

The Fang coming all the way down from 'Egyptland'?

Or how the walls of a myth may come tumbling down...

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Objective

- Presentation of some **expected and unexpected results** from the "Language, Culture and Genes in Bantu" project (OHLL, OMLL) related to
 - Fairly well-known population
 - Migration

Outline

- The Fang
 - Where they live
 - Who they are
 - Where they come from
- Evidence from Linguistics
- Evidence from Population Genetics
 - MtDNA
 - Y-chromosome
- Possible scenario(s)
- Further investigation



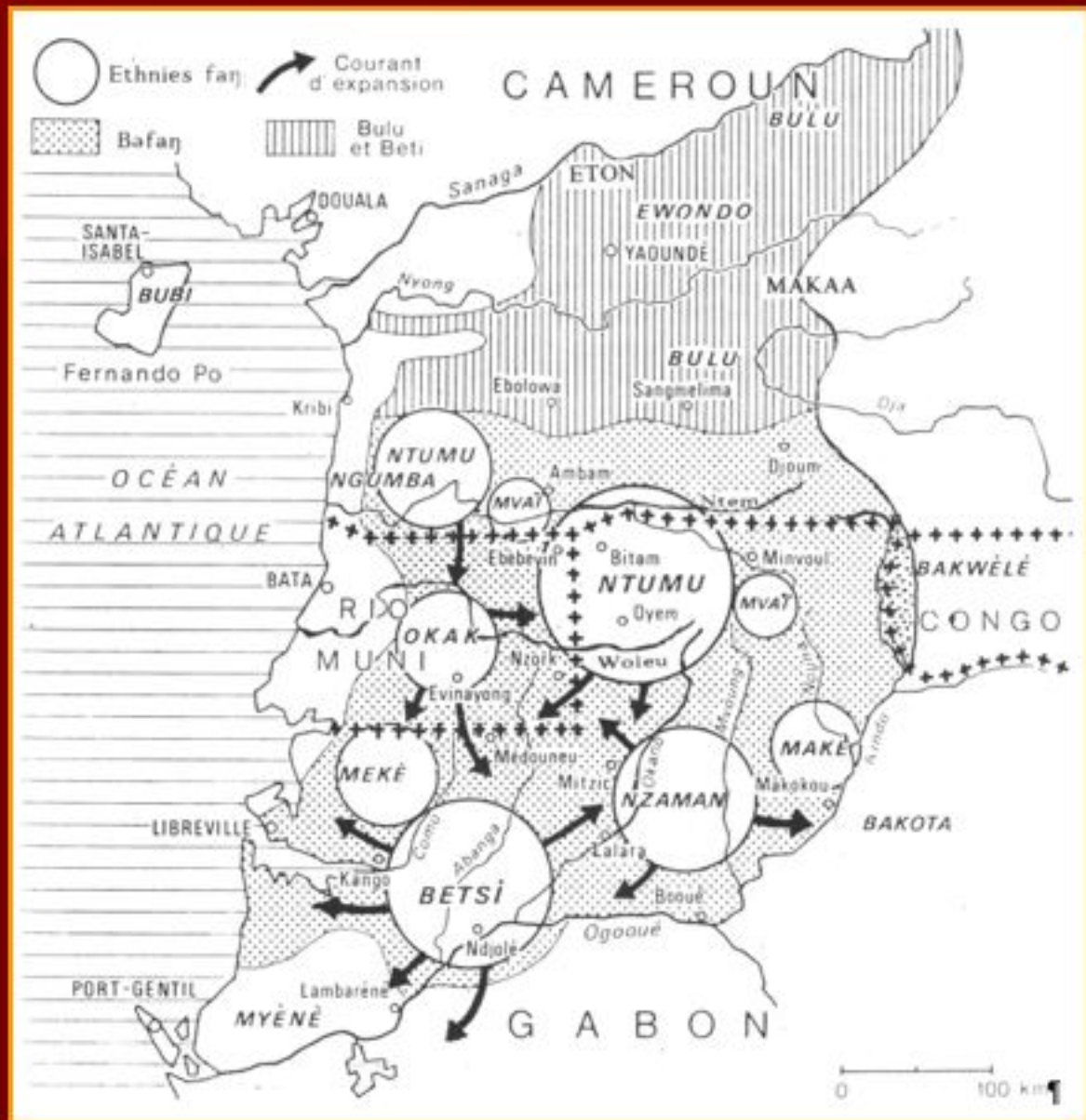
Fang: where they live

- Southern part of Cameroon (with the **Bulu** and **Beti** pops as their northern neighbours)
- Most of the northern half of Gabon
- Small region in northwest of Congo-Brazzaville

Geographical distribution of Fang, Beti and Bulu

With recent expansion patterns for Fang dialects: Ntumu, Mvaï, Okak, Mekè, Nzaman, Betsi

(Perrois 1972:102)



Fang: who they are

- Most recently installed Bantu-speaking population in Gabon
- Demographically and linguistically, dominant group (Gabon)
- $\pm 700,000$ individuals distributed over 3 countries
- Patrilinear descent system
- Marriage strategy: exogamy
- Farming villagers

*Fang women coming home
from plantation - Cureau (1912)*



Fang: who they are

■ Oral tradition

- Mvett (storytelling/music): performing ancestral myth
 - Differences between clans/lineages!

