 30). The *bonga* is not a symbol of a spiritual force, it *is* that force.

Nkita container: materials to protect and beautify the female body

Housed within the container, therefore, is the materialisation of a known spiritual force which could be activated to bring about a particular outcome in the world of the living. Such forces might be a known ancestor, as in the figurative *butti* containers described above, or it might house a named, and often but not necessarily, anthropomorphic, spiritual entity. Around 1940, one such container, consisting of a cloth wrapping described as a ‘Nkita bundle’, was handed over to missionaries Jakob and Märta Bjerhagen in Zanaga, Congo. The work is currently housed in the Wereldmuseum, in Stockholm (Fig. 120). The container is made of raffia or pineapple fibre held together with a piece of cord made out of the same material, attached to which is an iron bell. Its contents were opened and photographed in 2015 and thus provides a unique opportunity to study the *bonga* within.⁵⁹ Dupré suggested that such a container would have belonged to a woman called to be a healer, having herself completed the seclusion therapy and communicated with the spirit. The contents would have been collected for her by close relatives (Dupré, 1978: 70). The packet includes about 70 objects.⁶⁰ The first point to note is that all of these objects are covered in a thick layer of *tula* (otherwise known as *tukula*).⁶¹

Dupré noted that the elements contained in these Nkita bundles are fairly standardised. They are always doubled and of the objects photographed it is possible to discern many clear pairs. Historically, when twins were born in Teke society a basket was placed next to their heads, in which visitors placed small gifts. According to Dupré, the kinds of doubled objects found in

⁵⁹ Analysis of this material is conducted in relation to the scholarship of Marie Claude Dupré, combined with field research completed in March 2017 where the images of the contents of the bag were shown to a Nkita initiate in a village in the vicinity of Zanaga.

⁶⁰ Only 40 of the 70 objects have been photographed.

⁶¹ According to Ellen G. Howe, Department of Scientific Research, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, as this organic material decomposes it turns from a bright red to a bright yellow. Private communication.

an Nkita ritual bundle are reminiscent of the kinds of objects placed in such baskets. She noted that along with these paired objects, iron tools including needles, axes, knives and sometimes razors are also important components. In this example, more than forty iron objects are present, including sixteen knife blades and three axe heads. According to Dupré, these are ‘male objects and are also the sorcerer’s weapons, through which he can magically pierce his victims’. The presence of the skin of the carnivorous civet cat is there to ‘sniff out the devils and indicate whether a disease is the work of a sorcerer or not’ (Dupré, 1978: 70).

A small piece of seashell is also visible. Shells are standard additions to such bundles because of their association with water; the *nkita* or *mukisi* spirit is understood to be a water spirit. The symbolic force of the marine shell is compounded by the inclusion of pieces of egg shell. The two pieces of rock crystal included also have strong connotations with the ocean. Alongside these elements of the water are objects that have associations with fertility: fruits from the forest, including a seed commonly used by the Kongo Yombe peoples as a symbol of fertility. An insect inside its cocoon, pieces of bone and horn and a section of gourd are also part of the bundle. While it is not possible to accurately determine the precise symbolism of each object included, it is clear that the materials assembled here are all elemental; their combined intention is to protect the woman going through the Nkita therapeutic ceremony and work as a recipe to draw in a known spirit. The comb is perhaps above all symbolic of these protective and nurturing forces.

Performance

Such materials do not form a link to the spiritual realm in isolation. Dance and ceremonial action were specifically intended to help materialise forces in the spiritual realm. Hottot noted how all the standing figures he collected are depicted with their legs bent at the knee to show the figure in the action of dance (*nkibi*). He noted that the word ‘*nkibi*’ has the same root as ‘*nkiba*’, the word for a category of carved figure known as *Nkira* – a word that among the Teke Fumu of this period specifically refers to spirits responsible for certain diseases – and *nkiriga*, which ‘designates the leaping of the *nga* or *maganga* in the ritual ceremonies against the evil doings of the *nkira*, *mupfu* and *makani*, which are different classes of evil spirit’ (Hottot, 1956: 28).⁶² The act of dancing in this realm has a direct impact in the spiritual realm, and links the individual across these spheres.

Case study: the empowerment of a figurative container among the Kongo Sundi, Pangala, 1913

The French colonial administrator Kiener, based in Pangala in the roughly the same region where Hottot travelled in 1913, recorded in detail the ceremonies involved in the ritual empowerment of a large-scale figure intended to protect a community against sleeping sickness. In this, we see a variety of elements come together. A chief of a village commissioned a sculptor to make a work in the market. Kiener noted that in the marketplace, *tege* figures could be purchased from the ‘*katéka bikéti*’ (*katéka*: sell; *bitéki*: fétiches).⁶³ The sculptor would customise a work depending on the culture of the buyer, so that it might resemble a Teke or a Sundi person – the most striking difference being the shape given to the coiffure or the cicatrisation marks.

Kiener’s account provides us with the market value of these sculpted wooden figures: It cost 50 centimes to one franc for the smallest figures, standing up to 10 cm tall; one and a half to two francs for those of average size, standing 15 to 30 cm tall; and two and a half to four francs for a large-scale figure, standing 40 to 60 cm tall. The price of the empty wooden container itself, however, was only a small fraction of what the *ngaa* would be paid to empower the work. For

⁶² The word ‘*Nkira*’ refers to the category of carved figure. The word ‘*nkira*’ is a term for a nature spirit.

⁶³ The sculpting itself was completed by an individual who was specialised in this work, called ‘*gala bitéki*’ (*gala*: do; *bitéki*: fetishes) in the Sundi language and ‘*Ouaouala bitégui*’ in Teke. He noted that these figures are called *kifouiti* (*Bifouiti* pl.) in the Sundi language and *Itégui* (pl. *bitégui*) in Teke.

example, according to Kiener, if an *ngaa* visited a village to investigate the cause behind the death of someone who has died violently, the ceremony involving the empowerment of a figure would last a few days, during which the *ngaa* would not only be paid in kind, in food and housing while he was present in the village, but also for all the materials used in his process, which might be expensive. The chief of the village or the individual petitioner would also have to pay for the chickens and goats that were sacrificed as part of the empowerment process. On top of this, the *ngaa* would also receive no less than five pieces of cloth worth six francs each. At the other end of the scale, it would cost a minimum of 200 francs – up to 300 or 400 – for an *ngaa* to empower a large-scale figure that would defend a whole community from sleeping sickness or smallpox. This cost would be met by the chief of the village who would afterwards become the guardian of the figure.

In this case, the preparation by the *ngaa* of such large scale figurative containers could take up to six months. The *ngaa*, who was ideally and usually of Teke origin as noted above, would return to the village at each new moon, where he would spend two or three days. Each time he visited he would complete various rites intended to increase the power of the figure. The sculpture would, on each occasion, ‘receive gifts and...[was] copiously fed’ (Kiener, 1922:23). From the time of his first visit, the *ngaa* would start to train four or five young people aged between ten to twelve years as the ‘priests’ of the *ngaa*. They assisted him with the preparation of the materials that would eventually be added to the figure, and gained an education in its future maintenance. The *ngaa* introduced them to the power of different materials so that they could later provide care to the villagers by activating the figure on his behalf should there be outbreaks of sleeping sickness.

Having completed this training, some of these initiates might have chosen to become an *ngaa* in their own right, having begun to gain expertise in the construction of *bonga*. This group of neophytes were housed in a special hut especially constructed for them, where their daily life was prescribed by ceremonial action for the entire duration of the empowerment process. This included having to bathe daily in the river at a given time and concealing their heads from starlight with the fur of a civet cat should they venture out at night.

Music and song played a vital role in the empowerment of the sculpture. Each time the *ngaa* returned to the village, he would live in the hut with these initiates and, in their presence, prepare the mixtures of various materials that would be added to the surface of the sculpture. The

villagers would sing loudly around the fire while these preparations were being completed, accompanied by small drums created especially for this occasion. When the *ngaa* appeared out of the house of seclusion, followed by his young priests, ‘the songs become softer and more plaintive, men and women tapping their hands to better the sounds of chanting drum’ (Kiener, 1922: 26).

The *ngaa* and his followers would then proceed through the village, each with two vertical lines of red and white pigment drawn down their cheeks; one made with white clay *mpieme* and the other with *tula* (known as *kibilou* amongst the Sundi), both of which were vital constituent materials of the *bonga*. They would dance for around an hour following the *ngaa*, who wore strips of skin from the pelt of a civet cat, and this same cycle was repeated each new moon.

The final and most elaborate ceremony was held at the beginning of the sixth moon. After completing the ceremony described above, the *ngaa* would sacrifice chickens and goats, the number of which depending on the wealth of the chief of the village who had commissioned the dance. The *ngaa* then carefully collected the blood from these animals. In the presence of the whole village, he would mix the blood with various powders made from plant, mineral and animal sources, and this concoction would then be applied to the body of the statuette. The legs would be encased in pieces of cloth containing large quantities of *tula* and *mpieme*. The meat of the sacrificed chickens and goats would then be distributed to the villagers, but the feathers, legs and heads of the chickens were carefully preserved. Only now would the statue be deemed complete, and it was then delivered to the village chief and placed in its dedicated shrine. A celebratory dance for the whole neighbourhood marked the successful completion of this ceremony.

The following morning, the *ngaa* would take his young followers to the river where they would wash and then coat their bodies with bright red *tula*. The *ngaa* would then march them to the nearest market in ceremonial procession. Upon returning to the village, the *ngaa* would collect together the remnants of the blood mixed with *bonga* prepared the day before and reduce this to a paste. This was then placed either in a single piece of cloth or in a small wicker basket to which he added the feathers, feet and heads of the sacrificed chickens. This mixture was distributed to the people of the village, with most of it given to the leader. Subsequently, if any of the villagers suffered from sleeping sickness, one of the *ngaa*'s followers would imbue a piece

of cloth with this material and tie it to the patient's body. A portion of the mixture would be left to desiccate in the sun and afterwards ground into a dust. This would be distributed to all those who were involved in the ceremony, who would also take pinches of the powder as snuff, or smoke it like tobacco in order to heal themselves.⁶⁴

Musical Instruments

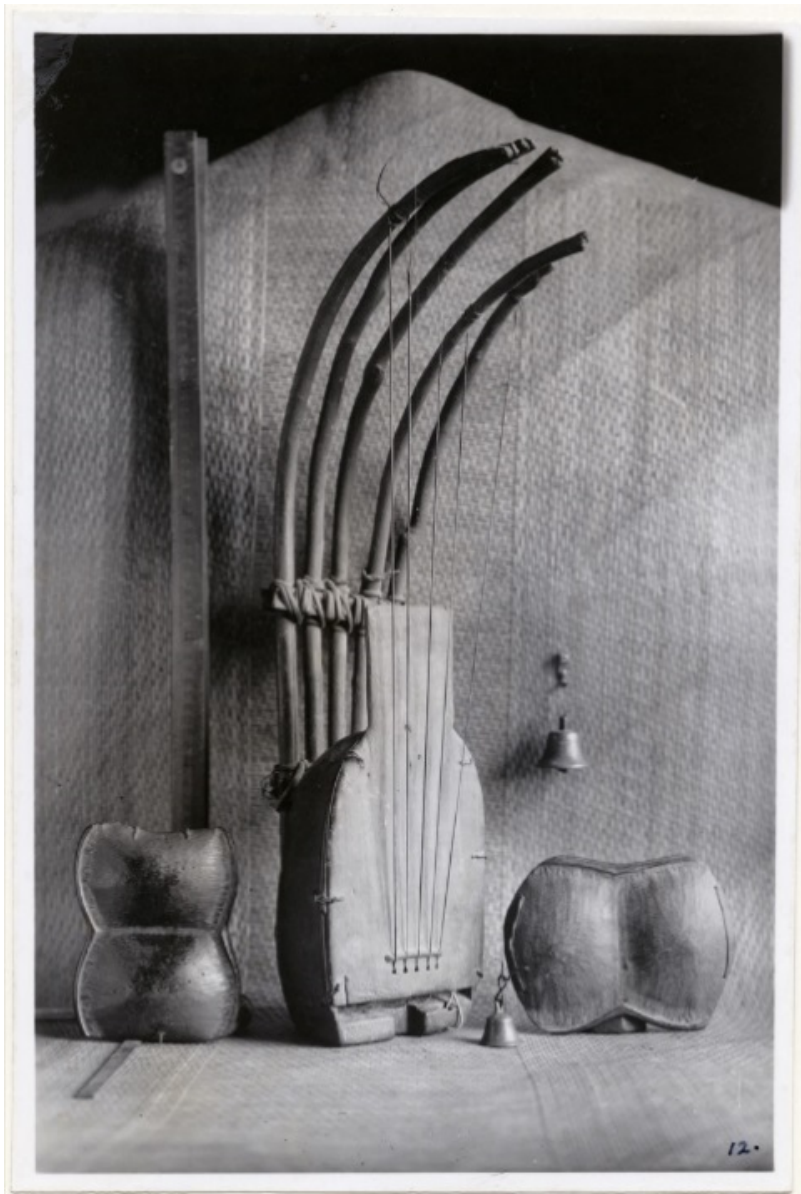


Fig. 121. A stringed musical instrument ('a sort of mandolin'), two rattles made of polished seed pods, and two bells. ('Obj coll'd by R. Hottot. /Bateke, Bobangi, French Congo. Rattles, bells, and harp. 1906'). Republic of the Congo. Photograph by A. Robert Hottot (1884–1939). Photograph: 1908–1909, 14 cm x 96 cm. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1998.175.8)

⁶⁴ This account is summarised from the only known publication of Kiener's 'Notice sur les fêiches des populations Bassoundi habitant la subdivision de Pangala', 1913; *Bulletin de la Société de recherches congolaises*, Brazzaville, 1, 1922, 21–28.

