

## Mandombe

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### Abstract

Mandombe, one of the most recent modern African scripts, was originally designed to write the Bantu languages of the Congos, and eventually all languages on the continent. Its symbols are made of simple and composite geometrical forms which predate the script. It is apparently the only African script which has gained some social success without any political support.

### Zusammenfassung

Mandombe gehört zu den rezenten modernen afrikanischen Schriften. Es wurde für die Bantusprachen der beiden Kongos, oder auch für alle Sprachen Afrikas entwickelt. Die Schriftzeichen bestehen aus einfachen oder komplexen geometrischen Formen, die der Autor schon vor der Erfindung seiner Schrift kannte. Mandombe ist augenscheinlich die einzige moderne afrikanische Schrift, die trotz fehlender politischer Unterstützung eine gewisse Verbreitung erlangen konnte.

### Résumé

Mandombe fait partie des écritures modernes africaines. Il fut créé pour écrire les langues bantus des deux Congos, et finalement toutes les langues du continent. Les symboles consistent des formes géométriques simples et complexes que l'inventeur connaissait déjà avant l'invention du Mandombe. L'écriture a gagné une certaine importance malgré le fait qu'elle ne fut jamais supporté par le gouvernement.

*“Les chinois, les Japonais et les Coréens ont leur écriture, les Arabes ont la leur, les Russes, les Juifs, les Ethiopiens écrivent en des systèmes graphiques différents. Le monde occidental aussi. Les négro-africains ont besoin d'un élément puissant pouvant cimenter leur identité culturelle. L'écriture Mandombe devrait être cet élément. Il suffit de la vouloir.”*

Zola ni Vunda<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction: The invention of the script

<1>

The Mandombe syllabary was invented in 1978 by David Wabeladio Payi<sup>2</sup>, in DR Congo, and therewith it belongs to the modern African scripts, the exact number of which is not known (cf. the ‘Introduction’ of Rovenchak’s article, this volume). Among these, it is apparently the only one which is not an “author-only script”<sup>3</sup>, but its promoters have to struggle hard to make it function as a mass-medium. It may be called a modern African script of the second generation, i.e. one that was invented after World War II,<sup>4</sup> when reading and writing were no longer new phenomena, but when written communication was already well established – at least for some social groups.

<2>

The invention of the script from the author’s point of view is fairly well described on the page “Aperçu historique” of the Mandombe website<sup>5</sup> and summarized in Pasch (2008), and need not be discussed here in detail. What matters for the scope of this article is by what item Wabeladio was inspired: One day, he discovered in the staggered pattern of the brickwall of his home shapes which resemble the digits “2” and “5” written in an OCR font, shapes which are symmetrical to each other by reflection and each to itself by rotation of 180°. Facing each other, these two shapes which are the basis of the script, constitute the emblem of Mandombe (see Graph 1). Occasionally the emblem is decorated by a little diamond in the lower section of the “5”-shape (see Graph 2) as a symbol for the cultural value of Mandombe script (Aristide Lutes, pers. comm. 2010).

Graph 1: The emblem of Mandombe<sup>6</sup>



Graph 2: Letter with diamond-decorated emblem



This paper discusses the structures of the symbols and the way they are produced in handwriting (ch. 2), the diffusion of the script (ch. 3), the correlation of scientific research and the script (ch. 4), and finally what makes Mandombe special among the modern African scripts.

<3>

Harbsmeier (1988) correctly states that the development of the modern African and also American and Asian scripts does not reflect that of the ancient writing systems, but that it is a reaction to colonization. This hypothesis is based on the study of scripts of the Vai, Mende, Loma, Kpelle (cf. Pasch 2008) which were created in colonial times. Mandombe, however, is far more recent and its creation is not a reaction to colonialism but rather to the economic, political and educational development after Independence in DR Congo.

<4>

Although the script is not a successful competitor of the Roman script, the economic success is such that the author can make his living on it and enjoy occasional invitations within Congo and to oversea countries.

## The Mandombe symbols

<5>

The symbols of Mandombe do not really look letter-like. They rather constitute geometrical constructions of which not only the specific shapes must be learned, but also the way in which to draw them.<sup>7</sup> Writing Mandombe can be learned in a fairly short time but it needs steady practice to keep the symbols in mind, since they are not "handy", i.e., when seeing a word written in

Mandombe one does not get a spontaneous feeling of how it is pronounced. This is to be explained by the fact that Wabeladio had been occupied with the basic shapes before getting the divine order to design a script out of them. After Bruly Brouabé Wabeladio is the second script-author who reuse given geometrical shapes to design letters (cf. Harbsmeier 1988: 269). This is in contrast to earlier African script inventors who created purposeful symbols for the sounds of their languages vaguely after the model of the Roman and/or the Arabic script. As a consequence the symbols of all of these scripts are more letter-like<sup>8</sup> those of Mandombe.

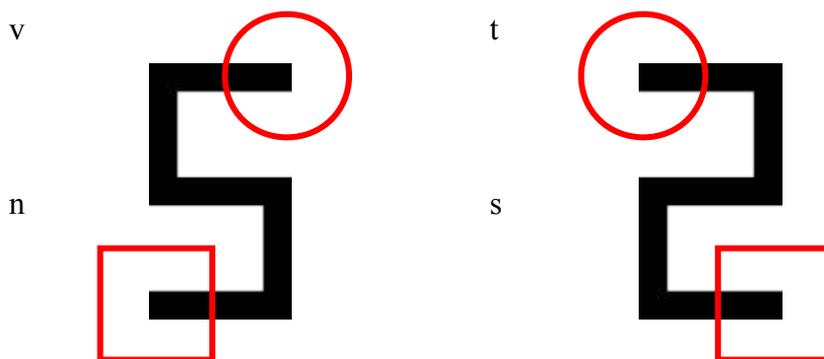
<6>

When the script was developed to write Kikongo, Lingala and other Congolese Bantu languages, an inventory of only 5 vowels and 16 consonants would suffice which were combined for open syllables. Over the time the inventory was increased so that now also languages with closed syllables and consonant clusters can be written, including French. First a new pattern was created which allows writing consonant clusters, e.g. <pr>, followed by a set of diacritics one of which allows marking nasalization of vowels and the other four the second vowels of diphthongs. In marking diphthongs with diacritics rather than by "normal" vowel symbols Wabeladio has chosen a pattern that deviates quite clearly from that of the Roman alphabet.