■ Initiation rituals

- Bwiti: adopted from Tsogo (southern Gabon) at beginning of XXth century
- Melan, as part of Byeri: ancestor worship

■ Art

- Masks (Ngil), funeral statuettes (Byeri), ...



Fang Ntumu reliquary

Fang: who they are

- Ethnic group that has never failed to fascinate the European traders, explorers, missionaries, anthropologists, ever since the first encounter
- Reputation largely based on Western (mis)-perceptions (outsiders' view, ideology, etc.)
 - 'Ferocious', 'superior', 'nomadic' 'conquerors'
 - 'Intelligent', 'industrious', 'honest', 'handsome'
 - Suspected of having practised cannibalism
 - Rumours spread by Mpongwe and allied brokers? (The latter's privileged position being threatened!)

Fang: who they are

- Usually considered to belong to larger cultural unit, with Beti and Bulu (the so-called 'Pahouin' group)
 - 'Mpangwe', 'Pamouay' or 'Pamue' < (mi-)pamye 'I don't know'?? (Mpongwe B11a)
 - Name most certainly attributed by others, probably the Mpongwe
- Possibly, a confederation of various clans/lineages
 - Related? Unrelated? Both?

Fang: where they come from

- Most consensual and most likely scenario (though limited time depth!)
 - Fairly well-documented demic expansion within the Cameroon-Gabon area, though the precise (ancient) geographical origin (*Mvog Etanga*) still a matter of debate
 - Adamawa highlands in north-central Cameroon?
 - Upper-Sangha in western Central-African Republic?
 - Both?
 - Wave-like expansion
 - Several stages and branches (split-offs)
 - Intensified during 18th century AD and come to an end during first half of 20th century AD in Gabon

Fang: where they come from

- Trigger(s) and/or conductor(s):
 - Groups (of non-Bantu speakers) invading northern Cameroon and triggering migration movements
 - I.a. Fulani expansion triggering southward migrations
 - More generally, Muslim invasions and slave trade (the figure of the 'Crocodile' in Fang oral tradition?)
 - Trade, European goods (increase of economic exchange: ivory, ironwork, captives, etc.) and misery among Fang were crucial factors, especially during final stage of expansion
 - Search for women (exogamy) and very high cost of dowry
 - Fang dowry system: highest cost in Gabon (Mayer, 2002)
 - Possibly, decrease of elephant population (Cadet, 2005)
- More than one population involved!
 - Proto-Fang: part of a more general, southward movement

Fang: where they come from

- Fang's arrival in Gabon (chronology)
 - Prior to arrival, the Mpongwe (*Myene-speakers*) are the exclusive trade partners of the Europeans
 - First reference to Fang in Gabon: Bowdich, 1819 (*inland location, but where?*)
 - First contacts between Fang and Europeans: Wilson, 1842 (*first description!*)
 - Progressive entring of the Estuary: from 1844 on
 - Descent encouraged by the French: development of trade activities (*tied to destiny of the Colony!*)
 - Southward movement to Ogooué: from 1866 on
- N.B. Some accounts suggest presence of Fang in Gabon (Komo region) is older

Fang: where they come from

- Arrival profoundly reshuffled the populational and linguistic landscape (their number, skills, economic status, etc.)
 - Previously installed groups left their territory being pushed away by the Fang (*e.g. Kele (B22)*)
 - Those who stayed underwent process of gradual assimilation (*e.g. Makina (A83)*)
- Main sources: oral traditions and testimonies, some written documents (*reports, registers*)



**Fang migrations
from 1800 AD on**

**Bulu migrations
from 1840 AD on**

*For Cameroon:
after Geschiere
(1981) based on
Alexandre (1965)*



The migrations of "Fang" groups since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, according to oral traditions.

Migrations of Fang groups since the 17th and 18th centuries, according to oral traditions

(Modified from Perrois 2006)

Fang: where they come from

- A more picturesque, Romantic theory: Nomadic warriors come down from the Upper-Nile region
 - Theory elaborated by the French (!) **Rev. Trilles** (1912, 1931) and several other 'specialists': 'Egyptian' origin (*plateaux of Bahr-el-Ghazal*) for the Fang population, language and culture
 - Built on a series of speculative and often random parallels drawn by 19th century administrators, explorers and missionaries (*natural fascination with the Unknown, the presumably 'Unspoilt', the Savage*)
 - Built on debatable interpretation of Mvett, and arguments referring to linguistic, cultural and phenotypical traits (*skin colour, overall size, etc.*)

