Les Congolâtres

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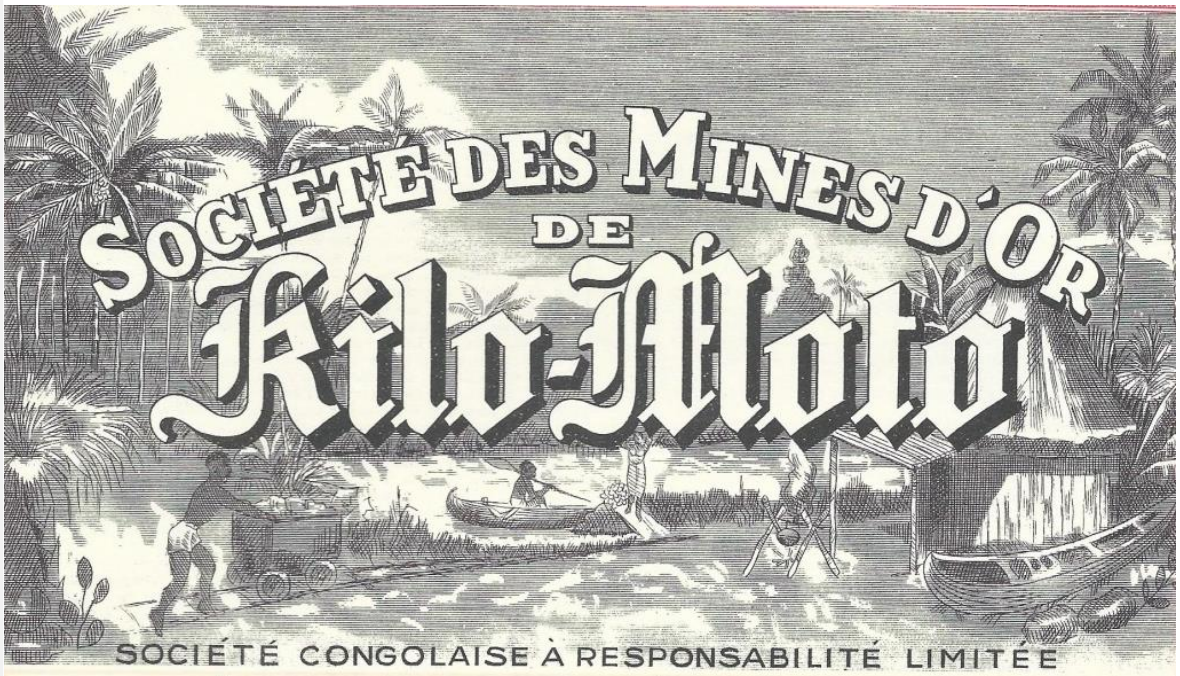

Minerals of the Congo

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Les Congolâtres

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SUMMARY

EDITORIAL

Chers lecteurs,
C'est avec un immense plaisir que nous vous annonçons le recrutement d'un nouveau rédacteur au sein de notre bulletin. Nous sommes donc ravis d'accueillir Michael Round dans notre équipe.
Dans ce bulletin vous aurez l'occasion de découvrir un article impressionnant sur le thème des minéraux au Congo Belge encore un tout grand merci à son auteur Théo Schilderman.

Bonne lecture

Dear readers,

It is with great pleasure that we announce the recruitment of a new editor for our bulletin. We are delighted to welcome Michael Round to our team.
In this newsletter you have the opportunity to discover an impressive article on the topic of Minerals of the Belgian Congo, thanks again to its author Théo Schilderman.

Good reading

Geachte lezers,

Met zeer veel genoegen mogen wij een nieuw lid verwelkomen in de redactie van ons bulletin. We zijn verheugd om Michael Round te mogen verwelkomen in onze ploeg.
In dit bulletin kan u een indrukwekkend artikel over het thema van de mineralen in Belgisch Congo ontdekken. Onze speciale dank gaat uit naar de auteur Theo Schilderman.

Wij wensen u alvast veel leesplezier

Minerals of the Congo

By *Theo Schilderman*

Summary

The Congo is very rich in resources, both natural and mineral. This became increasingly clear when Europeans began to visit the region. When the Congo Free State was established in the late 19th Century, it began with exploiting natural resources such as rubber and palm oil, then started prospecting for minerals. It was soon clear that the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt extended into the Congo, and several companies were established to extract and process copper. Once the railway from the Cape reached Katanga, in 1910, it became very profitable to mine copper, and the minerals associated with it such as cobalt. Diamonds were discovered, mainly in the Kasaï, and gold especially in the North East. There was tin along the Eastern border too. And then there were industrial minerals, such as limestone, clays and basalt, which could be turned into e.g. building materials.
This article attempts to describe the Congo's mineral wealth through stamps, postcards and covers. It describes some of the main companies involved, such as the Union Minière du Haut Katanga and the Forminière, in prospecting, mining and processing them and shows some of their mail and installations. The main minerals covered with include copper, diamonds and gold, but some attention is also paid to e.g. tin, uranium, coal, limestone, clays and cobalt.

Clay

The Congo is much better known for the minerals it exports, such as copper, diamonds, gold, cobalt and tin, than for the ones used within the country. Yet a simple mineral like clay, found all over the country, has probably been more useful to a larger number of Congolese than the exported minerals that created paid employment for a much smaller number, and financially awarded mainly foreigners and some high-ranking Congolese. Clay is one of the oldest building materials on earth and probably the first mineral used in the Congo Basin.

Clay is a fine-grained material created by the weathering of rock. It is a mixture of minerals, in varying proportions, the most important ones being silica, alumina and iron, but magnesium, calcium and alkaline earths may also be present. Its most important characteristic is plasticity: when mixed with water, it can be shaped or moulded. Clay can also be fired, using a range of kilns, to create ceramics.
An example of the use of clay as a plastic material is shown in fig. 1. It pictures simple village housing at Epulu, with walls probably made of "mud-and-pole", having a frame of timber poles and branches plastered with mud. Housing like this may be millennia-old in the Congo. Soil with a mixture of clay and sand can also used to shape blocks used for the masonry of walls, called adobes in some countries. In that case, the harder and larger grains of sand provide strength, whilst the clay acts as a binder. And example of an adobe wall can be found in the background of fig. 2, behind the female potter.

Pottery itself is one form of ceramics. The craft was introduced into the Congo by Bantu immigrants arriving in the country from both the West and the East, from around 500 BC. The unmailed postcard in fig.2 shows a female potter at work in Mikalayi (Kasaï), and the one in fig. 3 pictures a female potter at Luebo. Both postcards show women using the plasticity of clay to model various types of pots that will be used to store water, brew beer, cook food etc. On the left of the latter picture is a raised platform on which she bakes her pots in a fairly open fire with some surround, temporarily covered by a basket when not in use.

Temperatures in such fires are insufficient to produce proper ceramics. Many of the pots will be under-baked and quite brittle. Finally, fig. 4 shows female potters at Kinshasa, with a sitting woman shaping a pot from clay, whilst finished products are shown in the foreground. They appear to be well-shaped and fired, and have some form of decorative glazed bands that would require a fairly high temperature to be produced.

Fig.1: *Used postcard showing housing at Epulu, written at Elisabethville on 3 November 1955. It was mailed by air from Elisabethville to Lessona in Italy, but any stamps have been removed.*

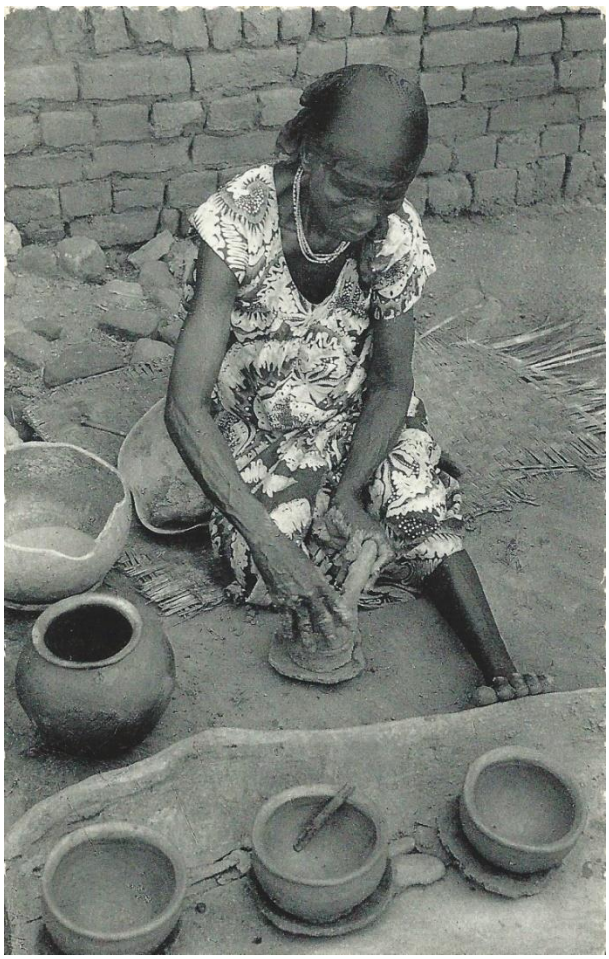


Fig. 2: *Unmailed postcard showing a female potter at Mikalayi in the Kasaï.*

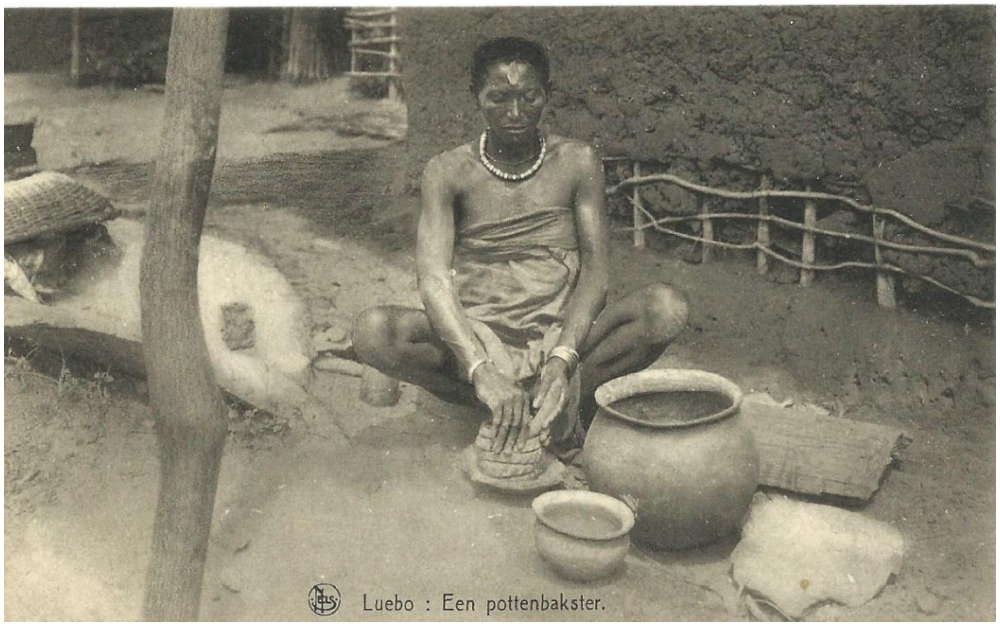


Fig.3: *Unmailed postcard of a female potter at Luebo*

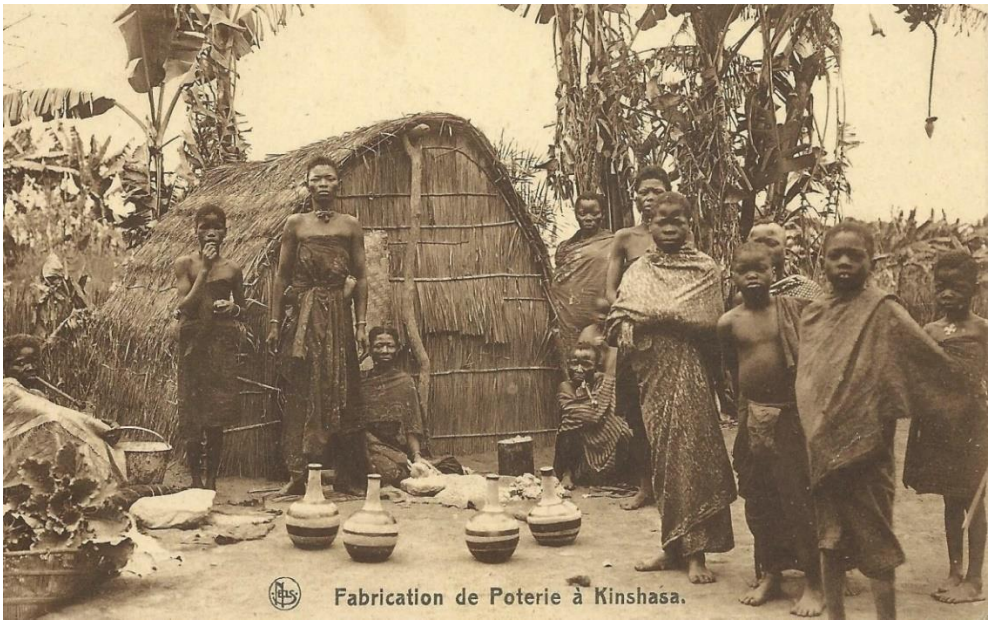


Fig.4: *Postcard handed out as an address reference in 1948 by Americo Caseiro of Mateus, Caseiro Cie., businessmen at Inkissi, showing the production of pottery at Kinshasa.*

Fired clay bricks are another form of ceramics. The craft of manufacturing bricks by moulding and firing soil containing a mixture of clay and sand was introduced at various locations of the Congo by the missions, such as the Redemptorist Fathers who produced the following postcard, and perhaps by a few companies, from the late 19th Century onwards. The bricks on the card will have been shaped in wooden moulds, slightly larger than the size of the required final products, as the mud bricks will shrink first during drying, and then again when becoming a ceramic material during firing. Brick production is in most places a dry-season activity, as drying often takes place in the open, or under slight cover. In the larger cities, there probably were industrial-scale brick producers using more advanced methods of shaping, drying and firing. The kiln on fig. 5 is built from unfired mud bricks, and the men on the top are still adding more layers. At the bottom are four almost triangular firing tunnels that run across the whole kiln, accessible from both sides. Fires will be started with straw and kindling, and once they are well under way, the larger logs one sees to the right will be added. The kilns will burn several days, and need to be kept going overnight. When all wood is finished, they are sealed off with bricks and mud, keeping the heat inside for longer. Temperatures in such kilns can easily reach 900°C, but the bricks on the outsides will not reach those and remain under-fired.