<7>

The two shapes which Wabeladio discovered in the staggered pattern of the brick wall of his home constitute the basis of all consonant symbols.

Table 1: The basic<sup>9</sup> shapes and their starting points



<8>

Depending on whether the letter is drawn from top (starting point marked by a red circle) to bottom, or from bottom to top (starting point t marked by a red square) they can be used to represent the bases for the phonemes /v/ and /t/ or /n/ and /s/ shown in Table 1.

<9>

Before vowel symbols can be added, the basic shapes are reduplicated starting from their endpoint in order to create the consonantal bases of syllables. The reduplicated shape starts at the endpoint in continuation of the line without need to take the pen off the paper. For the symbols for <v>, <t>, <n> and <s> the reduplicated shapes are copied to the unmodified basic shapes. Here we may speak of simple reduplication. In order to increase the potential for more symbols, the endpoint is moved to three different positions by adding a sixth stroke of normal length or half of the normal length to which the five-stroke shape is added.

Table 2: The basic shape "5" and the starting points for the copied shape



<10>

Here we may speak of shifted copies. The first spot at which the new endpoint is located is the angle opposite the original endpoint, which yields shapes looking like the OCR numerals "6", "9" and the horizontally reflected shapes, which results in graphemes for the phonemes of group 2 /d/, /b/, /g/ and /f/ (2nd row of Table 3). The second spot for the location of the endpoint is halfway between the endpoint of the basic shape and the opposite angle. From here the graphemes for /m/, /k/, /p/ and /l/ (group 3) are drawn. The third spot for the location of the endpoint is in the opposite direction elongating the basic shape for the symbols of group 4 for /r/, /w/, /y/ and /z/.

Table 3: Families and groups of consonantal bases

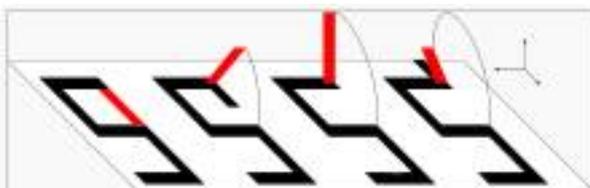
	Family 1	Family 2	Family 3	Family 4
group 1	v 	t 	n 	s 
group 2	d 	b 	g 	f 
group 3	m 	k 	p 	l 
group 4	r 	w 	y 	z 

The sixth stroke is as long as the original five ones in group 2, and it is about half as long in group 3 and group 4.

<11>

Originally, the reduplication process was described as being carried out at certain angles. This description can still be found on the French Wikipedia-page for Mandombe (13-08.2010). The process is depicted in a three-dimensional model Graph 3.<sup>10</sup>

Graph 3: Rotation of the 6<sup>th</sup> stroke before reduplication



Source: <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandombe> (13.08.2010)

With regard to the symbols of "Family 2" this means a rotation of 360° for <b>, 45° for <k>, 90° for <t>, and 135° for <w>. In a two-dimension model the angles cannot easily be explained, but a three dimensional model does not make much sense to explain scripts symbols which are written on paper – in two dimensions.

<12>

Only when a vowel symbol is added to the reduplicated form it becomes recognizable where the starting point of a syllable is.

Table 4: Vowel symbols

a		e		i		o		u	

The first row of Table 4 shows the absolute vowel symbols as they are used in isolation and in word-initial position, the second row shows bound vowel symbols which are attached to consonant symbols, and the third row shows the diacritics which represent the second vowel in diphthongs (for examples see below).

<13>

The position of the starting point of the consonants determine the writing direction, whether it goes right or left, up or down, and the vowel symbol constitutes the right or the left section of the syllable, or its upper or lower section. The viewer of the syllable symbols he does not know that they are drawn in a continuous line, will have the impression that the consonant symbols result from reflection and/or rotation of the basic shapes as it was described on the English Wikipedia-page on Mandombe (en.wikipedia) until beginning of August 2010.

There are four base consonants. Each base consonant can be reflected horizontally, vertically, or both to represent a different consonant of the same group. These consonants are combined with vowels in four families to create syllables.

- Family 1 The base character is placed to the lower left of the vowel without being geometrically transformed.
- Family 2 The base character is reflected both horizontally and vertically.
- Family 3 The base character is reflected horizontally.
- Family 4 The base character is reflected vertically.

<14>

The same description can, however, still be found (August, 13th 2010) on the French wikipedia-page (fr.wikipedia, 06.01.2010) for Mandombe, as well as on the Italian and the Russian ones. Table 5 shows a selection of syllables. The posture of the vowel is, however, in fact rotated depending on the preceding consonant.

Table 5: Syllables of non-complex consonants with the vowels /a/, /e/, /o/ and /i/

consonant base	family 1	family 2 rotation	family 3 reflection	family 4 rotation & reflection
 1 <sup>st</sup> group	 na	 va	 sa	 ta
 2 <sup>nd</sup> group	 be	 de	 fe	 ge
 3 <sup>rd</sup> group	 ko	 mo	 lo	 po
 4 <sup>th</sup> group	 wi	 ri	 zi	 yi

<15>

This above description results from a geometrical analysis of the shapes, while mine reflects the way the symbols are written by hand, which allows writing entire syllables without taking the pen off the paper.