Hottot acquired a number of musical instruments at the same time he collected containers for *bonga*. One of these is a Sundi stringed instrument that he photographed being played in Luoko village (Fig. 113). He described it as ‘un sorte de mandolin’ and photographed it with other musical instruments in 1908 (Fig. 121).⁶⁵ It is similar to an example collected by Jacques de Brazza, and it is clear that such an instrument would have served both sacred and profane functions for a village community, where they are still used today in Nkita performances (Fig. 121). Hottot also purchased a pair of rattles made from double seed pods, secured at one side with cane ties known as *tisani*. These too are still used today (Fig. 120). He noted that the *tisani* was a musical instrument used by men in mixed dances, and a common instrument employed by the *ngaa* to call his *butti* figures to action.⁶⁶ The surface of the example now housed in the British Museum is rubbed with combination of oil and camwood to produce rich patina that suggests extensive ritual use (Af1995,07.9). The example collected by Hottot housed in the Pitt Rivers Museum is described, according to the accession book entry, as having been ‘made from two sections of a very large bean pod, with small stones inside’. Collected west of the Jur River, it was attributed to either the Bateke or the Ballai peoples, and was said to have been ‘used for dances and formerly for controlling spirits’ (1932.57.11).

⁶⁵ In Luoko village, Bula N’Tangou, according to the handwritten label located inside the instrument, Hottot collected a stringed instrument described by him as a ‘mandoline’, attributed to either the Bateke or Basundi peoples (Af1995,07.2).

⁶⁶ ‘In the darkness the *nga* plays his instrument all round the *butti*. When he judges the dosage to be adequate, the *nga* comes out again and collects his fee. This is the traditional method’ (Hottot, 1956: 33).



Fig. 122. Musicians performing at the Nkita possession dance. March 2017, Zanaga, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

Nineteenth-century European visitors to this region were also struck by the importance of music to the Teke peoples and began to collect musical instruments – and in one instance an important masquerade costume (Fig. 123). Noël Bally noted that the Teke were ‘very musical’ and how, once the sun set, it was common to hear many villages get together and dance all night. (ANOM 16 PA II/1). Charles de Chavannes was first entertained by a troupe of Teke Tege dancers in the vicinity of the trading post of Lékéti, newly established by himself on the Alima River, in December 1883. He paid for this first performance with a gift of palm wine and invited the dancing group to return again, when Jacques de Brazza would be present with his camera (Chavannes, 1936: 134). On the 9 of February 1884, at around midday – with little warning, it seems – ‘the pseudo-musical societies of the neighbourhood’ appeared again. Jacques de Brazza had already left, and Charles de Chavannes recorded the dance with a watercolour and a written description. He made a clear distinction between the earlier performance and this one – which included a mask – stating that the latter was ‘the fetish dance’, a dance with spiritual import, whereas the first performance had been purely for amusement.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Charles de Chavannes made a watercolour of this performance (Chavannes, 1936: 134).



Fig. 123. Two views of mask and costume. 19th century, Alima River Region, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1896. Teke Tege peoples, wood, composite materials (including clay), cowrie, textile, woven raffia, 310 x 45 x 45 cm. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1896.51.26). Ex-collection: collected by a member of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).

We can understand the significance of this impressive dance costume by conceptualising it in terms of a container for spiritual forces. Chavannes noted how the extensive folds of raffia conceal the mechanism of the mask and the actions of the dancer beneath, and that the basketry helmet is attached to a round internal plank that is pierced with a hole, about 20 cm across. The dancer is able to ‘move his head inside and outside the mask’ though this hole. A handle, about a metre and a half long, ‘held by the dancer...under the dress’ is attached to the plank allowing the head of the mask and the folds of fabric to rise and fall with the motion of the dance. With the arm raised and fully extended, the mask would have reached a height of over three metres, with the fabric still long enough to completely conceal the dancer beneath the thick folds. Slits in the fabric served a practical function, allowing the dancer to see his public and plot his movements and also, presumably, provided the dancer with ventilation, an important consideration given the performance occurred in the midday heat. Chavannes compared the dance to ‘some games of

clowns in our circuses' while recognising that the performance was also an engagement with 'fetish' forces.

This description in all likelihood relates to the performance of the mask that was collected as part of the MOA at around this time.⁶⁸ Indeed, Chavannes's detailed technical description of the internal workings of the mask suggests that he must have studied it in person once the dance was complete, so it is possible that it was acquired the very day of the performance. A similar mask and costume was photographed around 1909 by the French trader Elso Dusseljé, who was based on the Alima river between 1899–1909 where he worked as a dealer for the concessionary company the Alimaïenne, indicating that this performance continued to be popular in this region well into the twentieth century (Fig. 124). The mask was photographed this time standing next to a secondary performer, also shrouded in cloth. The figures are described as 'Féticheurs' named 'Kadjouli and 'N'golli'. No more specific information about the dance is recorded in the text.⁶⁹

The mask itself is constructed from a double-layered basketwork structure concealed beneath layers of loosely hanging imported European trade cloth. On the front side, the upper layer of the basket is folded back to create a raised frame with oval-shaped sides that reveals the internal basketry structure beneath, at the centre of which is a hole. This is the mask's 'face'. Surmounting the basket are six arches concealed beneath loosely attached indigo trade cloth, including red trade cloth with a floral pattern, and strings of cowrie shells. The garment attached to the mask is made up of multiple layers of cloth made from the fibre of the raffia palm. The cloth is in total over three meters long and made up of several individually woven pieces stitched together. Small sachets containing organic materials are sewn into the fabric (Dupré, 1996: 250). This work was collected by the MOA amongst the Tegue Teke peoples in the region of the Alima River *c.*1884.

⁶⁸ Marie Claude Dupré has argued that this is the case (Dupré, 1996: 250).

⁶⁹ I want to thank Marie Claude Dupré for encouraging me to seek out this text.



Fig. 124. Two Masked Performers (Féticheurs' I 'Kadjouli, II 'N'golli). c.1909, Alima River Region, Republic of the Congo. Teke Tege peoples. Photograph by Elso Dusseljé (1911) 28.

The arches on top of the mask, covered in imported European cotton with a flowery pattern, resemble a headdress. Indeed, these fabric-covered arches are perhaps the 'textile' headdress of the Teke Tegue chief described by Brazza on 19 July 1877, 'whose appendages which surmount it, seen at a distance, resembled horns' (Dupré, 1996: 250). This indicates that this masked figure may actual depict the clothes that an individual might have worn. Suddenly, we see the familiar trappings of wealth: trade cloth, cowry shells, the hairstyle of a powerful chief. Dusseljé noted that Tegue men usually wore a simple loincloth made of raffia fabric on a day to day basis, attached at the waist with a pin or a thorn. When in mourning, however, a man's costume was much more extensive, consisting of raffia cloths that were 'much wider' and consisted of 'several *ntoulous* (squares of indigenous fabric that have the dimensions of the weaving loom; 40 x 40 cm) sewn together. Influential men usually [clasped] a piece of cloth, casually thrown over the shoulders' (Dusseljé, 1910: 38). is description of mourning clothes resembles the clothes of the dancer seen here. Indeed, in the photograph taken by Dusseljé, the

dancer is portrayed with piece of European trade cloth thrown over his shoulder, as if he were a wealthy chief, and perhaps one in mourning.

The dancer is dressed in a way that is recognisably authoritative, while also disorientating and carnivalesque. The viewer is forced to re-evaluate what he or she is looking at and to take the mask in on many levels. Adding to this confusion during performance would be the fact that the mask was in motion, the head rising up and down and controlled by an invisible force, the dancer believed to be possessed by a spirit. While the mask was undoubtedly on one level intended to delight, to be spectacular and to entertain the viewer – as indeed Charles de Chavannes was entertained – the costume may have, on a literal level, brought to mind in the viewer the image of a chief in mourning. Raffia cloth itself, and ostentatious displays of cloth generally, had strong associations with wealth and funerary practices for the Teke. The bundles of *bonga* sewn into the fabric further suggest that the dancer – and indeed the spectator – were being protected from a spiritual being who was brought into material existence during the performance. It is useful to note that clothes of masquerade may resemble a funeral shroud in many regions of Africa.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ See John Mack's forthcoming essay on material agency (expected publication 2018).

Contemporary dance performances

To return to the female therapeutic Nkita ceremony of the Teke Tsaayi, dance here served to induce a state of trance, and it was in this state that an initiate might be open to possession by the spirit of Nkita. Dance was a major tool employed during the entire performance. Historically, masked dancers, such as those of the Kidumu masquerade, may have played a part in Nkita ceremonies (Fig. 125). Representation of Kidumu masks are included in carved bed panels made for these initiation houses, suggesting that there is a link between Nkita and these masking traditions (Dupré, 1988). A performance that involved the whole community in song and dance might have served as a means of bringing together different, perhaps even discordant elements into a perfect unison. In terms of materials that represent this, the use of red, white and black as a major decorative feature of Teke Tsaayi Kidumu masks and the associated bed panel sculpture can be seen as the bringing together of elemental forces into a striking unity (Fig. 126). Scholars, including Karl Laman, have understood the use of these masks as a means of bringing together different elements of the spiritual realm into a unified material form; the deployment of these three essential colours may serve a similar function (Janzen, 1982: 192). This notion is employed to explain the multiple-faced masks of secret societies. It was likely such an idea that inspired Karl Laman's interpretation of a Teke Tsaayi Kidumu mask as representing an ancestor whose identity is lost in time (Janzen, 1982: 10).

On the Alima River in 2017, the Mbochi – a Kongo people and neighbours to the Teke Tegue – performed the Kiebe Kiebe masquerade that undoubtedly has its genesis in performances such as those of the Teke Tegue of the same region described above. The Kiebe Kiebe dancer, who is a male initiate, is concealed beneath a cape of raffia, attached to which is a carved wooden head. Also attached to the raffia are numerous feathers. He whirls around, spinning and raising and lowering the body, guided not by slits in the fabric as in the example above but by a younger initiate learning to perform the mask himself, who hits a double bell allowing the dancer to work out where he should move. This initiate also collects any feathers that fall during the dance, for these are extremely valuable.

As in the nineteenth-century performances, and the Kidumu performances recorded by Marie Claude Dupré in the 1970s, the Kiebe Kiebe is danced in the middle of the day. In the heat, with no shadow, the whirling feathered form was intended to confuse and dazzle the

viewer. The form of the dancer is lost beneath the moving feathered raffia cloth, which increased the impression that a possession was taking place. The dancer is believed to have transcended humanity during the performance, to have been taken over by 'the devil'. The raffia cloth shrouds him entirely from the view of the public, but behind this shroud he has access to another world, like a corpse that is wrapped in raffia and prepared for burial.



Fig. 125. Mask. 19th-early 20th century, Republic of the Congo or Gabon, inventoried 1930. Teke peoples, Tsaayi group, wood, pigment, 34 x 32 cm. Musée Barbier Mueller, Geneva (1021 - 20). Ex-collection: purchased by André Derain before 1931, Charles Ratton and Joseph Mueller collections.



Fig. 126. Bed panel for Nkita ceremony. 19th century, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1896. Teke Tsaayi peoples, wood, pigment. 193.5 x 35 x 3.5 cm. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (73.1999.1.4).

Conclusion: the Teke as a spiritual force

Brazza and his companions were struck by the degree to which the spiritual played a material role in all major transactions between individuals at all levels of society. Specialists who were able to claim authority in the spiritual realm, often through a process of initiation, could become hugely wealthy in their own right and be called upon to perform throughout a wider area. These individuals might be known for the creation of especially potent charms and these could be bought and sold, just like any other commodity.

The proliferation of certain powerful Minkisi on the Loango coast has even been understood in terms of franchising (MacGaffey, 2015: 65–66). From the seventeenth century, powerful Teke traders of the Pool, rich from international demand for the copper of the Niari region and the middleman role they continued to play in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, began to sell Nkobi to one another. These ‘super charms’ were more valuable than any commodity in the market because they served to legitimise the leader’s rule on the spiritual plane (Vansina, 1973: 324). Among the Kongo neighbours of the Teke, from Congo Pool to the Atlantic coast Nkobi were likewise considered ‘medicinal containers’, and the Nkobi box was one of the primary insignia of membership into the Lemba association, along with a distinctive bracelet and staff. *N’nati a mpemba* (carriers of light) was a term used to convey status and the trustworthiness of an individual carrying Lemba insignia. Those who were initiated into this association controlled the markets between the Pool and the coast. (Martin, 2015: 88).

