Appendix 1-History of the Bandundu Province of DR Congo
Bas-Congo Province
The lower Congo is an old cultural settlement with many habitations of “stone age” cultures, mainly
attached to the Tumba culture (a Mesolithic hand-axe culture). The Bongo claim to be the original
inhabitants of the Congo Region.
i

The Bas-Congo and Bandundu Provinces were considered one district by the Belgian colonizers. They
designated the two areas collectively as “Province Leopoldville”, with the same outer boundaries as
today. The Belgians divided the area into four administrative districts: Bas or Lower Congo (near the
ocean), Moyen or Middle Congo (near Leopoldville, now Kinshasa), Lac Leopold II, now Lac Mai-Ndombe
(mostly north of the Kasai River but including Banningville), and Kwango (south of the Kasai Rever). Each
district was further divided into territories (seemingly the same as sous districts today).
The Catholic Jesuits introduced Catholicism into the western (Kwango) area with their center at Kisantu.
Southwest Portion, Bandundu Province north of the Kasai River
The Pygmies Twa were the first people known to have lived in the area, followed by the Bantu Ntomb—
Lia and Konga. The Konda from north of Busira were pushed out by the Kundu—Mongo—Kote in a
westward movement. Several groups of Lia left Mondombe. Arriving at Lac Leopold, the Lia formed a
Kingdom between the 1500’s and 1700’s, co-existing for part of that time with the Nsese. The Ntomba
founded their first state of Lac Tumba and emigrated toward Lac Leopold, where they arrived fifty years
after the Lia.
The Sengele conquered the Lia and governed a population closely related to the Tio or the Boma. In
these Mongo goups developed the institution of the nkumu or Sacred Chief. The tradition is said to
have come from the Lia. Mongu a Pembe is reputed to have been the first Nkumu.
Other groups followed the same migratory path but moved on to the west past the empire, until
stopped by the Yela coming from the northeast (directly north of Lac Mbulu). According to Kuba
tradition this was about 1600 A.D.
By 1600 all the present inhabitants of the southeast portion of the northern Bandundu Province were
installed in their territories except for the Sakanyi (relaed to the Loki or Water People.) They
immigrated in the 1800’s.
Portions North of the Kasai River
The southwest portion had a more highly developed poltical structure, based on a kingdom directed by
an nkumu-ekopol Tribes there included Ntomba des lacs, Sakanyi, Mpama, Lia, Sengele, Konda, Iyembe,
Mbelo, Bidiankamba, Panga, Kongo, Titu, Obli du Kasai, Yajimi (Yaelima), Ngengese, Hindo, Solu, Kala,
Longo and Lendo.

The southeast also had and Nkumu, but it was more a title of prestige than of real power or deity.
Tribes there included the Nkutshu, Tetela-Kusu (Hamba, Sambala, and Kusu), Ngengele, Ombo, Langa,
Mbuli, Kuti, and Jonga.
The northeast had ceremonies of initiation called lilwa. Tribes there included the Ngandu, Lalia, Mbole
and Yela.
The northwest had neither Nkumu nor initiation ceremonies. Tribes there included the Kote, Mono, and
Nkundo.
In the strict north were found the Nsongo, Ntomba, Onde (Yamango), Fonge, Lionje, Kota, Kutu, Mbote,
Saka, Kongo, Kala, Doli de la Luilaka, and Moma Mpongo.
The Bankutu occupied a large district on both sides of the Lukenye River extending south almost to the
Sankuru and the Lubefu Rivers, and to the north almost to the third parallel south latitude. Their
northern neighbors were the Akela, and their western frontier along the 22
o
 30’ east longitude. Their
western neighbors were the Basongo and Meno. Bankutu elders living in 1922 remembered emigrating
toward the south and discplacing the Basongo Meno.
Life North of the Kasai River
The peoples who settled north of the Kasai were hunters (trappers), fishers and farmers. They raised
bananas and manioc from the 1800’s on, but all field work was done by women. Men’s jobs were
hunting and fishing. They had contact with the Twa pygmies, but marriage with them was forbidden.
The rituals associated with hunting were more important to the people than those connected with
agriculture. The women and children gathered food from the forest to be used for eating, medicine and
construction materials. Along the larger rivers lived specialized fishermen. Their women made earthen
pottery. These specialized fishers did not grow any crops, but exchanged pottery for other foods. Those
living away from the river and growing crops were called the “earth” Mongo, while those living along the
rivers and dependent upon fishing were called the “river” Mongo. They domesticated dogs, chickens,
goats, and sheep, using them for food, sacrifices, and for exchange of goods. Some dogs were also used
for hunting. The Mongo practiced iron forging from the late 1800’s on. They had no money, but
metallic objects and knives were easily traded. Their patterns of inheritance were basically patrilineal,
but some recognized double inheritance from both parents. In reality some functions were performed
by the maternal uncles.
The Bandundu Province South of the Kasai River
The populations of the savannah in 1920 were listed as these, from north to south: Bayaka, Basamba,
Wangongo, Basongo, Bambala, Bayansi, Bapende, Bahuana, Bakwese, Bambunda, Badinga, Bakongo,
and Basilele.
ii
 A 1922 survey of the tribes between the Kasai and the Kwango Oriental lists the Basonge,
Batetela, Bankutu, Akela, and Tofoke. The Basonge sub-tribes between the Sankuru and Lomami Rivers
are listed as Namale, Betendu, Bayumba, Batempa, Bamona, Balembwe, and to the southwest, the
Basanga, Bakabinda (Kuyambula).
iii
 The Basonge sub-tribes at Lualuaborg included a group called

