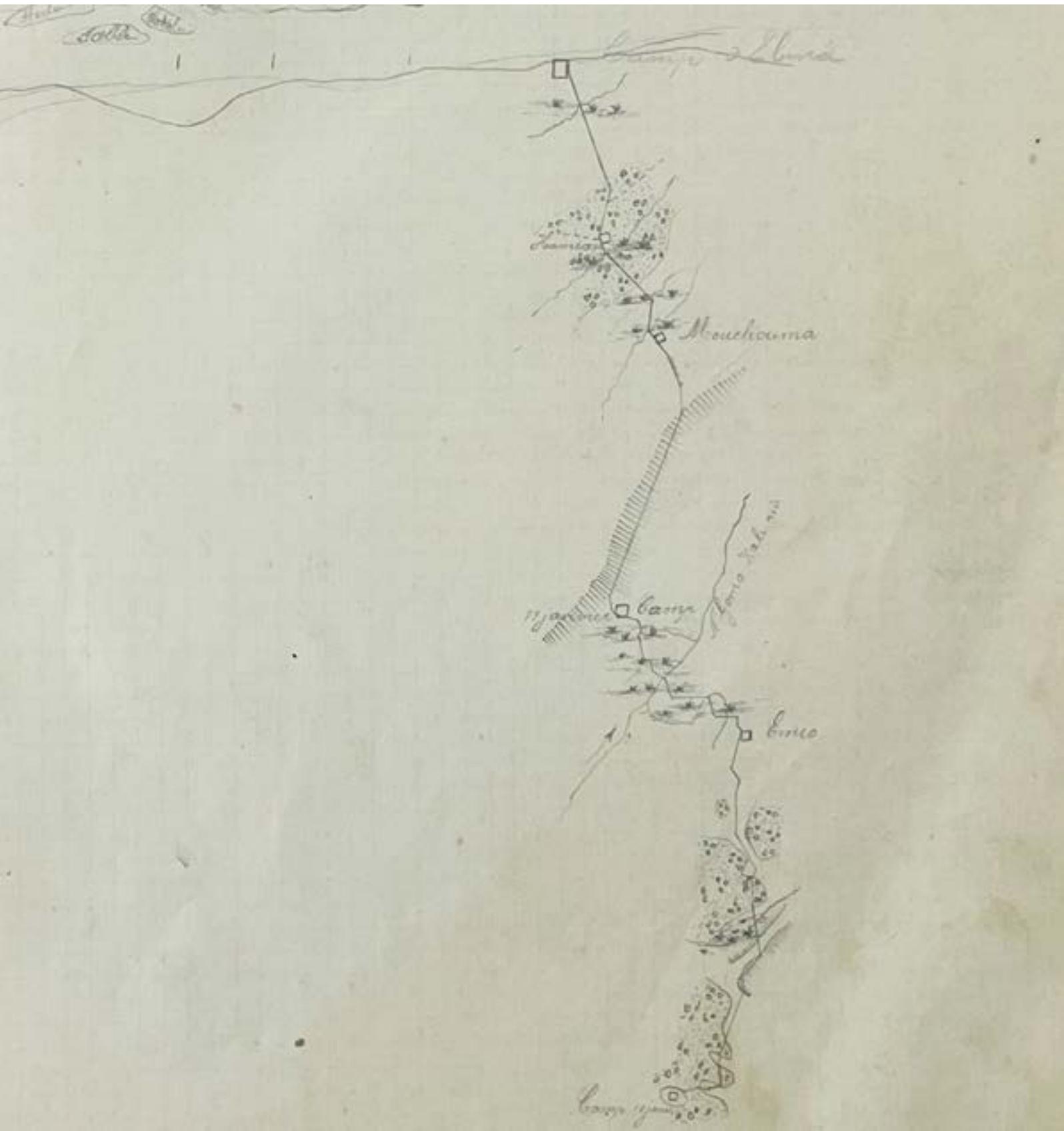


Eugène Constant BLOCTEUR  
Manuscript, Congo Free State, December  
1890 – September 1891.



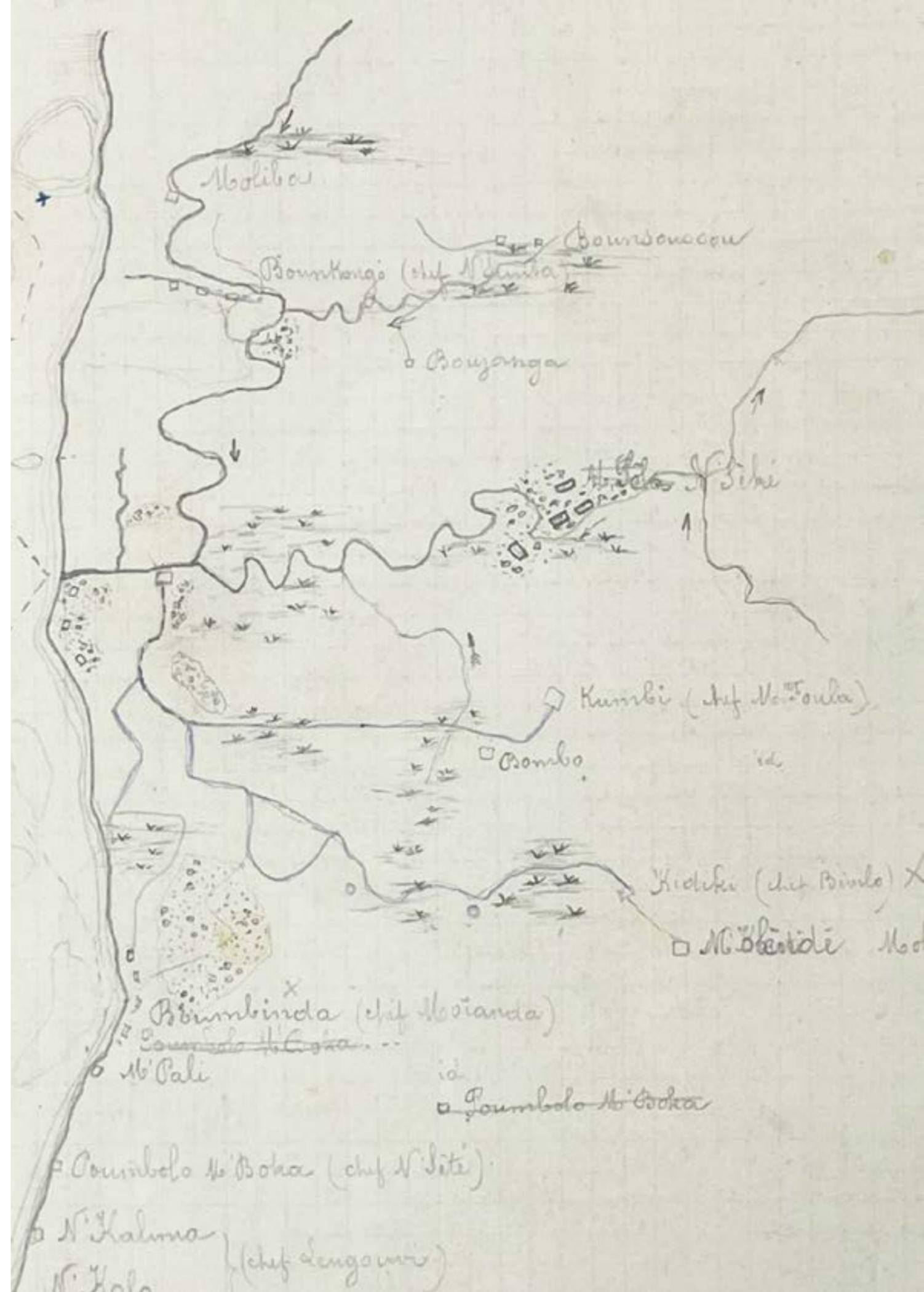
# CONGO (BELGIAN) - CONGO FREE STATE IMPORTANT UNPUBLISHED MSS. EXPLORATION-MILITARY TRAVELOGUE FRONTIER CARTOGRAPHY