***Bahr-el-Ghazal,
Sudan***



Fang: where they come from

- Direct descent of nomadic tribe heading for the conquest of Gabon
- Theory has become very popular, especially among Black African scholars, but also among non-scholars
- In Gabon, common belief that the Fang, as well as their language, are not Bantu
 - Birth of a new, glorifying myth, cunningly exploited by the French colonisers

Fang: where they come from

- Sometimes, strong ideological dimension: Cheikh Anta Diop (1979, 1981, 1993) and Théophile Obenga (1985, 1993)
 - School of thought
 - “White Egyptologists falsify ancient History!”
- Similar claims for Basaá (A43a) and Mboshi (C25) languages
- Theory in its strongest version claims that all Black African languages and cultures descend from the ancient Egyptian civilisation

Evidence from linguistics

- Fang: A75 (A70: FANG-BULU cluster)
- Gabon: northern, southern and intermediate dialects (Medjo Mvé, 1997)
- Impact on surrounding languages
 - Dominant language assimilating several other, related and less related, languages (cf. Shiwa, A83 dialect spoken by Makina)
 - Currently spoken by nearly 30% of the Gabonese population!

Evidence from linguistics

- Fang looks different from the neighbouring Bantu languages (at the surface)
 - Some peculiar phonological features
 - 8V + 3 diphthongs
 - Labiovelars ([kp], [gb])
 - Predominantly closed syllables
 - Palatal nasals in word-final position



Fang Ntumu (Bitam, Gabon)
Proverb (P. Medjo Mvé)

Evidence from linguistics

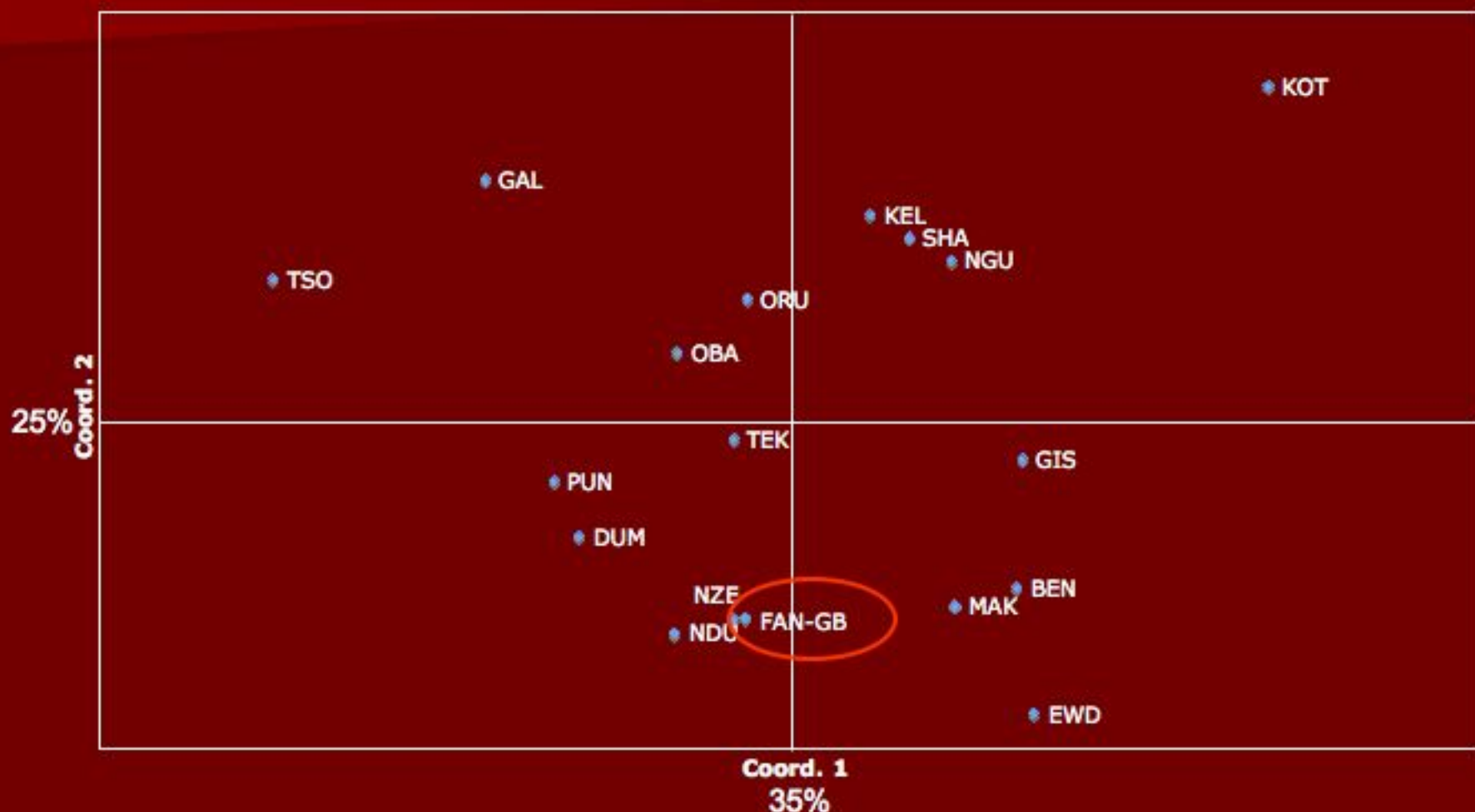
- But... according to Guthrie (1948, 1967-71), Hombert et al. (1989), Medjo Mvé (1997) and Mba-Nkoghe (2001):
 - Absolutely no evidence of a non-Bantu substratum
 - All the traits of a regular Bantu language
 - Lexicon can be directly and straightforwardly related to Proto-Bantu reconstructions, through regular sound correspondences (*vowels, consonants, tones*)
 - Regular Bantu noun class system
 - Regular Bantu verb system
- Fang is a foolproof Bantu language, no doubt