During the period under study, the Teke peoples were recognised regionally as a spiritual force, with the plateau region a locus of spiritual force and cultural genesis. Figurative containers bearing Teke marks were traded throughout the region and collected as far apart as the Loango coast and Bolobo, over 800 km (500 miles) up the Congo River. A Teke fetish figure displayed at the folklore society in London in 1908, first published in 1909, was collected near Bolobo, far upriver of the Teke region proper. This figure had been passed from hand to hand until it was given up by a Christian convert to a missionary in charge of a sub-station near Bolobo, in order for it to be destroyed. The author noted that ‘whenever such wooden images are seen in the possession of the [Ngala] Bobangi, Moye, or other tribes in this neighbourhood, they have almost invariably been bought from the Batende, who obtain them in turn from the more distant Bateke’ (Scrivener, 1909: 312). The object would have been passed through several different

groups of peoples as it travelled upriver, but regardless of how far it had travelled, ‘the scoring on the cheeks shows the Bateke tribal mark’ (Scrivener, 1909: 312).

The power of the figure increased because it was associated with a distant people who were believed to create spiritually powerful works.⁷¹ Indeed, in Bentley’s 1887 Kikongo dictionary of words spoken in San Salvador, ‘Teke’ is translated as ‘image, idol, statue’ (Bentley, 1887: 426). This suggests that, to their Kongo neighbours, Teke cultural identity was indeed defined by spiritual potency. A materialistic conception of the divine allowed for the dissemination of Teke beliefs through these charged containers that were traded from hand to hand like any other commodity. The word ‘Teke’ was not related to an abstract idea of ‘culture’, but rather the both spiritually and monetarily valuable Nkobi, for which they were known in the wider area. The Nkobi are *signifiers* of the depth of their connection with the spiritual world. Not only were the Teke known as a potently spiritual people, but this belief was spread along their far-reaching networks of trade.⁷²

The Teke, as autochthonous inhabitants of the land, continued to retain spiritual authority over the Kongo peoples who had moved to this region. Kiener argued that Teke religious practices had a profound impact on Sundi customs – especially religious celebrations – which were presided over, with few exceptions, by a priest of Teke origin (Kiener, 1913: 26). Moreover, the plateau region was never invaded by Kongo migrants and, with the Makoko living in a distant capital, it became in the popular imagination a place of spiritual potency and progeny. This remained the case in Brazzaville in January 2017.

⁷¹ Precisely the same process occurred with works created on the Loango coast that travelled inland to the Kingdom of the Kongo, and indeed the Songye figures recorded at the Kuba court by Torday were believed to be more powerful than locally produced works because they had been made in a distant land (Mack, 1990: 72).

⁷² I am grateful to Mo Harber-Lamond for his suggestions here.

Conclusion

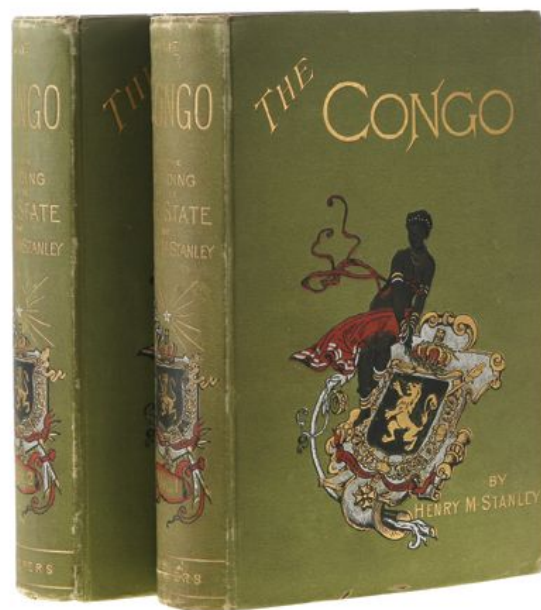
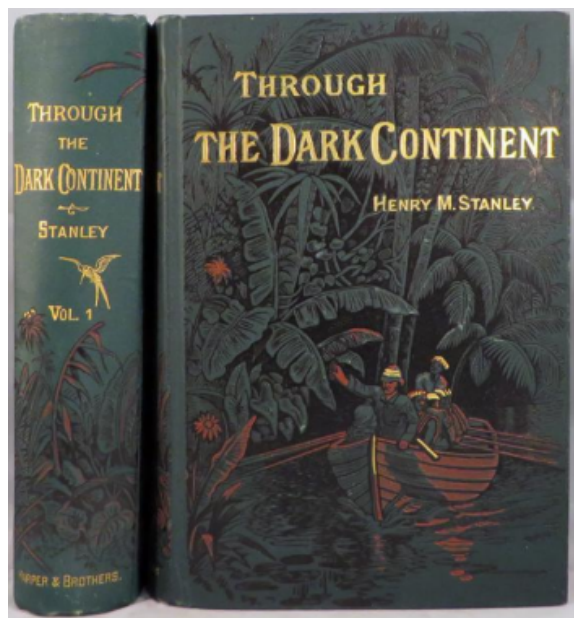


Fig. 127. Henry Morton Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent* (1877).

Fig. 128. Henry Morton Stanley, *The Congo and the founding of its Free State* (1885).

Stanley and Brazza and the formation of the Congo

On 15 November 1884, Prince Otto von Bismarck, first Chancellor of Germany, called to order the Congo Conference in Berlin. Over the next few months, the political borders of sub-Saharan Africa as we know them today would be drawn. The sovereignty of the Association Internationale du Congo (AIC), established by King Leopold II of Belgium in 1879, was recognised by fourteen nations, paving the way for the creation of the Congo Free State as a private enterprise. After the conference closed, Leopold II asked permission from the Belgian Parliament to assume the sovereignty of the Congo Free State, which was granted by the

Chamber of Representatives on 28 April 1885. On 1 August, Leopold announced that the International Association of the Congo had transferred all its rights and powers to the Congo Free State, of which he was the Sovereign-King (Starr, 1911: 389).

In that same year, Henry Morton Stanley published *The Congo and the founding of its Free State* (1885) which described how the nation came into being through his own monumental efforts – a five-year period in which he negotiated over 500 treaties with chiefs from Boma to ‘Stanley’ Pool and ‘Stanley’ Falls. The cover of his account alone demonstrates the degree to which ‘The Congo’ was authored ‘by Henry M. Stanley’; the ethnogenesis of this nation lies in his imagination (Fig. 128). The text served both as an autobiography of a man and the biography of a nation. Indeed, the cover marked the completion of a project begun in *Through the Dark Continent* (1877), which depicts Stanley as the lone European, pioneering through an unknown, dark, overwhelming forest in the name of the nineteenth-century ideals of ‘progress’, ‘commerce’ and ‘civilisation’ (Fig. 127).

While the south side of Congo Pool was recognised as belonging to the AIC with its capital at Léopoldville (Kinshasa), the north side of Congo Pool, after much discussion, was recognised as French in Berlin in 1885. Brazzaville and Léopoldville became the capitals of the two colonies, facing each other across the Pool. France’s presence in the region must likewise be understood as the vision of one man – Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza – a product of his own desires, fashioned both in competition with and inspired by Stanley’s vision for the AIC.

In the terms set out in Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*, we can picture the Congo Basin as being thrust into the mind’s eye of two individuals whose outlooks on the world reflected different ‘types’ in European thought current at the time. Savorgnan de Brazza came to the region much as the flâneur does to the arcades – he pretended to look in as an outsider, as a member of the urbane bohemian or intelligentsia, when in fact he was shopping for consumers for European goods. Stanley pursued a more violent approach than the flâneur counterpart and perceived the Congo Basin like Haussman ‘the demolisher’ did the historic city of Paris; with a stick of dynamite in hand and the dream of one centralised marketplace.

Surveying the landscape in the vicinity of Vivi in his 1885 account, Stanley recorded his dreams of a railway line that would connect the markets of Congo Pool to the coast. He presented the land at turns valueless and yet possessed of a defiant personality. His role was to ‘temper this obstinacy...to quicken that cold lifelessness; to reduce that grim defiance to perfect

submission' (Stanley, 1885: 140). In order to do this, it was necessary to blow the landscape up, and 100 men were ordered to attack the mountainside with sledge hammers and dynamite, earning him the title Bula Mutari or 'breaker of rocks' across the region.

In dreaming of the railway, Stanley imagined the implementation of a European colonial state. By linking the coast to the major markets of Congo Pool by railway, Europeans could effectively bypass the markets and gatekeepers between the Pool and the coast, transferring control of all trade from the interior to European hands. Raw materials could more effectively be extracted and the produce of European industry exported to the Congo in greater and greater quantities. 366 km (227 miles) of iron railway track, produced in Liverpool, would eventually be laid from Matadi to Kinshasa, and the line was completed in 1898.⁷³ European cotton increasingly replaced raffia cloth. European brass and iron replaced indigenous copper and iron. European glass and porcelain increasingly replaced local ceramics. Indigenous skills in working these materials were no longer practised. A foreign currency was soon introduced. In August 1887, the first coins were minted for the Congo Free State in copper and silver, a definitive sign that the peoples of the region were integrated into a global economy, part of world markets over which they had no control.



Fig. 129. 1 Franc. Congo Free State, 1887.

Both Brazza and Stanley were determined to bring 'commerce' to the region, which amounted, in actual fact, to cheaply manufactured European goods. They never intended to export industry to the region, only the finished goods of Europe. Stanley described this: 'I

⁷³ The weight of European ambition was imposed on the land in quite literal terms, in the form of the modern building material of the day: iron railway tracks. An 1889 report on the feasibility of the railway line that would run noted that each kilometre was expected to weigh 75 tons, meaning that 32,625 tons of European manufactured steel track and sleepers would be laid down on African earth, on paths that would have to be blasted through mountains. (*Le Chemin de fer du Congo, de Matadi au Stanley-Pool. Résultats des études*, 1889: 7).

foresaw a brilliant future for Africa, if by any miracle of good-fortune I could persuade the dark millions of the interior to cast off their fabrics of grass and don the second-hand costumes visible, say, in Whitechapel. See what a ready market lies here for old clothes!’ (Stanley, 1885: 130). Instead of making their own cloth and remaining their own masters of production, African men and women could instead be dressed in the cast-offs of Europe. Stanley’s dream would in many ways become true. In most places, indigenous traditions of making cloth in raffia fibre would come to an end, and the majority of the people of this region would wear textiles and finished clothing manufactured in Europe and the rest of the world by 1920.⁷⁴

Just as machines had replaced humans during the Industrial Revolution in England earlier in the nineteenth century, so the manufactured goods of industrial Europe were imported to Africa and replaced the work of local specialists working in indigenous materials.⁷⁵ What happened to the potters, weavers and blacksmiths? For the most part, when they died their skills went with them. While still alive, they may have been forced to collect rubber for the colonial regime. As the twentieth century progressed, violence, disease and political intimidation effectively ended many of these indigenous traditions of manufacture in the Congo. Filip De Boeck described how, in the DRC, the final outcome of colonialism was the transformation of the Congo peoples into the dead and the living dead (Boeck, 2005: 17).

Looking at the cover of Stanley’s 1885 text in this light, we see an African woman perched on the edge of the family crest of King Leopold II of Belgium. Her arms are decorated with silvered and gilded bracelets, apparently made from the same metals from which the crest is made. Around her waist she wears bright red and white European cloth, which appears to float in the air. The flutter of the cloth and ribbons suggests the crest is falling downward, as if she is being slowly dragged out of the picture while she clings onto the edge of a heavy weight. We can now imagine the female figure depicted on Stanley’s book as being dragged to her death.

⁷⁴ Sub-Saharan African countries continue to fight against these cheap imports. In Kenya today, second hand European cast offs are called the ‘clothes of dead white people’. In Mozambique, they are the ‘clothing of calamity’, and governments are attempting to resist their import. Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura, ‘For Dignity and Development, East Africa Curbs Used Clothes Imports’, *New York Times*, 12 October, 2017.

⁷⁵ Industrialisation in the United Kingdom meant that the jobs of men became the jobs of machines. In April 1812, ‘a mill at Westhoughton... was burned to the ground because its “weaving by steam had deprived the handloom weavers of work”’ (Barringer, 2018: 22). Artists of the nineteenth century such as Thomas Cole lamented the impact.

