

BELGIAN
CONGO

BELGIAN CONGO

VOLUME I

VOLUME I

DT
644
A4853
V.1
MAIN

BELGIAN CONGO

Volume I

PUBLISHED BY THE
BELGIAN CONGO AND RWANDA-URUNDI
INFORMATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE.
BRUSSELS 1959

Translated from the French
by
F. H. and C. Heldt

FOREWORD

The literature dealing with the Congo is abundant ; in the course of recent years especially it has been enriched in every field and has taken many different forms.

In the presence of this wealth of information the traveler, the public man, the scholar, and the student, desirous of getting acquainted with everything concerning our colony, sometimes find themselves perplexed.

The Office de l'Information et des Relations Publiques du Congo Belge et du Ruanda-Urundi (Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi Information and Public Relations Office) has deemed it useful to place at the public's disposal a sort of digest in the form of a handy volume that condenses and co-ordinates the copious and scattered material extant on the subject.

But a book of this nature involves an unavoidable risk : the Congo is undergoing a rapid evolution ; it is in a state of perpetual transformation, and is thoroughly alive and constantly in motion.

The works dealing with our overseas territories become outdated with disconcerting rapidity. Every writer who travels in central Africa today discovers a new Congo ; each one believes he has given a lasting picture of the country, but no sooner has he outlined it than it vanishes or is transformed. The political, administrative and judicial life of the country is undergoing sweeping

reforms and the data that is valid today may be obsolete tomorrow. Our book could not fail to recognize the ephemeral and precarious nature of certain aspects of the information it has undertaken to present. Therefore, in addition to this main volume, which shows the Congo from a more general point of view, and will suffer less from the swift changes so characteristic of current events, we have been led to plan a second volume which will be periodically published and will contain statistical and technical documentation illustrating or supplementing the data given in this first volume. The second volume will also give a bibliography and notably indications of the sources on which the reading matter has been based, indications which have not been mentioned in the text in order not to weigh it down.

For the work as a whole, we have secured the service of a specialist for each of the topics treated; they have taken pains to supply an account that gives only the essentials but is at the same time as complete and up-to-date as possible.

We hope to have thus offered the public a reference work whose value will not be short-lived. Perhaps in spite of everything this book will be speedily outstripped by an evolution which is that of life itself, but it will preserve at least a reflection of the Congo as it appears today, fifty years after the time when its founder confided its destinies to the Belgian people.

Gaston HEENEN

Honorary Vice-Governor-General of the
Belgian Congo.

President of the Office de l'Information et
des Relations Publiques pour le Congo Belge
et le Ruanda-Urundi.

PART I THE COUNTRY AND THE PEOPLE

CHAPTER I
**THE CONFIGURATION
OF THE COUNTRY**

SUMMARY

1. THE CONGO, A CHANGING AND COMPLEX COUNTRY	13
2. THE PHYSICAL STRUCTURE	16
A. THE GEOLOGICAL STRATA	16
THE FOUNDATION MASS	17
THE UPPER CRUST	18
B. THE RELIEF	19
C. THE WATERS	21
D. THE SOIL	24
E. THE CLIMATE	25
F. THE FLORA	27
THE FOREST	28
THE SAVANNA	30
G. THE FAUNA	31

1. The Congo, a Changing and Complex Country.

Like all Africa, the Congo at first sight conveys an impression of compactness and massiveness; it is an enormous block of nearly a million square miles that seems to have been carved with bold strokes of the chisel out of the very heart of the continent. It can easily be inscribed in a gigantic quadrilateral.

Like all Africa, the Congo produces an illusion of unity and simplicity; but again like all Africa, its compactness conceals unsuspected complexity. The very word « Congo » evokes pictures that come readily to the mind — sultry heat, forests, rains. Reality blots out these pictures. There is no Congolese world or environment that falls into a few broad categories; there are Congolese worlds and environments that are infinite in their variety. Indeed, the country is saturated with complexity.