Evidence from genetics (mtDNA)

- MtDNA variation (analysis team directed by L. Quintana-Murci)
 - 1404 samples (i.e. individuals) from Gabon and Cameroon
 - 9 hunter-gathering 'Pygmy' pops (*421 individuals*), 20 Bantu-speaking farming pops (*983 individuals*)
 - No evidence at all of a Semitic or Egyptian origin
 - If Fang really descended from 'Egypt', all Bantu-speaking groups of the area would be related to the (ancient) Egyptians!
- (Data, analysis and slide by Lluís QM)*

Evidence from genetics (mtDNA)

Principal Coordinates



Evidence from genetics (Y)

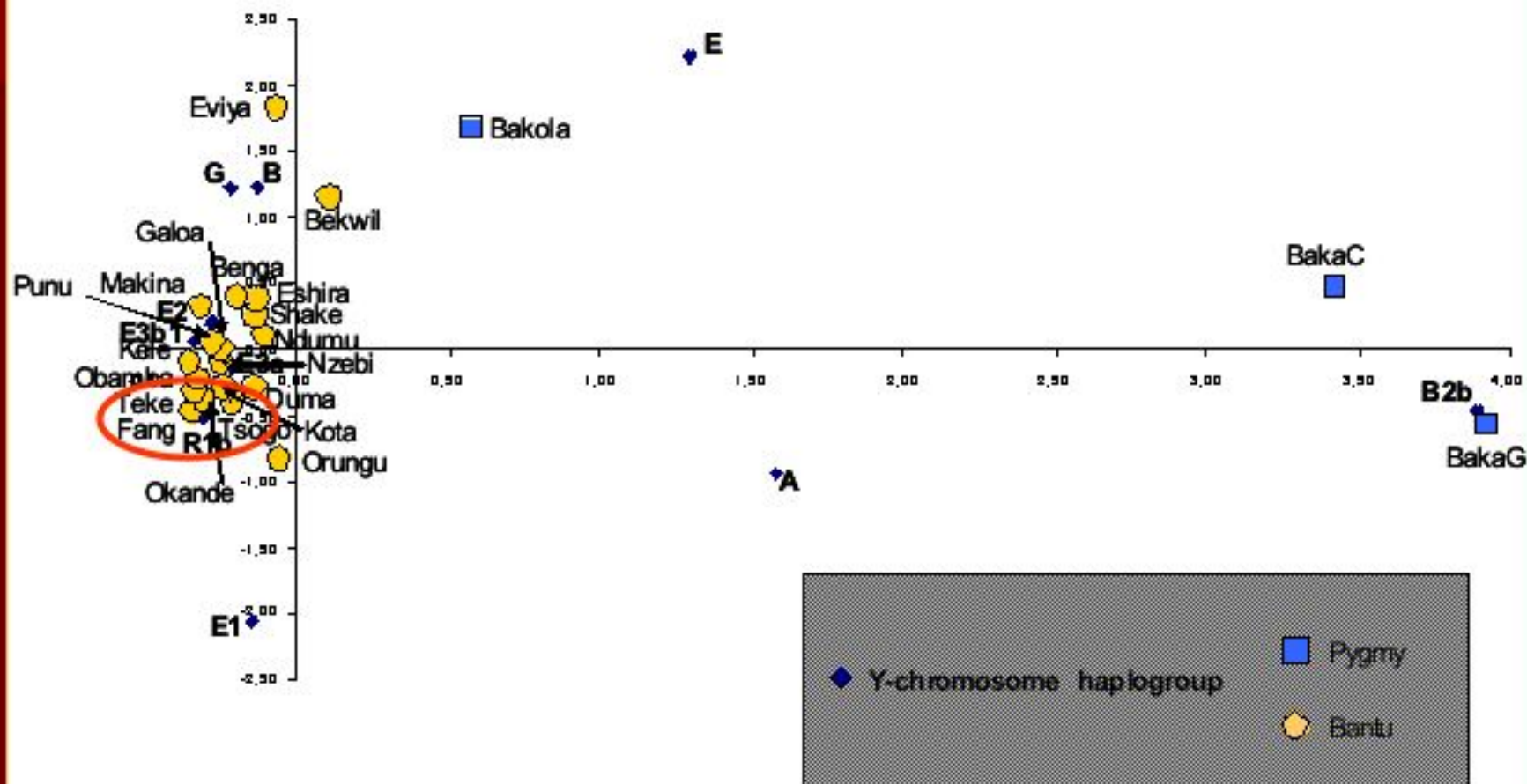
- Y-chromosome variation (analysis directed by J. Bertranpetit and D. Comas)
 - 900 samples from Gabon and Cameroon
 - 3 hunter-gathering ('Pygmy') populations, 20 Bantu-speaking farming populations
 - 18 STR markers (3 reactions)
 - ~40 SNP markers

(Data, analysis, slides by David Comas)

Evidence from genetics (Y)

- First result: Fang are basically 'Bantu'!

