

“Mokele-Mbembe”: a Cryptozoological Animal of Centre African Prefecture: Veracity or Hoax

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Abstract: The existence of living dinosaurs has been reported throughout the time from different regions of the world. Various encounters, exclusive photographs, clawed foot prints and eye witness reports converge upon the conclusion that an unclassified reptile of significant size is living, or at least recently lived, in the remote jungles of equatorial Africa. The scientific communities deny the survival of this animal. Because, hitherto the animal is not seen or understood, the visible evidences often appear to be irreconcilable with one another and lead to hypotheses that are in conflict. This animal has had several names within the various African cultures of that area and had a history among them for many centuries. The animal species known to the local natives as “Mokele-mbembe” and fits the description of a small plant eating dinosaur.

Key words: Living dinosaur • Mokele-mbembe • Congo • Cryptids • Cryptozoology

INTRODUCTION

The word “dinosaur” (Greek word *deinos* which means “fearfully great” and *sauros* which means “a lizard”) was coined by an English anatomist and pioneering palaeontologist Richard Owen in 1840s to distinguish a new category of reptiles and before it was known as monster/dragon. Evolutionary proponents states that the worldwide cataclysm wiped out all dinosaurs around 65.5 million years ago (MYA) and smaller one which thrived get evolved in to modern time aves [1]. They hypothesis that human being evolved from ape like ancestors in Africa around 4.4 million years ago [2]. Therefore, no human being has ever seen a living dinosaur.

Contrary to the general principle held by Darwin’s followers over the past one and a half centuries, report pertaining to the existences of pre-historic critters came out from the various unexplored region of the earth [1, 3-5]. There are numerous historic/archaeological evidences for the existence of dinosaurs in recent times [6-11]. Moreover, this century alone witnessed around 20,000 sighting reports of dinosaurs (or dinosaur like entities) from desolated area of various locales [10]. There are hundreds of place harbouring reputed monsters around the world [12]. Among these, 40% came out from

the remote regions of African continent. During the past few decades, different species with distinct physique analogous to dinosaurs were reported from Africa by various cryptozoologist [13] (Table 1).

Dark Continent is well known for its numerous weird mysteries, mythology and strange rituals like voodoo ceremonies, levitations, possessions, spectral incursions, cannibalisms [14] and the inexplicable animal behaviour (eg. human lifting by Tsavo lions). Relatively a fraction of these events are known from the secluded unpopulated areas of this continent, particularly its unexplored jungles and marshy swamps which remain some of the most impenetrable region on earth.

As western missionaries began to explore the marshy jungles and remote places of Africa, Chronicles of many legendary prehistoric critters which existed millions of years before began to be reported since the 17th century [15]. Among these, the most popular candidate was the Mokele-mbembe (MM), which thrives in the deep forest in swampy areas of central Africa [16]. Hitherto, more than fifty expeditions were conducted by various institutions, majority of them come up with inconclusive data. The evidence however is less than compelling. The existence of this animal has long been debated between scientists and cryptozoologist.

Table 1: List of dinosaur like cryptids reported from various region of Africa

Name	Physical characters	Assumptions	Geographical position	Reference
Mbielu-Mbielu-Mbielu	Suaropods like animal with large planks growing out its back	Stegosaurus	Central Africa	[34]
Isiququmadevu	Length, 20–40 feet. Larger than an elephant. Head is like a snake's. Long neck. Lizard like legs.	Sauropods	Central Africa	[15]
Emela-Ntouka	Unknown Dinosaur-like reptile As large as an elephant or larger. Reddish-brown to gray. Hairless. Single, large, curved, ivory horn on its nose. Beaked mouth. Short, frilled neck. Massive legs. Heavy tail like a crocodile's.	Monoclonius		[24,25,34]
Jago-Nini	Dinosaur-like animal of Central Africa, similar to the Mokele-Mbembe	Sauropod		[20]
Ninki Nanka	Freshwater Monster of West Africa. Length, 30 feet. Crocodile-like body. Horse like head. Three horns, one in the middle of its head. Long neck.			[57,58]
Nsanga	Dinosaur-like animal of Central Africa, similar to the EMELA-NTOUKA.	Monoclonis		[18]
Nyama	Dinosaur-like animal of Central Africa, similar to the EMELA-NTOUKA.			
N'yamala	Large and hippopotamuslike. Small head with a crest. Dinosaur-like animal of Central Africa, similar to the MOKELE-MBEMBE. Said to resemble a sauropod dinosaur. Length, at least 30 feet. Weighs as much as an elephant. Threadlike filaments at the back of the head and neck. Long neck. A pair of pouches near the front legs. Long tail.	Monoclonis		[6,7] [6,7,34]
Silwane Manzi	DINOSAUR-like animal of South Africa. Elongated. Scaly. Head is like a turtle's. Small, green eyes. Two sharp ears or horns			[22,23,13]
Chipekwe	Dinosaur-like animal of Central Africa, similar to the Em ela-Ntouka.		Lake Bangweulu, Kafue Flats, Luapula River, Lukulu River, Lake Mweru and Lake Shiwa Ngandu in Zambia; Dililo Swamps in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Lake Tanganyika in Tanzania; Lago Dilolo and the Kasai River in Angola.	[4]
Amali	Dinosaur-like animal of Central Africa, similar to the Mokele-Mbembe.			[7,20]
Badigui	Dinosaur-like animal of Central Africa, similar to the Mokele-Mbembe.			