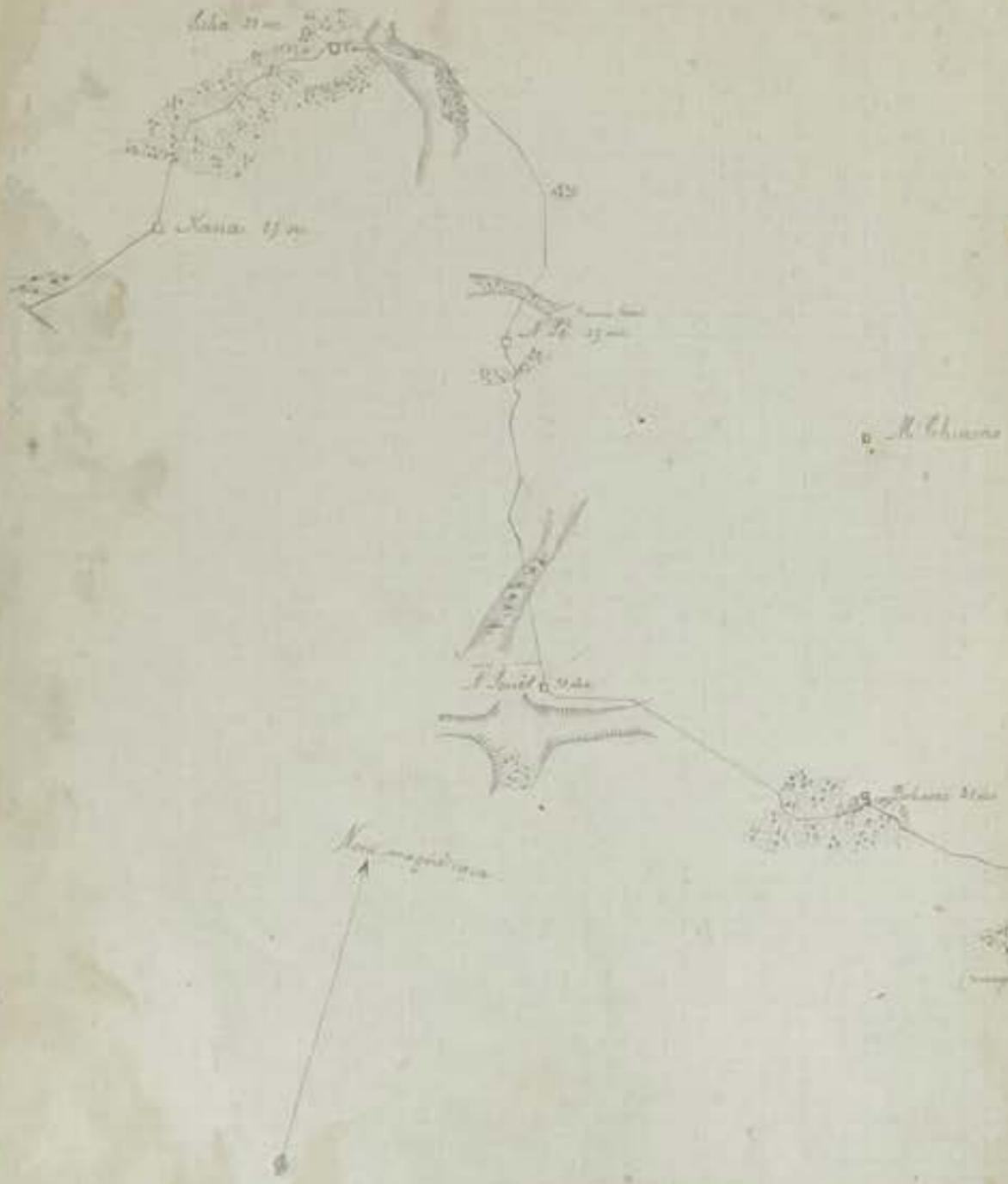
Eugène Constant BLOCTEUR (1864 - 1896).

Manuscript, Congo Free State, December 1890 – September 1891.

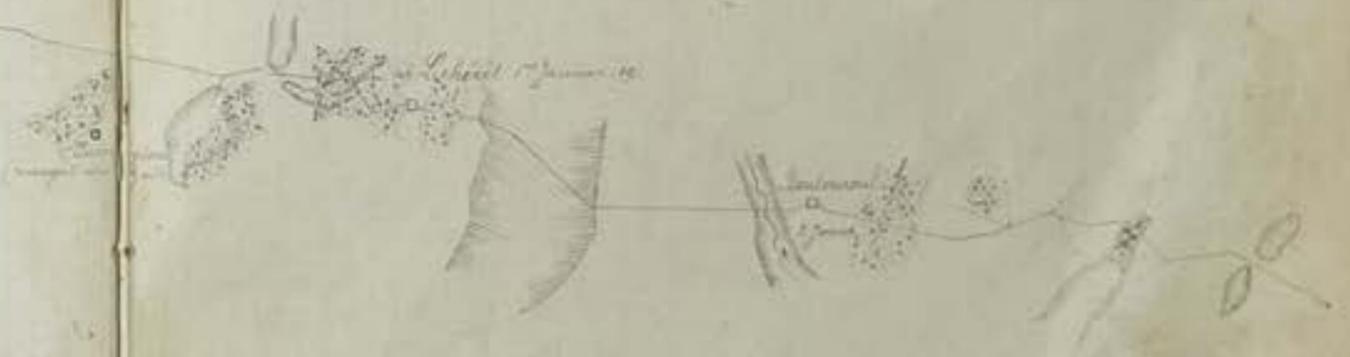
4° (27.5 x 21.5 cm): 25 pp. text, written mainly in brown ink, but some passages in pencil and indigo pen, plus 6 maps (2 double page, 4 single page) drafted in pencil (5 of which could be connected to form a 1.5-metre-long itinerary map), all on 27 ff. of paper, unbound and loose, but housed in a modern custom card clamshell box (Very Good, overall clean, some light sporadic staining and a few leaves slightly tattered in outer margins not affecting text, the 3rd map with loss to lower left corner but not affecting any important details, small closed tear to fist map with no loss).

