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## Was a Mokele-mbembe killed at Lake Tele?

by **William Gibbons\***

I can confirm that at least two of the pygmies who were directly involved in the killing of a Mokele-mbembe at Lake Tele about three decades ago were acquainted on a personal level with missionary pastor Eugene P. Thomas. I have discussed this incident with Pastor Thomas, and he was able to confirm most of the details of the story which follows.

Around 1960, the forest dwelling pygmies of the Lake Tele region (the Bangombe tribe), fished daily in the lake near the Molibos, or water channels situated at the north end of the lake. These channels merge with the swamps, and were used by Mokele-mbembes to enter the lake where they would browse on the vegetation. This daily excursion into the lake by the animals disrupted the pygmies fishing activities. Eventually, the pygmies decided to erect a stake barrier across the molibo in order to prevent the animals from entering the lake.

When two of the animals were observed attempting to break through the barrier, the pygmies speared one of the animals to death and later cut it into pieces. This task apparently took several days due to the size of the animal, which was described as being bigger than a forest elephant with a long neck, a small snake-like or lizard-like head, which was decorated with a comb-like frill. The pygmy spearmen also described a long, flexible tail, a smooth, reddish-brown skin and four stubby, but powerful legs with clawed toes. Pastor Thomas also mentioned that the two pygmies mimicked the cry of the animal as it was being attacked and speared.

Later, a victory feast was held, during which parts of the animal were cooked and eaten. However, those who participated in the feast eventually died, either from food poisoning or from natural causes. It should be noted that pygmies rarely live beyond 35, and pygmy women give birth from aged 12. I also believe that the mythification (magical powers, etc) surrounding Mokele-mbembes began with this incident.

During my first expedition in 1985, we met with several eyewitnesses who have observed Mokele-mbembes in the Sangha and Likouala aux Herbes Rivers. Our pygmy informants also mentioned that there was at least two Mokele-mbembes still living in the Lake Tele vicinity, but they were simply too afraid to take us to a precise location where we could actually film and observe a specimen of Mokele-mbembe, due to their superstitious beliefs surrounding the animals and fear of reprisals from the Boha villagers who are regarded as the owners of the lake. The Boha villagers are also familiar with areas in the river and swamps where we can observe these animals for ourselves. However, the general belief that speaking of Mokele-membes to white outsiders will result in great misfortune or death is fairly prevalent throughout the Likouala region. This presents huge problems in obtaining accurate and up-to-date information on Mokele-mbembes and other cryptids.

I should add that I am not convinced that Marcellin Agnagna, Rory Nugent, or Herman Regusters have observed Mokele-mbembes. During our two visits to the Congo, my colleagues and I were unable to locate a [single](#) one of the "dozens" of witnesses that allegedly observed Mokele-mbembes with the aforementioned explorers. Marcellin Agagna changed his story several times, and is now thought (by Roy Mackal) to have observed the giant African freshwater turtle, *Trionyx*

*triunguis*. Herman Regusters and his wife [Kia](#) are the only individuals on his expedition to have observed a "long-necked member" travelling across Lake Tele, in spite of the fact that 28 other people were with them from the village of Boha. Rory Nugent's alleged Mokele-mbembe photos could be anything, although he may have seen "something" in the distance.

But Jose Bourges, the Congolese wildlife official who accompanied the 1988 Japanese expedition to the lake, reported that the entire expedition observed a large humped back of an animal, slowly moving along, as if foraging on the bottom of the lake, which is three meters deep at most. So the animals are still there, and I still want to find one!

\***Bill Gibbons** has conducted two major expeditions to the Congo, in 1985-6, and 1992, in search of the Mokele-mbembe. He conducted two other field investigations on the island of Mauritius in the southern Indian Ocean in 1990 and 1997, after two European visitors claimed Dodo sightings. Operation Congo III, and Project Dodo III are currently under development. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology with Warnborough College, Oxford.