The period of 1880–1920 has been conceptualised differently on either side of the Congo Pool. From the early days of independence, the DRC sought to distance itself from the European men of colonial history. In 1966 President Joseph Mobutu (in office 1965–1997) changed the names of the three main cities from Léopoldville, Elizabethville and Stanleyville to Kinshasa, Lubumbashi and Kisangani respectively. In 1971 he changed his own name to Mobutu Sese Seko and demanded that his ministers with Western names replace them with African ones. At the same time, Stanley Pool was renamed Malebo Pool and Mount Stanley renamed Mount Ngaliema. Several statues of Stanley and Leopold II were removed or destroyed (Fig. 130). These changes were part of Mobutu’s wider call for ‘national authenticity’ and can be situated as part of a broader reaction to the colonial period of history across sub-Saharan Africa that has occurred in waves from the time of independence through to the present day.⁷⁶



Fig. 130. Statue of Henry Morton Stanley, originally erected in 1956 on top of Mount Ngaliema. (Source: <http://kosubaawate.blogspot.com>)

In the Congo, a different conceptualisation of the colonial period has occurred in the post-colonial period, which will be analysed here in more depth and in relation to Teke history. The patterns of commerce established in the Congo during the period of 1880–1920 could, in

⁷⁶ See Adelman, Kenneth Lee. ‘The Recourse to Authenticity and Negritude in Zaire’. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 13, no. 1 (1975): 134–39 for a wider discussion of Mobutu’s ideas of authenticity. The ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ movement at the University of Cape Town in 2015, which led to the removal of a statue of Cecil John Rhodes and the renaming of the administrative buildings as Azania house, can be understood as being part of this same movement.

many ways, be said to have continued through to 2017. Raw materials extracted from the region by foreign owned enterprises continued to be exported to industrial nations in exchange for finished goods. While certain foodstuffs such as manioc were produced for indigenous consumption, and small-scale raffia cloth weaving was still practised in the Teke Tsaayi region, production did not occur at a level much above subsistence. The country relied almost entirely on imported goods, predominantly from France and China, including textiles and second-hand clothes.⁷⁷ In return for these goods, US\$1.04b worth of raw material was exported to China, and US\$714m worth to France, making these countries both the major export markets of raw material and the main suppliers of finished goods.⁷⁸

During his presidency, Denis Sassou Nguesso (in office 1979–1992; 1997–present) had shown himself to be intent on maintaining these global trade networks, shoring up historic trading links with France and forging new partnerships with China and also South Korea. One way in which he demonstrated his support for these historic patterns of trade was by formalising the narrative of the formation of the Congo as authored by Brazza himself. In so doing, he co-opted the history of the Teke peoples for his own purpose, using the authority of Iloo I as a means of strengthening his own right to rule.

Sassou may be seen as continuing the pattern established during the colonial period under the French, where certain African figures of ‘traditional’ authority continued to be ‘respected’ as a means of demonstrating support of French presence in the region.⁷⁹ Teke Queen Ngalifourou (1864–1956) became one of the ‘best known and most beloved women in African history’ (Opou, 2006:11). In the 1988 novel *L’affaire du Silure* by the Congolese writer Guy Menga (born 1935), Ngalifourou is described as offering a direct link to the past. Set in 1946, the heroes of the story are in the countryside where they hope to meet her: ‘Queen Ngalifourou, the one who was present at the signing of this famous treaty which places the Congo under the flag of France, [and] is still alive. Chances are we’ll meet her’ (Menga, 1981: 83). The history of the

⁷⁷ In 2015, the top exports of the Republic of the Congo were crude petroleum (US\$3.71b), refined petroleum (US\$116m), refined copper (US\$826m), rough wood (US\$241m) and sawn wood (US\$116m). Its top imports were goods specifically related to the petroleum industry such as tankers (US\$476m), iron structures (US\$200m) and insulated wire (US\$140m). Packaged medicaments (US\$124m) and palm oil (US\$123m) were the most significant imported consumer goods.

⁷⁸ Data according to <https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/resources/about/> (accessed 8/3/18).

⁷⁹ Archival research in what survives of the Archives de l’Afrique Équatoriale Française in Brazzaville reveals that French colonial agents would continue to meddle in the investiture of new leaders until the late 1940s. Documents contained in fonde GG 41 Makoko (1933–1936) Archives de l’Afrique Équatoriale Française in Brazzaville.

country is again equated with an individual, and to meet Ngalifourou is to meet history. In her person she offered a link back to the Brazza, Makoko Iloo I and the ‘age of exploration’. Wife to both Makoko Mboulignaoh Iloo I (r.1874–1892) and his successor Makoko Mbaindele Iloo II (r.1892–1899), she moved to Ngabe – the site of the most important Nkwembali shrine – after the murder of her second husband at the hands of the French government in 1899.⁸⁰ In Ngabe she became the Nga-ntsii-bi, the designated guardian of an important Nkwembali shrine, and she managed the initiation of the future Makoko along with the other vassals. (see p. 211 for more information on her role in the investiture).



Left: Fig. 131. King of the Teke and Queen Ngalifourou at the inauguration of the Lycee Brazza. 1951, Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo. Unknown photographer. Source: DMCARC.

Right: Fig. 132. Queen Ngalifourou alongside Martha de Brazza, daughter of the explorer Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza. Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo. Unknown photographer. Source: DMCARC.

Ngalifourou’s authority as an indigenous figure of power was recognised by the French government who awarded her, amongst many medals, the Legion d’Honneur in 1949.⁸¹ She was photographed wearing this and a number of other medals on several occasions, demonstrating the degree to which she collaborated with colonial forces (S. Dianzange, personal communication, January 2017) (Figs. 131–132). The scale of her funeral, held in 1956 in Ngabe and attended by a number of Europeans from both the Belgian and French Congo, is still remembered today.

⁸⁰ The current Nga-ntsii-bi, Sophie-Josephine, is a direct descendant of Ngalifourou, and includes her name in her title.

⁸¹ Scholastique Dianzange has argued that she was a collaborator. It has yet to be conclusively determined who she was married to, as there is some conflict between oral and printed sources.

Congolese writers of the period noted how it demonstrated the extent of her political and religious influence (Youlou-Kouya, 1957). Others saw it as a sign of the degree to which she had collaborated with the colonial regime.



Fig. 133. Makoko Alphonso Ntsalou visiting Paris on the eve of Congo's independence. On the left, his wife Ngadoua and on his right, his secretary Auguste Nguenio ('Sa Majesté Makoko Alphonse Ntsalou, Roi des Batékés au premier plan, en visite a Paris a la veille de l'indépendance du Congo. A gauche sa femme Ngadoua et a droit son secrétaire Auguste Nguenio'). c.1960, Paris. Photographer unknown. Source: Alexandre Mpinandzi (born 1963)

Her death in 1956 was presented by the urban intelligentsia in Brazzaville as a reawakening of precolonial Congolese power. Independence from France a few years later in 1960 saw an active revival in 'traditional' authority figures in the Congo, and in the lead up to independence it was even imagined that the Teke court might play some role in determining the country's future. The Makoko of the time, Nsalou (r.1948–1964), was invited to Paris in 1960 to

celebrate the birth of the independent Congo nation (Fig. 133). Certain Teke art traditions were also consciously revived in the early years of independence. The ‘Semaine Culturelle’ of 1968 in Brazzaville, for instance, celebrated, amongst other traditions, the cultural traditions of the Teke Tsaayi and involved the performance of a Kidumu masquerade in the city. In the sub-prefecture of Bambana, masks that had not been carved for a century were made again near Mount Lekoumou. Marie Claude Dupré studied the new versions of these traditions as an approach to art history (Dupré and Fry, 1968; Dupré 1984, 1989). Other scholars of the time questioned the art historical value of these new versions of nineteenth-century masks (Lema, 1978: 24).

In 1960, the Teke court in Mbe had not been of economic or political significance for 85 years. The Makoko, however, had continued to rule as a religious head, relatively free from the political changes in the capital. The French had not entirely left the Teke court alone, however. Archival research in what survives of the Archives de l’Afrique Équatoriale Française in Brazzaville reveals that French colonial agents meddled in the investiture of new leaders through the 1920s and 1930s until the late 1940s.⁸² At the time of independence Makoko Nsalou was the Makoko, and the current Makoko is part of the same clan. Makoko Nsalou ruled until 1964, when he was replaced by Makoko Iloo III Patrice (r.1964–1971). Under the presidency of Marien Ngouabi (1938–1977), relations with the state shifted dramatically. In 1971, he outlawed the Teke court, declaring it not to be in line with the Marxist policy of his government. The new People’s Republic of the Congo had no place in it for kings, a diametrically opposed vision to that of Mobutu on the other side of the Pool.⁸³

In spite of changes in politics in the capital, it is clear that the court continued to function. In 1980, when the independent government celebrated the founding of Brazzaville in the presence of Savorgnan de Brazza’s granddaughter, the then-outlawed Makoko was paraded in front of her along with Gotala, the *ngantsii* of Mpila (Impila), wearing all the attributes of royal authority. As soon as he returned to Mbe, he had all of these symbols – including his hat, red cloth, brass *onlua*, bracelets and leopard skin – forcibly removed by the representatives of the Congolese Labour Party (PCT). When Lehuard visited him in 1983, Makoko Ntsali was ‘no more than a diminished old man, who lived in a modest traditional house’ (Lehuard, 1996: 38).

⁸² Documents contained in fonde GG 41 Makoko (1933–1936) Archives de l’Afrique Équatoriale Française in Brazzaville.

⁸³ The outlawing of the Teke court may have had an ethnic dimension: as a Koyou from the Cuvette in the north, Ngouabi had no interest in the power structures of a rival ethnic group.

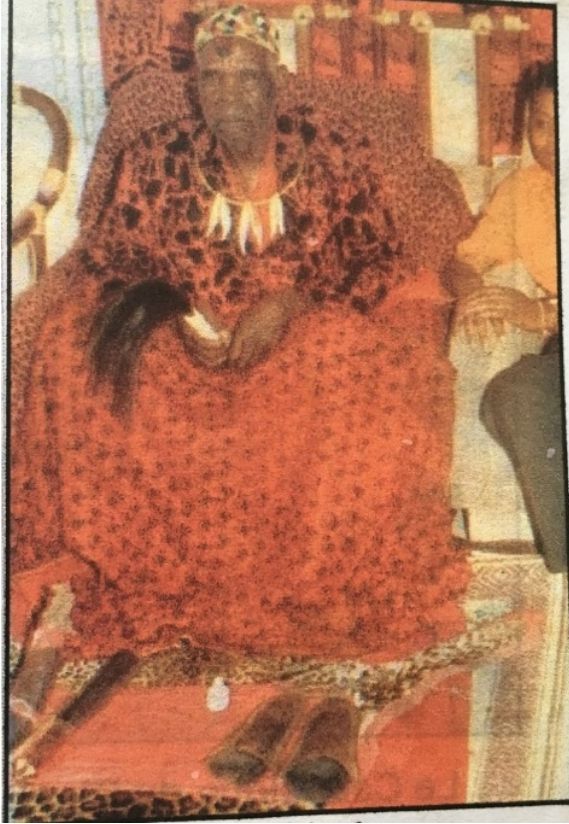


Fig. 134. Makoko Wawa (r.1993–1998) on his throne in Mbe, on the sacred day of Nkwembali ('Sa Majesty Pierre Wawa, Le Jour Sacré du Nkouembali'). Mbe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Maurice Omvini (born c.1950).

Interviews in Mbe in 2017, however, tell a different story; one in which this government ban had little, if any, actual impact on the functioning of the court in Mbe. It continued to function much as it always had done, until the Sovereign National Conference was held in Brazzaville from 10 February to 10 June 1991, when the government officially validated the court again. This conference culminated in the country's first democratic election, and the appointment of Pascal Lissouba (born 1931) as President.

Though not of Teke origin himself, Lissouba respected the Makoko and the indigenous authority he represented. In 1993 the principal dignitaries met in Mbe to officially elect a new Makoko, and Mialami Wawa (r.1993–1998) was selected (Fig. 134). According to some informants – commenting outside of the official court history – Wawa kept 'his own fetish'.⁸⁴ Doubts about his quality as a leader meant that after three years he was made to go through the kinship initiation ceremony known as the *Ousson lisse* – organised by the Nga-ntsii-bi – that involved seclusion in the forest near Ngabe and was intended to test him and ensure his fitness to

⁸⁴ He caused terrible things to happen in Mbe, including cars crashes and miscarriages.

rule (see pp. 207–213 for more information on this ceremony). A year after completing this ritual he died, said to have been killed by lightning in his house. In keeping with tradition, his body was preserved in an elaborate catafalque for three months before he was buried on 25 July 1998 in Ngabe (Fig. 98).

Sassou and the Teke

Violent political upheaval in the capital during the 1997 Civil War led to the exile of the Republic of the Congo's first – and currently sole – democratically elected President, Lissouba, and the re-instatement of the former President Sassou Nguesso as dictator. Today, common lore holds that Sassou, who is of Kongo Mbochi origin, is alternately threatened and fascinated by the 'traditional power' of the Teke.⁸⁵ Sassou has taken the Congo in a direction which is unique in sub-Saharan Africa; accepting and reiterating the history of the region as told by European men of the late nineteenth century in accounts such as those described above. The ultimate expression of his support for the colonial narrative is the mausoleum dedicated to Brazza which sits at the very heart of the city as the capital's most significant public monument. Constructed between 2004–06, it is said to have cost up to ten million euros, with funding provided in part by the Government, the President's private funds and donations from French multinational corporations including Total (Fig. 135).