*A real life, first-hand account of entering what Joseph Conrad called the 'Heart of Darkness' - a highly important and early unpublished original manuscript travelogue written by Eugène Constant Blocteur, one of the commanders of the advance force of the 'Kerkhoven Expedition' (1890-2), a Belgian military mission that travelled over 1,500 km across the Congo Free State (later Belgian Congo), from the Léopoldville (Kinshasa) area, up the Congo River and then over to the Uelle River Valley, with the ultimate objective of fighting the Mahdist Islamist movement; along the way, the expedition explored the "little known" countryside inland from the Congo River, while liberating slaves, and either forging peace treaties with, or, violently suppressing numerous tribal villages; the manuscript comes in the form of an unusually well-written, engaging and action-packed daily journal, composed by Blocteur in the field between December 1890 and September 1891, that chronicles the Belgians' experiences that included almost daily violent skirmishes and ambushes, while being stalked by deadly tropical diseases, as well as surprises such as Hippopotamus attacks, while marching through vast and varied expanses of territory, ranging from the most morbid swampy jungles to verdant sunlit plantations, or traveling by river steamer, while vulnerable to enemy attack by war canoes; Blocteur's account forcefully draws the reader in, perfectly capturing the essence of the intensely fascinating horror of 1890s Congo - illustrated by 6 manuscript maps, finely drafted by Blocteur, five of which can connect to form a 1.5-metre-long itinerary map of the march between Kimpoko and the Kasai River, while the other map charts the Yumbi area in the Middle Congo, the maps representing the first accurate cartography of these areas. The work concludes with a description of a separate visit that Blocteur made to Stanley Falls, the natural wonder at the head of the Congo navigation.*





*H. Chamae (P. ally) ...*



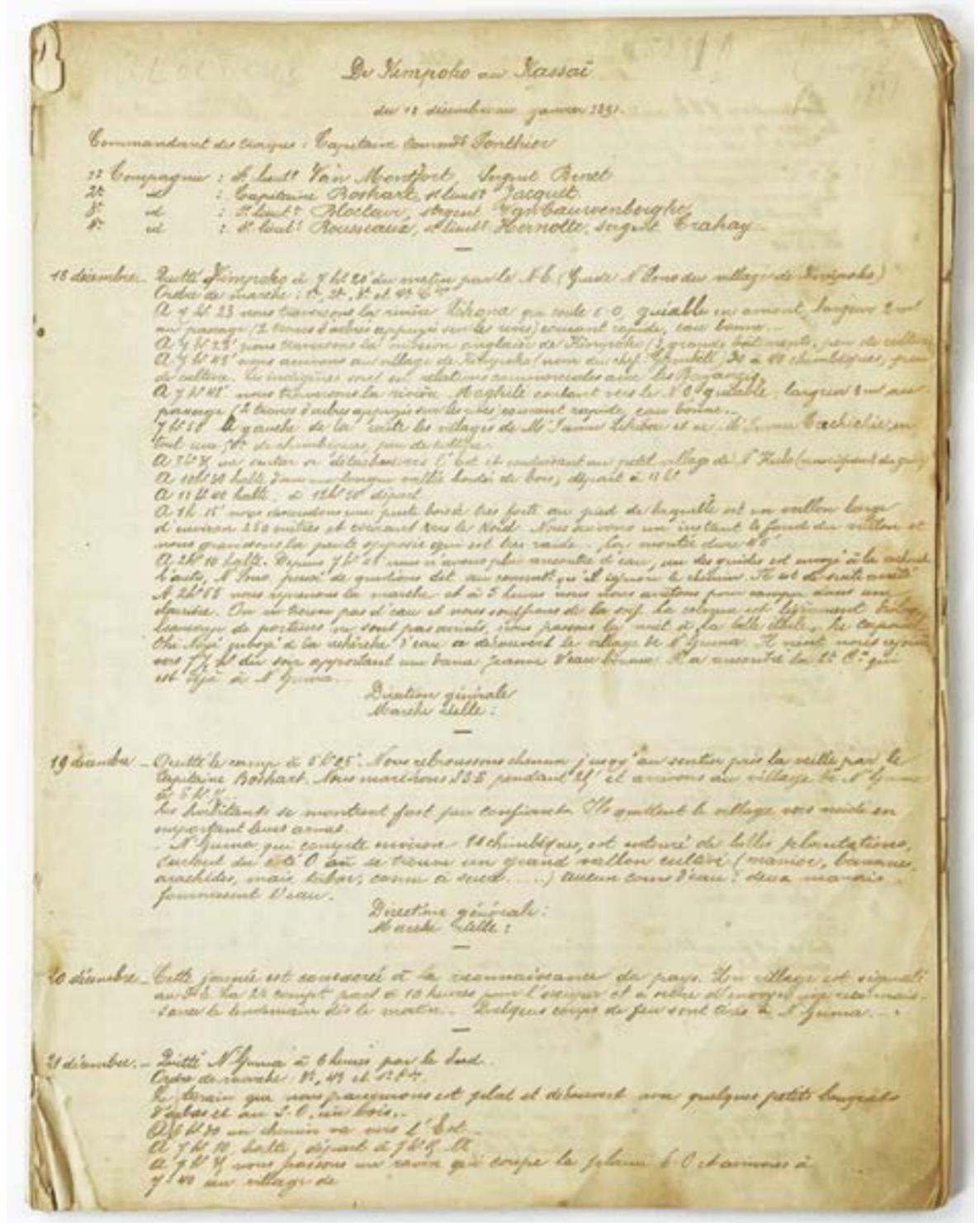
The Berlin Conference (1884-5), which divided Africa amongst the various European powers, awarded the Congo (today's Democratic Republic of Congo), encompassing the vast heart of Africa, to the Belgian King Leopold II, in his personal capacity, as opposed to it being made a Belgian colony. Leopold II duly created the Congo Free State (État indépendant du Congo), which given that it was owned by an individual, and not a state, was not subject to contemporary legal and moral norms. To exploit its immense natural resources (the colony became the world largest rubber producer by the late 1890s), the Belgian king's agents presided over what may have been the most brutal regime anywhere in the world at the time, creating a climate of terror, racism and slavery perfectly captured by Joseph Conrad's novella, Heart of Darkness (1899).