This study aims to summarize, what is known about MM of central African prefecture from modern times and the last few centuries. This work is never aimed to justify the existence of this animal, neither there existence is denied. The data therefore consist of a potentially biased series of reports and publications of varying quality.

The prospect of a surviving pre-historic reptile from central Africa intrigues the scientific community more than two hundred years. For centuries the elusive Mokele-mbembe (MM) has been sighted throughout the jungles of Cameroon and Congo areas of western Africa [6, 7, 8, 11, 17-28]. The Mokele-mbembe in Lingala

(local language used by the inhabitants of Congo basin) means, one that prevents the flow of rivers and tributaries or one that eats the top of the plants or even a half-spirit/ half beast [24, 30, 31]. The tribal inhabitant of central Africa has a separate name for this entity and recognizes this animal to be something entirely different from rest of the native fauna [32]. It must be a survivor of small variety of Apatosaurus, ("a variety of Lizard-Footed" dinosaur) [25]. This prehistoric reptile stands about roughly 25 feet (5-10 meters), allegedly the size between a full grown African forest elephant and Hippopotami with a long serpentine neck (1.6 to 3.3 meters) and small head with an oval crocodylian eye [33-36]. The body plan of MM and

Table: 2 Morphological similarities between MM [6, 7, 8, 11, 17-28, 32, 36, 43] and Apatosaurus [49]

Characters	MM	Apatosaurus
Size	20-45 ft (some reports reaches up to 70 feet)	65 feet
Colour	Brownish gray to Reddish brown	Unknown to science
Body	Small head, Stretchy reptilian like neck (1.7 to 3.5 m) holding horizontally, hairless, four stumpy legs with clawed feet and a whip like heavy long tail.	20 feet long neck, holding horizontally; used its power full tail as whiplash to deter attackers; Had 5 short toes on each foot, with one claw on the big toe of each front foot and three claw on back foot
Ornamentation	Frill on the back of the head; Male with horn like protuberance and spike on its back; Female with long neck with out spikes.	Absent
Track	Round shaped between 2 to 23 feet in diameter with three claws	Stride of 7-8 feet
Diet	Malombo fruits of <i>Landolphia manni</i> and <i>L. owarensis</i> . The animal used to rear up on its hind leg to browse the vegetation	Herbivorous; feed on pteridophytes like horse tail, club moss and ferns
Habitat	Semi aquatic (pools, swamps and rivers). Swimming with horizontal flexation (indicative character of reptiles)	Nostrils were located on the top of its head (snorkel-like device for water dwelling animals). But this theory was contradicted since the fossils have been found far from the water bodies.
Life span	Unknown (no cadaver/carcasses were found to analyse the cause of death)	100 years
Character	Solitary life, highly territorial	Move in groups
Birth instinct	Congo natives says that MM give birth to single offspring every twenty years (lack of reports regarding the eggs). Dam used to remain with the young for one year.	Unknown
Mating	Occasionally seen in pairs	Unknown
Geographic distribution	Central African Swamps and Rivers	North America plains
Shelter	Relay on clay caves washed out by the river	Unknown

Apatosaurus was structurally similar [34, 37]. According to the native eyewitness its skin is smooth, hairless (unique character of reptiles) and reddish brown to brownish gray in color. Their underbelly is soft like crocodiles. The most striking feature is three clawed feet and very long muscular tail (1.6 to 3.3 meters) [11, 24, 34, 37-39]. This animal is thought to still inhabit the marshy vine choked swamps of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic, Cameroon and Gabon [34]. The Likouala Swamp in Congo basin is considered as the hot spot of this creature. While there sightings were reported from other lakes, rivers and tributaries like Bai River, Likouala aux Herbes River, Likouala Swamp, Lake Makele, Sangha River, Lake Tebeki, Lake Télé and Lower Ubangi River, Republic of the Congo; Boumba Cross, Loponji, Mbamé, Ngoko, Ntem and Sanaga Rivers, Cameroon [6, 7, 8, 11, 24, 25, 33-35].