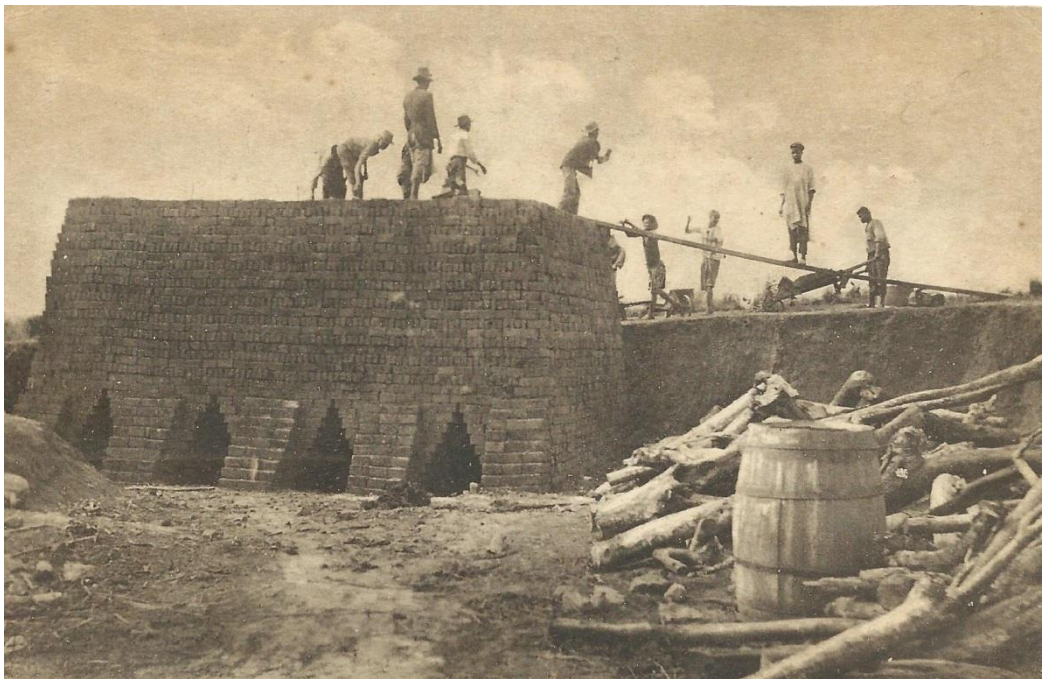


Fig.5: *Unmailed postcard of a brick kiln at Nkolo.*

Fig.6: *This postcard shows a church built with bricks at the mission of the Filles de la Charité at Nsona-Mbata. It was mailed, without stamp, by a sister from Ixelles, Bruxelles, to a colleague at the Mission du Sacré Coeur at Nsona-M'Batta.*

The missions built churches, schools, workshops and much more with the bricks they produced. A church is shown in fig. 6, and fig. 7 depicts a house being constructed with burnt bricks. The rocks in the foreground are of the type used in foundations under brick walls.

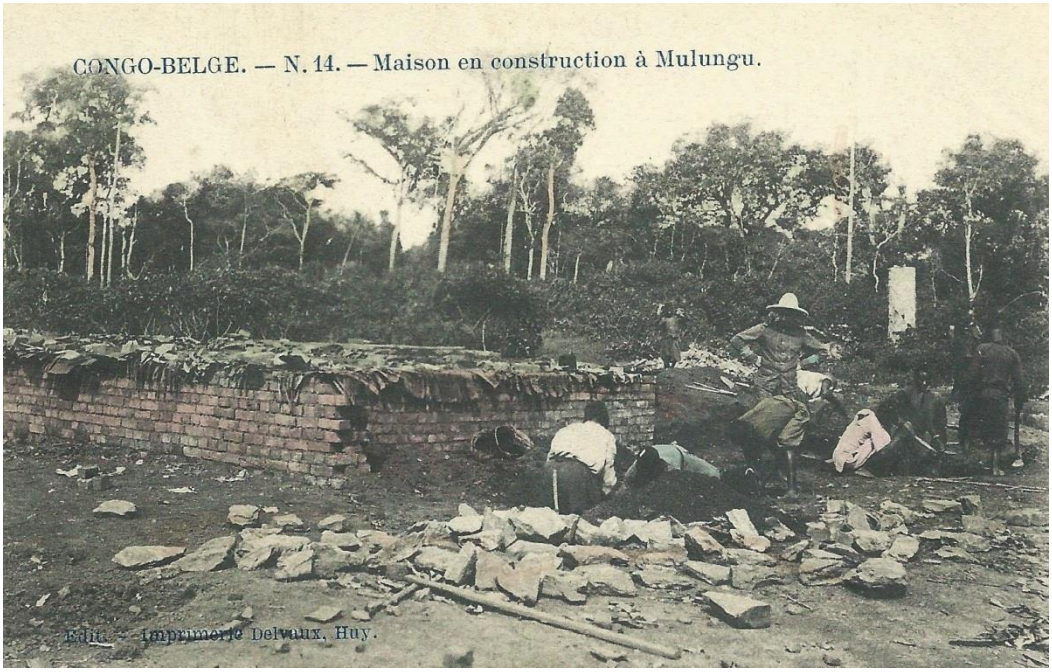


Fig.7: *Unmailed colour postcard of a house under construction at Mulungu.*

As well as bricks, roofing tiles are a form of ceramics; to produce tiles requires a more clayey soil than for bricks. Both bricks and tiles were predominantly used to build for whites in the Congo, as fig. 8 shows. The tiles are often machine-pressed, and fired in vertical shaft kilns. Their use is shown in more detail in fig. 9: that roof of part tiles and part thatch is supported by adobe walls.

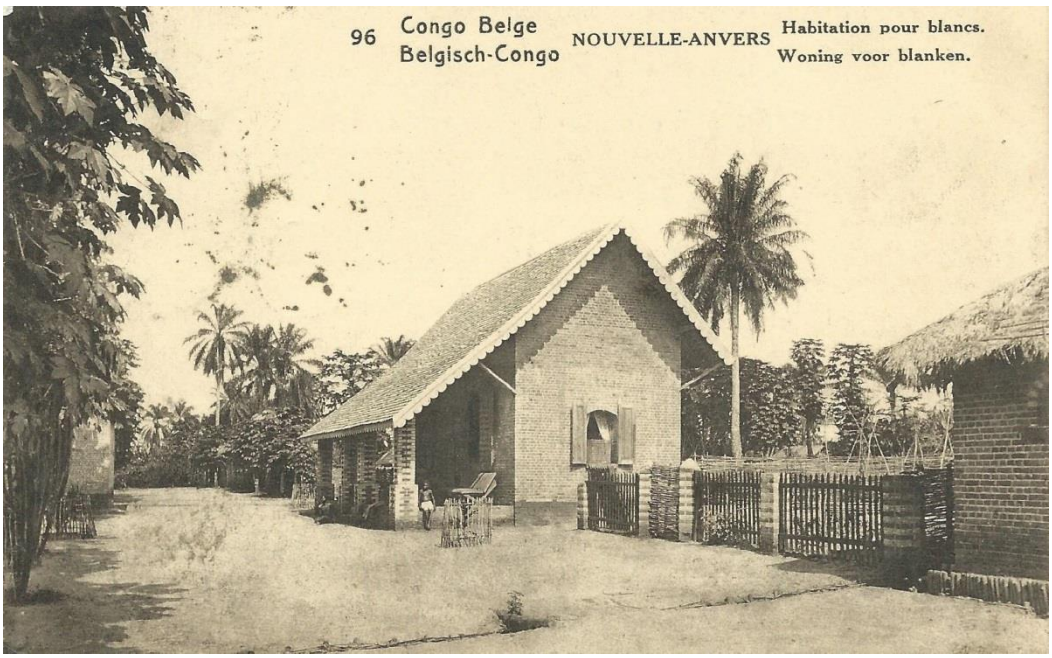


Fig. 8: *A house for whites is shown on view 96 of the Stibbe type 61 postal stationery card of 1922, with a prepaid 15 c. blue-green palm tree stamp on beige paper, mailed from Elisabethville to Brussels on 21 December 1922.*

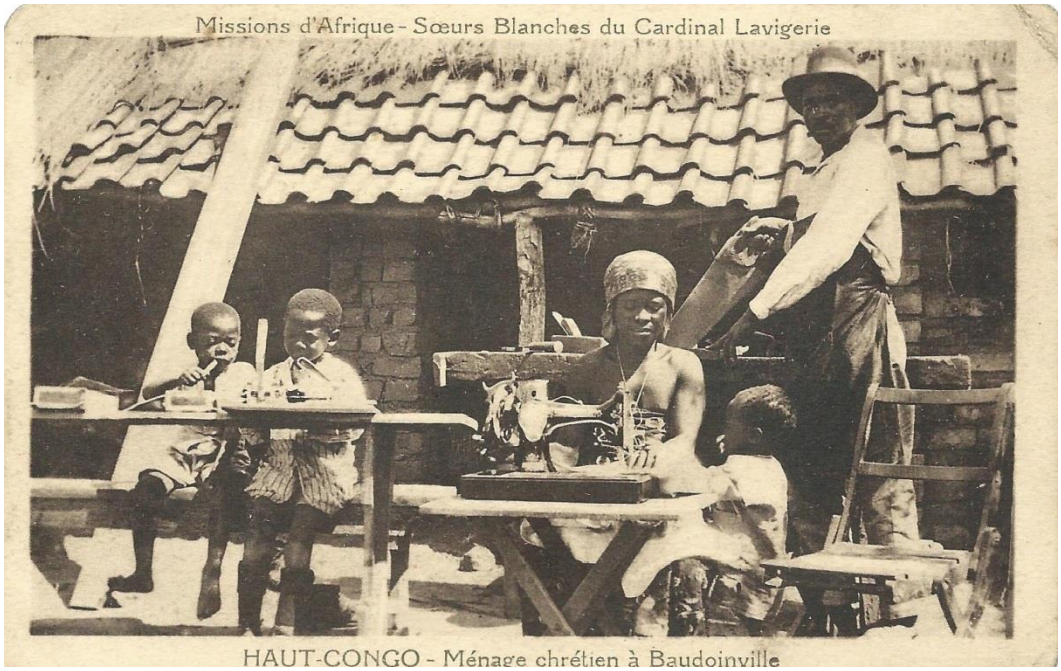


Fig. 9: *Unmailed postcard produced by the White Sisters, showing a Christian household in Baudouinville on Lake Tanganyika, a deliberately composed picture.*

Iron

Iron ore is quite common in the Congo; there are many ancient blacksmithing sites too. The first geologist to enter Katanga in 1892, with the Bia expedition, was Jules Cornet. Not only did he discover many copper deposits there, but also quite a number of sites with iron ore. He wrote several reports on those discoveries, which became hugely important for further exploration and mining in Katanga. Far less noticed was a report he wrote in 1908 on the geology of the Mayumbe, an area between the mouth of the Congo river and the Cabinda enclave that is part of Angola. In it, he describes Mount Sali as a hillock covered by iron-bearing rocks, especially magnetites and pyrites. The latter report was based on geological studies undertaken in the Mayumbe in 1904 by M. Kostka; he may well be one of the prospectors pictured in fig. 10.

According to Jan Vansina (“Paths in the Rainforests”, 1990), the craft of smelting iron and the subsequent blacksmith work - featured in fig. 11 - required to produce e.g. utensils and weapons was spread by Bantu migrations as in the case of pottery, and is thought to have entered the Congo from both the East and West, in the last centuries BC. This craft produced the picks, axes and hoes used for clearing forests, leading to more productive agriculture and thus a more abundant and safer food supply. It also made the immigrants superior in armaments, because they had iron spear- and arrow-heads, which helped them to master tribes that stood in their way. And there were many more uses of iron.

Fig. 10: *Life as a prospector: camping on the magnetites of Mount Sali in the Mayumbe. Postcard mailed from Boma to Brussels, impossible to date because the stamp, and with that most of the cancel were removed, as well as the text. Large T applied for postage due in Belgium, but no sign of postage due stamps*.