The Congo Free State was an astoundingly vast land of over 2 million square km, encompassing half of the basin of the Congo River. It was generally covered in thick jungle and traversed by innumerable large rivers, many of which were navigable, including a 1,700 km-long, stretch from the colonial capital, Léopoldville (Kinshasa), to Stanleyville. Yet traveling through the country was exceedingly dangerous, as tropical diseases often cut down otherwise healthy Europeans, while some of the region's many tribal nations were (understandably!) less than welcoming towards the Belgians.

In the initial years after the official creation of the colony, Leopold II's vision of creating a tightly controlled, profitable corporate powerhouse remained elusive. While his agents had successfully established an archipelago of forts stretching deep into the interior, mostly hugging the Congo River and its main tributaries, the vast majority of the territory was totally beyond their authority, while hundreds of thousands of sq km of territory had never even been visited by Europeans. The Belgians knew that even if they managed to establish successful plantations and towns along the major travel corridors, an inability to control the hinterland would doom the colony to invasion or rebellion from powerful indigenous nations.

The greatest potential threat to Belgian hegemony in the Congo were the Mahdists, a radical Islamist movement that had famously evicted the British and Egyptians from Sudan in 1885 (only for the British to retake Khartoum, killing their top leadership). However, the Mahdists survived, and while past their prime, they were growing in strength in southern Sudan and adjacent Uelle River Valley area of the northern Congo. Should their expansionist designs continue unchecked, they would soon be in position to threaten key Belgian outposts in the Upper Congo. Urgent action had to be taken.

In 1890, Leopold II ordered the creation of a military expeditionary force, under the leadership of Captain Guillaume van Kerkhoven (1853 - 1892), who held the title 'Inspector', to travel up the Congo River, and over to the Uelle River Valley, to neutralize the Mahdist bases, before moving on to attack the main Mahdist centre in southern Sudan, Bahr-el-Ghazal. Ironically, the force was also to fulfill an abolitionist mandate, freeing slaves from captivity wherever they encountered them (Kerkhoven and many of his top lieutenants were ardent abolitionists), as the Mahdists and many of the indigenous tribes kept slaves. This was ironic, as the Belgians would end up enslaving hundreds of thousands of people in the Congo. Along the way, they were to either subdue or treat with recalcitrant local



tribes in an effort to consolidate the regime's control over the hinterland near the colony's most critical travel corridors.

The advance force of the 'Kerkhoven Expedition' was led by Commander Pierre-Joseph Ponthier (1858 – 1893), and it was to operate an autonomous, pathfinding mission to the Uelle Valley, pacifying troublesome tribes en route, so that Kerkhoven's main force could have a relatively easy trip up the country, saving its strength for the Mahdists.

Ponthier's crack force was to consist of four companies, that were generally to shadow each other. His '3e Compagnie' was led by Lieutenant Eugène Constant Blocteur (1864 - 1896), whose second-in-command was Sergeant Guillaume van Cauwenburghe. Blocteur, a native of Tirlemont (Tienen), Belgium (near Louvain), entered the army in 1880, as a member of the 3rd Chasseurs Regiment. In 1883, he enrolled at the Belgian Ecole Militaire, graduating as a lieutenant 3rd class, in 1885. Blocteur received advanced training in orienteering, surveying, and cartography, skills ideal for service in the Congo.

In the summer of 1890, Blocteur, who held the rank of 2nd Lieutenant, was selected to be one of the key members of the Kerkhoven Expedition. He arrived in Boma, the seaport of the Congo Free State, on October 23, 1890, and then proceeded to Léopoldville to receive his orders. Ponthier's vanguard force for the expedition was marshaled in December 1890, at Kimpoko, near Léopoldville. It is at this stage that the story chronicled in the present manuscript commences.

#### The Present Manuscript in Focus

The present manuscript was clearly composed by Blocteur in the field, en route, and covers his adventures as a company commander in the advance guard of the Kerkhoven Expedition, between December 1890 and September 1891. Written in a neat cursive, easily readable, hand, it comes in the form of a daily journal with occasional extra passages providing general descriptions of specific areas. The narrative is engaging, and action-packed - there are no lulls in the adventure - which seems to have been a terrifying high-octane melodrama, where anyone could be ambushed by unknown assailants at any time, lost in a dark fever-infested jungle, or attacked by a hippopotamus! One gains the impression that Blocteur and his colleagues were certainly brave and driven, but also had a callous attitude towards the native peoples and were more than a little naïve as to the unique dangers of the country.

The work has 8 distinct parts (as described below) and commences with Ponthier's advance force departing Kimpoko (near Léopoldville) in mid-December 1890 and traces their harrowing march through the interior to the Kasai River, fighting innumerable battles against indigenous warriors. This is followed by an account of their ascent up the Congo River by steamer, including their dangerous and dramatic onshore mission to the Bolobo-Youmbi area, followed by their arrival at Bumba, the northernmost point on the river, and Blocteur's disease-plagued march and canoe voyage to the Uelle River Valley. The narrative ends with Blocteur having to leave the expedition due to illness and charts the beginning of his return to Léopoldville.

The final section (Part 8) departs from the main narrative. Likely written by Blocteur between 1894 and 1896, he recounts a trip he made from Bumba to Stanley Falls, the natural wonder at the head of the Congo River navigation.

#### [Part 1].

**“De Kimpoko au Kassai au 18 décembre au [19] janvier 1891”, [8 pp.], plus 5 maps in pencil (2 double page, 3 single page).**

The work begins with an outline of the composition of the mission force: “Commandant des troupes: Capitaine Commdr. Ponthier; 1e. Compagne: 2e. Lieutt. Van Montfort, Sergent Benet; 2e. Compagnie: Capitaine Boschart, 2e. Lieutt. Jacquet; 3e. Compagne: 2e. Lieutt. Blocteur, Sergent Van Cauwenburghe; 4e. Compagne: 2e. Lieutt. Rousseaux, 2e. Liett. Hernotte, Sergent Crahay.”