<16>

On the present English Wikipedia-page (August 6, 2010) for Mandombe the syllable-shapes are described as resulting from replaced copying, or of horizontal or vertical reflection or both, a description which is insufficient.

<17>

Reflection of the basic shapes only seemingly plays a role with regard to the symbols for fricatives and affricates and prenasalized plosives, e.g. /sh/, /dj/, but again there is a writing device which makes use only of the basic symbols. In order to produce the symbol for /sh/, the "5"-shape is added to the "2"-shape started from top, and in order to produce the symbol for /dj/, "5"-shape is added to the "2"-shape started from bottom. In order to write the symbol for /tsh/ the "2"-shape is added to the "5"-shape started from top, and for /j/ the "2"-shape is added the the "5"-shape started from bottom.

Table 7: Syllables beginning with fricatives or affricates and the vowel /u/

 shu	 dju	 tshu	 ju
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<18>

There are three types of complex symbols. The first is used to mark prenasalization. Here the symbol for /n/ iconically precedes the symbol for the plosive.

Table 8: Prenasalized plosive



<19>

The second type involves the use of diacritics to mark nasalization of vowels and to indicate the second vowel in a diphthong. Nasalization of vowels is indicated by a rectangular diacritic, but unlike the tilde in Spanish which is above the vowels, the rectangle follows after the vowel symbol, i.e. it is located to its right (taking into consideration the rotation of the vowel).

Table 9: Nasalized vowel



<20>

While the rectangle is an innovative solution, adapted to the rectangular character of the script in general, the diacritics for the vowels /a/, /e/, /i/ and /o/ (cf. Table 4) resemble diacritics used in the Roman alphabet to indicate vowel quality. Just like these latter they are added on top of the vowels.

Table 10: Diphthongs



<21>

For the symbols for clusters of plosives and liquids a third pattern of modification of the basic symbols was created, again an iconic solution. The "5"-shape is inserted between the reduplicated shape of the plosive and the vowel. It must be noted that the "5" symbol is not normally used to write /r/ (cf. Table 5, row 4, column 2).<sup>11</sup>

Table 11: Consonant cluster



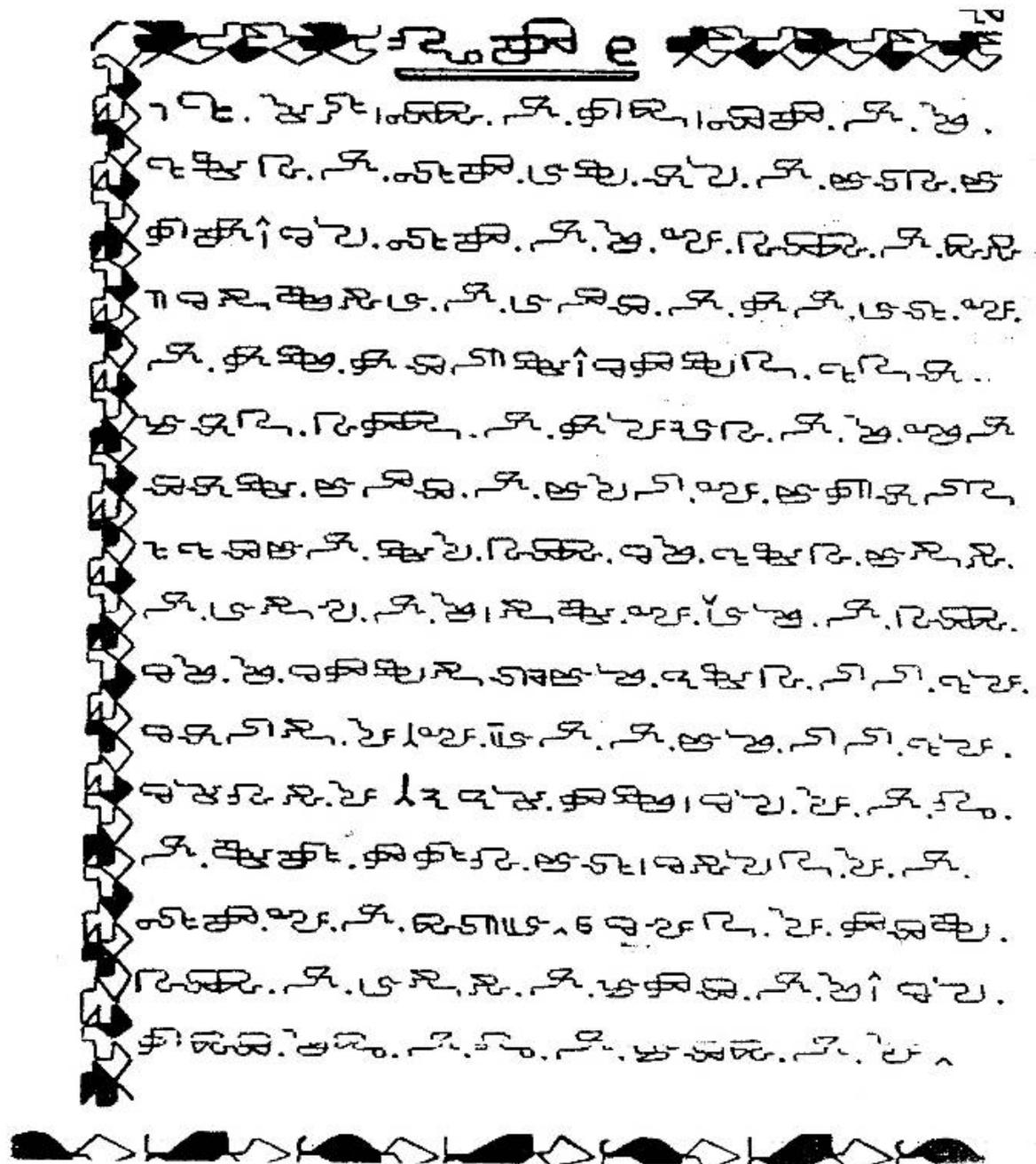
<22>

The complete table of Mandombe symbols (see Index 1), which is modeled after of the Ethiopic, script contains 129 syllable symbols. Most of these consist of a consonantal basis to which a vowel symbol is added to represent open syllables, and the inventory of vowels is still restricted to 5 vowels, the very same ones that are used to write these two languages. This choice of sound-representations shows quite clearly that Mandombe is heavily based upon the Roman script.