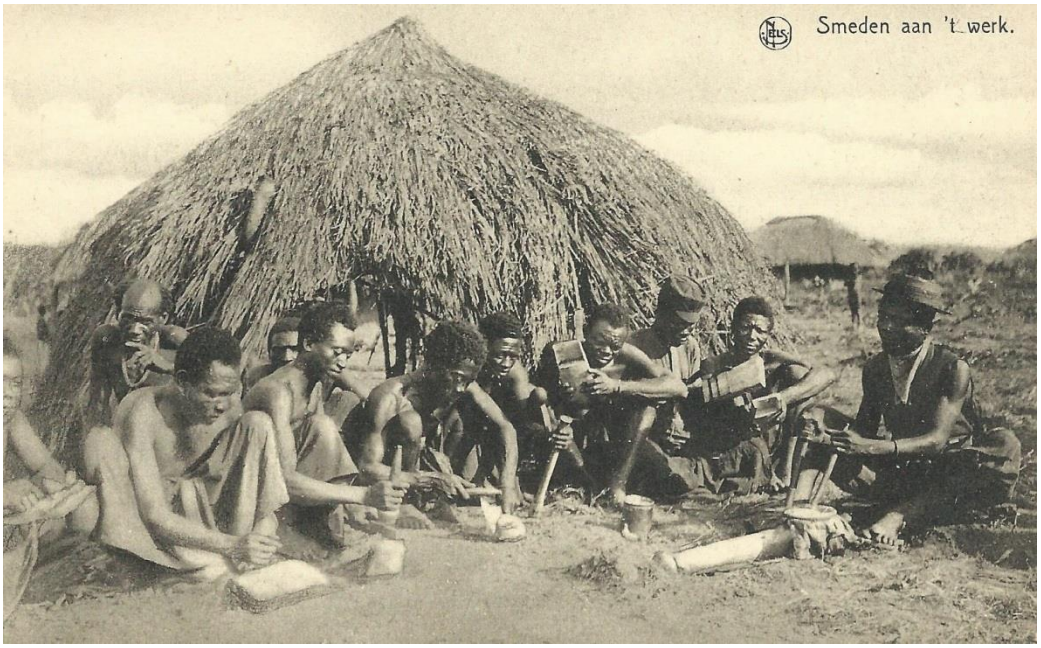


Fig. 11: *Unused postcard of traditional blacksmiths at work, at an unknown location in the Congo. The iron ore is buried with charcoal; the blacksmiths blow air into a bellows through a reed attached to (probably) an animal stomach, and from there through a pipe into the buried hearth.*

Stone

Various types of stone do occur in the Congo, but not everywhere. They are not as abundant in river valleys and the rainforest. A mountain range made infamous by the early explorers of the Congo runs parallel to the coast from Gabon to Angola. It is covered by quartz clusters in matrices of schist and mica, which gave it the name of Crystal Mountains by the likes of Stanley. A rock with quartz crystals is shown on the 45 kuta stamp of a minerals set issued by Zaïre in 1983:

quartz crystals on a
45 kuta mint stamp of 1983

quartz crystals on a used 45 kuta
stamp overprinted 300 Zaïre in 1990

The mighty Congo River had to make its way through the Crystal Mountains between Leopoldville/Kinshasa and Matadi, via a series of cataracts and falls. Stanley and his men struggled to build a road through them to the North of the river, which gave him the nickname "Bula Matari" (Breaker of Stones) by the locals. Constructing the railway line, on the South side, was no easier, as shown in fig. 12.

Fig. 12: *The Lower Congo railway line from Matadi to Kinshasa had to cut through the Crystal Mountains, as can be seen on the right of the above postcard. This is view 49 of a Stibbe type 53 card, prepaid 10 c. carmine on beige card, overprinted with a large 15 in 1915. The card was cancelled at Luebo on 29 April 1924 and sent to Blandain in Belgium.*

Stone, once crushed, made good bases for roads and railways (fig. 12), and could be used to produce concrete for other infrastructure works. Larger stones were often used for foundations, and sometimes for stone masonry and pavements, even occasionally in pre-colonial times; those could be extracted in the quarry shown in fig. 13.

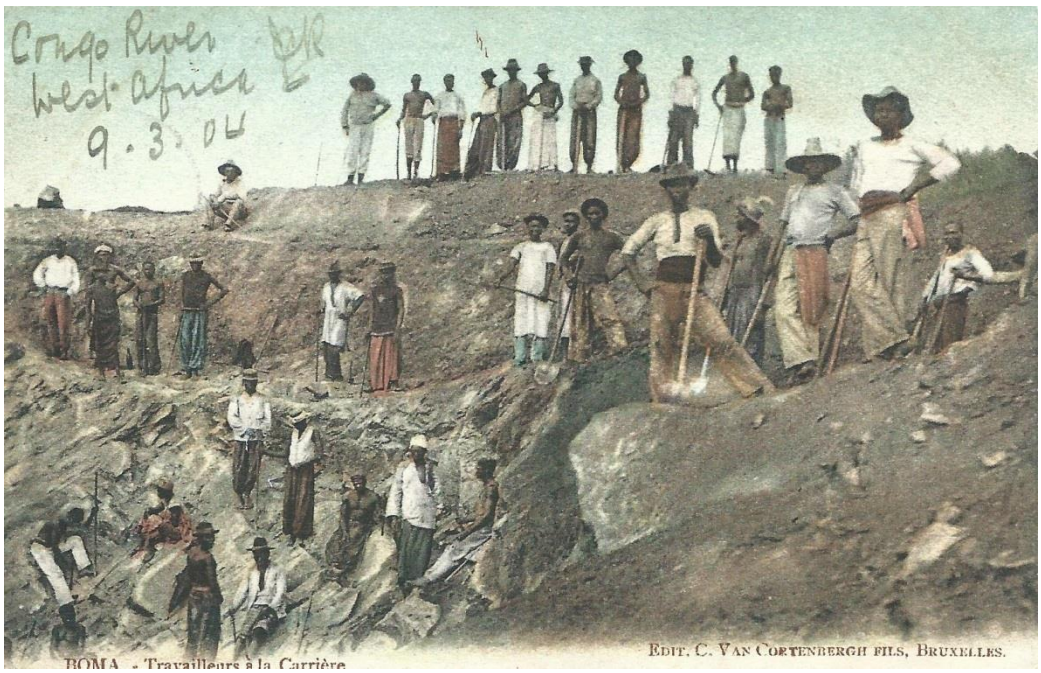


Fig. 13: *The picture on the above colour postcard dates from around 1900, and appeared in a book as well as on cards. It shows workers in a quarry near Boma; it is unclear what type of stone is quarried here, and for what purposes, but they are sizable blocks. The card was written on 9 March 1904, and mailed to Liverpool, but its stamp has disappeared.*

Basalt

The branch of the African Rift Valley that separates the Congo from Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda houses a number of active and dormant volcanoes. In the North Kivu, both the Nyiragongo, around 20 km North of Lake Kivu and the Nyamuragira, 5 km further North are unusually active, large volcanoes, both around 3 km high. Nyiragongo erupted at least 34 times since 1862, and Nyamuragira at least 46 times. The latter is a massive high-potassium basaltic shield volcano, with a caldera measuring 2 km across containing around 500 km³ lava. The lava flows from its eruptions cover about 1500 km². Fig. 14 features the caldera of the Nyamuragira in 1933, and fig. 15 shows it is often very active, with lava being thrown in the air. When the volcano erupts, it is usually through fissures in its walls; this creates the lava flows as can be seen in fig. 16; they can go in all directions. Once the lava cools it hardens and becomes the basalt shown on fig. 17 that has Lake Kivu in the background. This particular flow may have emerged from either of the above two active volcanoes. Lava plains are quite a barrier for traffic, even on foot, as shown in fig. 18, where a column of porters is crossing a plain on their way to a World War I front. Basalt is locally used for infrastructure and construction. Finally, fig. 19 shows a crater submerged in Lake Kivu. The Lake contains an estimated 60 billion m³ of methane gaz linked to volcanic activity. The KivuWatt project has installed a floating barge to extract the gaz 12.5 km offshore of the Rwandan town of Kibuye, fed through a floating pipeline to a 25 MW electric power plant near the town that was due to start feeding into the electricity grid on 1 January 2017.

Fig. 14: *Unmailed postcard of the internal platform (caldera) of the Nyamuragira volcano as it was in 1933, in the Parc National Albert, now the Virunga National Park.*

Fig. 15: *Unmailed postcard showing the internal crater of the Nyamuragira, with lava thrown upwards*.

Fig. 16: *Unmailed colour postcard showing lava flows of the Nyamuragira Volcano during an eruption.*

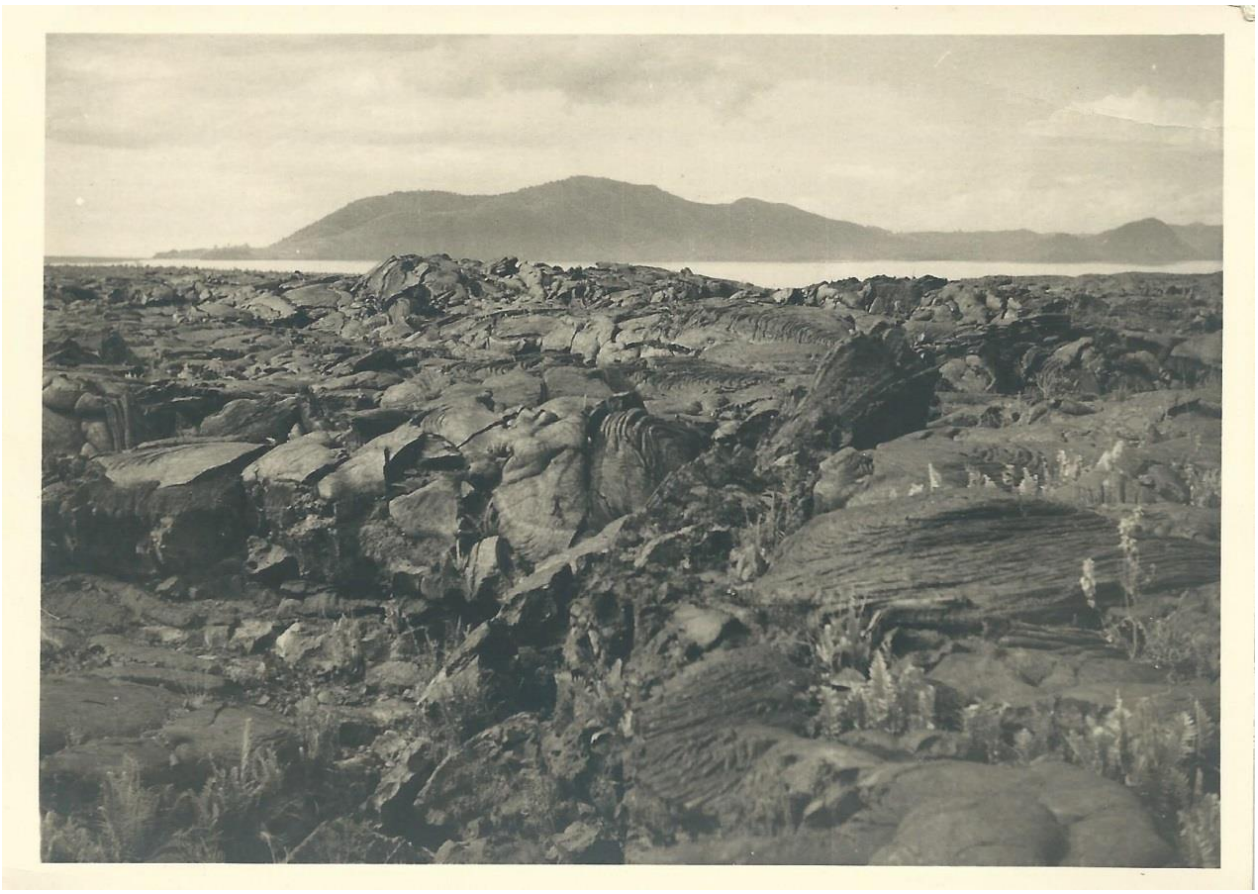


Fig. 17: *Unmailed postcard of lava flows near Goma, with Lake Kivu in the background.*