⁸⁵ His daughter, Edith Lucie Sassou-Nguesso, was married to the twice-President of Gabon Omar Bongo (1935–2009), who was of Teke origin. An urban legend in Brazzaville in 2017 described how Sassou used his daughter as a conduit to Bongo in order to claim Teke power.



Fig. 135. Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza Memorial. February 2017, Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

Situated in a large ornamental garden on prime real estate facing the Congo River, the building is in a Sino-neoclassical style with panes of glass that reflect the light in an artificial mirrored blue. A large statue of Brazza is the central feature of the garden, positioned in an empty pool of cracked blue tiles on a concrete pebbledash plinth. Looking up at the statue, the big toe looms over the platform and in profile he has a cartoonishly enlarged nose. The statue appears to have been cast from concrete and then painted white, the paint cracked and black in places, revealing the porous material underneath.⁸⁶

The mausoleum houses the bodily remains of Brazza, his wife and his four children, which were moved here from Algiers – where he lived for some years after his marriage – and reinterred in this newly constructed mausoleum. At the ceremony of interment, conducted on 3 October 2006, members of the Brazza family knelt down before the newly enthroned Teke king, Makoko Auguste Ngempio (r.2004–present). During his official speech, President Sassou Nguesso told the press that Brazza had ‘treated the people of this country with a lot of love’. Bélinda Ayessa, the president of the Congolese *Association des Amis de Brazza*, declared:

⁸⁶ A poster inside celebrates the tenth memorial of the monument with a quote from the French journalist Nicolas Hulot, who described Brazza: ‘C’est l’homme qui a ouvert le Congo a la France, mais ne voulut etre roi. Beau comme un prince Italien, sombre comme un titan de Victor Hugo, Savorgnan de Brazza est l’un des heroes les plus touchants du 19 siecle. Coeur pur, silhouette a la Corto Maltese, un destin immemorial.’

‘Brazza came peacefully to conquer our people. He observed the rituals and the customs of the blacks he encountered. He respected them and considered them as equal human beings... When the King welcomes him, it is as a friend’ (Bernault, 2010: 367).

The Mausoleum has recently been described as a ‘suave reconquest’ by France of its former colonies and a ‘neo-colonial farce’ (Bernault, 2010: 267). The narrative of Brazza as the conqueror who came to Africa in love and friendship, with understanding and respect for the people and cultures he encountered, is a construction authored by Brazza himself during his lifetime in reaction to that of Stanley. Once again, we can see Brazza as the flâneur who came to the region in love, in contrast to Stanley, the ‘demolition artist’, who came in violence. Indeed, the design of the statue itself is based on publicity shots Brazza sold to gain financial support for his second mission where he signed the treaty with Iloo I (Fig. 8). Barefoot and in vaguely ‘oriental’ clothing, Brazza is presented in the guise of a holy man or prophet, an image of himself he wished to promote and for history to remember. To commission a statue of him in this guise is to directly support the vision of himself that Brazza authored.

While the idea for the reinterment of his bones in Brazzaville was initially arranged with the Brazza family, Sassou took over the ceremony in order to promote trade and political alliance between French, Congolese, Gabonese, Algerian, Chinese and Korean governments, all of which had a stake in the construction of the mausoleum which became a platform for promoting trade deals. By laying claim to his bones, Sassou in turn was able to lay claim to Brazza as an ancestor figure, and it is common lore that he kept some of the bones for his own *ngaa* to use in his spiritual practice. Recorded history begun when the people of this region entered the global economy and indigenous means of trade and production were destroyed. Brazza is thus presented as a ‘transnational ancestor-founder’ and a ‘white ancestor to black citizenries’ (Bernault, 2010: 371). The treaty he signed with the Makoko is presented as the first act of creation, a replacement of the gift from Obu; the copper alloy *onlua*. Brazza now stands in the place of indigenous hero figures. Like them, he came from another land with the tools for the development of a ‘modern nation’ and transformed the lives of the people he found there.

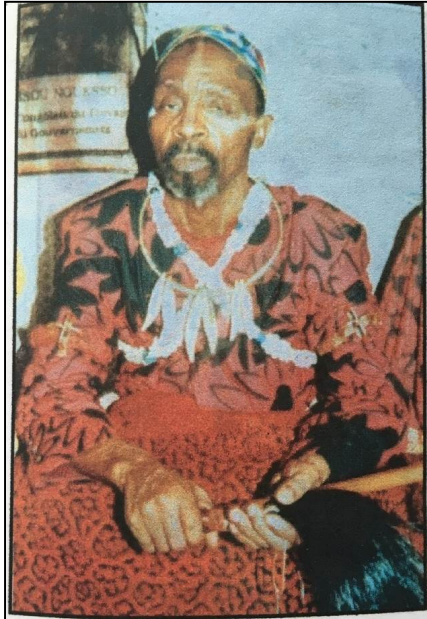


Fig .136. Makoko Ngouayoulou (r.1998–2004) on his throne in Mbe. Mbe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Maurice Omvini (Congolese, born c.1950)

After Wawa died in 1998, Makoko Gaston Ngouayoulou (r.1998–2004) ruled peacefully until his death in 2004 (Fig. 136). At the death of Ngouayoulou, and in the run up to the creation of the Brazza mausoleum, Sassou’s government attempted to break tradition and play a role in appointing a new Makoko on the throne, resulting in Maurice Intsilambia’s selection. The outrage this caused – both at court and amongst the Teke population in the Congo generally – meant he was finally rejected in favour of the current Makoko. This process was spearheaded by the Nga-ntsii-bi and other court officials, and in the process the Teke court boldly asserted its independence from politics.⁸⁷ The current Makoko, August Nguempio, was named and continues to rule at Mbe. He was present at the inauguration of the mausoleum in 2006, rather than the imposter Maurice Intsilambia.

Born in Mbe in the 1940s, as a young man August Nguempio was secretary to Makoko Nsalou (r.1948–1964), and they were photographed together in Paris (Fig. 133). Nsalou appears to have come from the same clan as the current Makoko, and his grandson, Mariss Balekala Gampo, also a nephew of Nguempio, was put in charge of coordinating the courtiers who related to me the history of the court during my stay in Mbe. He was photographed as he wished to be

⁸⁷ An account of this period of history is presented in Maurice Omvini, ‘Mbe, siege du Royaume Teke; berceau de l’histoire du Congo, district de Ngabe’ c.2004.

presented, holding a photograph of his grandfather in the court at Mbe (Fig. 17). Nguempio worked for the mayoral office in Brazzaville and spent his retirement in Mbe.



Fig. 137. Daniel Lyonel Diakouka (1993–present) negotiates a path next to the main road leading to Mbe. February 2017, Mbe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

The threat to the traditional systems of the Teke court that Sassou posed served to re-energise the Teke court, who have subsequently sought international bodies, such as UNESCO, in order to ensure its cultural protection. In 2008 the royal compound of Mbe was submitted to UNESCO as a site of cultural heritage and it remains on their tentative list for inclusion.⁸⁸ While Sassou failed in his attempts to directly seize Teke authority by influencing the selection of a new ruler in 2004, he must be content to relegate Teke culture to obscurity in the Congo today, while other cultural traditions receive extensive support and government funding.⁸⁹ The condition of the road to Mbe is symbol of this wilful neglect; while Mbe is technically close to Brazzaville, it is impossible to get to other than by off-road vehicle or motorcycle (Fig. 137).⁹⁰

⁸⁸ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5374/>

⁸⁹ See, for example, the recent opening of the ‘Kiebe Kiebe’ museum in Sassou’s birthplace in the Cuvette region. James Green forthcoming publication.

⁹⁰ Some argue that this is the choice of the Makoko in order to protect the spiritual force of Mbe. A main road would certainly alter it beyond recognition.

The mausoleum

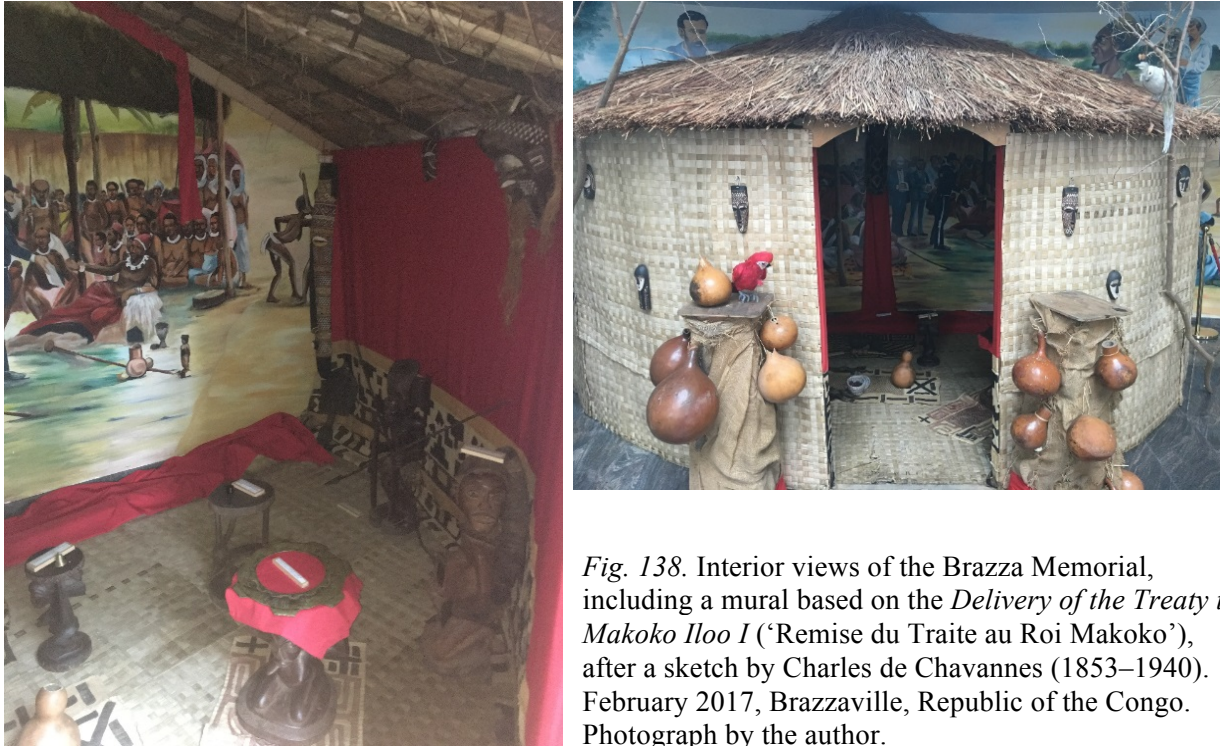


Fig. 138. Interior views of the Brazza Memorial, including a mural based on the *Delivery of the Treaty to Makoko Iloo I* ('Remise du Traite au Roi Makoko'), after a sketch by Charles de Chavannes (1853–1940). February 2017, Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

Within the mausoleum itself, a mural showing Iloo I receiving Brazza forms the backdrop to a generic 'African hut' intended to represent the royal public chamber. (Fig. 138). The scene depicted on the mural is a copy of a watercolour by celebrated French illustrator Édouard Riou (1833–1900), based on the 1884 sketch by Charles de Chavannes. In this white-washed vision of the late nineteenth century, precolonial African history only matters because it was non-European. Within the hut, precolonial Africa is symbolised by an incoherent agglomeration of different 'African' ethnic objects produced for sale to tourists, while the exterior is decorated with generic masks, a red parrot and calabashes. Inside, there are objects from ethnicities as diverse as the Chokwe, Luvale, Songye, Kuba, Luba and Vili, with copies of iconic masterpieces such a Luba stool by the Buli Master.⁹¹ The walls are decorated with a mixture of red cotton cloth, and raffia cloth from the Kuba peoples of the DRC.

Positioned on a Luba stool is a roughly worked *onlua*, described as an 'impressive copper necklace of the Makoko, a powerful royal symbol'. This description, as well as the object itself,

⁹¹ The stool is placed to the bottom right of the image, beneath the *onlua*. See <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/314034> for an original by this artist (accessed 7/7/17).

displays a deep unwillingness to look into the indigenous meanings of this object to the Teke peoples. The object serves simply as a visual shorthand for indigenous beliefs. The general overall shape corresponds to a historic *onlua*, but the surface decoration only does so in the most general of ways, as if the design was based on a photograph, or as if the object was made somewhere else altogether. Indeed, the object appears to be based on a celebrated etching of Makoko Iloo I wearing the *onlua*. It is possible to discern exactly the same circles, lines, squiggles and arrangement of patterns on both the copy presented in the mausoleum and that shown in the etching (Figs. 139–140).



Left: Fig. 139. Profile portrait of Makoko Iloo I ('Makoko D'Après une photographie faite par M. Jacques de Brazza'). *Le Matin*, 1 February 1883.