<23>

Due to the reduplication the syllable graphemes have big ascenders and descenders which cause difficulties for digital text production. Therefore the script was modified and the symbols replaced by shorter ones. A simplified version of Mandombe, called Sakwameso, is mentioned in several Internet-forums and wikis (e.g. PanAfril10n, <http://www.panafri10n.org/index.php/PanAfrLoc/Mandombe>, 13.08.2010). It is also mentioned on the Mandombe-page of Wiki-visual, but during the past years the links to the illustrations did not work. As a consequence information on the structures of Sakwameso symbols is not available. Only one example text titled “Diminutif – un exemple” (<http://entraidekimbanguiste.pagesperso-orange.fr/Mandombe%20en%20Sakwameso.htm>, 13.08.2010) is available. It clearly shows that there are no more long ascendants and descendants. The text is shown in Scan 1.

Scan 1: “Diminutif” (text written in Sakwameso, the simplified version of Mandombe)



## History of its usage and diffusion

<24>

To the best of my knowledge Mandombe is the first African script the knowledge of which was made accessible outside Africa via the Internet from the very beginning and before print publications on the script were available.<sup>12</sup> Besides an individual website (<http://www.mandombe.info/info.htm>, 15.01.2010) Wikipedia has been a most welcome platform on which to give such type of information to an international readership. The first publication in French dates from September 5, 2005 April<sup>13</sup> (fr.wikipedia), the English one followed on April 25, 2006 (en.wikipedia), initially a translation of the French one. Since different Wikipedia-pages for Mandombe give the most comprehensive information and good illustrations, with basically no other sources being available, they constitute important sources for this paper. Given that the information on the English Wikipedia-page has undergone deletion of content, it appears the more necessary to conserve the data, before the content on the French Wikipedia-page will be removed in the same way.

<25>

The World Wide Web is still the most important medium for the diffusion of knowledge about Mandombe. Via this way and due to the activities of diaspora communities it has reached the western World at the latest in the beginning of the second millennium. From then on print publications on Mandombe appeared in France (Mahouahoua 2000, 2004, Nsimba & Lomba 2006, Samba Lusakweno 2004), Germany (Pasch 2008) and Ukraine (Rovenchak & Glavy 2009), in Canada one of the Gospels was printed in Mandombe script (L'Évangile de Mathieu 2006). In the francophone countries of western Europe, a series of yearly literacy courses and yearly conferences has taken place in Paris (2007), in Geneva (2008) and in Liège 2009 (<http://www.mandombe.info/affiche.htm>).

<26>

The production of print publications about Mandombe as well as those written in the script is likely to have started by the latest with the foundation of C.E.N.A.<sup>14</sup> (Centre de l'Écriture Négro-Africaine) in April 30, 1994. Most of the print publications about Mandombe as well as those written in the script produced in the DR Congo (Diankenda 2000, Masano ya Mandombe n.d., Wabeladio 2007, Bokanga 1999, Nkasa ya masano 2001 – 2005, Nsimba & Lomba 2006, Wabeladio n.d.), in the Republic of Congo (Louthes 1998) and in Angola (Anonymus 2001) are no longer available, in particular in oversea countries. The reader by Wabeladio (1996) is an exception since it can be found in the realm of the Kimbanguist church in Kinshasa and Brazzaville and the author distributes copies of it on his lecture tours. There are, it is true, also some scholarly investigations (Louthes 1998, Lusikila Kueno Bwayi 1998, Malueki Matuasilua 2000), but these are unpublished, and the only copies are to be found in those universities in Kinshasa where the theses were written.

<27>

The promoters of the script have been ambitious to get recognition, cooperation and support from international institutions. The alleged successes<sup>15</sup> fill an accumulative list on the page "Aperçu historique" of the Mandombe website.

<28>

Mandombe was invented by a David Wabeladio Kayi, a member of the Kimbanguist church in DR Congo. Although the script did not become influential in the church, it is only here that it was given a space to be practiced and to develop. The little impact the script has on the church and its members is reflected in the fact that there is not a single prayer or song book written Mandombe, and in literature on the Kimbanguist church, be it printed or online. But here Mandombe-courses are given, and here a few public inscriptions in Mandombe can be (see Photo 1). Even in the diaspora, the script is used mainly in the shelter of the Kimbanguist church.

Photo 1



<29>

Since a couple of years Mandombe is taught at the Université Simon Kimbangu in Kinshasa and a number of readers and other publications have allegedly been produced in DR Congo and in the Republic of Congo. More than all other scripts Mandombe and the knowledge about this script has been spread via the Internet.

<30>

On June 2, 2003 the ministry of education of DR Congo in Kinshasa recognized Mandombe as a result of scientific discovery and invention and gave permission to teach the script in primary and secondary schools and also at universities.<sup>16</sup> The alleged widespread use of the script as indicated on the website (see quote below) may be doubted. On the page "Aperçu historique" the following statement is found, which apparently dates from the year 2003:

"Actuellement, l'écriture négro-africaine « Mandombe » est enseignée dans toutes les écoles primaires, secondaires et supérieures kimbanguistes en Angola, au Cabinda, au Congo-Brazzaville et en République Démocratique du Congo ainsi qu'à l'Université Simon Kimbangu à Kinshasa. Certaines écoles et universités en République Démocratique du Congo l'enseignent d'une manière non officielle en attendant la signature de l'arrêté par le Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale autorisant l'enseignement du Mandombe dans toutes les écoles de la République Démocratique du Congo."