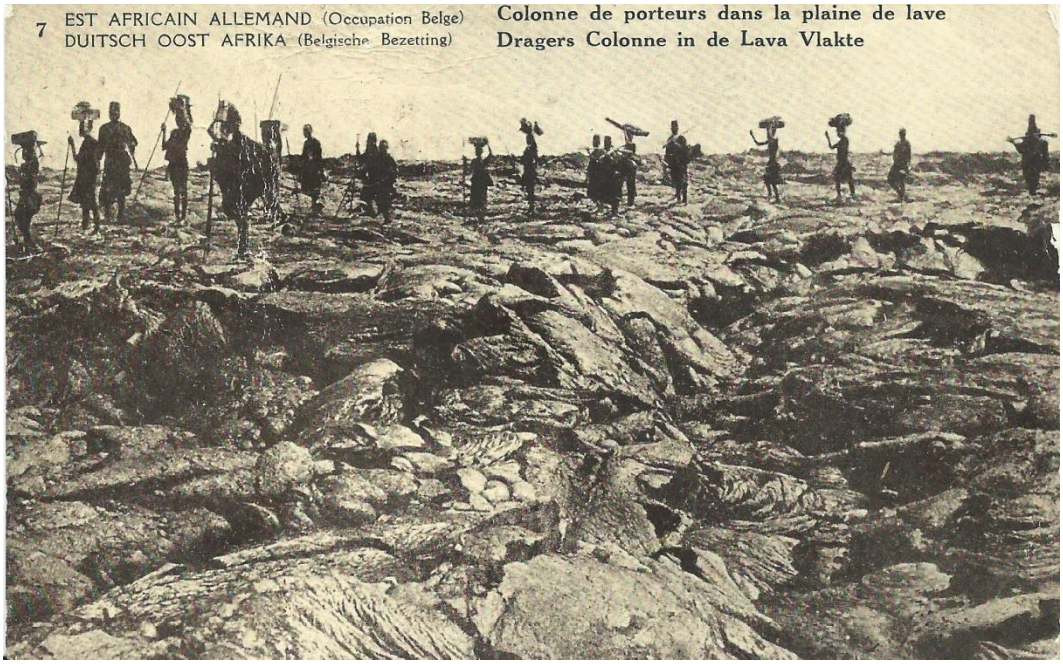


Fig. 18: *Postcard showing a column of porters crossing a lava plain, possibly in Rwanda, on their way to a front where Belgian colonial forces were fighting Germans occupying East Africa. The card is view 7 of Stibbe type 11, issued in 1918, with a prepaid 5 c. yellow-green stamp on beige paper. It was mailed at Kigali on 6 September 1919, to Ciney in Namur, where it arrived on 10 November.*

Fig. 19: *Postcard featuring a submerged crater in Mobimbi Bay, Lake Kivu. This card is a Stibbe type 53, originally issued as a prepaid 10 c. carmine on beige paper card in 1912, but overprinted with a large 15 in 1921. The card also bears a 1 Fr. rose definitive stamp of 1925-27 on the front. There are incomplete Kipushi cancellations on both front and back, but the card may not have been mailed.*

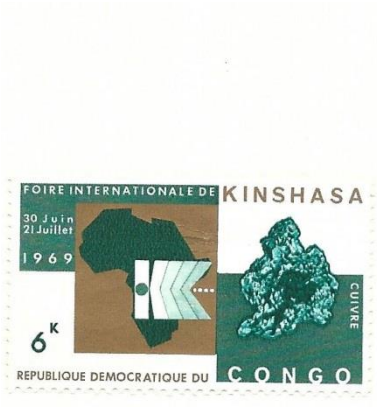
Copper

From the 16th Century, Dutch ships of the Oud West Indische Compagnie started to bring copper to The Netherlands that they had acquired at the mouth of the Congo river and along the coast of Angola. This copper was brought there from somewhere in the interior, but where exactly was unknown. Over the next

two centuries, the quantities increased. The existence of copper mines in Katanga was first mentioned in 1798 by the Portuguese explorer de Lacerdas. In 1874, the British explorer Cameron describes copper items in the form of a St Andrews Cross, with arms 15-16" long by 2" wide and 0.5" thick, weighing 2-3 pounds. These crosses were produced by the natives. Bayeke invaders, coming from around Tabora in Tanganyika in the middle of the 19th Century improved the more primitive production methods used before. In periods of reduced agricultural activity, from May, they practised surface mining, and had kilns up to 2m high near the copper quarries, fired with charcoal with air blown in through bellows. The copper lumps thus produced were then taken to their villages to be further refined in smaller kilns. The molten copper was shaped in moulds dug into ant heaps. Thus were produced the famous crosses, but also bullets, hoes, bracelets etc. But then King Msiri came to power in Katanga, leading to a period of warfare and insecurity, strongly reducing local copper production; it had virtually disappeared in the early 20th Century.

During the Belgian reign of the Congo, no postage stamps were produced showing copper, but a wide range of postcards showed its mining and processing. After independence, in 1960, the Congo/Zaïre issued at least eight stamps showing different forms of copper found in the Congo, shown hereafter:

Native Copper
(Cu)

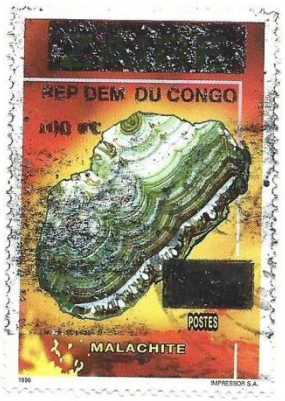


6 kuta mint stamp in a set on the International Fair of Kinshasa in 1969

Dioptase
hydrated copper silicate
($CuSiO_3.H_2O$)

6 zaïre used stamp in a minerals set issued in 1983

Malachite
copper carbonate hydroxide
($Cu_2CO_3(OH)_2$



40,000 new Zaïre stamp of 1996, overprinted 100 Congolese Francs in 2001

Apart from the dioptase stamp above, the minerals set issued by Zaïre in 1983 contains three other stamps with copper-bearing minerals. These are here shown mint, but not on mail.

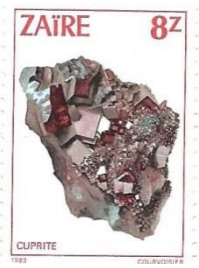
Malachite
copper carbonate hydroxide
($Cu_2CO_2(OH)_2$)

2 kuta mint

Bournonite
a sulfosalt: trithioantimonite of lead and copper (more interesting as an antimony ore)
($PbCuSbS_2$)

1.50 Zaïre mint

Cuprite
copper oxide
(Cu_2O)



8 Zaïre mint

Fig. 20: *The 6 Zaïre stamps showing the copper ore dioptase were issued by Zaïre in 1983 as part of a mineral set. They were printed in sheets of 50 by Courvoisier S.A. of La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland. A full mint sheet is shown here in a somewhat reduced size.*

Chrysocolla
hydrated copper cyclosilicate
$(Cu_{2-x}Al_x(H_{2-x})Si_2O_5)(OH)_4.nH_20)$

mint pink and blue-green 1,350 Francs stamp issued in 2011 by the Democratic Republic of the Congo showing a piece of chrysocolla, a minor copper ore occurring, amongst others, in the Congo.

Aurichalcite
basic carbonate of zinc and copper
$((Zn,Cu)_5(CO_3)_2(OH)_6)$

mint multi-coloured 480 Francs stamp issued in 2002 by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, picturing two pieces of aurichalcite, which can be mined to recover copper or zinc.

Fig. 21: *Express airmail cover mailed at Matadi on 21 August 1970, via Kinshasa where it received a transit cancel at the rear on the 25th, to Marina di Carrara in Italy, arriving there on the 28th. It carries the green and gold 6 kuta stamp showing native copper. This stamp was issued by the Congo Democratic Republic in 1969, in a set on the International Fair of Kinshasa. It also carries a 2 kuta multi-coloured stamp issued in 1970 at the 10th anniversary of Independence, and a 4 kuta orange and blue Palais de la Nation stamp overprinted 9.6 kuta in 1968.*

Fig. 22: *Airmail cover from Kinshasa to Merville Franceville Plage in France mailed on 6 June of an illegible year. The cover bears three superimposed stamps showing the copper ore malachite. They were originally issued in 1996 by Zaïre for a value of 40,000 New Zaïres, but then overprinted 100 Congolese Francs in 2001 by new regime of what had now become the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The other two stamps, showing a dinosaur, were originally issued by Zaïre in 1996 for 20,000 New Zaïres, then overprinted 25 Congolese Francs in 2001. It is interesting to note that the Kinshasa canceller still has Zaïre as the name of the country.*

It was clear there were rich copper deposits in Northern Rhodesia and neighbouring Katanga. The borders in this area were by no means defined; a lot depended on who could get Msiri to sign over his territory first. Cecil Rhodes liked to get hold of Katanga for his Chartered Company. He sent 2 expeditions in 1890; the first ran into a smallpox epidemic and had to return. The second, led by Alfred Sharpe, reached Msiri at his capital Bunkeya before the Belgians did, but Msiri refused to sign a treaty, because Sharpe had brought meagre presents. At that stage, Leopold II was so concerned that he ordered several expeditions himself. The first, under Marinel reached Bunkeya in April 1891, but an explosion in his arms store forced him to return. The next under Delcommune arrived in October that year, followed by Sharpe returning in December. But the Belgians won the race for a treaty, and therefore gained Katanga. A final expedition, led by Bia arrived in January 1892; it was the most important one, as it had brought a young geologist, Jules Cornet, who subsequently reported many sites rich in copper as well as iron and limestone.

The Comité Spécial du Katanga (CSK) was established in 1900 to administer the domains of the Free State and the Katanga Company. It soon sent an expedition under Major Weijns to Katanga. He established the seat of the CSK at Pweto on Lake Mwero. When he left in 1903, he had established 20 posts occupied by 80 Europeans. Kayumba, to the East of Manono but on the other side of the Lualaba River was one of them. The border between Katanga and Northern Rhodesia was confirmed on 12 May 1894.

Fig. 23a: *Front of a New Year postcard sent by a CSK administrator from Kayumba to Bruges on 19 October 1905. It took over a month to be carried to Lusambo, on the Sankuru River, where it was cancelled on 20 Novermber. From there, it reached Leopoldville by boat, where it got a transit cancel on 23 December. It was carried on the mailboat "Philippeville" arriving in Antwerp on 21 January 1906, and in Bruges the next day.*

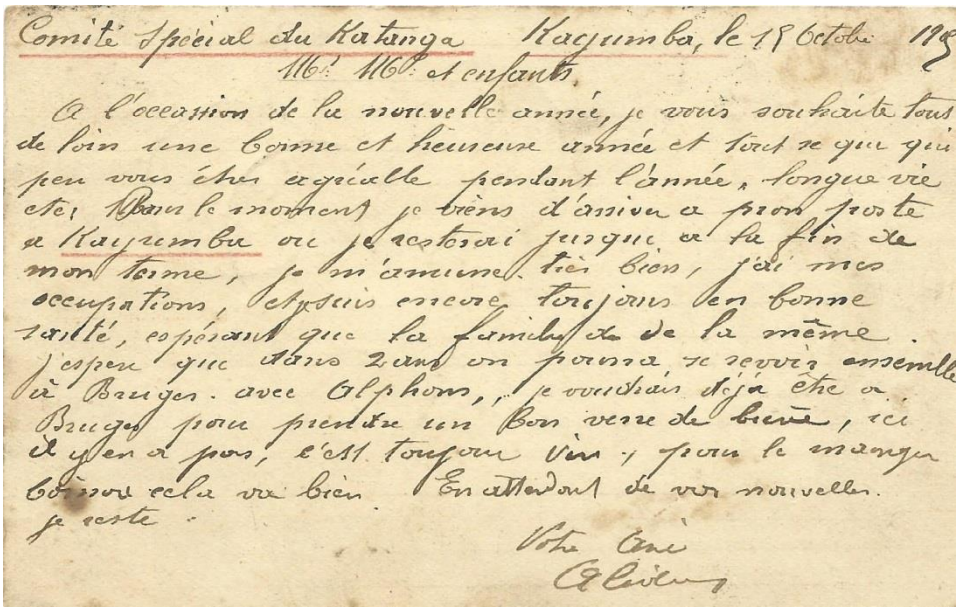


Fig. 23b: *Rear of the same postcard, showing its origin.*

Tanganyika Concessions Ltd was founded in London in January 1899 and directed by Robert Williams, a former collaborator of Rhodes. Soon after, he sent an expedition into the region, led by George Grey. In August of that year, they discovered the copper deposits of Nkana and Kansanshi in Northern Rhodesia, as well as that of Kipushi just across the Congolese border. They also reported gold being carried in streams emanating from the Congo. The CSK had very little mining knowledge, and therefore agreed with Williams that TCL would undertake 5 years of prospecting in Katanga, of which the costs were shared. That work was again directed by George Grey. It found copper at e.g. Luishia, Musonoi, Kolwezi, Kambove, Shituru, Likasi, Kamatanda, Kamfundwa and Shangulowe. By 1902, 52 mine sites had been discovered, and TCL started to exploit the Kambove deposits.

In 1892, Jules Cornet had discovered evidence of traditional copper mining at Kambove, and it was the first site TCL started to exploit, from 1902. After the UMHK was founded, in 1906, the site fell within its large copper concession; the first administrative office of the UMHK in Katanga was at Kambove. But in 1908, the company decided to prioritise mining at L'Etoile, and transferred its office there.