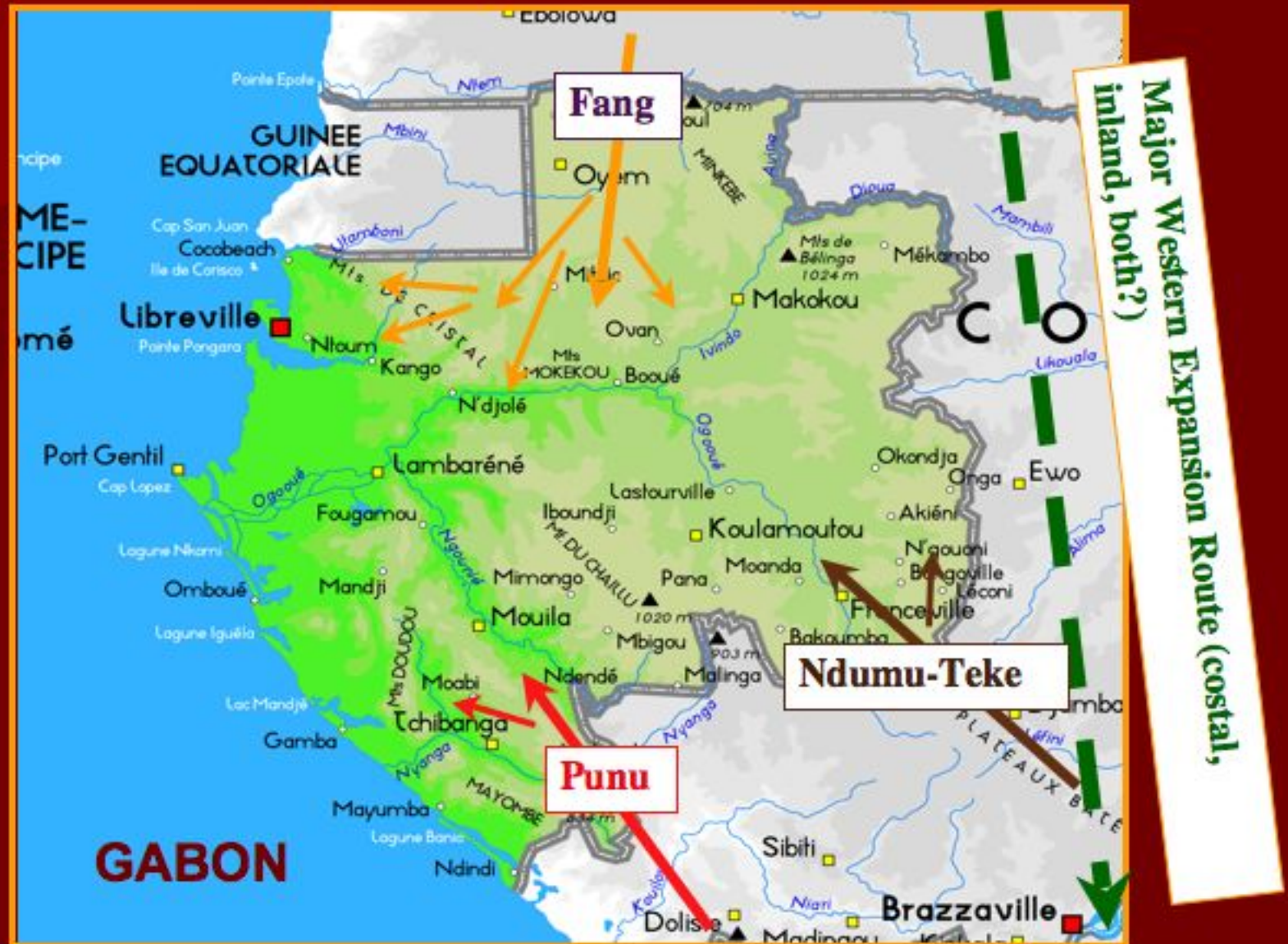
Y-chromosome in Central Africa: haplogroups



Evidence from genetics (Y)

- But... Fang attest a non-African haplogroup (R1b)!!
- However... they are not the only ones!!!
 - Punu, Teke, Ndumu, Obamba! (In particular!)
 - Pops having different oral traditions
 - Especially Fang vs. others
 - Pops not directly related, linguistically
 - Especially Fang vs. others
 - Geographical distance
 - Fang vs. others