Right: Fig. 140. *Onlua* housed in the Brazza Memorial, based on the 1883 engraving. February 2017, Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

The etching was first published in the centre of the front page of *Le Matin* on 1 February 1883, where it was said to have been based on a photograph taken by Jacques de Brazza (Fig. 96; Fig. 140). The original function of the publication of this etching was to mark the presence of France in this region, and the image of the Makoko served as an icon of French colonialism. A contemporary metalwork version of the *onlua* depicted in this engraving has very little to do with the Teke peoples, but rather how nineteenth-century France justified its presence in the Congo. Once again, the symbols of the Teke have been claimed by a jealous neighbour.

Teke renunciation of Sassou's vision of history

In preparation for my visit to Mbe in January 2017, I was made aware of the history of the 'fake Makoko' and the government's attempts to usurp the throne in 2004. The degree to which early colonial history had become politicised in Brazzaville became clear to me. In the eyes of my cultural guide and ambassador to the Teke court, Alexandre Mpinandzi (1963–present), the Brazza mausoleum stood as a symbol of the politicisation of Teke history and he claimed never to have gone inside.⁹² Mpinandzi stressed that the historical narrative was not as clear cut and the implications of decisions made by Iloo I and other Africans of the colonial period continued to be interrogated by scholars, and even by courtiers of the current Makoko.

Iloo I was presented to me as an ambivalent figure; both a powerful spiritual force and the man who 'sold' the Congo to the French. The 'Brazza-Makoko' treaty also elicited a mixed response – regret in its implications, but pride in its significance. The treaty is understood to have initiated the formal division of the African continent by competing European countries in Berlin in 1885. As Mariss Balekala Gampo, nephew of the present Makoko, described in an interview at Mbe in February 2017: 'It all began in Mbe, the whole of history.' History might be a mixed blessing, but its genesis was Mbe, a vision of the past that ties into contemporary ideas of the Teke as the autochthonous population of the region.

The court continues to resent and reject 'political' meddling in their affairs. In 2009, a project partly sponsored by the French Government was launched to build a documentation centre relating to Tio culture in Mbe. The Bibliothèque Sans Frontières, in charge of creating the archive, looked to the Teke Tio *onlua* preserved in the collection of the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, as an iconic symbol of Teke culture. An 'exact copy' of this work was commissioned to be put on display at the centre in Mbe. The intention was to make as true a replica as possible, copying 'traces of use, wear and deterioration' (Masarovic, 2009) (Fig. 141).

⁹² In 2003, Mpinandzi founded the association Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza Iloo premier (APSB), one of the goals of which was to 'redynamiser les relations culturelles et historique avec les descendants de Pierre Brazza'. In his eyes, a major – and unanticipated – outcome of this had been that it set in motion the process that would lead to the reinterment of Savorgnan de Brazza's and members of his family's bodily remains in Brazzaville.



Fig. 141. Photographs showing the process of manufacturing the copy. From Stephan Masarovic, 'Rapport de réalisation d'une reproduction du collier 'de chef Makoko'', 2009. Musée du Quai Branly archive.

The gift of this imitation collar – the original commissioned by Jacques de Brazza in 1883 – was meant to right a historical wrong. Intended as a form of cultural restitution, the object has been rejected by the Teke court as a 'fake' or a 'facsimile', and mention of it at the court in 2017 provoked strongly negative reactions. It is not displayed in Mbe. As far as the Teke court are concerned, France still owns the original *onlua* given to the first Makoko by Obu, and they will not be fobbed off with a copy of a copy.⁹³

The rejection of this gift shows the degree to which nineteenth-century history remains a raw nerve.⁹⁴ Eugénie Mouayini Opou, contemporary Teke writer, poet and mayor of Mfilou, views the late nineteenth century as an unresolved 'historical enigma' forming a 'background to present conversation' (Opou, 2010: 21). In her eyes, making sense of this history is a form of communal post-traumatic stress, and one way in which the past is made sense of in the present is through storytelling. According to Opou, a popular oral history in modern-day Congo relates to the 'disappearance' of the Makoko's collar. Like many children of her generation growing up in

⁹³ In fact, my presence at the Teke court was welcomed as an opportunity to tell the 'real' history.

⁹⁴ This episode can furthermore be situated in terms of wider contemporary debates about the restitution of works of African art from Europe to their nations of origin.

a post-independence Republic of the Congo, the story of ‘the king’s collar’ was one with which she was intimately familiar. As a girl, the story had been passed down to her by her grandmother and she noted that a conversation with a traditional Teke chief might easily turn to this familiar tale.

In her 2010 novel *L’Incroyable Histoire du Collier Du Roi Makoko de Mbé*, Opou set down a version of this history as related to her by the current Makoko, Auguste Nguempio, at the court in Mbe. In setting this story down in print, Opou understood that what she was creating would function as a permanent memorial: ‘tradition tells us that the words fly and writings remain.’ In publishing the text, she was able to monumentalise the story in the same way that Europeans monumentalise their history: ‘to engrave the story on a marble stone’ (Opou, 2010: 6).

Published a year after the erection of the Brazza memorial, this text offers us an alternative testimony to the public portrayal of Brazza as the founding figure of the modern nation state. In Opou’s telling, the figure of the Makoko – and, by extension, the *onlua* that the Makoko historically wore – is symbolic of a world of permanence that was lost with the arrival of Europeans in the region. She stresses that the power of the Makoko stretches across centuries, and that the dignity of his position is inherited. While the individual Makoko changed over time, ‘the mode of election, nor the rite of investiture did not change one iota’.

The Makoko existed as a constant force of political stability that transcended the lives of individual rulers, and the *onlua* is viewed as the most potent symbol of this constancy over time. According to Opou, the same *onlua* was worn by successive sovereigns, the last one being Makoko Mbaindele Iloo II (1892–1899), who succeeded the celebrated Makoko Iloo I. The French were responsible for stealing the *onlua* and so modern history was initiated. The trauma will not be healed, in Opou’s eyes, until the original *onlua* is returned to the Teke peoples. The events of this time are a part of daily conversation in a city still named Brazzaville, whose most important monument is of this white conquistador.

According to the version of this story recounted to me by the courtiers of Makoko August Nguempio in January 2018, after Brazza left Mbe in 1884 he gave two pieces of cloth to the Makoko; a white piece and a red piece.⁹⁵ If there was a drought – which happened periodically in

⁹⁵ I have collected a number of versions of the story of the missing *onlua*, both in Brazzaville and Mbe, and it serves as a metaphor for the meeting of two cultures who understood each other well enough to be able to exchange goods

the harsh climate of the plateau – the Makoko was to send the white piece of cloth to Brazzaville and supplies of food would be sent in return. If the life of the Makoko was at risk and military assistance was urgently required, the Makoko was to send the red piece of cloth to Brazzaville. In 1892 Makoko Iloo I died, and he was succeeded by Makoko Mbaindele Iloo II (1892–1899), who was photographed by Alfred Fourneau (1860–1930) surrounded by his court and with his wife proudly wearing the *onlua* in c.1893 (Fig. 142).



Fig. 142. Mbaindele Iloo II (1892–1899) and his court. c.1893, Mbe, Plateau region, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by *Alfred Fourneau* (1860–1930). Published in Lehuard, 1974, pl.41.

In 1899 there was a terrible drought. Makoko Mbaindele reached out to the French for support.⁹⁶ Misunderstanding the significance of the colours, he sent the red cloth to Brazzaville. Believing the Makoko was in danger, the French militia came to Mbe and killed the guard of the Makoko, thinking they were the enemy. They took Mbaindele to Brazzaville where they imprisoned him, supposedly in order to keep him safe.

Mbaindele soon died of thirst and starvation for he was only permitted according to Teke custom to eat certain foods and drink water from a single source in the vicinity of Mbe. When his body was returned to Mbe for burial, the *onlua* was missing. This episode barely registers in the

– on a superficial transactional level – but beyond this failed to understand the intentions of the other, with devastating implications for the Teke people. While each story differs in detail, essentially, I was told the same tale of tragic misunderstanding.

⁹⁶ There are many variations in the oral accounts for the dates of Mbaindele Iloo II's rule. 1899 is the date recorded in European written accounts.

colonial archive. According to European sources, Makoko Mbaindele Iloo II died in 1899, following a Teke revolt that occurred in June 1899. As Vansina described it:

An administrator of Brazzaville had gone to the Lefini to claim land for one of the *Compagnies concessionnaires*. . . . As a result of the notification to the king about the loss of his land north of the Lefini an affray broke out and the administrator had to retreat to Brazzaville. A military patrol returned, killed a dozen Tio and beat up the king who was taken to Brazzaville to die there. His successor Ikukuri had to go to Brazzaville to receive the investiture. (Vansina, 1973: 471)

The Teke, it would appear, were no longer sovereign and the French had taken charge of the nomination of a new ruler. 1899 marks a significant moment in the history of this region. It was in this year that France divided its territory into private concessionary companies, following the example of Belgium south of the river, with devastating consequences for the Congo peoples. It is quite possible that the *onlua* was taken from the corpse of Mbaindele in 1899 and may well be in a Western collection. I have certainly been keeping an eye out for it. It is also possible that the story of the ‘missing *onlua*’ represents a form of cultural post-traumatic stress that speaks of a much wider loss.



Fig. 143. Alexandre Mpinandzi (1963–present) seated in front of a memorial to Makoko Mbaindele Iloo II (1892–1899) and those murdered by French colonial forces in 1899. February 2017, Mbe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

The trauma of the period of 1880–1920 continued to be negotiated by the Teke peoples in 2017. On arriving in the vicinity of Mbe for the first time, I was led down a freshly cut track through the chest-high grass of the savannah by Alexandre Mpinandzi in a revenant silence. We arrived in front of a crumbling colonial-era memorial, presented in a circle of neatly cut grass (Fig. 142). Mpinandzi described the memorial as being positioned on the exact spot where the massacre of the guard of Makoko Mbaindele Iloo II occurred in 1899, just before he was taken as a captive to Brazzaville where he died in prison and his *onlua* was stolen from his corpse. The plaque on the monument, however, records a different historical event, one more in keeping with

the narrative of the French colonial regime who had installed the monument. The brass plaque reads: 'Ici Alliance Brazza-Makoko 10 Septembre 1880.'

According to Mpinandzi, every 10 September, the day on which the treaty was signed, a ceremony is conducted at the monument, but instead of commemorating the signing of the treaty, it commemorates the massacre. The monument was believed to have become the home of an *nkira* nature spirit, a spiritual being of the natural world that inhabits important and unusual natural formations. Mpinandzi claimed the monument had been allowed to decay so it would be a more fitting home for one of these spirits. As Mpinandzi noted, even though the structure itself was crumbling, the grass around it was cut and a new piece of red cotton cloth hung from a pole next to the monument. Now that the monument had become a sanctuary for an *nkira* spirit, it was tended to by its own guardian.

That a colonial-era monument should be reclaimed as a vital site of Teke spiritual force is testament to the power and continuity of the Teke religious belief system, Nkwembali. It also speaks to the fact that while much was destroyed under colonialism, remarkable continuities run through to the present day in Mbe, where the Makoko still sits on the *likuba*.

Glossary of Terms

Andzuunu: anvil (Lema, 1978: 211).

Ankouobi: the twelve vassals of the royal court.

Ano: rings given to the Makoko during initiation in the *Lissee* that destroy his virility.

Balongi: sorcerer who sends evil spirits into a person.

Bina: (pl. *ma*, **mabina**): ‘incision’ (Hottot, 1956:36). Also ‘razor’, ‘lancet’ (Calloc’h, 1911: 241).

Bonga: ‘the medicine or magical substance placed in the abdominal socket of the *butti* fetish’ (Hottot, 1956: 36).

Bongos: squares of plain weave raffia cloth, ‘very often striped, and sometimes made even in check patterns’ (Du Chaillu, 1867: 290).

Buma: ‘to weave’, **i-mbuma biko**, ‘the maker of cloth’ (Calloc’h, 1911: 333).

Bumu: ‘a secret society’ (Hottot, 1956: 36).

Butti: ‘a fetish figure containing *bonga*’ (Hottot, 1956: 36).

Bunganga: fee paid on the head of a slave (Sims, 1888: 132).

Ekaar: an individual’s own matriline (Lema, 1978: 80).

Etaar: matrilineage of the father (Lema, 1978: 80).

Enkoetsyuu: matrilineage of the father of the mother (Lema, 1978: 80).

Engumukuru: matrilineage of the father of the mother of the mother (Lema, 1978: 80).

Fwana: ‘worth’ or ‘valuable’ (Sims, 1886: 169, 180).

Idzwa: sacred forests (Vansina, 1973: 35), according to Sims refers to ‘the height of the dry season’ (Sims, 1886: 123).

Ifuna: place to make pottery (Sims, 1886: 102). General word for ‘place’.

I-le (pl. **bi**): a new born.

Ikwi: ancestral forces that had to be placated in order to ensure good fortune (Vansina, 1973: 43). Also, **Ikuru:** ‘ancestor’ (Sims, 1886: 189).

Kaa or **Káá:** royal crown made from raffia fibre by the blacksmith (Vansina, 1973: 387).

Inkoura onkoo: annual tax each village was required to send to the Makoko, usually a package of goods consisting of kola, tobacco, raffia cloth, European fabrics and occasionally copper *ngiele*.