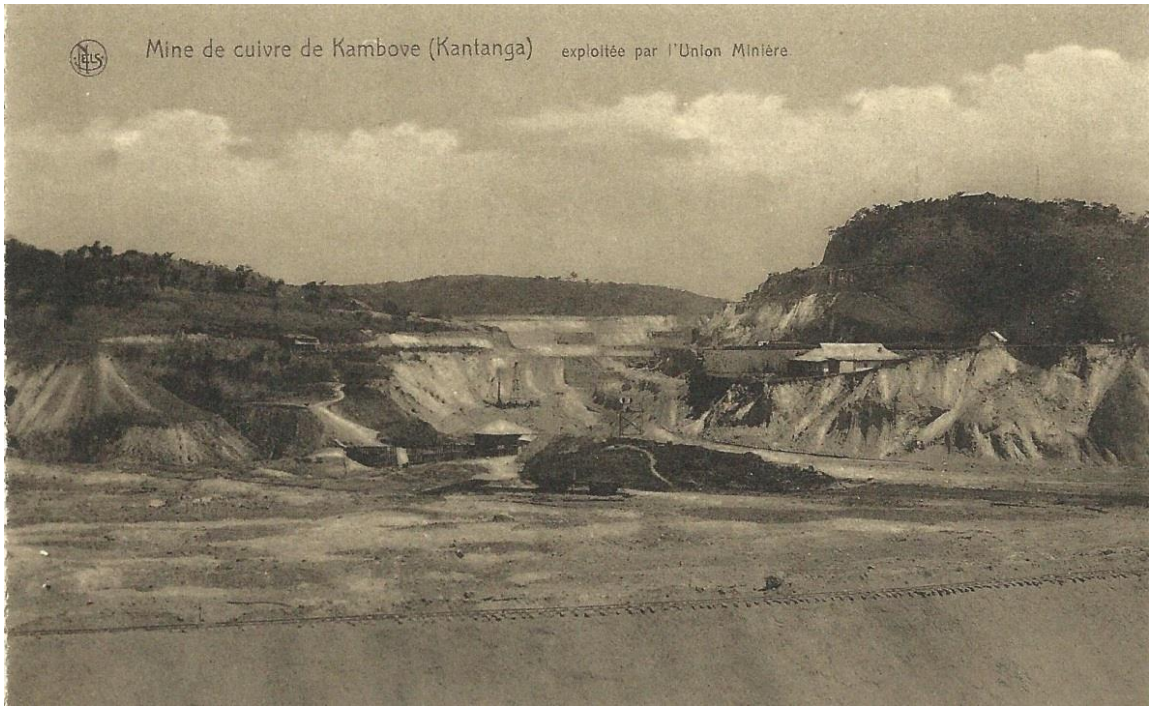


Fig. 24: *Unmailed postcard showing the Kambove copper mine in its early days, but it had been taken over by the UMHK in 1906.*

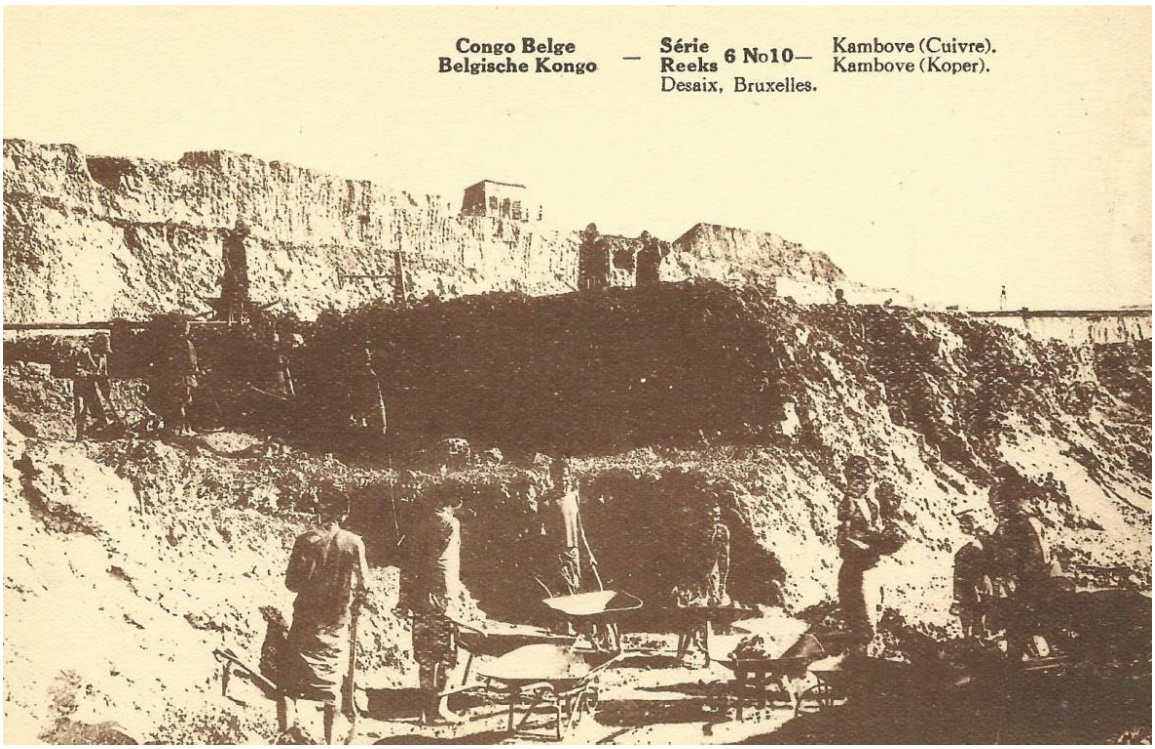


Fig. 25: *Unmailed postcard showing the very simple manual ore extraction methods originally used.*

In 1908, TCL agreed with the Congolese government to form the Rhodesia-Katanga Junction Railway & Mineral Company that would build a railway from Broken Hill in Rhodesia to the Katanga border and take over the Kansanshi mine and other TCL interests in the Copperbelt. In 1929, this company became Rhodesia-Katanga Company. The cover shown in fig.26 is from their office in Elisabethville to the TCL office in Kisumu, Kenya.

Fig. 26a: *Front of a TCL cover mailed in Elisabethville on 8 November 1933, flown to Broken Hill with the Société du Transport du Katanga, receiving a transit cancel on the 9th, and then carried on an Imperial Airways flight arriving in Kisumu on the 11th. The cover is franked with two 2 Fr./1 Fr.75 Stanley stamps of 1931, a violet definitive 50 c. stamp of 1931/7 and three green 5 Fr. airmail stamps of 1921-30.*

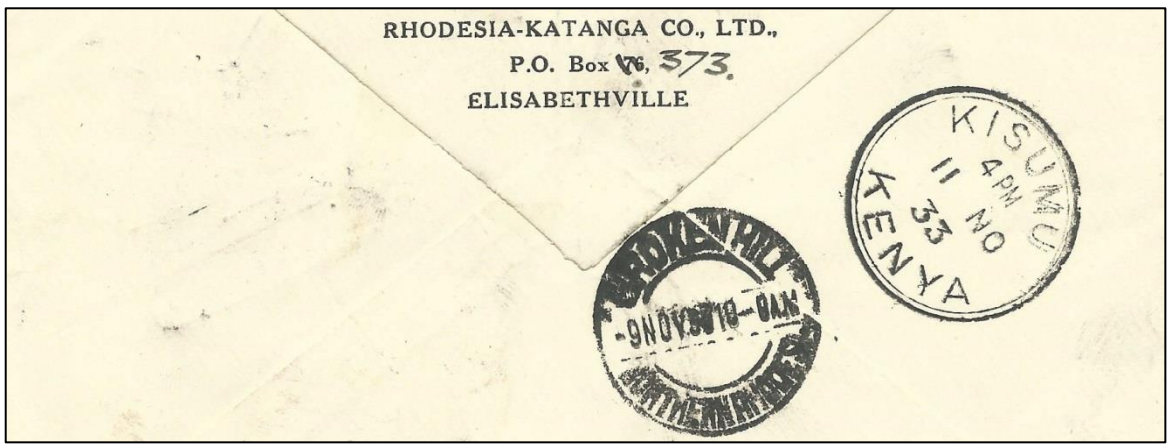
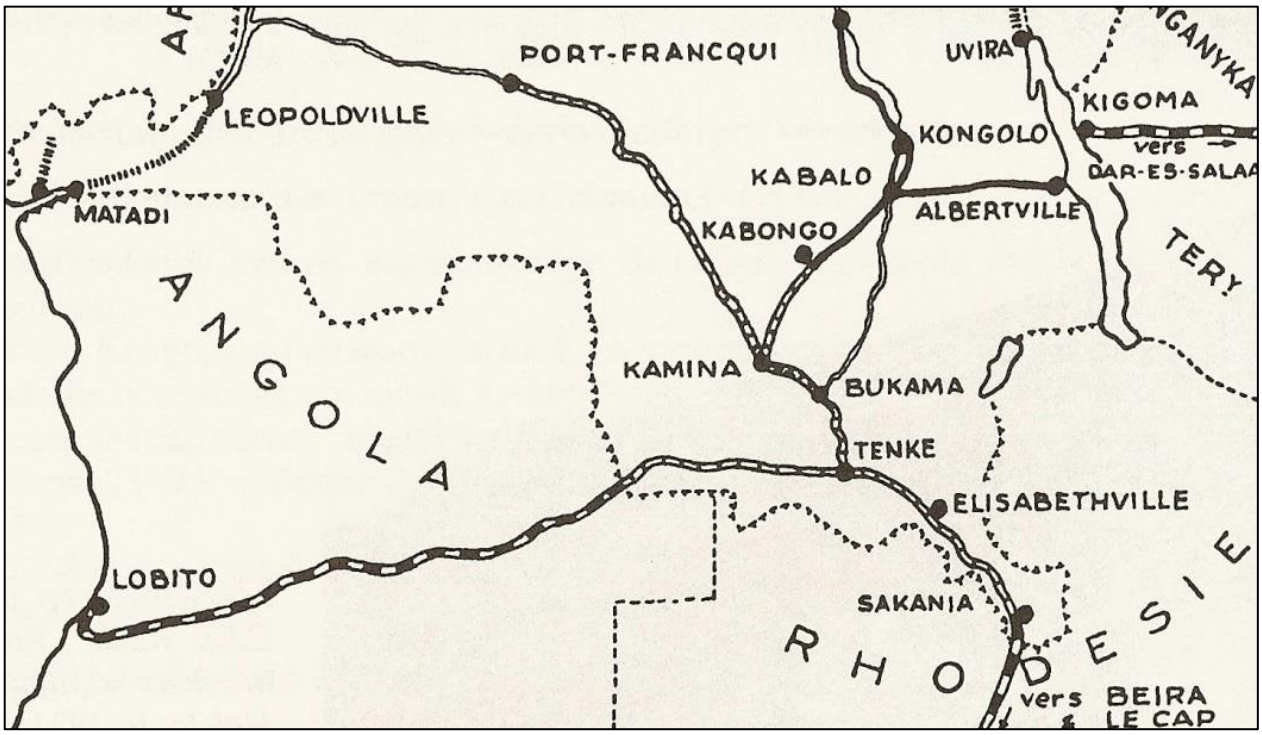


Fig. 26b: *Part of the rear of the same cover, showing its origin as well as transit and arrival cancels.*

The Compagnie du Chemin de Fer du Bas-Congo au Katanga (BCK) was created in 1906 on the orders of King Léopold II, anxious to enable the export of the mineral riches of Katanga. BCK was the fourth railway to be started in the Congo, but in importance only matched by the Lower Congo Railway. It linked up with the Cape railway that reached Elisabethville in 1910 (see fig. 25a), then extended to Bukama, on the Lualaba, by 1918 and to Port Francqui on the Kasaï, by 1928. A branch from Tenke to Dilolo, on the border with Angola, was started late 1928 and completed in March 1931; this linked up with the Benguela railway to the port of Lobito, as shown on the small map below:



Source : After R. Gallant: "De Geschiedenis van de Postdienst in Belgisch Congo (1886-1960)", Vol. 1, p. 278

Fig. 27a*: Front of a postal stationery card Stibbe type 43, prepaid 10 c. on beige paper, issued in 1912. View 2 shows the posing of rails on the trajectory to Elisabethville. The card was mailed on 12 May 1913 from Kinshasa to Amersfoort in The Netherlands, where it arrived on 4 June, carried by the "Elisaberthville 1"*.

Fig. 27b: *Rear of the previous card, showing the cancels but also a message from a son telling his mother he will be in Brazzaville from 21 August 1913.*

The Congolese Copperbelt is an extension of the one in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and stretches over about 70x250 km from Elisabethville (now Lubumbashi) in the East to Kolwezi in the West of Katanga Province. Some ores here have amongst the highest copper grades in the world. At the start of the 20th Century, the only mining company active there was TCL.

A new company, the Union Minière du Haut Katanga (UMHK) was founded in Belgium in 1906, with half of its shares financed by the Belgian Société Générale and the other half by TCL. The UMHK was allocated the mining rights in two huge zones of Katanga, the above one having mainly copper ore, and another to the North with mainly tin ore. The main route for the copper and other minerals from the Congo to freighters at the Cape started on the Katanga Railway at or before Elisabethville, then passed into Rhodesia just South of Sakania, where the Rhodesia Railways took over. This rail route was crucial for the mining industry in Katanga and the Kasai, which partly relied on it for its mineral exports and supplies of equipment. Besides, this route was also important to speed up mail. The UMHK must have been frequently in touch with the Rhodesia Railways regarding the transports of copper and other goods. The cover shown in fig. 28 is an example of that.