<31>

While Mandombe was designed initially to write Kikongo and Lingala, then it was supposed to be applicable to all Bantu, and even all African languages. Now, the promoters claim that it can also be used for European languages and in principle for all the languages of the world. This capacity, which makes it a potential competitor for the Roman alphabet, is demonstrated on the page "[Mandombe et les langues négro-africaines](#)" of the Mandombe website. It is true that the Lord's Prayer in several languages and written in both Roman and Mandombe script is shown. This is, however, not a proof that the script is an important medium in the respective languages, but rather an indication that it has the potential of a full-fledged means of writing any language. It is a matter of fact that the Lord's Prayer makes part of those texts which are at the beginning of translations into formerly unwritten languages and of writing in new scripts.

## **Mandombe and scientificness**

<32>

From the very beginning the script was presented not as a mere writing tool, but as a result of scientific research and even as a tool in itself that can enhance technical and scientific development. In order to demonstrate the scientific character of his invention, Wabeladio has acquired solid knowledge of linguistic terminologies which enable him to present his script at university level in Africa and overseas. He thus has developed a large network including linguists and scholars of other disciplines. The visual aspect of the scientificness is a series of pictures, diligently composed of symbols of the script, on the page "Application scientifique" shall serve as a proof. Some are shown on the page "Scientific applications"

(<http://www.mandombe.info/applicat.htm>, 12.08.2010).

<33>

The use of computers is daily routine for Wabeladio and he has declared publicly that he will also use the computer for writing Mandombe. As for the development of fonts cf. Rovenchak, this volume.

M. Wabeladio, inventeur de cette écriture qui s'est satisfait de cette acquisition, avant de promettre de se servir précieusement de ce matériel de la nouvelle technologie dans le cadre de ses recherches dont les graphiques de son écriture se trouvent dans le logiciel de l'informatique. (Senego, [http://www.senego.com/rd\\_congo/le-centre-de-l%E2%80%99écriture-%C2%AB-mandombe-%C2%BB-équipe-d%E2%80%99un-outil-informatique/2010/04/06/5055](http://www.senego.com/rd_congo/le-centre-de-l%E2%80%99écriture-%C2%AB-mandombe-%C2%BB-équipe-d%E2%80%99un-outil-informatique/2010/04/06/5055))

<34>

Quite recently, Wabeladio has publicly expressed his intention to engage in research on traditional herbal medicines (acp-online, Agence Congolaise de Presse, <http://www.un.int/drcongo/archives/BQ-1283.htm>, 13.08.2010).

### **Un chercheur engagé dans la revalorisation de la médecine traditionnelle en RDC**

Kinshasa, 27/02 (ACP).- Le chercheur David Wabeladio, promoteur du Centre de recherche « MANDOMBE<sup>o</sup> », s'est engagé à apporter une contribution substantielle à la promotion et la revalorisation de la médecine traditionnelle en RDC, au siège du centre dans la commune de Kalamu. Chercheur congolais, qui a annoncé la mise au point, par son centre, des méthodes de production et de conservation des médicaments en poudre produit en base des plantes médicinales, s'est dit disposé de mettre ses recherches à la disposition de tous pour le bien être de la population et l'amélioration de la santé. Il a déjà fabriqué plusieurs produits notamment « FUMPA<sup>o</sup> » dont les propriétés soignent les maladies inflammatoires et renforcent l'énergie corporelle, ainsi que « Ntotu Meno<sup>o</sup> » qui lutte contre la carie dentaire chez les enfants et les adultes et la soigne, a-t-il indiqué. Le promoteur de ce centre qui est dans les recherches depuis belle lurette par la découverte de l'écriture Negro-Africaine « Mandombe » et dans d'autres secteurs, a appelé les partenaires locaux et internationaux de le soutenir dans ce nouveau domaine de recherche pour développer la médecine traditionnelle en République Démocratique du Congo. (acp-online, Agence Congolaise de Presse, <http://www.un.int/drcongo/archives/BQ-1283.htm>, 13.08.2010).

There is, however, no mention as to whether and in what way Mandombe script will be involved

<35>

More fascinating is the fact that users of the script also begin to make inventions, motivated by the functions and the highly geometrical structures of the script. The first follow-up invention is that of a new calendar by Kandu Batshema (see Appendix 2).

### **What makes Mandombe special?**

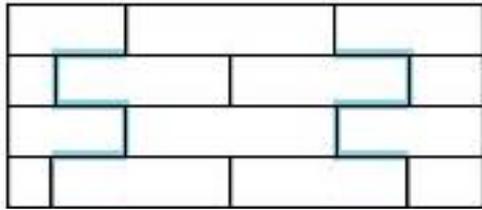
<36>

There are a number of features which Mandombe shares with other modern African scripts. To begin with, the author was motivated by a divine order. This command did, however, not come from God, but from Simon Kimbangu (\*1887, †1951), founder of the Kimbanguist church. Second, the script was explicitly designed to become a marker of African identity. This function is most ostensibly demonstrated by the very name Mandombe, which means "for the Black people". Third, it was initiated as a personal project on a local level without any public support. Presently the government of DR Congo tolerates its use, which is restricted to the realm of the Kimbanguist church anyway. In Kongo Republic it is apparently also tolerated, but outside the Kimbanguist church it plays no role. Even within its functions are restricted to inscriptions, which hardly anybody can read. Teaching children Mandombe as the first script is, however, not allowed by the government.