Katéka bikéti: seller of fetishes in a Sundi market. (**katéka:** sell; **bitéki:** fetishes).

Kana: clan.

Kila mpu: the candidate selected for initiation to the role of Makoko (Opou, 2005: 14). Also, historically ‘crown’ or ‘a king’, and ‘to enthrone’ (Sims, 1886: 30, 81, 119).

Koro: ‘wealthy slave’ (Sims, 1888: 132).

Kura: ‘gifts of the dead’; items collected and presented to the deceased (Calloc’h, 1911: 150).

Leboo: a courtyard area at the entrance of the forge (*nzo e tsula*) (Lema, 1978: 212–13).

Libia: a ring made out of a copper alloy given to the Makoko during his initiation.

Lifutu: sacred ashes worn by the Makoko on the face, also **lifuru** (Sims, 1886: 7).

Likuba: the royal seat or cushion, a form of *nkobi*. Historically refers to a bag for valuable materials, specifically a bag for salt (Sims, 1886: 11).

Ma: pluralisation prefix.

Mabina: ‘The facial scarification which distinguishes a member of the Teke tribe’ (Hottot, 1956: 36).

Makoko: The sovereign leader of the Teke peoples. Also spelt *Onkoo*: alternative name for Makoko (Lehuard, 1996: 159).

Malafu: palm wine or ‘the fermented sap of the *Elias*-palm’ (Hottot, 1956: 36).

Makani: ‘class of evil spirit’ (Hottot, 1956: 28).

Mbali imfumu: the public square of Mbe.

Mbandjuala: the name for facial cicatrisation marks among the Teke Tsaayi.

Mbielembiele: bracelet made out of a copper alloy given to the Makoko during his initiation.

Mbula a ngoh: cape of red cotton, with a leopard spot design in black and a border in white cotton. Worn by the Makoko.

Mpieme: ‘a white earth, “the bones of ancestors”’ (Hottot, 1956: 36).

Mupfu: ‘class of evil spirit’ (Hottot, 1956: 28).

Museo: ‘sceptre’ and ‘bellows’ (Sims, 1886: 122). Vansina related this to the *Oussey ampa* (Vansina, 1973: 333).

Mutiri: royal blacksmith, also name for the royal crown made from raffia.

Mabye (sing. *bye*): hide covering of the bellow compartments (Lema, 1978: 211).

Mishao; museo: bellows with two or four hide membranes. Also, royal ‘sceptre’ (Lema, 1978: 211).

Mitako (pl. *mitako*): brass rod, according to Guiral ‘the only money’ accepted on the Pool in 1880 (Guiral, 1889: 231).

Mityen: small hammer (Lema, 1978: 211).

Motsulu; mutsuli: the blacksmith, also *mutswii u wootsolo*. ‘The one who works the metal’ (Lema, 1978: 212–13).

Mpika: a holy day dedicated to the Nkwembali shrines that occurred one day in four. Also, ‘*marché*’ Calloc’h, 1911: 262).

Muta: raffia cloth funeral shroud amongst the Teke Tsaayi. Imported from the Tege and stored by a chief until his death (Dupré, 1999: 46).

Mutette: a form of long basket that was carried on the head.

Muwa: sculptor. Also, *muwa a biteo*; ‘sculptor of statues’, or *uwe waa biteo*; ‘the one who sculpts statues’ (Lema, 1978: 211).

Muwe: the religious charm of the blacksmith-sculptor. When a blacksmith becomes a true master of this charm he is known as the *ngaamuwe (ngaa muwe)*; ‘master of the *muwe*’ (Lema, 1978: 214).

Mutsina: ‘perfect’, ‘whole, not cut up’ (Sims 1888, 17, 97).

Mwn-na: a child.

Mu-ke mu-ke: a boy aged 5–10 years old.

Mu-bwia; mwa-na balaga: a boy aged around 12 years old.

Mukissi (also **Nkita**): a female therapeutic tradition.

Ndzal ankori: an upper arm bracelet made out of a copper alloy that is given to the Makoko during his initiation.

Ncouna: Congo Pool, or Malebo Pool, formerly Stanley Pool (Guiral, 1889: 196). Also, **Abula abzali** (Sims, 1886: 141).

Ndzo ancweli: catafalque of a Makoko or important chief.

Ngaa: religious specialist, ‘fetish man’ (Hottot, 1956: 36) also ‘doctor’ (Sims, 1886: 36). Spelt **Nkhum** (Lema, 1978: 211).

Ngáá mbulu: ‘the most revered among the *ngáá*.’ (Vansina, 1973: 196),

Nganga (pl. **banganga**): Kongo priest.

Nga-libagi: a boy aged 0–5 years.

Ngaunga: ‘village headman’ (Hottot, 1956: 36).

Ngandzuunu; **nga andzuunu**: ‘master of the anvils’, title of the Makoko (Janzen, 1982: 59).

Ngantsii: ‘master of’ (*nga*) the *ntsii*, also *ngaantsie*; ‘master of the land’. (Lehuard, 1996: 143).

Nga-ntsii-bi: Female guardian of the power of the Nkwembali during the period of transition between rulers. Established in Ngabe, she has her own court and plays a vital role in the initiation of a new Makoko.

Ngiele: copper currency from the mines in the southern Niari plateau, the only regional source of copper north of the Congo River. Metal was primarily exported in the form of ingots, bracelets and the sometimes-decorated currency bar, *ngiele* (Sautter, 1960: 37).

Nguiangobou: full ceremonial garb of the Makoko.

Nka: the red blanket with black leopard spots with which the Makoko is publicly covered by the Nga-ntsii-bi, marking the completion of the *Oushion ounko*.

Nkana: markets. The root '*kana*' refers to an area of a village or a neighbourhood, to offspring, family and tribe (Sims, 1888: 44, 88, 91 163, 170).

Nkam turu: currency concealed in the dowry cloth (Lema, 1978: 68).

Nkhime (pl. *Bankhime*): an unidentified climbing plant with sharp leaves (Lehuard, 1996: 55).

Nkibi: 'men's ritual dance' (Hottot, 1956: 36).

Nkiba: 'a fetish figure which is not intended to have *bonga*' (Hottot, 1956: 36).

Nkira: nature spirit. A powerful, beneficial spiritual being that inhabits important and unusual natural formations. Conversely, 'spirits of disease', also '*Nkira*' refers to a category of carved figure that counters these harmful spirits (Hottot, 1956: 36).

Nkiriga: 'designates the leaping of the *nga* or *maganga* in the ritual ceremonies against the evil doings of the *nkira*, *mupfu* and *makani*, which are different classes of evil spirit' (Hottot, 1956: 28).

Nkobi: powerful charm, the guardianship of which was the source of a ruler's political power.

Nkwembali; *Nkwe Mbali*: 'the national *nkira*' (Vansina, 1973: 374). The Makoko 'derived his authority from the possession of a hoard of sacred objects (*nkwe mbali*) connected with the spirit of *Nkwe Mbali*, who dwelled in the waterfalls of the Lefini' (Vansina, 1968: 108). Today, refers to the combined natural and ancestral forces of the spiritual realm.

Nke: a clay pipe separating the fire from the wooden body of the bellows.

Nsere: cicatrisation marks of non-Teke people (Hottot, 1956: 30).

Ntsua: ‘bondslave’ (Sims, 1888: 132).

Ntsuo: middleman agent on the pool who arranged a trade in slaves (Sims, 1888: 132).

Ntsii: territory of land under the dominion of a number of *nkira*.

Nzuun: large hammer of the blacksmith (Lema, 1978: 211).

Nzo e tsula; ku baful biloo: open sided forge, one of the central gathering places for the male elite of the village (Lema, 1978: 212–13).

Nzo mfula: a purpose-built structure placed in the forest near Ngabe, where the Makoko must remain for the nine days of the *lissee*.

Nzo a backwe: a separate area within a chief’s house where power figures are presented.

Okuru biko: final stage of the betrothal ceremony in which the woman is dressed in new clothes (Lema, 1978: 68).

Ologhi: autopsy of the body intended to ‘search for the evil spirit in the body of the dead’. Practised by the Teke peoples of the Alima River.

Onlua: name for the copper alloy collar of the *nga ntsii*. Also spelt *ouloua* (Opou, 2010: 5).

Osomo mu manzo ma bako; owaa maa: the second stage in the betrothal ceremony (Lema, 1978: 68).

Ouandjas: ‘houses without walls’ in which weavers worked, each of which contained ‘four or five looms, with the weavers seated before them weaving the cloth’ (Du Chaillu, 1867: 290).

Ougnah: the flywhisk, held by the Makoko as a sign of justice. The *oussey ampa* is always placed in front of the *ougnah* in his hands to demonstrate that ‘power comes before justice.’

Oussey ampa: a dried piece of beef held by the Makoko as a symbol of his power and right to govern.

Oushion ounko: ‘trapping of the king’. A stage in the investiture process for a new monarch.

Owaa biko: a stage in the betrothal ceremony known as ‘the delivery of clothes’ (Lema, 1978: 68).

Swolo: when the vassals come together in Mbe to designate he who shall be ‘raised to the dignity’ (*infumu*) of Makoko following the wish of the ancestors.

Tchulu: standard square unit of plain weave raffia cloth.

Tege: ‘a fetish intended to have *bonga* but lacking it’ (Hottot, 1956:36). Also, *itégui* (pl. *bitégui*). Known as *kifouiti* (pl. *bifouiti*) in the Sundi language.

Tula: red pigment made from crushed redwood. *tukula* in Kikongo. (Sims, 1886: 38,98).

Ulani: the ‘chief’s share of anything’ (Sims, 1886: 154).

Umbura: ‘slave-boy’ (Sims, 1888: 132).

Umbuo andzuo: potter (Sims, 1886: 102).

Untsa-a-ntsa: dried leaves intended to calm the spirits of those present when the court is in session.

Waafiteere: the wife the Makoko gains during his investiture. She is a relative of the Nga-ntsii-bi and serves as ‘his spiritual wife’ for the ceremony. She is charged with proclaiming (*bira liere*) the name of the new sovereign.

Wačuko: ‘the maker of garments’ (*waču*, ‘do’; *eko*, ‘garments’) (Masson-Detourbet, 1957: 68).

Major Informants in Mbe and Ngabe

Titles and personal information provided by the individuals themselves.

1. Makoko Auguste Nguempio (2004–present), ‘his majesty, 17th Makoko, nephew of Makoko Iloo I (1874?–1892) and Makoko Mbaindele Iloo II (1892–1899), grandson of Makoko Ngambouala [*sic.*] and nephew of the Makoko Alphone Ntsali (1948–2004)’.
2. Norbert Nbinombino, ‘guardian of the Libvii shrine, son of Makoko Alphonse Ntsali, younger brother of Makoko Auguste Nguempio’.
3. Elie Nganbara, ‘grandson of Makoko Ntsali Alphonse Ntsali, nephew of Makoko Auguste Nguempio’.
4. Mariss Balekala Gampo, ‘grandson of King Alphonse Ntsali, nephew of Makoko Nguempio, son of Faustin Balekala.’
5. Jean Claude Ngabioue, ‘Certified Professor of the CEG, Secretary to Makoko Auguste Nguempio’.
6. Serge Arnaud Mfoukieme, ‘guard of Makoko Auguste Nguempio’.
7. Wilfrid Gabio Guema, ‘guard of Makoko Auguste Nguempio and nephew of Makoko Gaston Ngoua-Youlou’.
8. Alexander Mpinandzi, born on 29 July 1963, ‘sculptor artist, Inspector of Fine Arts, Professor of Plastic Arts (sculptor, anatomy of the Aesthetic Arts) of the Academy of Fine Arts, Brazzaville’.
9. Daniel Ngantsui, born around 1898, ‘when Brazza left Ngabe for Brazzaville during the time of Govourner Antonetti’.

10. Jane Eninouwe, born about 1910 (?), 'the first-born child of Mbe. The founders of Mbe was Ngankia, who, along with four other people including her father Nza, part of the guard of the Makoko, founded Mbe 100 years ago'.

11. Pascal Ikoukouri, 'grandson of Vassal Ngambion, king's blacksmith'.

12. Joseph Ngantsibi, 'son of Nga-ntsii-bi Ngalifourou Sophie Josephine, born on January 15, 1943 in Ngabe, chief of the Livii shrine, appointed the 1st vassal'.

13. Ngampo, 'born about 1943 to Ngabe, land chief Ampoh'.

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Fig. 83. Receptacle with figurative relief and stopper. 1880–1890, Loango region, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Kongo peoples, Vili group, ivory, 17.1 x 5.1 x 5.7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1993.382a, b). Gift of Marcia and Irwin Hersey, 1993.

Fig. 84. Portrait of a Teke woman ('Femme bateke d'après une photographie'). *c.*1892, Congo Pool. From Jean Dybowski, *La Route du Chad*, (1893), 75.

Fig. 85. Rich Teke Woman of Congo Pool ('Bateke Riche'). *c.*1892, Congo Pool. Drawing by Édouard Riou (1833–1900). From Jacques de Uzès, *Le voyage de mon fils au Congo* (1894), 90.