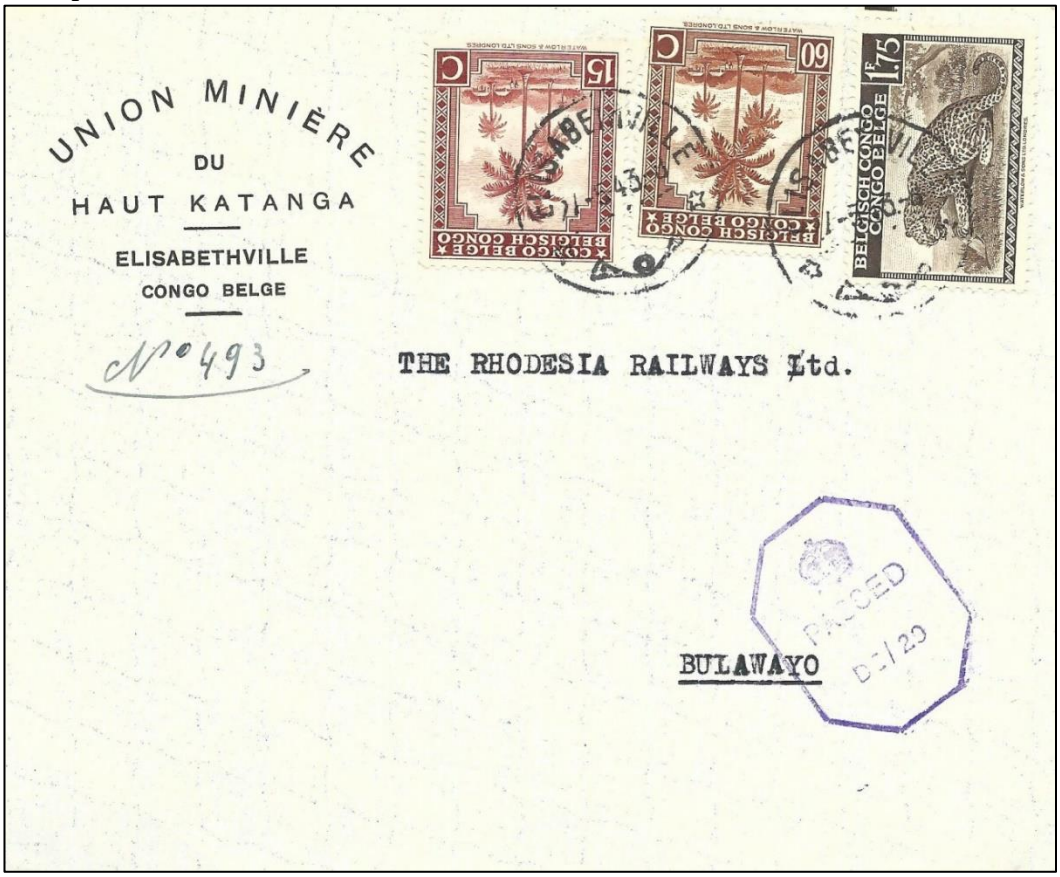


Fig. 28: *Cover from the Union Minière du Haut Katanga at Elisabethville to the Rhodesia Railways at Bulawayo, franked with three stamps of the bilingual animals and people set of 1942: a 15 c. red-brown, 60 c. brown and 1 Fr.75 dark brown. The letter was cancelled twice in Elisabethville, on 27 May 1943 at 09.00, using canceller type 8A4. It was mailed during the Second World War, therefore its contents were passed by Rhodesian censors who applied the DE/29 cancel.*

In 1907, the UMHK started exploring at a site around 10 km NE of what would become Elisabethville, the Kalukuluku mine. An ore body was discovered, and its extraction given priority over the Kambove mine, given that the railway would reach this area first. Soon after that the colonisers re-baptised the site L'Etoile du Katanga (Star of Katanga). Ore was moved from the mine to a processing plant by narrow-gauge railway line, as can be seen on Fig. 29.

L'Etoile du Congo was important enough to get its own Sub Post Office. That opened on 1 January 1913, but closed again on 22 November 1917. Stamps with an Etoile cancel are therefore rare. To the right is an example, on a 5 centimes green definitive stamp of 1915, designed by Mols and Van Engelen. It was canceled at Etoile du Congo on 10 July 1917, only a couple of months before the office closed.

Fig. 29: *Nels postcard no. 72 showing the Etoile du Congo mine near Elisabethville. The card, bearing a 20c. olive-green definitive stamp of 1923 was written at Ruashi but mailed at Elisabethville on 3 April 1925, and mailed to Thun in Switzerland. The message on the front reads: "This mine is the oldest and already entirely exploited. I am 4 km from here, in the newly opened mine of Ruashi, where they intend to extract cobalt."*

When the Etoile mine started producing its first copper ore it needed to be processed and processing required water. A site was found about 12 km to the West, on the banks of the Lubumbashi River, seen in fig. 30.

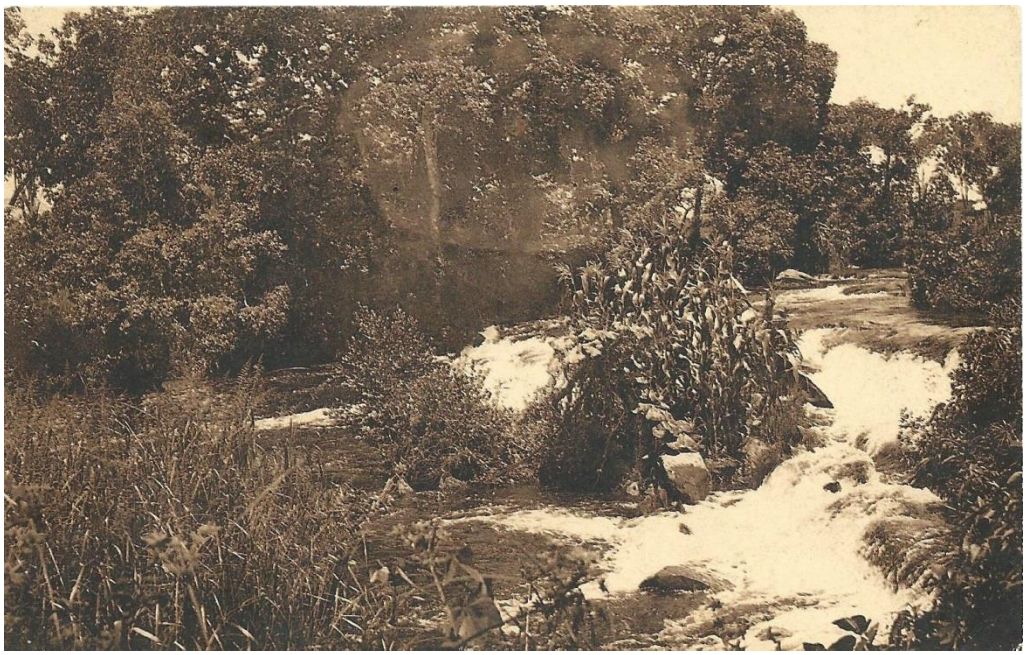


Fig. 30: *Nels postcard featuring rapids in the Lubumbashi River near Elisabethville, written at Loupoto on 9 March 1923, but mailed at Elisabethville bearing a 5 c. yellow--orange definitive stamp of 1923 plus a 40 c. lilac definitive stamp of 1925-27, to Quaregnon in Belgium.*

A processing plant was constructed here from 1909, using a water-jacket kiln that was relatively modern for that time, coke imported from Europe, and local smelting aids (limestone, dolomite and iron ore). A settlement was founded, named Elisabethville after the then Belgian Queen; after Independence in 1960, the city was renamed Lubumbashi. On 27 September 1910, the railway from Rhodesia and the Cape reached here. The first copper was smelted in mid-1911. With the railway, coke could now be brought in from Wankie, Southern Rhodesia, and a 5-year contract was issued for that. More water-jacket kilns were installed; there were 4 by 1914. The postcard on fig. 31 provides a view from the West of the copper processing plant around that time, or perhaps a little later.

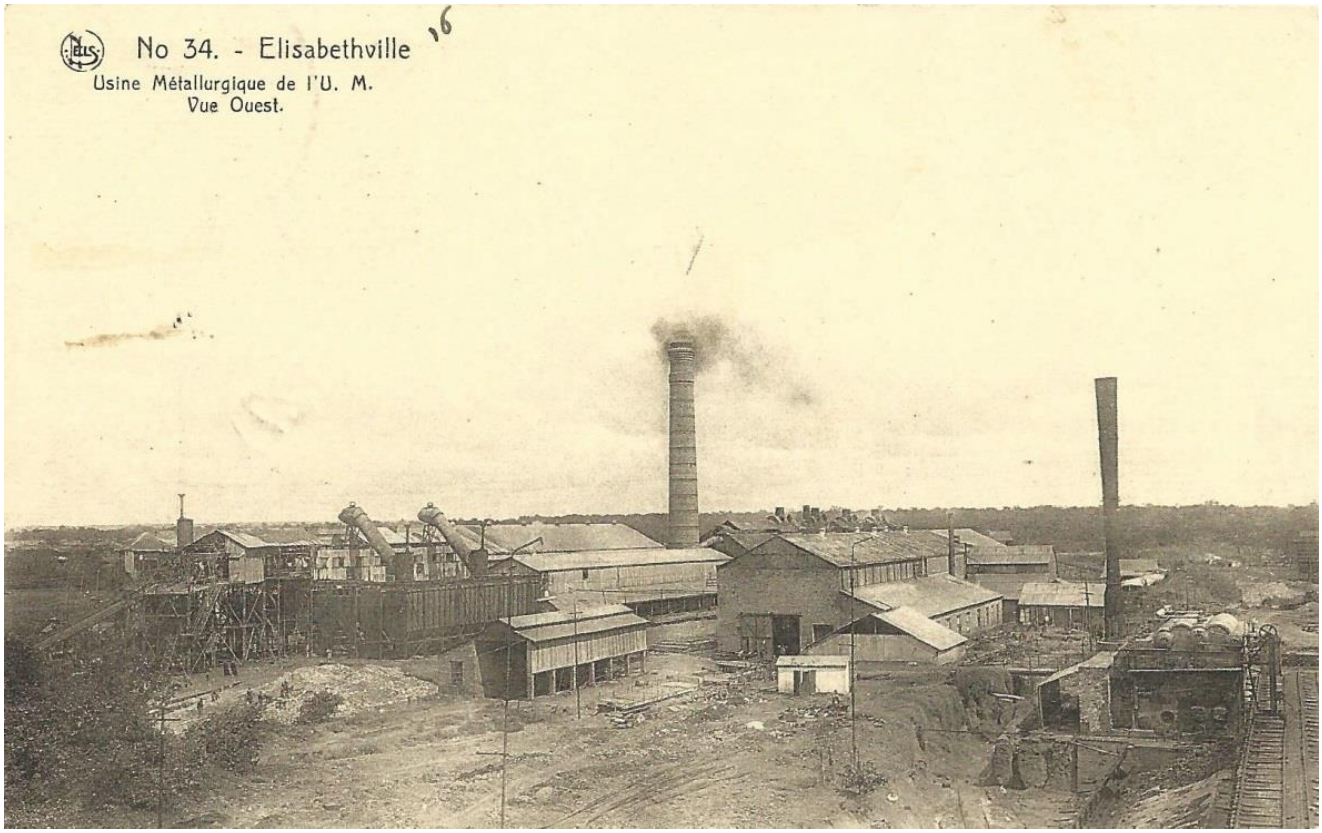


Fig. 31: *Nels postcard no. 34 with an early view of the UMHK metallurgical plant at Elisabethville, bearing a 15c. green definitive stamp of 1916 cancelled at Elisabethville on 15 September 1921 and mailed to Brussels.*

World War I sharply increased demand for copper used in armaments. As the railway moved West, from 1911, more copper ore was brought from e.g. Kambove; two more water-jacket kilns were installed in 1916-17. Production at the Elisabethville plant rose steadily, from 7,400 tonnes per year in 1913 to 27,000 tonnes per year by 1917. At the same time, the plant grew incrementally, as can be noticed from figures 32 and 33. The water-jacket kilns used to smelt copper, shown on fig. 34, required coke as fuel. Importing that was expensive, and in its first years the plant was therefore not profitable. But coal deposits had been found in Katanga, e.g. at Luena, by the geologist Cornet and others after him. By December 1913, a battery of 22 coke ovens was ready to produce coke on the site of the metallurgical plant; a second was ready in February 1914. Fig. 35 shows one of these.

The Ruashi Mine, also at about 10 km from Elisabethville, was another important mine, not only for its extraction of cobalt, but of copper too. Tanganyika Concessions had dug exploratory tranches in the area in 1907, but the ore body was struck by the UMHK in 1919, and subsequently exploited. The UMHK continued to exploit both mines till 1967, when the company was nationalised by President Mobutu and its possessions and claims transferred to state-owned Gécamines.