The MM is said to a strict herbivorous which relay on local vegetation particularly the fruit of shrubs, Malambo, which is a common flora to this region [34, 40, 41]. The animal is vigorous early in the dawn and late in the day (nocturnal), leading a semi aquatic life [42]. Most of the time it spends underneath the water bodies, dive and swim with horizontal flexation (a distinct

character of reptiles). They have also been report of frills and horns on its heads [43, 45]. It's said to use clay caves washed out by the river, probably in which to lay its eggs. These creatures are extremely feared for their aggressive nature. Reports of killing humans and other mega fauna suggest that MM is a highly territorial entity [11, 44, 45]. The physical feature of the critter sounds suspiciously like a sauropod. Other creatures fitting the description of the Mokele-mbembe type of animal have been sighted in Lake Victoria, Lake Tanganyika, Lake Albert and Lake Tele [46, 47, 48]. Table 2 shows the physical similarities between MM and Apatosaurus.

The MM is 90% akin to Apatosaurus (meaning "deceptive lizard"; formerly known as "Brontosaurus") except in few cases such as presence of horn/frill and the semi aquatic life cycle. The accounts regarding the ornamentation may be due to the misidentification of this animal. The lifestyle of the Apatosaurus has long been under debate. Marsh [49] reported that the presence of nostrils in the head region of Apatosaurus (distinct character of water dwelling animals) and misidentified it as semi aquatic, however, was later rejected and they are now considered to be grazers using their head and tail to balance each other and feasting

Table 3: List of MM expedition by various Institution [42, 44, 59, 60]

Year of the expedition	Institution/ Authority	Out come
1920	Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C	Failure
1932	American cryptozoologist Ivan Sanderson	Found tracks and some wake in the swamps
1972	Herpetologist James H. Powell, Jr	Collected eyewitness testimonies
1976	American expedition James powell	Collected sound recording of "jago-nini. Identified the track of "amali," a animal analogous to MM
1980	German Expedition Engineer Herman Regusters and Kia	Sound recording of creature unknown to science; blurred photograph of MM
1980	Powell and Mackal	Sound recordings, dropping and eye witness testimonies. This expedition is considered to be the most trust full among the all Trust full encounter and pug marks.
1981	Mackal, J. Richard Greenwell, M. Justin Wilkinson and Congolese zoologist Marcellin Agnagna	
1983	Marcellin Agnagna, a zoologist from the Brazzaville Zoo	According to Agnagna, the animal was a reptile, though not a crocodile, nor a python or a freshwater turtle
1985-86	William J. Gibbons	Eye witness testimonies; Identified new sub-species of crestless mangabey monkey (<i>cercebus galeritus</i>)
1987	Japanese Expedition led by Tatsuo Watanabe	A piece of blurry video footage filmed by a Japanese film crew supposedly showing the creature in Lake Tele remains disputable evidence of the animal's existence
1990	Redmond O'Hanlon	Failure
1992	William Gibbons American explorer Rory Nugent	Photograph
1998	The extreme expeditions team was set to travel to the likouala region, however the 1997-1999 civil war made this impossible	Failure
1999	The Megatransect into the wilderness of the Congo basin by the biologist and Africa explorer J. Michael Fay did not reveal any trace of the Mokélé-mbembé.	Failure
2000	In January 2000, the Congo Millennium Expedition (aka. DINO2000) took place, the second one by Extreme Expeditions, consisting of Andrew Sanderson, Adam Davies, Keith Townley, Swedish explorer Jan-Ove Sundberg and five others	Failure
2000	William Gibbons and David Wetzel.	While visiting with a group of pygmies, they were informed about an animal called Ngoubou, a horned creature. The pygmies asserted it was not a regular rhinoceros, as it had more than one horn (six horns on the frill in one eyewitness account) and that the father of one of the senior members of the community had killed one with a spear a number of years ago. Gibbons identified the animal with a <i>Styracosaurus</i> . No evidence of Mokélé-mbembé was found
2001	Cryptosafari and the British Columbia Scientific Cryptozoology Club (BCSCC), a research team traveled to Cameroon consisting of William Gibbons, Scott T. Norman, John Kirk and writer Robert A. Mullin. Their local guide was Pierre Sima Noutchegeni. They were also accompanied by a BBC film crew.	
2006	Milt Marcy Expedition in Dja river of Cameroon, near the Congolese border. It consisted of Milt Marcy, Peter Beach, Rob Mullin and Pierre Sima.	They spoke to witnesses that claimed to have observed a Mokélé-mbembé only two days before, but they did not discover the animal themselves. However, they did return with a plaster cast of a Mokélé-mbembé footprint
2006	"Super Snake" of the National Geographic series Dangerous Encounters included an expedition headed by Brady Barr to Lake Tele.	No unknown animals were found
2008	Syfy (formerly the scifi Channel) series Destination Truth involved investigator Joshua Gates and crew.	The crew of Destination Truth kept calling the animal "Mokélé-mbembé" to the locals, when that name is only used in the Republic of the Congo. Their episode featured a videotaped close encounter, but filmed from a great distance. On applying digital video enhancement techniques, the encounter proved to be nothing more than two submerged hippopotamus.
2009	History Channel series Monster Quest- Bill Gibbons, Rob Mullin, Pierre Sima. Cameroon, in the region of Dja, Boumba and Nkogo Rivers, near the border with the Republic of the Congo.	Evidence of a large underground cave with air vents, sonar readings of very long, serpentine shapes underwater.

