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Introductory Remarks¹

Luba People and their Origin

The Luba-Kasai people are the Bantu-speaking cluster of people of south-central Congo (Kinshasa) or the Democratic Republic of Congo (see below). Also known as the “Baluba”, the Luba-Kasai number about 5,594,000 in the late 20th century and inhabit a wide area extending throughout much of southern Congo. The name Luba applies to a variety of groups who, though of different origins, share closely related languages, exhibit many common cultural traits, and share a common political history founded on the origins and disintegration of the Luba empires. Three main subdivisions may be recognized: the Luba-Shankaji of Katanga, the Luba-Bambo of Kasai, and the Luba-Hemba of northern Katanga and southern Kivu. All are historically, linguistically, and culturally linked with other Congo peoples.

The Luba people originated from the marshland of the Lakes Upemba and Kisale, a place called Nsanga-Lubangu. In the mid-17th century, Nkongolo Mukulu founded the first Luba Empire, and Ilunga-Mbidi Kalaala founded the second Empire. No one knows for certain the exact period of the emergence of the centralized empire characterized by the strong authority of the Mulopwe, the traditional king of the Luba people. The oral tradition accounts, that the empire can be traced as far back as the early 15th or 16th century. It expanded north and southeast until 1840 under Kumwimbe Ngombe and then to the northwest and northeast from 1840 to 1870 under Ilunga Kabale. The Luba people claim one common ancestor in Ilunga-Mbili Kiluwa. It was around his authority that the first empire began and expanded. One gets bits and pieces on the history of these people, but not many references show their exact migration and how they ended up in the Kasai area. The empire began to diminish after the death of Ilunga-Mbili Kiluwa, in 1870, as Arab slave traders and European invaders challenged notions of Luba supremacy in the region contributing to the decline of Luba power. The legacy of the great empire is still recognizable in the region today, where local customs and art styles often reflect a strong Luba influence. These empires were also noted for their praise poetry and songs (Kasala). Luba people

are classified according to their geographical location. In Katanga province, there are Luba-Kabongo, Luba-Kinkondja, Luba-Malemba-Nkulu, Luba-Mutombo Mukulu. In Kasai, there are Luba-Lubilanji, Luba-Luluwa, Luba-Luntu, etc.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (Kinshasa)

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (Kinshasa) is located in central Africa and has a short 25-mile (40-kilometre) coastline on the Atlantic Ocean. It is bordered to the west by the Angolan exclave of Cabinda and the Congo; to the north by the Central African Republic and the Sudan; to the east by Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania; to the southeast by Zambia; and to the southwest by Angola. It is the third largest country on the African continent, encompassing an area of 905,354 square miles (2,344,858 square kilometres). Only the Sudan and Algeria are larger. The capital, Kinshasa, is located on the Congo River at a distance of about 320 miles from its mouth and is the largest city in central Africa. It serves as the nation's administrative, economic, and cultural centre. The country is often called Congo (Kinshasa) to distinguish it from the other Congo republic, which is called Congo (Brazzaville).

Kasai is the former province, in the south central of the Republic of the Congo (Kinshasa) with Luluabourg (Kananga Malandi wa Nshinga) as its capital. Situated between the Kasai and the Sankuru rivers, the Kuba kingdom of the Shongo people existed from the early 17th century. The constant warring between the Luba and Bena Lulua peoples was partly responsible for the secession in 1960 of the Baluba-dominated Mining State of South Kasai, headed by Albert Kalonji, who proclaimed himself "Mulopwe" of South Kasai. The central government reestablished control over the whole of Kasai in December, 1961. The region is now divided into Kasai-Occidental and Kasai-Oriental provinces. The Kasai Oriental (formerly South Kasai) province, with Mbuji Mayi as its capital, is the Democratic Republic of the Congo's diamond center and is geographically located in the southeastern part of the country. Having two climates or seasons, rainy and dry, it is divided as such: Mbuji Mayi and Kalelu, Lubilanji and Lomami, Lwalaba and lake Tanganyinka. Their "form" of language, Ciluba (Tshiluba), is one of the four national languages in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Culturally, they have very strong sense of belonging.

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¹ Introductory remarks were derived from the following sources: Mpoyi Mwadyanvita. Lwendu Lwa Baluba, 2nd ed. Kananga, Impremerie Katoka, 1987; "Congo." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2003. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 11 December, 2003, <http://search.eb.com/eb/article?eu=114568>; and "Luba." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2003. Encyclopædia Britannica Online, 11 December, 2003, <http://search.eb.com/eb/article?eu=50392>.