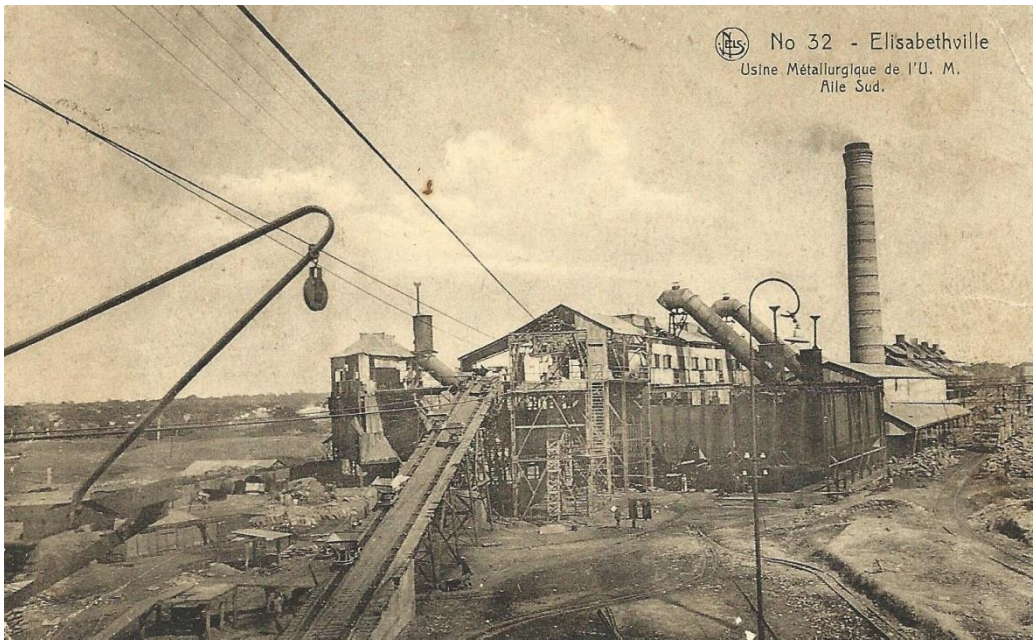


Fig. 32: *Nels postcard no. 32 shows the South Wing of the UMHK metallurgical plant at Elisabethville. It was written at Etoile du Congo on 7 January 1925 and mailed to Liège, but any stamps were removed.*

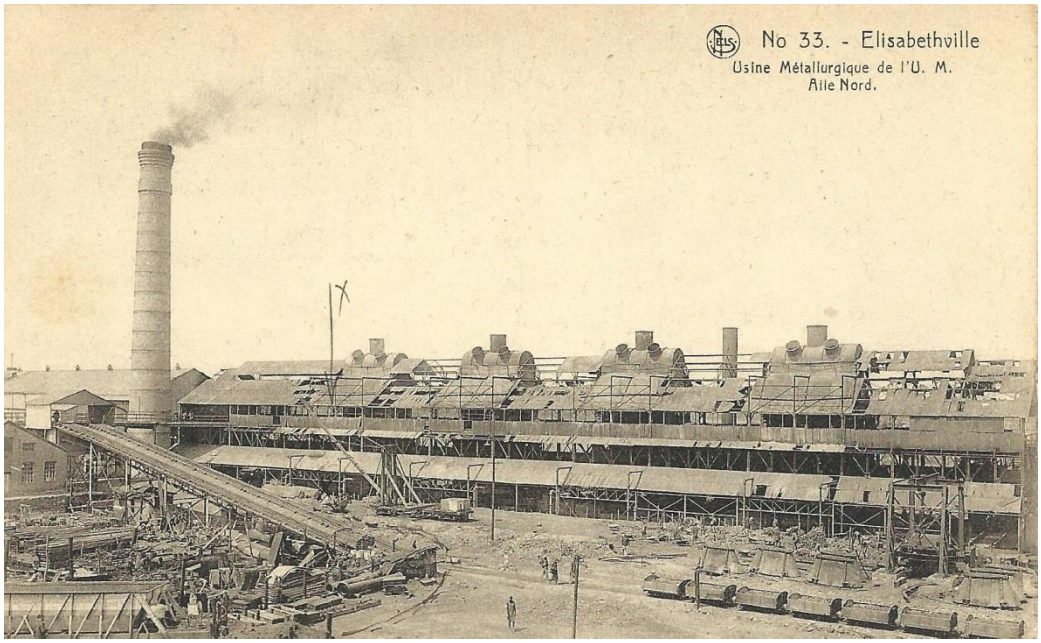


Fig. 33: *Nels postcard no. 33 shows the North Wing of the UMHK metallurgical plant at Elisabethville. The card has a long story on the back, which seems to be no. 5 in a series, but it has not been addressed nor bears a stamp, so may have been mailed in a cover.*

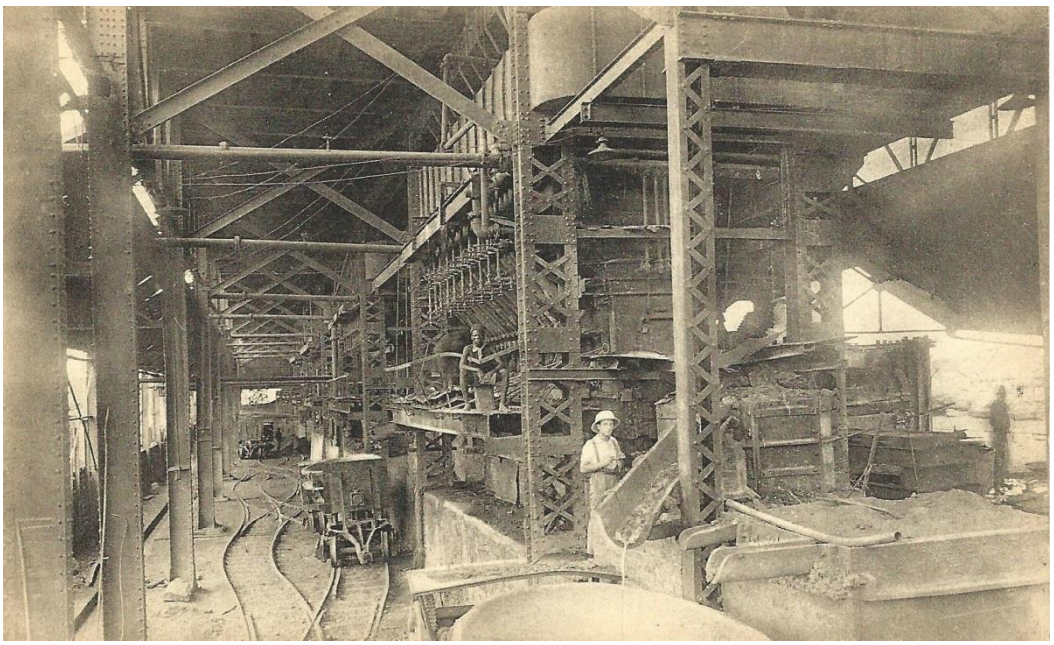


Fig. 34: *Unmailed Nels postcard no. 37 showing the interior of the hall with the water-jacket kilns at the UMHK metallurgical plant of Elisabethville.*

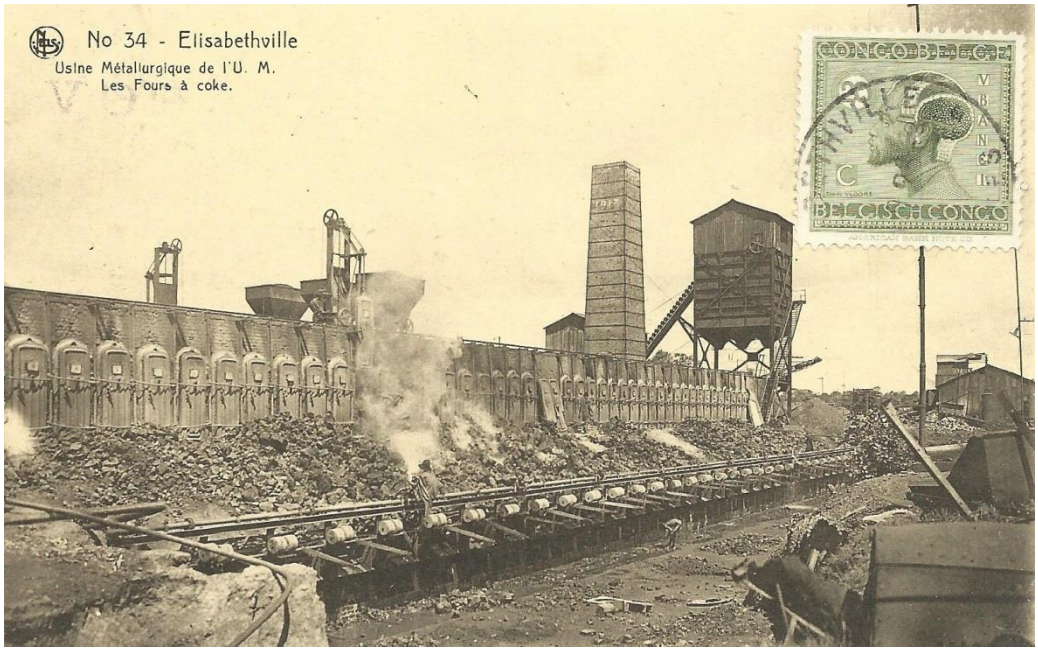


Fig. 35: *Nels postcard no. 34 shows the coke ovens at the UMHK metallurgical plant in Elisabethville. The card bears a 20c. olive-green definitive stamp of 1923 at the front and was mailed from Elisabethville on an illegible date to Copenhagen.*

Around the same time as the UMHK plant in Elisabethville was expanding, a letter arrived there by rail from Lusaka, shown in fig. 36. There is no name mentioned as sender on the cover, so we do not know who was responsible for affixing a stamp of insufficient value, since the letter god taxed upon arrival.

Fig. 36a: *Front of a cover sent by rail from Lusaka to the Union Minière at Elisabethville. The letter was franked aith a damaged 1½ d. George V stamp issued by Rhodesia in 1913-22, but that was insufficient and it therefore got taxed 20 c. with two 10 c. Mols and Van Engelen postage due stamps of 1916. The letter was mailed in Lusaka on 5 January 1920 and received a transit stamp at the rear at Broken Hill on the 7th. It bears three Elisabethville type 1.2 tDMY cancels dated 13 January 1920.*

Fig. *36b: Partial rear view of the above cover, showing the transit cancel at Broken Hill om 7 January 1920.*

In the mean time, the Kambove mine had been linked to the Katanga railway too by 1913, a good reason to start working there more efficiently. The mine started to mechanise in 1913, introducing diggers and light rail transport, as shown on figures 37 and 38. As the war effort in Europe demanded more copper, this helped to increase production considerably. Ores extracted at Kambove were then sent by rail to the metallurgical plants at Elisabethville.

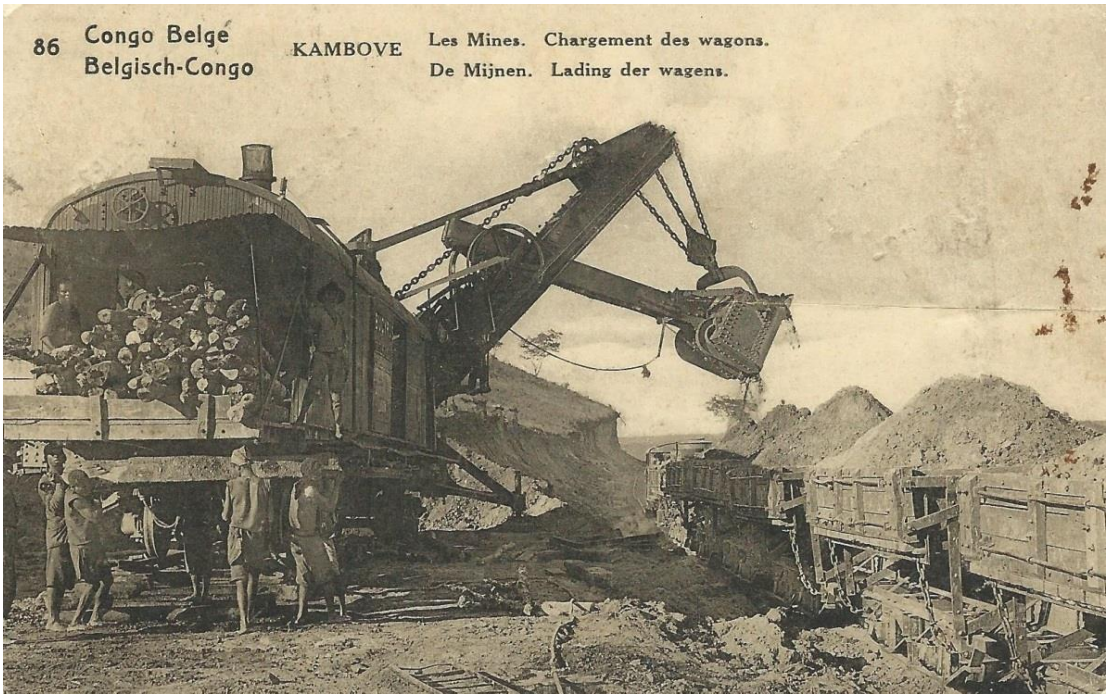


Fig. 37a: *Front of postal stationery card Stibbe type 61, prepaid 15 c. blue-green on beige paper, issued in 1922. This view 86 shows a digger used to load train wagons with copper ore, to be transported to the metallurgical plant in Elisabethville. The card was written on 7 Seotember 1928, bears additional 10, 15, 20 and 25 c definitive stamps of 1923 cancelled at Matadi on the 8th, and was mailed to the Rhineland-Palatinate.*

Fig. 37b: *Rear of the same card, showing the additional stamps and cancellations.*

Fig. 38: *Front of postal stationery card Stibbe type 61, prepaid 15 c. blue-green on beige paper, issued in 1922. View 85 shows a narrow-gauge rail line into the mine with wagons being loaded. It was written at Bolobo on 29 November 1923, bears an additional 15 c stamp of 1923 at the front, and was mailed at Gombe on 5 December to Bouillarges in the Gard Region of France.*

The construction of a metallurgical plant at Panda-Likasi was discussed as early as 1913, but World War I intervened. Nevertheless, the UMHK started mining here in 1915, because the war effort demanded copper. Likasi, during colonial times called Jadotville for a while, is sitiated SE of Kamina, and the Katanga railway line had reached the settlement by then. Research into the recuperation of cobalt was undertaken too. The building of a gravity concentrator started in 1919.