primarily on plant growth that grew near the ground. Another anomaly is the geographical distributions of this animal, according to palaeontologist the presence of this animal during the Jurassic era is only confined to the northern American plains.

Historical Report/Sighting: French Missionaries, Abbe Leu Bonventure first reported the existence of MM in 1776. According to Boneventure, the creature that was not seen but which must have been monstrous. The pugmarks of its claw are seen on the earth about three feet circumferences. After a century, In 1913 German Capt. Freiherr von Stein zu Lausnitz while surveying the Cameroon reported an animal called MM. Ivan T. Sanderson and Gerald Russell heard a loud roar and saw a huge animal swim out from a submerged cave in Mamfe Pool on the Cross River, Cameroon, in 1932 or 1933. In 1935, Firman Mosomele reported a Mokelembembe in the Likouala aux Herbes River near Epéna, Republic of the Congo. It had a reddish-brown, snakelike head and its neck was 6–8 feet long [10, 48].

Modern Sighting: Arrey, a British soldier stationed near lake Barombi im Cameroon reported two sauropods like dinosaurs (1948). In 1950s, a civil servant from the Belgian Congo reported a dinosaur like animal in the swamp and shot it without hitting it. Alan Brignall (1954) of Zambia reported a giant monster in Lake Bangwemte. In 1956, a Belgian Captain with his telegraphist, joogers, during a flight over the vast Addar swamps in Congo observed three colossal monsters. In 1963, A French man named J.M Lefebvre said he saw MM while hunting game. In 2000, two security guards at river Fery in Cameroon was encounter by MM. Recently in 2006, Missionary Paul Ohlin claim to have seen a MM in Sanha river [10].

Expeditions: The first full-fledged scientific investigation/expedition for MM was mounted during the 1920s by Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. A greater number of expeditions on this topic have been launched by various authorities/Institutions during the past few decades and much is still going on (Table 3). Majority of these expeditions end up with worthless reports [49]. Nearly a fraction of these expeditions came out with acceptable proof such as verbal testimonies, droppings, sound records, pugmark cast and other circumstantial evidences but no undeniable photograph have yet been reported. Mackal R. P in the years 1980, 1981 and Hermen R. in 1982 led the most tangible research/investigation.

Mokele-Mbembe Encounter with Bangombe Tribe at Lake Telekinz:

There is an account of Bangombe tribe telling pastor Eugene Thomas, a missionary about the killing of MM [32, 39, 44, 45, 50, 51]. The year was around 1960s the Bangombe tribe of lake Tele was being threatened by MM during their fishing activities. In order to ward off this creature from the fishing area of lake the tribal people build a barrier. Being a territorial animal, two of them encountered the tribal people by destroying the fence. The terrified pygmies killed one of the animals to death. According to the pygmies, the size of the monster was quite bigger than a full-grown elephant with a serpentine neck, reptilian head and muscular legs with clawed toes. They also mention ornamentation of comb like frill on the back of its head.

