

Mbe in the history of mankind XVIIIth -XXth Centuries

Oba Dominique, Sah Zéphirin and Nzoussi Hilaire Kevin

Department of Humanity Sciences

Marien Ngouabi University, Teacher Training College, Brazzaville, Congo

Brazzaville

Republic of Congo

Abstract

In the XIXth century, the movements of discovery and exploration engaged by explorers commissioned by European governments allowed to take possession of territories situated in black Africa in general and in Central Africa especially. For, Stanley occupied a vast territory for the King of Belgium, Leopold II, and Belgium. For France, Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, a French explorer from Italian origin Italian occupied a vast territory in Central Africa. After his second trip, Brazza managed to create Franceville in June 1880 in Teke countries on September 10, 1880, Brazza, signed in with the Teke king in Mbe the capital of the kingdom a treaty of friendship according to which that This vast territory was made under the control of France. In October 1880, Brazzaville city was born. Since the signature of the Treaty of Friendship, the city of Mbe, the political capital of Teke Kingdom has entered the contemporary history of humanity. The Teke kingdom is one of the kingdoms that marked the history of Black Africa and the one that remains the most alive in the memory of the African peoples, regarding its geographical location in the heart of Central Africa, but also by its extent and by the power of its kings. The history of this Teke metropolis will be known through the reports of the different missions carried out by European explorers, missionaries and European travelers and it is important to emphasize that the history of the Teke kingdom is inseparable from the work of the explorer PS De Brazza and the history of Congo.

Keywords: Mbe, Teke kingdom, Congo, History.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant and historical events in the XIXth century during French colonization in Central Africa, the signature of the treaty of friendship between the Teke King Makoko (unko) and the French explorer, PS De Brazza on behalf of France. This treaty was signed in Mbe , the capital city of the kingdom Teke, September 10, 1880 Congo, in that was at that time under the sovereignty of France. Since then, Mbe has returned to the contemporary history of humanity. The history of this Teke metropolis will be known through the reports of the various missions carried out by european explorers, missionaries and European travelers and by that, we can emphasize today that the history of the Teke kingdom is inseparable from the work of the explorer PS De Brazza and the history of the Congo. The Teke kingdom is one of the kingdoms that have marked the history of Black Africa and the one that remains the most alive in the memory of peoples, by its geographical location in the heart of Central Africa, but also by its extent and by the power of his kings. The history of this Teke metropolis will be known through the reports of the various missions carried out by European explorers, missionaries and European travelers. We can emphasize today that, the history of the Teke kingdom is inseparable from the work of the explorer PS De Brazza and the history of Congo. This study aim at contributing to know of the history of the Teke kingdom and to show particularly the primordial role played by Mbe in the history of this kingdom. It also intends to show the outstanding universal value of the Mbe site regarding the wealth of its cultural heritage.

1. 1 -Presentation of the kingdom of Makoko and of Mbe

In the traditional Teke lexicon, Mbe is the equivalent of a city, a capital village of a land. Mbe royal is the seat of unko (capital of Teke kingdom) [1].

The Teke kingdom is one of the kingdoms that have marked the history of Black Africa and the one that remains the most alive in the memory of peoples not only by its geographical location in the heart of Central Africa , but also by its extent and by the power of his kings[2]

In its initial limits, this kingdom stretched from the savannah to the forest, from the forest to the sea, from north to south, and east to the west of present-day Congo Brazzaville, beyond the limits of Gabon and the current democratic Congo, went from Angola to the Central African Republic (Fig.1). The Teke kingdom was decentralized and it constituted a federation of chieftaincies. Makoko, nickname «Teke Pope» by the European authors, exerted considerable influence.