Blocteur then commences the narrative of the journal, on December 18, 1890, with the companies setting off from Kimpoko, on the shores of Stanley Pool, about 30 km up to Congo River from Léopoldville, at 7:20 AM, guided by a local villager named N'Sons. They headed northeast, passing the English Christian mission of Kimpoko, and the village proper of the same name (noting that its chief was named Gambili).

On December 19, the expedition started off 5:05 AM, marching SSE, and came across the village of N'Guma, whose inhabitants were very self-confident and bore arms, although they did not attack. They subsequently encountered a valley cultivated with manioc, bananas, tobacco, etc. Later, arms fire could be heard from the direction of N'Guma.

On December 21, the “journey was not happy”, as the parties got lost, but Lt. Jacquet of the 2nd Company, managed to reconcile the situation, getting the expedition back on track. They located a village that had recently been raided by the people of N'Guma for its stores of flour, with the villagers having fled. On December 22, the parties continued their reconnaissance and at 7:15 PM some of the Belgian troops were fired up by some locals, wounding 3 men.

On December 23, the Blocteur's company was ordered to destroy the village that was home to the attackers, which was accomplished with 4 Belgian troops dead and 1 wounded. The following day, the mission traversed a plateau and encountered a pleasant village of friendly people. On Christmas Day, they toured the countryside, but 2 Belgian troops were injured by booby-traps placed by the locals.

On December 26, Lt. Montfort's company attacked by hostile villagers, suffering 2 deaths and 3 wounded, and taking 5 prisoners (4 women and 1 child). Later the mission encountered 2 Zanzibari traders who told them that Licha (today Léchia), a village on the Congo River, that was a key intended waypoint for the Belgians, was only a short march ahead.

On December 27, the expedition encountered the Congo River, which would have been comforting, as it took them out of the dangerous enigma of the interior, for a time. They reached the key village of Licha the following day.

On January 3-4, the Belgians became involved in a battle at the village Bokoro, fighting in alliance with a neighboring tribe, which resulted in light casualties. They burned the village before departing, with the locals harassing their rear guard. The mission was engaged in further fighting in the jungle and amongst plantations before encountering the friendly village of Mikélé, where the chief provided them with guides.

On January 6, the mission arrived at the village of Toua, which was the “most important yet encountered”. The settlement lay amidst a beautiful forest, while the affluent locals “hunted elephants”. The villagers were described as good looking, but rather “corpulent”. They were friendly to the Belgians and gave Commandant Ponthier the gift of a large elephant tusk.

From there, they were faced with the choice of two district routes to the Kasai River, one that was short, bearing northwest, and the other, more difficult and meandering, heading northeast. Gaining the assistance of a guide from Toua, the expedition decided to take the latter, as it would afford them more opportunities to gain intelligence and to subdue recalcitrant tribes.

On January 8, after a “very hard” trip through varied topography, under unusually hot weather, they arrived at the village of N’Douma, in a country that was rich in ivory.

On January 12, the mission arrived at Ebina, on the south bank of the Kasai River, which is described as “grand course of water”. Ebina is said to be a very important village, consisting of groups of 5-6 houses surrounded by water. The mission awaited the arrival of a steamboat, the Stanley, to take them up the Congo to Bolobo. On January 13-14, the inhabitants of Ebina mysteriously left the town en masse. Many of the Belgian troops were suffering from dysentery, while much of their food supplies had become rancid – a bad omen before they were to head into “unknown country” on the way to Bolobo.

On January 15, Captain Hernotte took a party on a reconnaissance of a mid-river island and the opposite shore of the Kasai. The inhabitants of Ebina then returned, and their chief demanded that Commandant Ponthier “exchange blood” with him in an elaborate ceremony, which occurred. That day, the mission boarded the steamer and made a short tour of the immediate area, stopping at the Belgian mission of Ste. Marie, near the confluence of the Kasai and Congo. Worryingly, Blocteur notes that he was coming down with a “bilious fever”, but fortunately Dr. Dryepont was present, and he remained functional. The expedition returned to Ebina.

On January 16, the people of Ebina turned hostile and an altercation took place, during which one of the troops was gravely wounded. The force quickly returned to their camp, gathering their provisions. The following day, they prepared to board the Stanley at the nearby village of Babuma, however they were attacked by the locals, such that the Belgians seized the village, taking prisoners. They then boarded the steamer and headed toward Bolobo.

In an entry entitled “Généralités sur la région comprise entre Kimpoko et le Kassai”, Blocteur gives an overview of the region.

In the first passage, “Aspect du sol”, he describes the topography of the country, ranging from plateaus, with “vegetation that was not brilliant” to verdant valleys, lush forests and prairies with magnificent produce and ample potable water. The message for any future European traveller was that they should carefully manage their progress, to make camp at bountiful, safe locations, otherwise the trip promised to be most unpleasant.

The remarks on “Population” note that the region was heavily populated, with large villages located 4.5 hours apart. The people generally made a living from hunting, while low-level trade was conducted in some villages. As the Belgians found out the hard way, the natives possessed a great deal of guns.

On “Cultures”, or agriculture, the country along the early stages of the march featured many plantations of tobacco, although beyond there were few large farms, yielding only small quantities of corn, manioc, peanuts, etc.

In the “Route followed” passage, Blocteur gives a brief overview of the march that has been described in detail.

Finally, in this last element of this part of the journal, “Sur Kassai (rive droite)”, he recounts the mission’s investigation of the northern bank of the Kasai, which was reconnoitered on January 18-19, 1891. A detachment of Blocteur’s 3rd Company landed and encountered a village. However, they were attacked by the locals, with Sgt. Van Cauwenburghe receiving a minor wound, while 2 of the troops were seriously injured. Ponthier ordered the Stanley steamer to come to the party’s rescue. However, they were attacked again, before they could make their escape by boat, taking with them their wounded and sick. Notably, Captain Boschart and Lt. Rousseaux fell seriously ill, such that they would not be able to continue with the expedition (they would be relieved at Bolobo).

#### **The Suite of Kimpoko-Kassai Itinerary Maps:**

Importantly, this section of the journal is illustrated by a suit of 5 interconnecting maps (2 double page, 3 single page), drafted by Blocteur, in pencil, a very refined hand, indicative of his professional training as a military draftsman. Indeed, the quality of the maps is much higher than generally seen in explorers’ journals of the time. The maps connect, and if they were joined, would form a single map, of irregular dimensions, measuring approximately 1.5 metres long!