Zappo-Zapp, who were fugitives from many different tribes. The Basonge are thought to have
originated along the right bank of Lomami. Toward the end of the 19
th
 Century, the Arabs appeared in
the region and introduced much confusion.
Another listing of the tribes of the Kwango-Kwilu area lists the Mbala, Ngongo, Suku, Tsaam, Kwese,
Sonde, Lera, Yaka, and Holo (north to south). The Kwango area of the Bandundu Province was first
reached by the Jesuits with their headquarters at Kisantu.
Bayansi---The Bateke call the Bubangi “Bayanzi” (gens aux chiques)
iv
Bakuba---The Bakuba were originally from Gabon. They lived near the Congo until the 1800’s. Then,
because of the raids of warlike tribes, they moved to what is now the Kasai Provinces between the Kasai
and Sankuru Rivers. They were known as “gens de l’éclair,” literally, people of a flash of lightning.
Bashongo—The Bashongo were known as “gens du couteau de jet,” literally, people of lances or spears.
v
Baluba—The first known historical record of the Luba says that they and the Bembe come from common
parentage in the chieftainship of Ntumbwe. They are thought to have originated north of the Luvuwa
River, west of Tanzania and east of the Lualaba River. Language differences between the two groups
show that the separation occurred hundreds of years ago.
vi
The beginnings of the Luba revolve around more or less mythical stories involving Kiubakaubaka, a great
builder, and Kibumbabumba his wife, a great potter. The Luba Empire is thought to have begun around
1650 A.D. by Nkongolo, a great tyrant. The Baluba people called themselves Kalanga. They had lighter
skin than the present Luba, and paid tribute to spirits in trees and rocks. One rock, called Mpanga
Maloba, is still venerated as the home of a spirit. Nindo and his wife Zwibi were protectors of the rock
spirit “vidye”. Their son Kalui became discontented that his parents worshipped something that gave no
response to their worship. He asked the spirit to leave the rock and take hold of a man. It entered
Milibe (Minjibu) who was called Mijibie wa Kalengne, and he then became the mouthpiece of the dead
to the living. The Baluba are believed to have had no kings nor necromancers prior to that time. Their
territory was sparcely populated, and strangers were killed on sight. The early society was more
oriented to the family than to the clan or tribe.
The Luba believed that white chalk was a sign of good will, etc. Therefore, they sprinkled it about before
digging a grave to prevent the spirit of the deceased from thinking that the grave diggers wished them
harm. Q19 Their witch doctors dug up and ate corpses after burial to prevent the spirit from coming
back to disturb the community. In Luba custom, male necromancers were called bilumbui, and female
necromancers bifikwa. They were believed to be under the influence of the spirit “vidye”. Gradually
these necromancers became isolated and unkempt and often scratched themselves into a pit. The
villagers were delighted because they assumed the scratching meant that the necromancer was in
communication with the spirit world.
Uner the influence of the spirits, the possessed one stared, breathed in gasps, whistled through his
teeth, talked in a very different voice, and his pulse could be seen on the surface of his body. Many

wore bags in which to urinate during the séances, which gave a very disagreeable odor. The
necromancers also acted as religious healers. For example, if a man was dying of yaws or syphilis, the
necromancer would ask the spirits what to do. They would reply that the sick man must spit into a
fowl’s mouth. The fowl was then carried far into the forest and tied to an ant hill. Then the spirits
would say the disease had been transferred and that the man was healed. If, as often happened, he
died, they would be happy that at least he did not die with his sickness still upon him.
One observer stated that “fear of the spirit world is perhaps the biggest factor in controlling their entire
lives from birth to death.” Q19 p. 43 The Luba believed that all leopards were reincarnations of an old
Luba thief. The dead were venerated, and almost no venture could be successfully undertaken without
their aid. Much of the wailing at funerals was not so much to express grief as to impress the spirit of the
departed with their respect for him so that he would not bring sickness or calamity upon them. In fact,
devotion to the dead was so strong among Luba and other societies that one author reported, “The
Central African is wholly devoted to the intercourse with the dead, and there is not a single feature of
his life which is not affected by it.” Q19 p. 40. The Baluba invoked the aid of the dead, placated them
with offerings, feared their displeasure, provided huts for their accommodation, and were convinced of
the reality of their incarnation.
There were several secret societies among the Luba, and every secret society had its presiding spirits
that imposed certain restrictions of their adherents. Amulets were believed to have either an attracting
or a repelling power on spirits. Charms were often put under and sometimes over paths leading to
villages to keep ancestral spirits from returning to harm the inhabitants of the village.
The deformed were disposed of. Every Luba neighborhood had a place for the disposal of deformed
children. Usually this was done at three or four years of age and was often a deep pit of water, into
which the parents would throw the live children, with instructions to come in a more suitable body next
time.
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iv
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