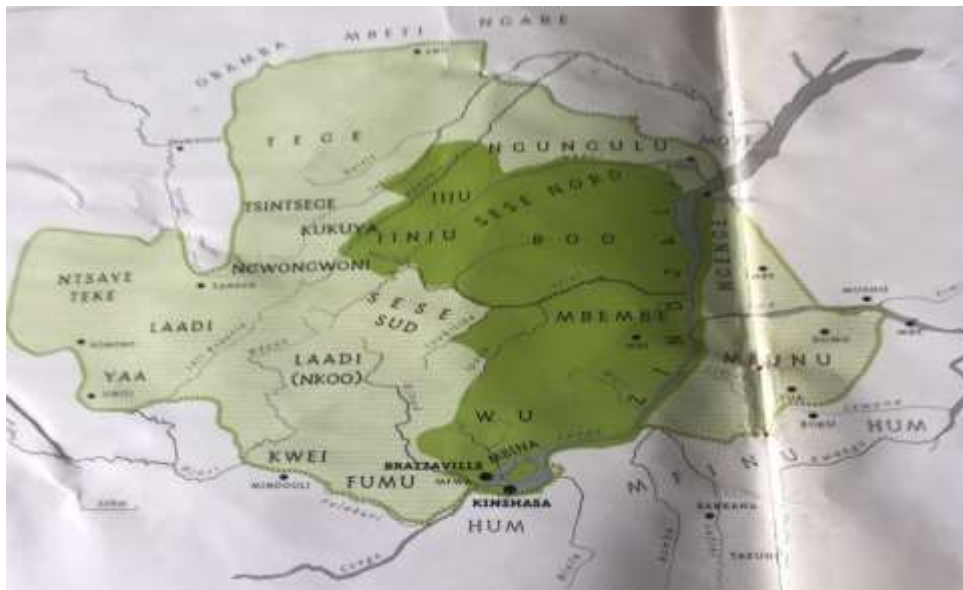


Fig.1: Makoko Tio Kingdom in the Teke area

Source : The domain of Makoko ,Mbe Congo Brazzaville, p. 6

The capital of the kingdom is Mbe . It was in Mbe, the *Tio* distinguished themselves from other Teke founding in the XVIIIth century the kingdom of Makoko. *Mbwambe* however is the port village on the Léfini. It is a vassal village of the great *Unko* , the village holds one of the powerful instruments of power : the *Nkobi* . N gab é meanwhile is the retirement of queens and kings who are no longer in exercise.

About Mbe and the plateau that bears its name , Georges Okouya remarked :

Mb é is part of what we call the central plateaux that take place hundreds of kilometers north of Brazzaville at an average altitude of 600 to 700 m^[3]

The territory of Mbé comprises 15 village entities of varying importance demographically speaking. The plateau itself currently includes nearly 30 thousand inhabitants distributed among the sub-prefectures on the edge of the river (*Unlum*) and *ngabe* in East .

2. Mbe IN THE HISTORY OF CONGO

The contemporary history of the Congo has one of the most important landmarks, the so-called Mbé convention signed between De Brazza and King Makoko. The convention will later give birth to Brazzaville on October 3, 1880, in French Congo in 1902 and in French Equatorial Africa in 1910. Mbé is both a royal capital and a plateau on which the destiny of several African countries has been played out. This Teke metropolis has existed for centuries even before the arrival of Europeans. This is where the Teke kings lived and still live. Nowadays, Mbé does not stop attracting many people and personalities either for economic activities, tourism, or to visit the royal court and its king.

During his reached West African mission De Brazza reached the gates of the Teke kingdom. From 1875 to 1885, Brazza carried out three missions in West Africa, but the most decisive was, the one that took place from 1879-1882. During this mission Brazza wanted to arrive on the right bank of the Congo before other explorers, Stanley. Thus he embarks on December 27, 1879 to Gabon where he founded in June 1880 Franceville, and the rushed to go deep into the unknown the part of Africa. That time, contrary to the first mission during which he met the resistance of *Afourou* , he was well received by the Teke who facilitated him the passage.