The maps chart the entire route of Ponthier’s companies’ march from Kimpoko to the banks of the Kasai River, from December 18, 1890 to January 12, 1891. These “croquis”, being itinerary maps executed to a scale of 1:20,000, show the Belgian line of march in a clear fashion, depicting every village encountered, as well as the camps where they stopped each night, with dates marked throughout. Topographic features, such as ravines, rivers, plateaus, and swamps are carefully expressed pictorially, following military conventions. The map intentionally omits all superfluous details, as the empirical ethic of the work eschews speculative distractions. The text, accompanied by the maps, allows the reader to easily follow the narrative, giving a sense of the forbidding nature of the countryside.

Los rios

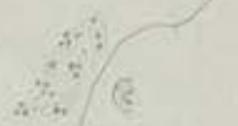


Campo 1º



Campo del primer

Atenas

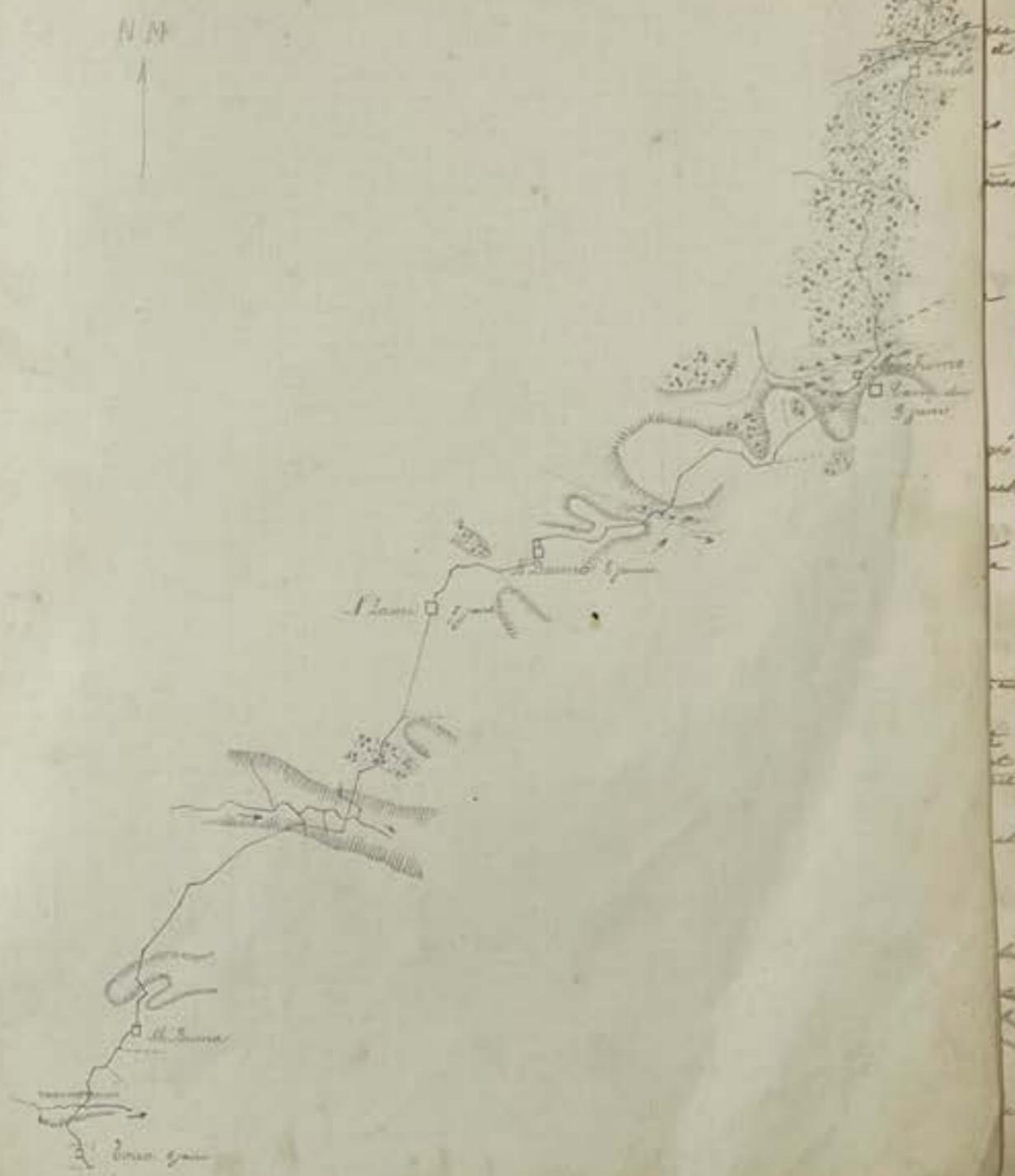


Campo 2º

N M



Campo de Atenas



Campo 3º

Campo 4º

Campo 5º

**[Part 2].**

**[Arrival at Bolobo], February 6 to 12, 1891, [9 pp.].**

This short section, consisting of single a page of stray text, is likely a fragment, as it is features isolated entries ranging in date from February 6 to 12. It takes up the story from when the expedition was aboard the Stanley steamer, travelled up the Congo River from Kasai, just before their arrival at Bolobo.

On February 7, the expedition alighted from the Stanley just below Bolobo. The Belgians wanted to reconnoiter the country to the south before approaching the village. After heading inland from the Congo, and traversing heavy jungle, they encountered a land of verdant plantations, and then a village, Bolibo, that was just outside of Bolobo. However, upon encountering Bolobo on February 8, they found the village destroyed. They soon encountered some hostile locals and in the ensuing *melée*, the Belgians suffered 4 casualties, 1 of whom died. Fortunately, Ponthier learned that the mission would soon be picked up by the steamer *Nouvelle Anvers*. On February 9, the Belgians encountered an abandoned village, while many of the other villages in the area had been destroyed. Clearly the region was affected by inter-tribal warfare.

On February 12, the expedition boarded the *Nouvelle-Anvers*, to find that their army's supreme commander, Captain Guillaume van Kerckhoven, was aboard. They then left Bolobo, heading for Youmbi (Yumbi), with the vessel being accompanied by another steamer, the *Ville de Bruxelles*.

**[Part 3].**

**“De Bolobo à Youmbi”, February 21 to April 4, 1891, [3 pp.], plus 1 map (1 single page).**

This section takes up the story on February 21, when the expedition was compelled to linger in the Bolobo area, having previously attempted to depart. The *Ville de Bruxelles* struck a sandbar and had to be floated off (the Congo had not yet been hydrographically surveyed in any proper fashion). That same day, after the vessel had been repaired, the mission, once again, set off from Bolobo, for the short trip to Youmbi (today Yumbi).

In February 22, the expedition arrived at Youmbi, where they fought skirmishes against the locals on shore, while the *Ville de Bruxelles* was attacked from the water. The Belgians did not suffer any injuries, while the indigenous forces endured 9 casualties.