<37>

Mandombe has, however, also some features which it shares with no other script or just a single one. To begin with, the script is outstanding to a degree that even lay-persons will recognize the difference in a second. Nevertheless it is a full-fledged writing system allowing to convey any possible idea. The outstanding graphic features result from the "5"-shape and the "2"-shape which Wabeladio recognized in the staggered brick wall (see Graph 4). Long before being asked to create a script, he had been tinkering about with these shapes fascinated by their inherent rotational symmetry and by the mirror symmetry they show with regard to each other.

Graph 4: Pattern of staggered bricks containing the shapes of “5” and “2”



Next to the Bete-Script by Frédéric Bruly Bouabré (cf. Dokumenta 11) it is the only script, of which the symbols were given before they were ascribed the function of indicating syllables. Then it is the only non author-only script presently used, about which outside the two Congos information could be found exclusively in the Internet until 2008. Until today, Internet sources like Wikipedia articles, blogs etc. are basically the only sources of substantial information about Mandombe. Finally, the use of the script is very much restricted to a religious community, i.e. the members of the Kimbanguist church. This is true despite the fact that it was designed as a medium neutral to religion and nationality.

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Wikipedia

Mandombe script

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandombe>

- <sup>1</sup> Zola ni Vunda is Professor at the University of Kinshasa. This quotation is found in "BREF APERCU HISTORIQUE - extrait de l'Ouvrage de Wabeladio-Payi l'inventeur", <http://pagesperso-orange.fr/entraidekimbanguiste/nouvelle.htm> (15.01.2010).
- <sup>2</sup> Like many designers of modern African scripts, Wabiladio was not born into a family of intellectuals, and he neither got a particularly high level of formal education. The Kinshasa weekly "La Conscience" summarizes his development until the very invention of Mandombe as follows: "Né le 15 janvier 1957 à Ngombe Lutete dans la région du Bas-Congo en République Démocratique du Congo, Wabeladio Payi est fils unique d'une famille de dix enfants. Après ses études secondaires à l'école Kimvuka à Mbanza Ngungu, Monsieur Wabeladio s'inscrit au Centre Social et Technique de Mbanza Ngungu où il sortit détenteur d'un brevet d'aptitude professionnelle section mécanique auto diesel en 1977. Sans avoir exercé sa profession, il se rend à Kinshasa pour poursuivre un stage à l'école artisanale de l'Onatra (Office Nationale des Transports) dans le but devenir conducteur de train. Mais quelques jours avant qu'il aille à son stage, plus précisément à partir de la nuit du 13 au 14 mars 1978 à l'âge de 21 ans, plusieurs événements inattendus et surprenants, à savoir rêves, visions, miracles dans lequel intervient Simon Kimbangu, le convainquent qu'il a une mission à accomplir pour l'homme noir d'autant plus que dans un des rêves Kimbangu lui apparaît et lui dit : « Va prier et te purifier dans la source sacrée à N'kamba car je vais te confier une mission pour l'homme noir »." ([http://www.laconscience.com/article.php?id\\_article=1565](http://www.laconscience.com/article.php?id_article=1565), 26.07.2010)
- <sup>3</sup> The term "author only script" denotes scripts which are only used by their authors. Other author-only scripts are the Futa-alphabet by Oumar Dembélé called *Dita*, the Fula-alphabet by Adama Ba (Dalby 1969b: 167ff), the Bete-script (Dalby 1968: 269) and the Wolof-script *Saliwi* by Saliyou Mbaye (this volume). Dalby mentions that the Dita-script caused its author considerable difficulties by the administration, a situation for which there are two explanations. Either he read his texts to an audience or the mere potential to produce and keep document the contents of which could not be controlled by the administration was perceived as an imminence to the state.
- <sup>4</sup> According to this timeline, N'ko, invented in 1949 (Ebermann 2004), is the first script of the second generation of modern African scripts.
- <sup>5</sup> Born on January 15, 1957 in Ngombe Lutete in the area from Kongo Central in Democratic Republic of Congo, Wabeladio Payi is only son of a family of ten children. After his secondary studies at the Kimvuka school in Mbanza Ngungu, Mr Wabeladio is registered in the Social and Technical Center of Mbanza Ngungu where it will leave holder a patent of professional capacity mechanical section diesel car in 1977. Without to have followed its occupation, he goes to Kinshasa to continue a training course at the artisanal school of Onatra (National office of Transport) with an aim of becoming conducting of train. But a few days before he does not go to its training course, more precisely as from the night from the 13 to March 14, 1978 at age the 21 years, several events unexpected and surprising, namely dreams, visions, miracles in which intervenes Simon Kimbangu, convainquant him that he has a mission to achieve for the black man more especially as in one of the Kimbangu dreams appears to him and says to him: "request and to purify you in the crowned source in Nkamba because I will entrust a mission for the black man to you." Thus, at the end of a long series of dreams, aimed and miracles, he finally decides to go in spiritual retirement in Mbanza Ngungu, after having been Nkamba to purify with the crowned source. In the eighth month of meditation, he discovers two elements which have the shape of figures 5 and 2. In fact, after its morning prayer, tired a little, he lengthened on his bed. Little afterwards around 10 a.m., he felt its body to vibrate of an intense interior push which put him in state awakening. While observing the not coated portion of the brick wall of its room, Wabeladio realized that the masons by arranging bricks to set up the wall, combine without realizing it the shapes of figures 5 and 2. In other words, the lines formed by the superposition of bricks are only one

combination of two forms which resemble each other the figures five and two.

He called his two cousins and pointed out to them this discovery, of which many people do not pay attention to it. And without being however posed many questions, he continued his day peacefully.

The night following this discovery, he made a dream in which a black insect was posed on its white shirt and its blue trousers that he carried during he sleep. This insect secrétait a black liquid while moving on its body and thus drew forms 5 and 2 on all the surface of its white shirt and its blue trousers. All its body was marked of these shapes of figures.