PS DeBrazza reports here the memory of his journey and his meeting with the king of Teke August 28 , 1880 :

Around 3 pm , we see the village of Unko. The men who bring me tell me to change my clothes and change my men because Unko is a great leader, in fact beautiful clothes; I have nothing, except my coat that I put back. The men leave their rags and take the

clothes of sailors which are clean. Finally at 400m from the village of Unko, NGIA told me to wait and while we roast in the sun, he went to announce our arrival to the village of Unko and we heard that Unko had asked him why he had left the white man in the full sun with hunger and thirst bring him quickly to the village. These are good words that come in favor of a leader. Preceded by the bugle and the French flag, I arrive in the village....we stopped in front of leader's door, waiting for him to receive me...Just a little suspense and unko appears. After that ... , the Witch Doctor stands up and kneels before me with the shield and the sword he stakes on the ground ... he puts his hands on mine as a sign of respect. Then I told the leader that in my country I am a leader and when two leaders meet they shake hands with a sign of friendship. Then I get up and I go to shake his hand and then sit on a package beside him.[4]

Further. Brunshwig continues:

In Mbe Brazza settled in the village and returned after twenty-five days with after a treaty which placed Makoko and states under French protection and abandoned to the France a land in N' COUNA, above great falls of the Congo rivers.[5]

From this long stay of De Brazza to Mbe, resulting the Convention of 10 September 1880 which states: *Makoko king to sovereignty located between sources*

of the mouth of Lefini and N' COUNA has ratified assignment of territory made by Ngampey for the establishment of a French station and moreover assigns his territory to France, to

which he made an assignment of hereditary rights of supremacy, wishing in sign of this assignment to approach the colors of France,

I gave him a French flag and, by the present, doubled and coated his sign e and my signature acknowledged formally the, measures it

has learnt for me, considering me, as the representative of the Government French. [6]

It is thanks to this historical act that Brazza went to N' COUNA, on the right side of the Unlum river in the Mfoa village, in the presence of the leaders delegated by the king, he solemnly took possession of the area granted and signed with them the line of 3 October 1880 which with the following terms:

On behalf of France, and by virtue of the rights conferred on me, the 10 september 1880, by King Makoko, October 3, 1880, I took possession of the territory that extends between the djoue river and Impila.[7]

The meeting between De Brazza and Makoko King as well as the signed conventions has triggered several events in Africa. Indeed, after treaty signed between the Teke King, his delegates and De Brazza, France definitively took final possession of the territory between djoue river played and Impila. The 1st July 1881, a year later, the name of Brazzaville given to the station N' COUNA by the company of geography and the french committee of the AIA. (African International Association).

However, it was necessary to wait until May 23, 1884 before the first settlers trod the soil of Brazzaville. We can say that this occupation and this establishment are important in the life of the natives who see their territorial space usurped by the Europeans. Then, the extension of Brazzaville city began. This is what Okouya confirms:

The westernization process of Central Africa initiated by Portuguese and Kongo at the end of the XVth century ends at the beginning of the XXth Century to N' cOUNA by the very skillful hand of the French colonizers who from June 29, 1886 placed the Congo and Gabon under the authority of a General Commissioner. On April 30, 1891, all the french territories of Central Africa take the name of French Congo, The settlement is not only economical, it is also cultural.

*On september 28, 1897, there was the appointment of a lieutenant
governor for the Congo. The Teke King now plays
the second rank, that of an auxiliary .[8]*

Mbe has been and still is a hub in Congo's history of Africa and the world.

3. THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Since the former time, the Teke have been organized and have seen many kings succeeding to the throne. It has perpetuated the Teke royal institution even though between 1971 and 1991; there has been suspension of the institution. However we can say that from 1800 to the present, or about two centuries, the Kingdom has seen succeed 19 kings have succeeded from Ngantho to Auguste Nguempio today. Customary power of Teke king remains virtually essential worship landmark and highly respected by the Congolese in general and in particular Teke. It is not uncommon throughout the year heads of state, heads of government, traditional authorities, church representatives, personality é s policies, public and private personalities, journalists visiting the king in his capital, Mbe.

Thus, the value of the intangible cultural and historical heritage of this remarkable territory is to be preserved. Certainly since colonization which germed in 1880 on the Teke territory during the reign of Makoko , the kingdom is no longer recognized as political power, and yet, until now, the community carries a set of rituals and traditions around Makoko and more specifically, to the tutelary god : the Nkwe - Mbali . For the Teke people of Congo, the Makoko remains irreplaceable and will continue with its court to ensure its traditional role. In fact, beyond the political role he was playing in the past, the Makoko symbolized and still symbolizes today the link between the material and spiritual worlds.