In February 26, in the Youmbi area, the mission was able to acquire a vast quantity of provisions, including much hippopotamus meat.

From March 1-3, Blocteur and 16 men, took a reconnaissance tour by canoe up the Youmbi River. They encountered some local people in canoes, who hastily abandoned their vessels and fled into the bush.

On March 7-8, the chiefs of the villages in the Youmbi area asked the Belgians to treat for peace. The Belgians met with a chief of the village of Kidiki, who was described as a

a strong and intelligent man, who made a living by selling slaves. On March 16, the Belgians sealed a peace deal with the local chiefs (or so they thought). All parties agreed to reconvene in 3 days' time.

On March 20, while the chief of Youmbi remained cooperative, most of the other local chiefs reneged on the deal. The Belgians sent out parties to hunt down the recalcitrant chiefs, and after some fighting, the chiefs relented and agreed to re-honour the peace deal.

On March 25, the Belgians visited the villages of the formerly hostile chiefs and found them abandoned, with their residents having fled into the interior, perhaps in anticipation of a Belgian offensive.

On April 1, Sgt. Cahay was injured when a hippopotamus overturned his canoe.

Importantly, on April 4, the advance force of the expedition split up, with Ponthier taking the 1st and 2nd Companies to continue ahead at pace further up the Congo, while Blocteur's 3rd and the 4th Companies were to continue a gradual pace, fulfilling reconnaissance missions and raiding hostile villages (the advance force would be reunited in May, at Bangala). The 3rd and 4th Companies departed aboard the *Ville de Bruxelles* steamer towards Bangala.

Blocteur next provides an overview of the Bolobo-Youmbi region. He starts with the “Aspect du sol”, in which he recounts the results of his reconnaissance of the innumerable rives and swamps, noting the travel times by canoe between villages. As for the “Population” he notes that the area is densely peopled. Regarding “Cultures”, or agriculture, the locals grew bananas, sugar, manioc, potatoes, and palms.

In the final, entry, “Groupes de Villages”, Blocteur records the names of all the villages in the Youmbi vicinity, with the names of their chiefs. These include Bounkongo, who leader was Chief N'Simba; Boumbinda, Chief Moïanda; Poumbolo, Chief N'Sété; Yoimbi, Chief Lobengo; Kidiki, Chief Biolao; N'Kulo, Chief Lengourie; Kumbi & Bomfo, Chief M'Foula; while the village of Molendé was led by Chief N'Kuti.

**The Map of the Youmbi Area**

This part of the journal is illustrated with a fine map of the Youmbi area, drafted in pencil by Blocteur, in his signature refined style. The Congo River appears on the far left, with the steamer routes running through to the site of Youmbi, that while unlabeled, its location is obvious. The result of Blocteur and his colleagues' reconnaissance missions by canoe, the map charts a series of small rivers that fan out in the interior, amidst swamps, with villages lining the shores of the Congo and located at the heads of the small rivers. The map is surely the first detailed cartographic rendering of the area.

**[Part 4].**

**“De Youmbi à Equateur-Station [but actually continuing beyond to Bangala (Nouvelle-Anvers / Mankanza)]”, April 4 to April 20, 1891., [1 p.].**

On April 4, the expedition departed Youmbi, aboard the Ville de Bruxelles, to make a detour back to Bolobo, where they got into an altercation with the natives. On April 5, the mission embarked up the Congo River towards Equateur-Station, and visited the mission of Loukobila, taking in slaves that had been liberated from local chiefs.

On April 7, the mission arrived at the village of Trébou. Even though a Belgian envoy, a Mr. Lemaire, was already present, the mission found themselves engaged in a skirmish with the locals, who lost 5 men. In the river, they encountered the steamer Harry Reid, which had recently been attacked by locals in war canoes.

On April 8, members of the expedition went up the Trébou River and attacked villages, with one Belgian being wounded. The following day, the local chiefs arrived to negotiate peace, with Lemaire brokering an accord. On April 11, the expedition left Trébou and was beset by a fierce tornado on the river.

The Belgians attacked the village of Ikengo on April 12, killing several villagers and their chief, while losing only one of their own men.

The expedition arrived at Equateur-Station (later known as Coquilhatville, today Mbandaka) on April 13, which lay exactly where the Equator crossed the Congo River. The following day, the Belgians attacked the nearby village of Loliva, under driving rain, killing 11 warriors. The locals attacked the Ville de Bruxelles, but without result. On April 15, the expedition attended to the liberated slaves in their charge.

On April 18, the mission left Equateur-Station, arriving at Bangala two days later.

**[Part 5].**  
**“Bangala à Bumba [but actually continuing beyond to D’Jabbir (today Bondo)]”, April 22 to June 29, 1891, [2 pp.].**

Having arrived at Bangala (later called Nouvelle-Anvers, today Makanza) on April 20, the expedition camped upon some islands in the Congo River. Over the next week, they attacked various hostile villages that threatened Belgian interests in the area. On April 29, the mission set off further up the Congo River.

On May 2, the Belgians arrived at Bumba, which lay deep in the heart of Africa, at the most northerly point of the Congo River. They shortly set off for the long and arduous overland trek to D’Jabbir (today Bondo), on the Uelle River. However, the army was unprepared and lacked water, while the jungle was so dense that it frustrated progress. Upon making camp near a village, the locals suddenly “fell” upon the Belgians, and a dreadful fight ensued. The assailants eventually retreated into the woods, but the Belgians were too exhausted to follow them. Blocteur remarked that it seemed “folly” to continue the march “under these circumstances”, and the army returned to Bumba.

On May 6, the Belgians, having decided to change their plan, headed up the Congo by steamer, bound for the village of Moëngivé, which they hoped to seize. By the time that they

reached a place called Malémam they learned that it would be impossible to attack Moëngivé, due to the swampy terrain. The expedition was joined by Captain van Kerkhoven. On May 7, Kerkhoven left to lead a side mission to the south bank of the Congo, which was scheduled to last until May 22. Meanwhile, it was decided that the advance force, including Blocteur, was to proceed to Ibembo, on the Roubi River (a navigable tributary of the Congo), aboard the Ville de Bruxelles. The force would then march from Ibembo to D’Jabbir. Kerkhoven returned from his mission on May 21.

On May 22, Blocteur and his men departed for Ibembo, a trip that was scheduled to last 4 days. On the third day, they shot an elephant. They arrived at Ibembo on May 25, a touch earlier than expected.

On May 27, the expedition set off overland, marching towards Ouguëtetra (Uguetra), on the Likati River, part way to D’Jabbir. They traversed “very difficult terrain” through jungle and swamps, arriving at their destination 7 days later (June 3). The chief of Ouguëtetra was friendly and was described as an intelligent man who instilled a remarkable degree of order upon his people.