By looking at this insect which transformed the aspect of its clothing into these two figures 5 and 2, he exclaimed : « Eh, ngieka nталu ye nталu! Eh, ngieka nталu ye nталu! » in French « Eh, I become figures, figures! ».

With its alarm clock, he realized that behind these figures certainly a enigma hid that it was necessary for him at all costs to discover.

The following night, he lives in dream Simon Kimbangu which presented a white document to him whose letters were gilded and shone. He could read : « Patent of material activities ».

Simon Kimbangu says to him: «You saw the figures of the material activities. It is with these two figures that you will carry out all which you will need for your material wellbeing ».

From there, having already discovered the enigma, he started to seek to solve the enigma which hid the two figures.

Not to carry confusion to figures 5 and 2, Wabeladio named these two elements the « Mvuala ». Mvuala in Kikongo language, means crowned object on which one confers an intrinsic capacity.

To distinguish one from the other, he invites the 5, Mvuala Pakundungu and the 2, Mvuala Pelekete. These two elements were the starting point of its research.

After ten seven years of meditation, reflexion and research on the key elements of the revelation, which is immense discovered for humanity, Mr Wabeladio managed to invent a script which he called with the whole beginning « Initiation with the vowels and the figures » and baptized much later Mandombe what wants to literally say « for the blacks » or « to the manner of the blacks » or « what belongs to the blacks ». Then seven years of research with the assistance as well spiritual, morals as financial of the spiritual Chief of the church kimbanguist, his eminence Diangienda Kuntima, which gave him an office of work with secretary in and the Reception and Conference Center of Kinshasa. This office became the international registered office of the Center of the Negro-African Script.

Since then he carries out a life of lecturer and haunts universities and other scientific circles for talks, conferences, interviews, lessons of Mandombe. It is today to its 216th conference throughout the world.

Its last tour in Europe, brings him in France where he makes seven conferences. Montpellier: the 15/02/03, Toulouse: the 22/02/03, Besancon: the 23/02/03, Saint-Denis/University of Paris VIII: 29/03/03, Paris/Room AGECA: 30/05/03, Orleans and Bordeaux.

Currently, he is assistant of research at the University Simon Kimbangu and consulting with scientific and technological research with the Ministry for National Education with Kinshasa. In parallel, he is occupied intensely of the Mandombe Academy and the Center of the Negro-African Script in Kinshasa of which he is the President-Director (<http://www.mandombe.info/inventor2.htm>, 13.08.2010).

<sup>6</sup> This emblem is copied from the Mandombe website where it is found on all pages, but the homepage, e.g. <http://www.mandombe.info/texte.htm> (12.08.2010)

<sup>7</sup> I am endebted to Aristide Lutes for giving me an introduction into writing Mandombe when I was in Brazzaville in 2006. Unfortunately, the online-introduction into the script has been deleted from Mandombe homepage. It showed the basic consonant symbols as well as the way consonantal and vowel symbols are combined to write syllables has been. In the meantime there is a short introduction into the script and its structures on Wikipedia (<http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandombe>), and the different symbols (vowels, consonants,

syllables and digits) are shown on Wikimedia (<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Mandombe>), though in an unsystematic order.

- <sup>8</sup> Even for people who have some information about Mandombe make not recognize the symbols as representation of linguistic sounds. After Wabeladio had given his talk on the workshop “5000 Jahre Schrift in Afrika” a Congolese man, wearing a shirt with an inscription in Mandombe, asked him about that inscription. He did, however, not ask for meaning of the text, but rather whether the shapes (i.e. the symbols) would have a meaning at all.
- <sup>9</sup> The Mandombe symbols in have been copied from the Mandombe pages of Wikimedia and Wikipedia.
- <sup>10</sup> The description and the graph disappeared on the English site in early August 2010.
- <sup>11</sup> Note that the structure of this syllable is explained in the same way on the French Wikipedia-page for Mandombe, but in the graphic representation the symbol for /p/ is not reduplicated before the "5"-shape is inserted. This makes the following 5 strokes difficult to explain.
- <sup>12</sup> The second one is Afar-Feera (Ethiopia) of which it is, however, not certain whether there really was such a script or whether the respective reports are misleading (Pasch 2008: 68-70).
- <sup>13</sup> This entry in Wikipedia is explicitly mentioned on the “Press book”-page of the Mandombe website (<http://www.mandombe.info/pressbook.htm>, 15.01.2010)
- <sup>14</sup> Le C.E.N.A. a été constitué sous forme d’une association sans but lucratif à Kinshasa en République Démocratique du Congo. Premier centre crée le 30 avril 1994, il est le siège social et international de l’écriture Mandombe à travers le monde et membre de la fédération congolaise des centres, clubs et associations UNESCO. <http://www.mandombe.info/cena.htm> (15.01.2010). Today it is represented in many countries, including Germany.
- <sup>15</sup> 1997: - Attestation de reconnaissance n°CNZU/SP/02/65/97 du 05 février 1997 délivrée par la Commission Nationale de la République Démocratique du Congo pour l’Organisation des Nations Unies pour l’Éducation, la Science et la Culture, U.N.E.S.C.O. en sigle  
1998: - Certificat d’enregistrement n° TX 4 - 886 - 554 ( juillet 1998 ) octroyé pour l’écriture Mandombe par le Copyright Office de la Bibliothèque du Congrès ( Library Congress ) à Atlanta aux Etats-Unis.  
2001: - Enregistrement de l’écriture Mandombe comme étant résultat de la recherche au fichier des résultats de la recherche, inventions, innovations et découvertes sous le numéro SGRST/183/02/01/E.R/01/2001 (23 octobre 2001) par la Direction de la Valorisation des Résultats de Recherche au Secrétariat Général de la Recherche Scientifique et Technologique du Ministère de l’Education Nationale en République Démocratique du Congo.  
2003: - Autorisation des activités de recherche scientifique et technologique du CENA par le Ministère de l’Education Nationale, Secrétariat Général de la Recherche Scientifique et Technologique en vertu des dispositions de l’arrêté ministériel n°RST/CAB – MIN/0018/94 du 13 janvier 1994 fixant les modalités d’agrément des activités scientifiques et technologiques des organismes privés et des chercheurs indépendants en République Démocratique du Congo.
- <sup>16</sup> Source: Bas Congo Info N°06, p.°15. Note that this decree is valid only in DR Congo. In the compounds of the Kimbanguist Church in Brazzaville (Avenue des Trois Martyrs) course in Mandombe script are given, but for lack of interest they are not frequent. As I was told in 2006, it is also not taught in the primary school on the compound, since the government does not allow to use it as a primary script. It may only be taught second to the Roman script, but there is not demand among the pupils.