On the former territory of Makoko, the beliefs and traditions are still lively. The rites related to the protection of the territory, to the enthronement and funeral of Makoko, the Teke week with four days including one reserved to Nkwe - Mbali , are some examples that perfectly illustrate this assertion. The descendants of *Tio* , despite modern influences still, believe in Nkwe - Mbali and respectfully in practice rituals inherited from their ancestors . [9]

In the kingdom, the power and its symbols were distributed among Makoko, the persons in charge of the rituals «the ministers and the lands owners ". On this territory, each of the administrators managed a definite portion of the country, and were responsible for the «expression of the nature ", all acting to ensure respect for Nkwe - Mbali .

In addition, the ancient royal cities are easily identifiable in the landscape. These are materialized by forests emerging naturally in the middle of the savannah. The territory is well punctuated by the sites that housed the capital city which, subsequently and in order to perpetuate the memory of the kingdom, have become sacred forests. The landscape that these forests present permits to know the chronology of Makoko. [10] This includes the forest of MPIE which was the capital of Makoko Nzaon Mbaon (before 1874), that of Nko , capital of Makoko Iloo I (1874-1892) , or even the forest of Impoh , location where Makoko Ngambouala (1915-1925) reigned. At the same registry, Mbe - Nkulu , made with the forests of Mpie , Nko , Impoh to Ngoon , Ampoh , Ndoua and kodoua (between Mbe and Inoni) and the forest of Ebala form one seems sacred forests Nkwe - Mbali . The forest of Ebala is a highly sacred place, it is at the same time the cemetery dedicated to the burial of kings and high dignitaries of the kingdom.

In the classification of these natural entities, one also finds the forests which serve as food reserve of the kingdom. Around Mbe, we can easily identify other remarkable sites. For example the falls of " Mban " on Lefini river, the Ngatiere stream, Ngobila , the whirlwind of the river Congo blue , lake Mah, Iboukikro , village of gorillas ...

About the historical and cultural legacy of the Mbé site, we can usefully refer to E.M. Opoou which refers us to the benchmark that constitutes the Mbe stele :

*A few kilometers from Mb é lost in the bush, among the shrubs
And high grasses , is stands the monument that commemorates
the signature of the treaty concluded on 10 September 1880 between the King of Teke
Iloo I and P.S.De Brazza. This stele which has become the symbol of the
reliability of the royal institution , so of the supra chiefdom
and the perpetuation of his power is a monument made of stones*

*about five meters in height. Like the lion, emblem of the kingdom,
it stands high, as if to challenge men from the risk of
forgetting the story. Everyone must remember that it is in this place,
that the French explorer arrives at Mbé on foot and rags at the end
an exhausting exploration concluded with the powerful king of the Teke people
the treaty of Mbe. Indeed, this treaty that linked the kingdom to France
Implicitly envelops all Central Africa whose Mfoa
(now called Brazzaville) was the capital of
French Equatorial Africa (FEA). Wisdom teaches us that
" th one who does not know where he comes from does not know where he is going ."
That is the sacred duty of memory. Thanks to what the press has reported
dilapidation in which the stele was it was
recently rehabilitated.[11]*

Besides of this stele that commemorates the line e of 10 September 1880, we can add another place of memory, which is the stele of Itiele. It was erected in memory of the massacre of Itiele, result of a burr between the royal army and military colonial because of a misunderstanding.

International speaking, we can remember that it is the deal between Brazza and Makoko that was the origin of the organization of the conference of Berlin in November 1884 to February 1885, during of which was decided balkanization of Africa into colonies. Congo then becomes one of the four states of the French Equatorial Africa.

4. THE UNIVERSAL IMPORTANCE OF THE SITE OF Mbé

Since 1972, Unesco had adopted the World Heritage Convention, inscribing certain sites which have played a major role in the history of mankind in the aforesaid heritage. This measure obviously became effective in 1978, and focused on many spaces. The World heritage entering generally takes into account the fauna, flora and fixed elements present in these areas, but it leaves out the ideas, practices and mobile artifacts.