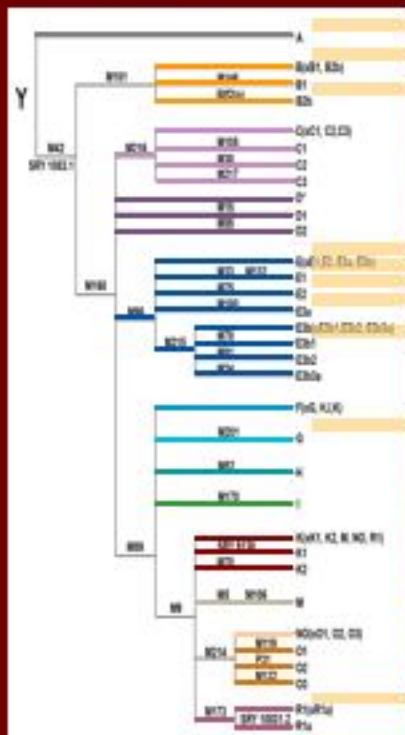
Peopling of Gabon by Punu, Ndumu, Teke and Fang acc. to oral traditions



Evidence from genetics (Y)

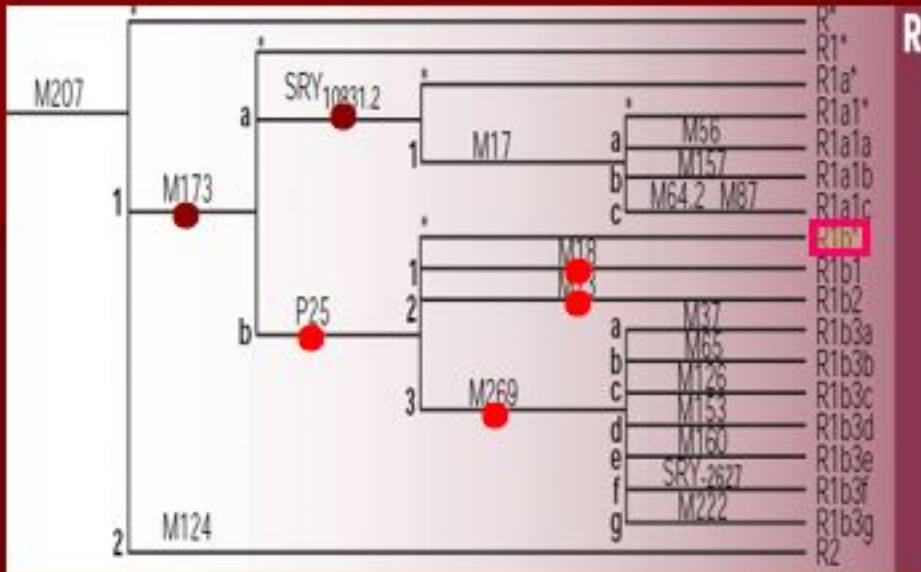
- Distribution, origin and age of this haplo-group?