Could MM Be a Pre Historic Survivor or a Hoax?:

During the beginning of the twentieth century, natives of Africa reported the existence of three animals (Okapi, mountain Gorilla, White Rhino) that appeared to be strange for scientist. Scientific community denied their existence until it discovered in the early 1900s. Now the Okapi (*Okapia johnstoni*) is the official emblem of International Society of Cryptozoology. The largest land animal next to the African elephant is the White Rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*), which remained officially unacknowledged until 1990. Similarly, the largest of the higher primates (apes) mountain gorilla (*Gorilla beringei beringei*) was considered as nature's supposition until 1901 [42]. Another classical candidate is coelacanth that was thought to be extinct was caught in tropical waters in the 1930s [27]. However, the inhabitants of Comoro Island, Madagascar, it was an (local name: Raja laut) edible fish and recently it was found in northern Indonesian fish markets. Komodo dragon (*Varanus komodoensis*) was official discovered in 1912 but the people of komodo called it as "boeaja darat" the land crocodile reported it during 1880s. Similar in the case of King Cheetah, Panda, Platypus, Mega mouth shark, Tuatara, horseshoe crab, Hoan Kiemb Turtle etc. Many of the scientist states that the MM was nothing but a rhinoceroses/ elephant/hippopotami/giant turtle/crocodile of enormous size. However, the majority of expedition noticed the queer absence of elephants, crocodile hippo and rhino in these regions. Similarly, many of the expedition reported the presence of clawed footprint as big as an elephant's. So far no animal other than dinosaurs has been categorised as clawed foot with 2-3 feet circumferences.

Geographically, Congo lies on the equatorial region of the earth with wide expanses of marshland and swamps, including several unexplored large lakes. This thick, impenetrable forest of the Congo is a perfect hiding place for this animal. According to the modern scientist the equatorial region has changed relatively little, climatically and physically for millions of years. Therefore, the possibility for the survival of dinosaurs in this region is quite considerable. Moreover, many scientist claims that the credence of MM existence is significantly higher than the Loch Ness monster because of the vast area of uncharted territory. In future the discovery of this sauropod will refute the theory of evolution.

Difficulties Faced by Cryptozoologists to Obtaining Acceptable Proof for MM Existence:

- Animal is an inhabitant/ frequent visitor of Likouala swamp, which is considered as the biggest and least explored swamp in the world. The swamp is 55,000 square miles of swampland [43], means it is bigger than the whole state of Tamil Nadu. The Govt. of Congo official declared that the 80% of this swamp's flora and fauna is still unknown.
- Very hostile environment (full of blood sucking leeches, venom spitting insects, diseases carrying microbes and poisonous snakes) to do research and difficult to maintain the investigation instrument under humid conditions and heavy down pour. Similarly, due to the transportation problem, expedition team could carry only a limited supply of food and medicaments. As a result, the majority of expeditions end up within two or three months.
- The creature is said to be nocturnal and semi aquatic. Occasionally found during the daytime. Therefore, the researchers have to spend months to get enough data. Night vision binoculars, infra red cameras are employed to trace out but always end up with technical problems.
- Political instability in this region is a threatening factor for the investigation. The investigators have to wait for months to complete the official formalities.
- Lack of social support (the investigators being foreigners) some of the pygmies are notorious cannibals and tribal peoples near the lake Tele worship this animal as a deity.
- Lack of interpretation (pygmies are uncivilized people) leads to misidentification of the animal.
- Due to deforestation there is a decline in the population of these animals during this century.

Concluding Remarks: Congo lies on the equatorial region of the earth and sustains the second largest rain forest in the world. Worldwide the equatorial region is considered to be the highly conserved part of the earth. Scientist claims that the climatic condition of this region being unchanged for millions of years. Many of the flora and fauna of these region might survive the natural calamities occurred during 65 MYA. So there could be undiscovered critters residing in this area. eg. Indonesia, the world's largest archipelagic, nation scattered around the equator, is a hotspot for many prehistoric critters like Ahoon [42] and Organ Bati [4]. Kenya and Papua New Guinea, another two equatorial countries famous for the existence of pterosaurs (Indava, Ropen, Kongomato, Sasabonsam, Olitiau) [46, 49, 50, 54].

Application of biotechnology in the field of Cryptozoology started during the 1990s, when a group of scientist isolated the DNA from the blood/ tissue samples of Sasquatch [55]. The idea of extracting the DNA from Dino fossil is impossible [56]. It is possible to extract the DNA if fresh un-fossilized samples were found. Therefore with the advent of modern biotechnological tools we can identify this creature, eg. being a herbivores there is a possibility of isolating DNA from the droppings and saliva of this animal (while consuming the fruits, animals used to deposits mucous containing saliva in the leaf foliage). This DNA will provide conclusive proof of the actual identity of these unknown creatures. Moreover the scientific community has to adopt some military aid to survive in the hostile environment during the expedition.

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