While going along, these different sites, an integral part of the fauna and flora and generally of the environment, have an exceptional universal value (EUV). Generally, the focus is on the spaces and their remains. That is why all that is supposed to have a "Exceptional universal» value normally visible to anyone visiting the site in question (the criterion of EUV, valid for the entire humanity not just for some nationalist, religious factions, is the prerequisite for inclusion on the list of World heritage)[12]. Indeed, Mb é site has outstanding universal value because of its historical, aesthetic, cultural, artistic, ethnological, anthropological and natural richness.

Indeed, the site of Mbé has an exceptional universal value. This is justified by the fact that Outstanding Universal Value means cultural and / or natural significance so exceptional that it transcends national boundaries and has the same invaluable character for present and future generations throughout the world humanity. As such, the permanent protection of this heritage is important for the entire international community [13].

If the above definition can be used, it is important to note that the Mb é site has outstanding universal value, given its role in pre-colonial history and the vastness of its cultural richness in the history of humanity. As illustration, it is from Mbé that the territory of the current Congo passed under the control of France.

As can be seen, the site of Mb é has an exceptional characteristic which, today, preserves originality, tradition and culture which are moreover an undeniable contribution in the modern history of humanity. The Teke living traditions (ideas, beliefs or artistic and literary works) have an exceptional significance in comparison with other kingdoms that have left no vestige (case of the Kongo kingdom).

The richness of these living Teke traditions is a moving testimony that testifies a millenary civilization that was not organized and structured only in contact with Western civilization.

The universal importance of the Mb é site could therefore be indisputable in terms of the criteria for selecting UNESCO World Heritage Site.

For example, on the 10 criteria for selecting a UNESCO World Heritage site that are:

- 1- Represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- 2- Demonstrate a significant exchange of influence over a period of time or in a given cultural area, on the development of architecture or technology, monumental arts, city planning or landscape creation;
- 3- To bring a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or a living or disappeared civilization;
- 4- Provide an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble or landscape illustrating a significant period or periods of human history;
- 5- Be an outstanding example of traditional human settlement, traditional land or sea use, representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment, especially when it became vulnerable under the impact of an irreversible mutation;
- 6- be directly or materially associated with living events or traditions, ideas, beliefs or artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria) ;
- 7- to represent natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;
- 8- To be eminently representative examples of the major stages of earth's history, including the testimony of life, of ongoing geological processes in the development of landforms or of geo-morphic or physiographic elements of great significance;
- 9- to be eminently representative examples of ecological and biological processes underway in the evolution and development of terrestrial, aquatic, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;
- 10- To contain the most representative and important natural habitats for the *in situ* conservation of biological diversity, including those where threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation survive. [14]

We can take an example to support this argument. The first criterion states that each site must: «represent a masterpiece of human creative genius ». Teke people have, long time ago, developed a civilization that is one of the oldest of the Congolese basin, civilization carried by a language (*Kiteke*), also very old. Of all the kingdoms that have marked the history of black Africa, the Teke kingdom certainly remains one of the most alive in the memory of peoples not only , by its geographical location in the heart of Central Africa, but also by its extent and the power of its kings. Through this kingdom and the exercise of power with their King *Unko* sitting in Mbé, the Teke have developed an age old culture, identity and tradition.

5. CONCLUSION

Through its political, social and economical organization, the teke kingdom, with Mbe its capital brings material proof of a civilization unknown by the general public and whose history, culture, traditions and beliefs are impressive. Despite the influences of modernity, the Teke continue to perpetuate their cultures and traditions. We can therefore wonder about what allows the permanence of this tradition.

The Teke metropolis of Mbe remains ultimately an outstanding historical and cultural site outstanding, and the point of departure of major political decisions that will largely influence the history of Africa. That is why in the perspective of protection and enhancement of this site, we attest to its outstanding universal value and wish ultimately for the inscription of the site of Mbe in UNESCO World Heritage.

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