Index 1. Complete list of Mandombe symbols

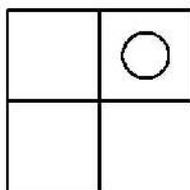
	A	E	I	O	U	
Silbenanlaut						wortfinaler Konsonant
B						
D						
DJ						
F						
G						
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J						
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TSH						
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table designed by Andrij Rovenchak.

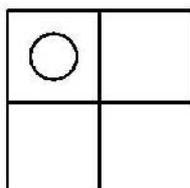
The information on the syllables was taken from Pater Noster texts in various languages found at <http://www.mandombe.info/linguafrica.htm> (12.08.2010). Other Information was taken from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandombe\\_script](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandombe_script) (12.08.2010)

**B. Interprétation graphique du calendrier Kimbangumuna**

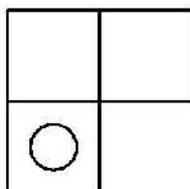
1. Kintombo (Avril – Mai)



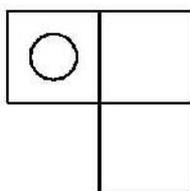
2. Nkiela (Mai – Juin)



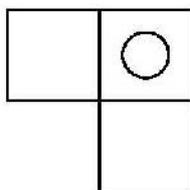
3. Luanza (Juin – Juillet.)



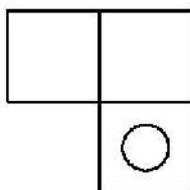
7. Mbangala (Oct. – Nov.)



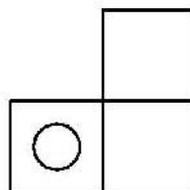
8. Kumpua (Nov. – Déc.)



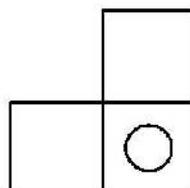
9. Vila (Déc. – Jan.)



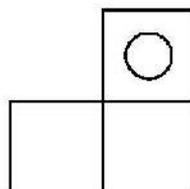
4. Sivu (Juillet – Août)



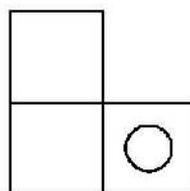
5. Lunkiesa (Août – Sept.)



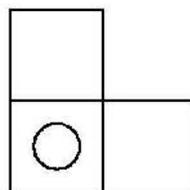
6. Senza Kiamasanza (Sept. – Oct.)



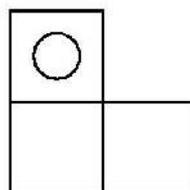
10. Akunde (Jan. – Fév.)



11. Kundi (Fév. – Mars)



12. Kundi Kianene (Mars – Avril)



Adapté au système solaire, le Kimbangumuna, calendrier africain, comprend 365 jours dont sept mois de 30 jours et cinq mois de 31 jours.

Autrement dit, dans le calendrier Kimbangumuna, les six premiers mois ont 30 jours, les cinq mois suivants ont 31 jours et le dernier mois a 30 jours sur un total annuel de 12 mois solaires c'est à dire, sept mois de 30 jours et cinq mois de 31 jours.

Toutefois, nous tenons à préciser ici que le système lunaire admet treize mois de 28 jours. Le 13<sup>ème</sup> mois étant intercalé entre le 6<sup>ème</sup> et le 7<sup>ème</sup> mois, le 365<sup>ème</sup> jour s'ajoute au 13<sup>ème</sup> mois qui a 29 jours.

Ainsi, le nouvel an<sup>1</sup> kimbanguiste de cette année, le 1<sup>er</sup> kintombo de l'an 88 coïncide avec la date du 6 avril de l'an 2008 du calendrier grégorien.

Grâce à ce système de repérages du temps, l'Afrique se dote d'un calendrier unique en son genre. Des témoignages dignes de ce nom affluent pour le soutien inconditionnel de « cette extraordinaire invention<sup>2</sup> » qui remet les pendules à l'heure, pour le démarrage de l'Afrique tout entière dans le concert des nations techniquement développées.

Il convient de noter que le calendrier africain a pour repère une chronologie biblique kimbanguiste d'où il tire son nom **Kimbangumuna** et ce, suite aux multiples rabattements, rotations, symétries, inversions, projections, etc.

A tous et à toutes, votre soutien s'avère indispensable pour la promotion de cette extraordinaire invention.

**Kandu Batshema**  
**Inventeur**

1. Le premier jour de l'an du calendrier Kimbangumuna est le 1<sup>er</sup> Kintombo de l'an 1 qui correspond au 6 avril 1921, date du début du ministère de Simon Kimbangu.
2. Terme employé par Monsieur Wazi Nandefo, professeur de géologie à l'Université de Rouen (France).

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Source: <http://www.mandombe.info/KIMBANGUMUNA.pdf>