First, the complexity of its landscapes. To the eyes of the hurried visitor, whether traveling by road or by air, a dreary monotony arises out of the vast stretches of land whose far horizons keep receding as he approaches; indeed, he has to journey for days to go from the savannas to the forest lands and from the forest lands to the savannas. But, beneath this conventional picture, the country — for the traveler who really wishes to know it — breaks up into a great variety of facets, to such an extent that, as a scientist has remarked, it forms « a mosaic of changing landscapes juxtaposed in the greatest disorder ».

Next, there is the complexity of the country's climate. Here too, the bookish conception of an equatorial zone bordered by two tropical zones with well-known characteristics is only a very imperfect reflection of reality. Many factors modify this all too easy classification and create a multiplicity of local climates.

As for the fauna, it is one of the richest and most complex in the world; it offers all over the country a wide variety of species conditioned by the extreme variety of the flora.

Even the Congo's subsoil is complex. Here the rock formations accumulated in the course of ages have been displaced, dislocated, shaken, and fractured, to such an extent as to be tangled up in utter confusion, confusion complicated by outcrops, sunken strata, layers broken up and reappearing at long intervals. The result is an immense mosaic.

And finally, there is the complexity of the people themselves. Once more the pattern is a mosaic: a mosaic of migratory tribes proceeding along trails that are often untraceable, and intersecting each other's paths time and again; a mosaic of languages where more than 450 different dialects exist side by side; a mosaic to which the recent arrival of Europeans and Asiatics have added new colors; a mosaic which is itself divided into many cultural strata ranging from the nomadic Pygmies of the forest to the university-trained Bantu, from the gatherer of wild fruit to the African bishop.

Therefore, in speaking of the Congo one must not make the mistake of treating it as a homogeneous unit. It is advisable to bear constantly in mind its extreme diversity and also its perpetual changes.

An old continent, Africa has a thousand changing faces. Its heart — the Congo — is in a state of perpetual evolution; there is an endless transformation in its hydrographical system and in the flow of its watercourses; transformation likewise in its zones of vegetation, its climates, its species of animals, and its soil which is eroded in one place and built up in another.

These physical phenomena are sometimes imperceptible to anyone who is not an expert. More spectacular, more evident to the layman is the double evolution that the country is experiencing and whose pace has accelerated during the past few years: the evolution in its physiognomy and in its population. Under the European influence the appearance of the land is undergoing a complete change: networks of roads and railroad lines intersect, factories spread out, and the plantations are taking on a new aspect. But what is more important, the population itself, stirred up by external factors, is changing the tempo of its existence and entering a new cycle of civilization. Throughout the country, a phenomenon is taking place whose consequence no one can calculate: the emergence of some 13 million human beings from the magma of clanish collectivity; their realization — to a greater or lesser degree — of their importance as individuals; the beginnings of their long apprenticeship in democracy; and their entrance into a way of life that is new in all its aspects.

2.

The Physical Structure.

A.

The Geological Strata.

The Congo of today rests on an ancient foundation mass which has come into existence in the course of some three billion years. It is made up of rocky strata that were deposited in the course of ages. Chains of mountains, often complex in character, were uplifted after folding had occurred, and were later leveled down one after another. Today the foundation mass represents the essential part of the mountainous rim circling the vast depression formed by the central basin of the Congo River over an area of nearly 400,000 square miles. To this foundation with its various folds can be traced most of the mineral wealth of the country.

In the depression itself, and on the stretches extending to the peripheral mountainous rim, more recent sediments have been deposited; resting on the ancient foundation, they constitute an upper crust which has been formed in the course of the last 200 million years.

The Foundation Mass.

Neither in the Congo nor anywhere else has any hypothetical original stratum been discovered that could be traced back to the initial cooling of the earth's crust. Even the most ancient formations are sedimentary, but these were transformed into a complex crystallophyllian rock mass in which pronounced folding occurred, and which underwent intense metamorphism. This rock mass often thrusts through on the edge of the central depression, especially in the North and the Northeast. The mineral resources found there are limited: gold, corundum, monazite, mica, limestone, manganese, and silicious iron.