Y-chromosome in Central Africa: haplogroups

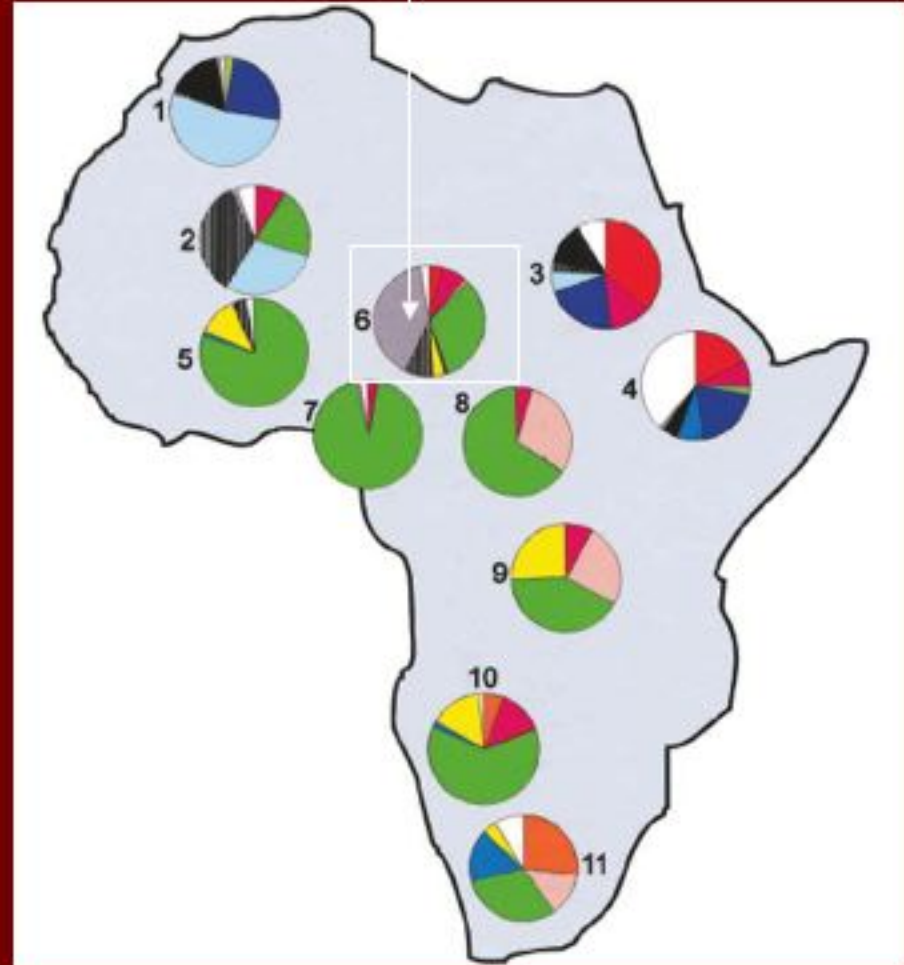


%	Kele	Bekwil	Benga	Duma	Eviya	Fang	Kota	Makina	Ndumu	Namumba	Nzebi	Obamba	Orungu	Punu	Snake	T eke	Tsongo	Eshira	Galoa	Okande	Bakola	Bakag	Bakac
A			2						3		4						2					9	
B	2		4	2	21	2	4	14	3	33	7	4		7	9		8	17	2		9		
B2b			2	3	4		2						5	2	7						27	64	60
E	12	20	2						3				5	2					2		5	12	20
E1							2						5										
E2			2	10	17		2	2	6	4	2	11	10	3	9	8	5	12	4				
E3a	84	80	88	81	58	80	35	84	75	63	84	75	80	74	72	81	35	71	89	100	55	12	20
E3b1																			2				
G			2																				
R1b	2		2			19	6		11		4	11		12	2	10					5	3	
Total	50	5	48	58	24	64	53	43	36	24	57	47	20	58	43	48	50	42	47	8	22	33	5

Y-chromosome in Central Africa: haplogroup R1



Haplogroup R1b*



Haplogroup R1b*

(Zalloua, personal communication)

Chad: 20 - 35 %
North Africa: 7 %
Middle East: 10 %

Modified from Cruciani et al. 2002

Workshop 'Migration', Eurocores programme OMLL, Ile de Porquerolles, 5-7 September 2007

Evidence from genetics (Y)

- Haplogroup R1b*
 - Estimated age: $13,000 \pm 3,000$ years
- Haplogroup R1b (including Chad samples)
 - Estimated age: $12,700 \pm 2,200$ years
- Haplogroup R1
 - Out-of-Africa
 - Partial back migration ($\sim 16,000$ YBP)
 - Subsequent contacts: Central Africa

Possible scenario(s)

- Scenario(s)
- Type(s) of migration

*Fang warrior
(19th century
drawing)*



Possible scenario(s)

- Contacts between Bantu-speaking farmers and other groups (Nilo-Saharan?) before and/or during southward-bound migration
 - Initial contacts: Chad?, northern Cameroon?, Central-African Republic? Farther south?
 - More than one region, possibly
 - Over an undetermined but considerable stretch of time
- Several Bantu-speaking pops have thus become, with others, the new 'carriers' of a much older 'back-into-Africa' migration

*Current distribution
of Nilo-Saharan
languages*



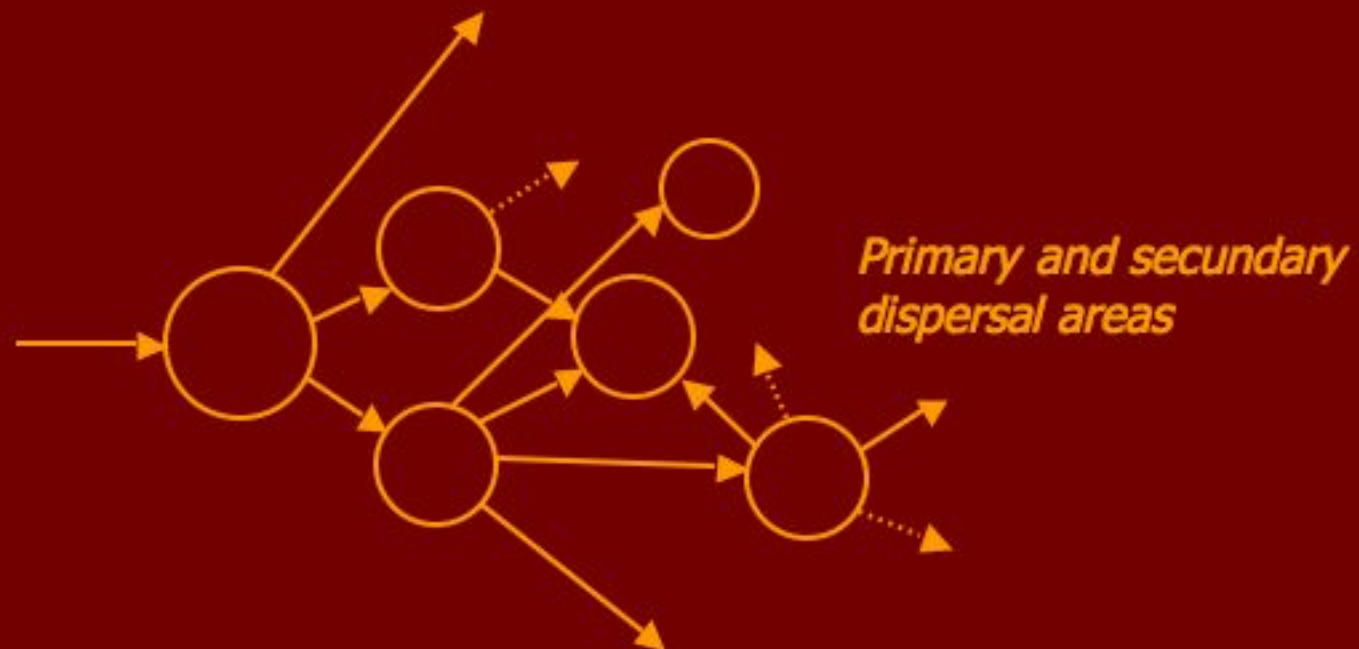
Possible scenario(s)