Fig. 86. Staff finial; kneeling female figure. 19th century [documented *c.*1891], Banana region, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Kongo peoples, ivory, 16 cm. Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, University of East Anglia (UEA252).

Fig. 87. Portrait of Chief Nemlão.. *c.*1890, Banana region, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Unknown photographer. From Congo Illustré, 1892. Image Source: RAAI.

Fig. 88. Portrait of a woman wearing a brass necklace ('Femme Upoto, ornée d'un collier en laiton. Le poids de ces colliers dépasse parfois 15 kilogrammes'). Early 20th century, Upoto region, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Unknown photographer. Published in Alfred Mahieu, *Numismatique du Congo 1485–1924* (1924) 33.

Fig. 89. *One of the King's wives at Chumbiri*. Engraving. From Henry Morton Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent* (1878) II, 319.

Fig. 90. Slaves in a Congo market. 1888, Chumbiri region, Congo Pool, Republic of the Congo. Photograph. Google images. Image source unlocated.

Fig. 91. Bracelet. Late 19th century, Alima River, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1891. Teke or Ngala peoples, brass, 2.5 x 11 x 11.2 cm, 1011 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1896.28.21).

Ex- collection: collected as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).

Fig. 92. Bracelet (*Midjoko*) with monetary function. Late 19th century, upper Sangha River, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1891. Ngala peoples [?], brass, 7.5 x 3.5 cm 325 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1896.28.75).

Ex- collection: collected as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).

Fig. 93. Portrait of Ngassa, Queen of Makoko Iloo I, in the Royal Compound. ('La regina Ngassa, moglie di Makoko'). 1884, Mbe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Jacques de Brazza (1859–1888). Published in Elio Zorzi and Attilio Peçile, *Al Congo con Brazzà: viaggi di due esploratori italiani nel carteggio e nel "Giornale" inediti di Attilio Peçile (1883–1886)* (1940), 448–49.

Fig. 94. Mpocontaba, First Vassal of the Makoko ('M'Pohontaba Premier Vassal de Makoko'). Engraving. From Savorgnan de Brazza, *Conférences et Lettres de P. Savorgnan de Brazza* (1887), 236.

Fig. 95. *Bankoa*, chief of the Bateke. Early twentieth century (postmarked 26 June 1920) Postcard, 14 x 9 cm. Holly W. Ross Postcard Collection.

Fig. 96. Profile portrait of Makoko Iloo I ('Makoko D'Après une photographie faite par M. Jacques de Brazza'). From *Le Matin*, 1 February 1883.

Fig. 97. The Chief of Ndolo's catafalque ('Grand ballot d'étoffes entourant le cadaver d'un chef Bateke.'). 1913, village of Ndolo, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photograph by J. Maes.

Fig. 98. The Catafalque of Makoko Pierre Wawa. October 2004, Ngabe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Maurice Omvini (born c.1950).

Fig. 99. Norbert Nbinombino, guardian of the *Libvii* Nkobi shrine in the courtyard of the Makoko's residence. February 2017, Mbe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

Fig. 100. Forge bellows (*nkom*) with a sculptural element of a female face. 19th century, Gabon, inventoried 1949. Fang peoples, wood, brass, 56.2 x 28 x 18 cm. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1949.20.5). Ex- collection: Miss Arsandaux.

Fig. 101. Ngalifourou completes the investiture of Makoko Auguste Nguempio by covering him with the *nka* blanket ('La Reine Ngalifourou en pleine investiture de sa Majeste Auguste Nguempio'), 16th October 2004, Ngabe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Maurice Omvini (born c.1950).

Fig. 102. Bracelet. 19th century, Mbe, Pool region, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 2012. Teke peoples, Tio group, copper alloy, 16.5 x 8.5 cm. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (70.2012.13.1). Ex- collection: Collected by Robert Lehuard in the vicinity of Brazzaville, 1920–30.

Fig. 103. Bracelet. 1884, Mbe, Pool region, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1896. Royal Blacksmith Ngaambiôô, Teke peoples, Tio group, copper alloy, 12.2 x 9 x 10 cm, 225 g. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1896.28.11). Ex- collection: commissioned by Jacques de Brazza in 1884 as part of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–85).

Fig. 104. Profile of a Teke Fumu woman near Gambali, showing cicatrization marks ('BAS-Congo – Batéké woman near the village of Gambali'). 22 March 1908, Plateau Region, Republic of the Congo. A. Robert Hottot (French, 1884–1939), stereo glass, 107 x 44 mm. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1994.62.19).

Figs. 105, 106. Pierre Savorgnan of Brazza handing over the treaty with France to King Makoko ("Pietro Savorgnan di Brazzà consegna a re Makoko il trattato con la Francia"). Vicinity of Mbe, 1884. Jacques de Brazza (1859–1888), 160 x 115 mm (excluding mount). Archivio Storico Capitolino, Archivio Savorgnan di Brazzà, Rome, 017; 019.

Fig. 107. *Hairstyles of Teke chiefs* ('*Coiffures de Chefs Batekes*'). Drawing by Édouard Riou (1833–1900), From Jacques Uzès, *Le voyage de mon fils au Congo* (1894), 90.

Fig. 108. Woman Making *Tula*. 1906–07, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Manuel Gomez (1883–1912). Published in Frederick Starr (1912), Plate VIII.

Fig. 109. Power Object ('Fetish bundle') 1905–1906, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, acquired 1910. Teke peoples, horn, feather, cord, pigment, 27.1 x 9 cm. The American Museum of Natural History. Ex- collection: Frederick Starr, 1906.

Fig. 110. Delivery of the Treaty to Makoko Iloo I ('Remise du Traite au Roi Makoko'). After a sketch by Charles de Chavannes (1853–1940). Painting by Édouard Riou (1833–1900).

Fig. 111. Journal entry for 26 September 1880. Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza (1852–1905). (16 PA II/5 ANOM). Photograph by the author, May 2016.

Fig. 112. Standing Janus-form figure. 19th century, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1896. Teke or Kamba peoples, wood, resin, earth, cotton, glass, organic materials, 27 x 10 x 5.5 cm. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1896.51.1) Ex-collection: Collected by a member of the Mission de l'Ouest africain (1883–85).

Fig. 113. Portrait of Chief Mipako (Mipako, headman (ngaunga) of Kinda village and fetish man (maganga) of repute, wearing feather head-dress used in ritual ceremonies in which a drum is beaten). 26 September 1906, Louoko or Kinda village, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by A. Robert Hottot (1884–1939). Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1994.62.712).

Fig. 114. Teke figurative containers posed next to a Sundi musician (Sise fetishes, Kinda village, the musician is a Sundi, not a Teke). 26 September 1906, Louoko or Kinda village, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by A. Robert Hottot (1884–1939). Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1994.62.711).

*Fig. 115. Seated male figure (tege). 19th– early 20th century, village of Luoko, Bula N'Tangou region, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1906. Teke peoples, Sisse group, wood, glass, metal (brass), 46 x 14 x 19 cm. British Museum, London (Af 1995,06.1).
Ex-collection: Collected by Robert Hottot in the village of Luoko, 26th September 1906.*

*Fig. 116. Seated male figure (butti). 19th– early 20th century, Bula N'Tangou region, Republic of the Congo. Teke peoples, Sisse group, wood, glass, brass tacks, buttons, fabric, rope, organic materials, 38.4 x 11.5 x 13.5 cm. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (70.1998.7.1).
Ex- collection: Robert Lehuard from the vicinity of Brazzaville, 1920–30.*

Fig. 117. A collection of baskets used to contain sacred materials. 1906, Republic of the Congo. Teke Fumu. Photograph by A. Robert Hottot. Source: Hottot (1956), fig. 2.

Fig 118. Container for sacred materials ('Bassoundi Fetiche?'). Early 20th century, Boula N'Tangou region,

Republic of the Congo. Kongo peoples, Sundi group. Ex- collection: Robert Hottot, collected September 1906.

Fig. 119. Ologhi ceremony ('Congo français. Région: Bas-Congo; tribu: Batéké – ouest de la riviere Alima. cérémonie: ologhi. 1907'). 1907, Alima River region, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by A. Robert Hottot (French, 1884–1939), print black and white, 107 x 44 mm. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1994.62.383.3).

Fig. 120. Nkita Bundle. 20th century, Zanaga, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1940. Teke Tsaayi peoples, raffia, iron, organic materials, stone, animal hide and hair. National Museums of World Culture, Världskulturmuseerna, Stockholm, Sweden (2015.0001). Ex-collection: collected by Jakob and Märta Bjerhagen c.1940.

Fig. 121. A stringed musical instrument ('a sort of mandolin'), two rattles made of polished seed pods, and two bells. ('Obj colld by R. Hottot. /Bateke, Bobangi, French Congo. Rattles, bells, and harp. 1906'). Republic of the Congo. Photograph by A. Robert Hottot (1884–1939). Photograph: 1908–1909, 14 cm x 96 cm. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1998.175.8)

Fig. 122. Musicians performing at the Nkita possession dance. March 2017, Zanaga, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

Fig. 123. Mask and costume. 19th century, Alima River Region, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1896. Teke Tege peoples, wood, composite materials (including clay), cowrie, textile, woven raffia, 310 x 45 x 45 cm. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1896.51.26). Ex-collection: collected by a member of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain (1883–1885).

Fig. 124. Two Masked Performers (Féticheurs' I 'Kadjouli, II 'N'golli). c.1909, Alima River Region, Republic of the Congo. Teke Tege peoples. Photograph by Elso Dusseljé (1911) 28.

Fig. 125. Mask. 19th-early 20th century, Republic of the Congo or Gabon, inventoried 1930. Teke peoples, Tsaayi group, wood, pigment, 34 x 32 cm. Musée Barbier Mueller, Geneva (1021 - 20). Ex-collection: purchased by André Derain before 1931, Charles Rattou and Joseph Mueller collections.

Fig. 126. Bed panel for Nkita ceremony. 19th century, Republic of the Congo, inventoried 1896. Teke

Tsaayi peoples, wood, pigment. 193.5 x 35 x 3.5 cm. Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (73.1999.1.4).

Fig. 127. Henry Morton Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent* (1877).

Fig. 128. Henry Morton Stanley, *The Congo and the founding of its Free State* (1885).

Fig. 129. 1 Franc. Congo Free State, 1887.

Fig. 130. Statue of Henry Morton Stanley, originally erected in 1956 on top of Mount Ngaliema. (Source: <http://kosubaawate.blogspot.com>)

Fig. 131. King of the Teke and Queen Ngalifourou at the inauguration of the Lycee Brazza. 1951, Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo. Unknown photographer. Source: DMCARC

Fig. 132. Queen Ngalifourou alongside Martha de Brazza, daughter of the explorer Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza. Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo. Unknown photographer. Source: DMCARC

Fig. 133. Makoko Alphonso Ntsalou visiting Paris on the eve of Congo's independence. On the left, his wife Ngadoua and on his right, his secretary Auguste Nguepio ('Sa Majesté Makoko Alphonse Ntsalou, Roi des Batékés au premier plan, en visite a Paris a la veille de l'indépendance du Congo. A gauche sa femme Ngadoua et a droit son secretaire Auguste Nguepio'). c.1960, Paris. Photographer unknown. Source: Alexandre Mpinandzi (born 1963)

Fig. 134. Makoko Wawa (r.1993–1998) on his throne in Mbe, on the sacred day of Nkwembali ('Sa Majesty Pierre Wawa, Le Jour Sacré du Nkouembali'). Mbe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Maurice Omvini (born c.1950).

Fig. 135. Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza Memorial. February 2017, Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

Fig. 136. Makoko Ngouayoulou (r.1998–2004) on his throne in Mbe. Mbe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by Maurice Omvini (Congoese, born c.1950)

Fig. 137. Daniel Lyonel Diakouka (1993–present) negotiates a path next to the main road leading to Mbe. February 2017, Mbe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

Fig. 138. Interior views of the Brazza Memorial, including a mural based on the *Delivery of the Treaty to Makoko Iloo I* ('Remise du Traite au Roi Makoko'), after a sketch by Charles de Chavannes (1853–1940). February 2017, Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

Fig. 139. Profile portrait of Makoko Iloo I ('Makoko D'Après une photographie faite par M. Jacques de Brazza'). *Le Matin*, 1 February 1883.

Fig. 140. *Onlua* housed in the Brazza Memorial, based on the 1883 engraving. February 2017, Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

Fig. 141. Photographs showing the process of manufacturing the copy. From Stephan Masarovic, 'Rapport de réalisation d'une reproduction du collier 'de chef Makoko'', 2009. Musée du Quai Branly archive.

Fig. 142. Mbaindele Iloo II (1892–1899) and his court. *c.*1893, Mbe, Plateau region, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by *Alfred Fourneau* (1860–1930). Published in Lehuard, 1974, pl.41.

Fig. 143. Alexandre Mpinandzi (1963–present) seated in front of a memorial to Makoko Mbaindele Iloo II (1892–1899) and those murdered by French colonial forces in 1899. February 2017, Mbe, Republic of the Congo. Photograph by the author.

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