On this very ancient foundation mass which constitutes the basic structure of the country, other strata have been superimposed. They began by partially covering up the foundation with circular ranges of folds measuring in some cases more than 26,000 feet in thickness; they are found chiefly in the Kibara Mountains, the Kibali Massif, the Crystal Mountains, in the region of the Lulua River, and in the Northwest; consequently, their distribution is peripheral. There is a great deal of mineral wealth here, especially in Katanga and the Kibara Mountains: tin, tungsten, tantalum, niobium, rare earths, gold, and bismuth — the deposits vary according to the region (1).

Forming a new aureole around the depression, other layers have been added, consisting essentially of schisto-calcareous deposits covered by schistous sandstone deposits. They are

(1) In Part 4, see the chapter entitled « Basic Industries » for the distribution of the Congo's mineral deposits.

divided into several groups; the most important one — in Katanga — includes the Kundelungu system and that of Roan. The Roan system reveals abundant mineralization in copper and allied products: cobalt, uranium, zinc, lead, silver. A large part of the Congo's wealth and prosperity is due to this mineralization. The copper-zinc-lead-silver combination is found also in the Lower Congo.

Such are, very briefly outlined, the leading elements that constitute the foundation mass of the Congo. In the successive upheavals of the earth's crust, this foundation was dislocated and folding occurred time and again; thus mountain chains emerged while stratifications intermingled in a complicated network. Some 600 million years ago, the great movements of the earth's crust subsided. Then came a period of transition that lasted some 400 million years during which hardly any new deposits were formed; the foundation mass was leveled — its mountain chains being worn down as a result of atmospheric action — and the Congo took on the appearance of an immense plain.

The Upper Crust.

The sedimentation of the terrains that cover the Congolese foundation mass began some 200 million years ago.

The oldest of these terrains were formed in the depressions to the east and south of the present central basin; they include notably the coal beds of Katanga. Later, in the lacustrine expanses spreading over the leveled foundation mass, other terrains were deposited; they cover the entire bottom of the Congo basin, part of its sides and of its edge. The Lublilash sandstone and the bituminous schists of the Lomani and the Luahaba are found there, as well as — in certain spots — diamantiferous deposits whose original beds were in volcanic rocks.

Finally, a series of varied layers piled up during the last geological periods, viz., between the Tertiary and the Quater-

nary. (1) Here several cycles can be distinguished. The first of these, related to the formations existing in southern Africa, has taken the name of the « Kalahari System ». Erosions of every kind have brought about these Kalahari terrains which present two characteristic aspects: sometimes they are accumulations of deposits in the depressions, and sometimes terraced morphological plateaus that have emerged in the course of ages, the latter being found chiefly in the South of the country. The cycles of layers that followed — often called the « Busira strata », cover up deposits that started to accumulate at least a million years ago (viz., at the end of the Tertiary or the beginning of the Quaternary); they occur in the deepest hollow of the central basin. These last sedimentary deposits, whose formation has been going on down to the present time, are not rich in minerals; most noticeable is a progressive concentration of gold, tin, diamonds, etc.

This outline must be supplemented by the mention of special formations along the seacoast and in the vicinity of the great lakes. Here are found certain specific deposits; on the coast they contain notably bituminous impregnations and phosphates.

B.

The Relief.

This geological history as sketched here in its broad outlines explains at one and the same time the aspect of the Congo's relief and of its hydrographic basin.

(1) It was during the Quaternary, at a time when tectonic displacements of slight amplitude created the central depression, that the most ancient of the prehistoric cultures of humanity — the pebble culture — appeared. It was born in Africa, and traces of its existence have been found in the Congo. (See the chapter devoted to prehistoric times in the Congo.)