Around June 5, the expedition left Ouguëtetra and arrived at Maliba on the Uelle River, above D’Jabbir, and from there they took canoes, over rapids, to reach D’Jabbir, a Belgian outpost.

D’Jabbir is described as “very beautiful station”, although its fortifications were not completed. It lay amidst abundant plantations (growing rice, corn, manioc, etc.). The chief of the post, a Mr. De Jaiffe, was an old man in ill health, and despite the nearby plantations, the place was short of food (and wine).

It was at this point that the main force under Kerkhoven joined Ponthier’s force, forming a grand army. Regrettably, Ponthier fell very ill and had to take a temporary leave of absence from active duty.

On June 29, the army departed D’Jabbir, heading up the Uelle Valley towards the Mahdist lands. Along the way, the people were friendly and intelligent, and they provided the Belgians with an excellent agent to assist their progress.

**[Part 6].**  
**“D’Jabbir à al M’Bima”, [Early July] to August 18, 1891, [5 pp.].**

The Belgians progressed along rough roads, encountering one “miserable hamlet” after another, while pounded by torrential rain, Ponthier’s health deteriorated, and he returned to D’Jabbir to recover. On July 7, Ponthier was able to rejoin the army. The trip remained difficult, as the army’s porters had a hard time keeping up, while it was also difficult to hire new sets of porters from the villages as they progressed, leaving the army short of provisions at times – a major problem. While a local chief claimed that the Uelle was navigable in those parts, and indeed the Belgians saw many canoes in the river, they discovered a waterfall, suggesting that this was not the case. Worryingly, many of the troops fell ill with

virulent fevers, including Lt. Jacquet. Along the way they met an Arab trader from Khar-toum and shot an elephant.

The expedition arrived at a village called Nangwa, where they found the chief grumpy and uncooperative; he would not supply porters to the Belgians. On July 15, Lt. Jacquet died of fever, causing much sadness (he was the first senior officer of the mission to die). On July 17, the army left Nangwa, plagued with fever, traveling through thick forest, short on provisions. From July 25, Blocteur and Ponthier marched together, at the head of a detachment. Lt. Montfort was very ill, which distressed his good friend Blocteur.

On July 30, the detachment arrived at the village of M'Bejirra, where they were able to acquire provisions. There, they encountered an assembly of local chiefs, which they were pleased to meet.

On August 1, the expedition rested by the banks of the Uelle, where they were set upon by a large group of armed locals in canoes. Here Blocteur asks "Has Ponthier fallen into an ambush?". Caught off-guard, the Belgians stumbled to grab their guns. As it turned out the tribesmen were not necessarily hostile, and Ponthier was able to diffuse the situation. That day, Blocteur started to fall ill with fever.

On August 4, Blocteur's health deteriorated dramatically, and he started to believe that he needed to leave the expedition, and the Congo altogether, heading back to Europe. He returned to D'Jabbir. He had a horrible night on August 11, downing a bottle of liquor to staunch the pain! The next morning, he felt better – the fever had disappeared!!! (Although it would soon return with a vengeance!)

On August 14, Blocteur headed down the Uelle by canoe. The trip was uncomfortable, as they had to contend with rain and waterfalls, although the people they encountered were friendly and helpful.

On August 16, at noon, Blocteur arrived at D'Jabbir, only to find Captain van Kerkhoven. Since he was last there, the situation in the village had deteriorated dramatically. The people were at war with another village and had even burned their stores of ivory to prevent it from falling into enemy hands. The Belgians managed to acquire some ivory in the chaos. The main army proceeded to head up the Uelle.

#### **[Part 7].**

**"Retour de D'Jabbir à Ibembo", August 19 to September 9, 1891, [2 pp.].**

On August 1, it seemed that Kerkhoven was cross with Blocteur for leaving the expedition, and so denied him some requests for provisions. On August 20, Blocteur left the Uelle Valley, and headed towards Ibembo, via Ouguëtetra, arriving there on August 29. There he met some Belgians en route to join the Kerkhoven Expedition – he wished them good health! Blocteur departed Ibembo (bound eventually for Léopoldville) on the familiar Nouvelle-Anvers.

#### **[Part 8].**

**[Untitled Narrative of a Trip from Bumba to Stanley Falls, perhaps written 1894 - 1896], [2 pp.].**

Departing from Blocteur's narrative of the Kerkhoven Expedition, this 1½ page account, written in pencil, chronicles his visit to Stanley Falls, the natural wonder and major trading outpost located at the head of navigation of Congo River. We are not sure when the trip was made but it seems that it occurred when Blocteur was posted at Nouvelle-Anvers from 1894 to 1896.

Here Blocteur describes his trip from Bumba, by steamboat, to Stanley Falls, noting the people he met on the trip and the sites he witnessed, on what was a relatively civilized and calm journey. At Stanley Falls he visited the Belgian Factory and the house of an Arab trader, a local potentiate who was known as the "Vali" (governor). The cataracts themselves were described being an "important spectacle".

#### **Epilogue**

The Kerkhoven Expedition ended up being a success, as the Belgians destroyed the main Mahdist base in the Uelle Valley, at Bomokandi on October 27, 1891. Eventually, Kerkhoven managed to attack the Mahdist epicentre of Bahr-el Gazal but was forced to withdraw from Sudan due to French diplomatic pressure. However, the mission's success was curbed by Kerkhoven being killed in a friendly fire incident on August 19, 1892. Otherwise, Ponthier claimed to have liberated 250 slaves during the expedition, much to the delight of liberal newspapers in Belgium.

As for Blocteur, he returned to Léopoldville by October 1891, where he recovered from his fever. Stationed in the Lower Congo, he founded the Zambi outpost, near the coast, between Banana and Boma, and was wounded in action against the natives in March 1893. He took leave in Belgium but returned to the Congo in March 1894. Blocteur, with the rank of captain, was made the district army commander of the Ubangi-Uelle Region, before becoming the Belgian Resident at Nouvelle-Anvers, in May 1894. In that role, he was credited with greatly improving the settlement and strengthening the Belgian presence in the region, including setting up the postal service. Tragically, he died on August 6, 1896, from malaria, the fate of so many Europeans in the Congo. The present journal is his greatest surviving written legacy.

References: N/A – Manuscript seemingly unrecorded. Cf. INSTITUT ROYAL COLONIAL BELGE, *Biographie Coloniale Belge*, vol. 1 (1948), pp. 128-9; Osumaka LIKAKA, *Naming Colonialism: History and Collective Memory in the Congo, 1870–1960* (2009).

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