- Carried along by southward migrations
- Not a rush!
 - Large-scale movement, with various rates of velocity over time
 - On the whole, slow progression
- No direct descent from the Upper-Nile region!
"Out-of-Egypt theory" is untenable
 - Serious problem of time depth! Much older genetic substratum
- Not a carefully planned, aggressive conquest!
 - Non-oriented, non-planned, non-linear process

Possible scenario(s)

- Non-teleological event (most of the time)
 - Just 'get out of the way' ... to God-knows-where
- No nomads: authentic villagers
 - Probably experienced tradesmen already in pre-colonial times
- Wave-like in space, in time ('flea-like')
 - Southern linguistic features in some northern dialects (Gabon) strongly suggest (minor) **back** migrations
 - Some split-offs may have miscarried
 - Some groups stay, others move on

Possible scenario(s)



Possible scenario(s)

- Triggered and/or encouraged by a variety of factors that **may evolve over time**
- Repellers, attractors, conductors
 - E.g. Fulani expansion: hight of centralised empire during 19th century AD
 - Usman dan Fodio
 - Sokoto empire and jihad (northern Nigeria)
 - Invasions, raids and pressure contributed to southward migratory movements through Niger and Nigeria into Cameroon



Fulani (Fulbe) people

Possible scenario(s)

- European trade and goods: efficient attractor during second half of 19th century in Gabon (the French: strategic, political **choice!**)
- Repellers: fear of slave trade, strong social ties (clans)

■ Complex event:

- Migration(s) within migration (admixture before and/or during spread)
- Several (related or not related) populations involved

Possible scenario(s)

- Incorporation: partial integration through contact with pops already in place (*substratum*) and/or encounters of various types (!)
 - Archaeological evidence: Hunter-collecting settlements prior to arrival of Bantu villagers
 - Carriers of R1B??
 - Motivation and modes of incorporation?
 - Evidence (Y-chromosome) only concerns male individuals
 - What about females?
 - Voluntary basis? Forced integration?
 - Time depths?

Possible scenario(s)

- 'R1b-free' pops: Myene (B10), Tsogo (B30) and Kele (B20) groups
 - No real contact with R1b-carrying pops
 - More ancient? (Suggested by linguistic evidence!)
 - Other migrations paths? (Coastal??, more western?)
 - Limited number of Kele and Pygmy individuals: gene flow
- Possible explanation for perceived phenotypical traits in Fang??
 - Why Fang and not the other pops such as Punu?

Further investigation

- Further explore **origin** and **distribution** of the non-African haplogroup
 - Chad, Cameroon and Central African Republic (e.g. Upper-Sangha area in CAR)
 - Farther down south
 - Examen **North-South, decreasing gradient**
 - Two Congos (other Bantu-speaking populations)
 - Angola (idem)
- Linguistic research
 - Proto-Fang
 - Vocabulary
 - Reconstructions
 - Borrowings



Further investigation

- Sorting out time depths
- Fang: Originally an (ethnic) unity? Or result of (recent) convergence?
 - Cultural variation
 - Artefacts (*funeral statuettes, traditional knives*) and style differences within Fang (Perrois, i.a.),
 - Differences between Fang and Beti (Laburthe-Tolra, 1981)
 - Problems with genealogies within 'Fang': absence common ancestors, incompatibilities
 - Lineages as most significant units?
 - Variations in oral tradition
 - What can population genetics tell us?

Acknowledgements

- To ESF,
- To CNRS,
- To the Organisers,
- To the Audience,



*Fang blacksmiths in 1856
(Du Chaillu, 1863:168))*

... for this stimulating workshop!