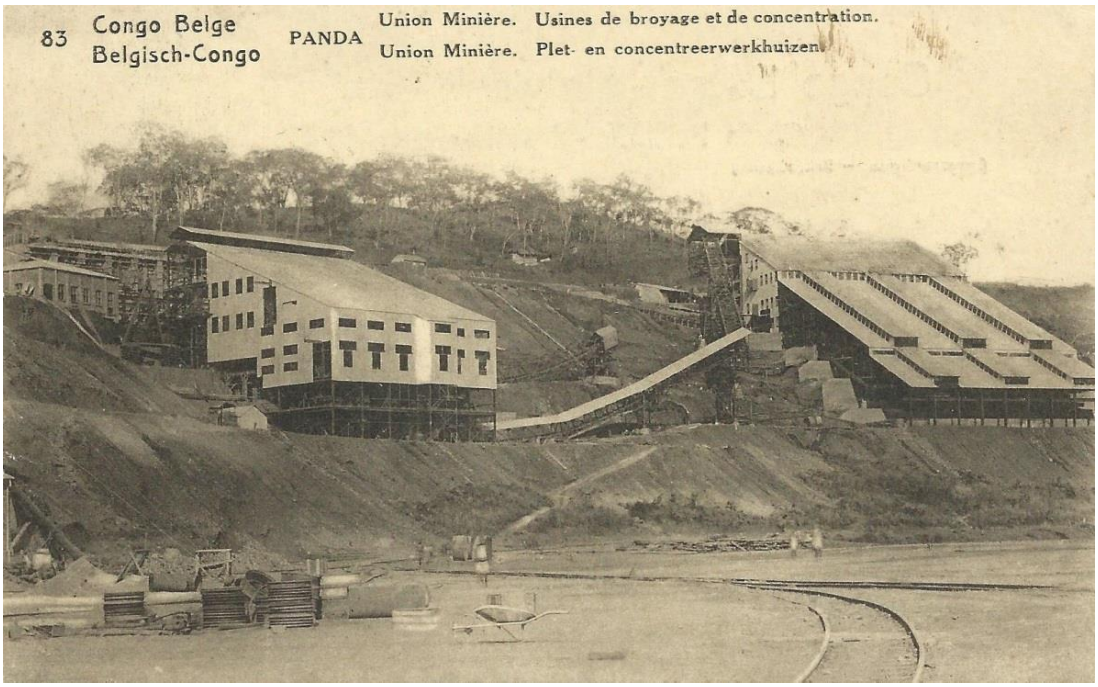


Fig. 39: *Postal stationery card Stibbe type 61 of 1922, with a prepaid 15 c blue-green stamp on beige card, view 83 shows the ore mill to the left, from where a conveyor belt takes it to the concentrator on the right, which started working in late 1921. The card was written at Stanleyville on 4 October 1924 and mailed to Brussels.*

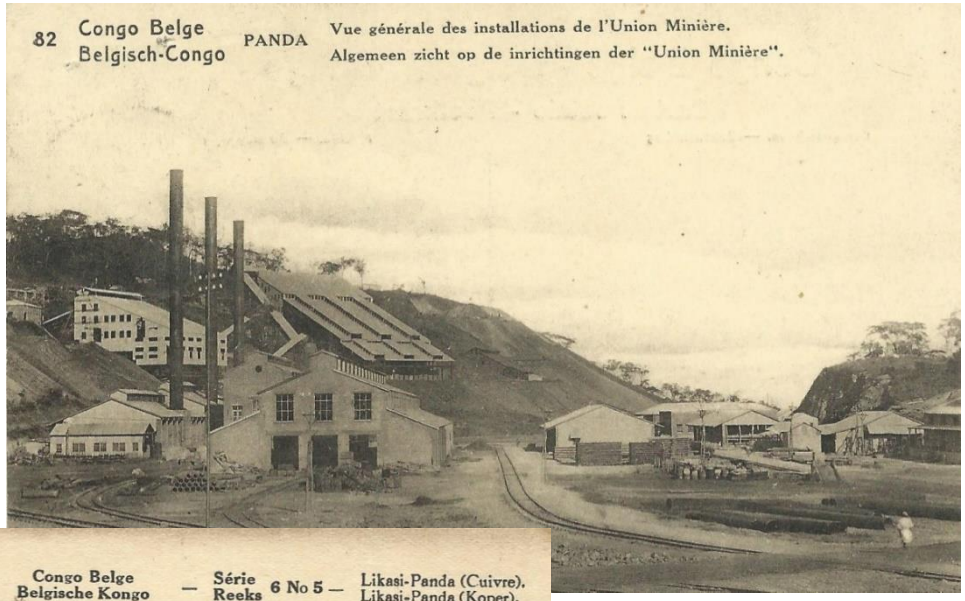


Fig. 40: *Postal stationery card Stibbe type 61 of 1922, with a prepaid 15 c. blue-green stamp on beige card, view 82 shows the same installations on the left, from a different angle, and provides a clearer view of rail access, as well as further installations across the rail line. This card was written at Stanleyville on 1 September 1923 and sent to Brussels the same day.*

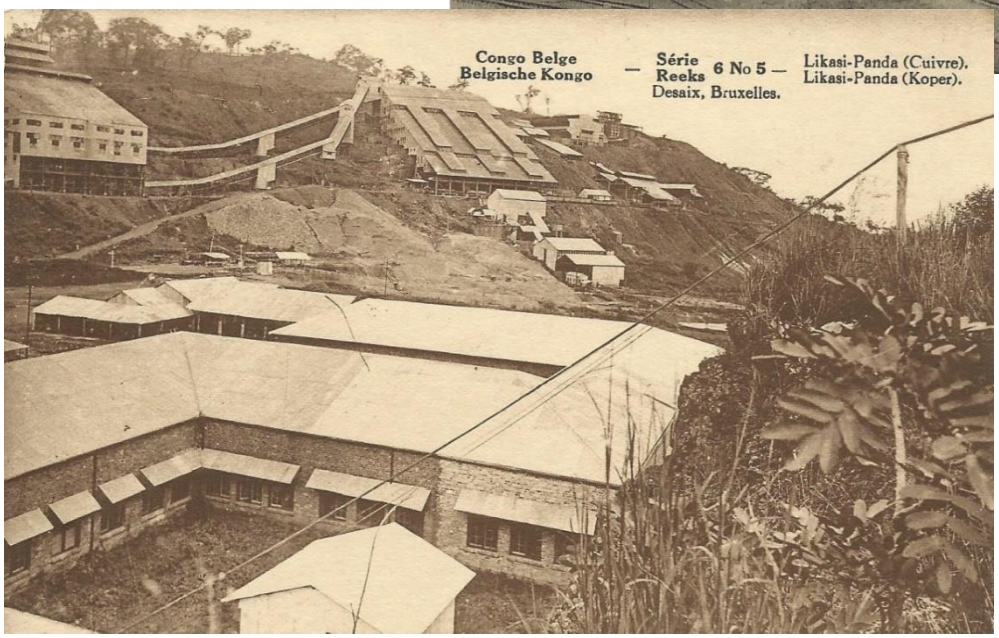


Fig. 41: *This unmailed postcard no.5 in series 6 by Desaix shows the same installation from a different angle, with the experimental leaching and electrolysis plant to the right of the gravity concentrator.*

The copper concentrates were initially sent from Panda to Elisabethville for smelting into ingots. But the water-jacket kilns at Elisabethville did not work well with the fine material from Panda. Hence, further experiments were undertaken, leading ultimately to a new metallurgical plant at Panda, of which parts are shown in figures 42 and 43.

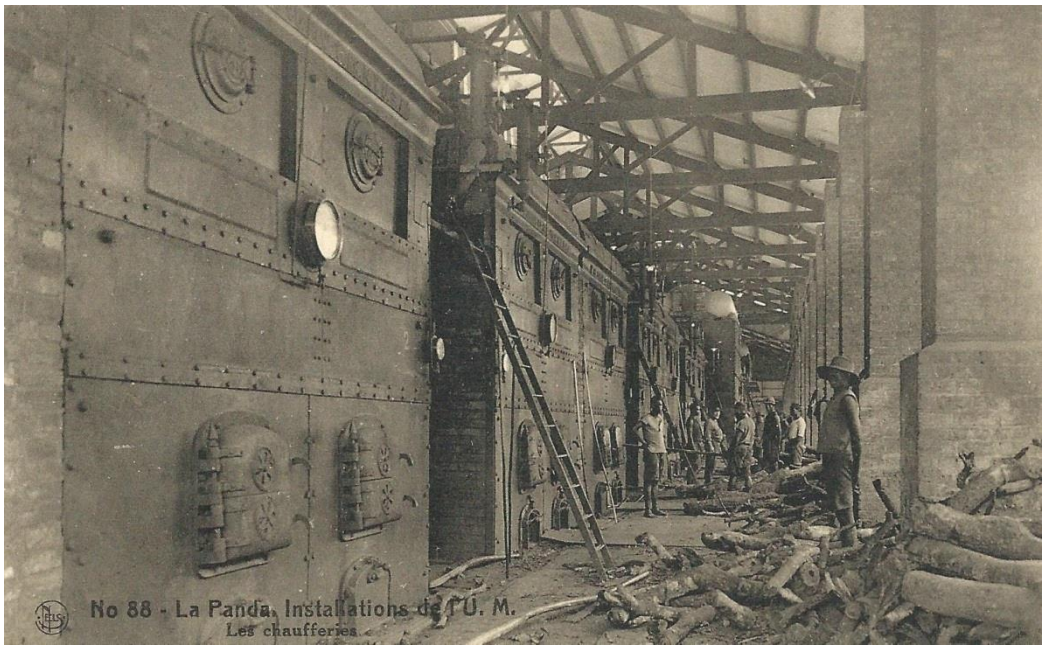


Fig. 42: *This unmailed postcard no. 88 produced by Nels shows the UMHK furnaces at Panda.*

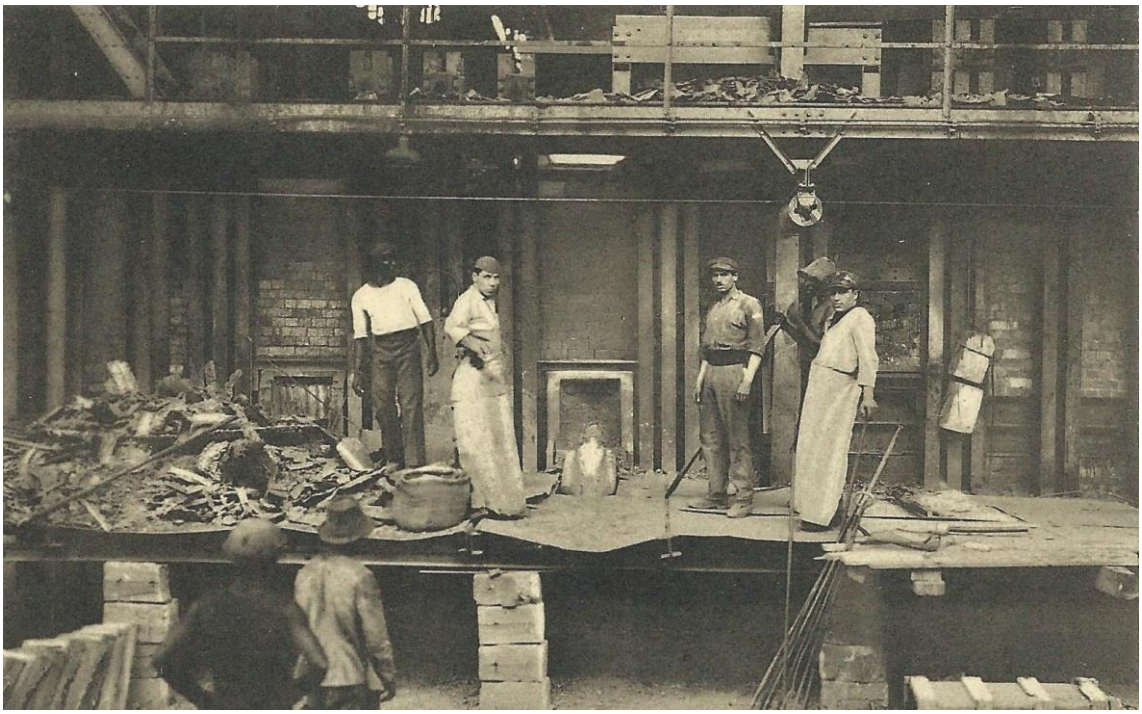


Fig. 43: *Unmailed postcard of the bottom end of the copper smelters from where the molten copper is moulded into ingots below.*

After World War I, copper production near Likasi expanded even more rapidly. By the late 1920's, there were at Panda: a gravity concentrator, a copper electrolysis plant, rotary kilns for copper ore, electric kilns for cobalt, a production plant for sulphuric acids and one for fatty acids for use in a new flotation factory started in 1927; most of these should be visible on fig. 44. Copper processing requires a lot of energy, and if it is done via electrolysis, that energy is electricity. Fortunately, the potential for hydropower of the Congo is huge, and UMHK did tap that in Katanga. Fig. 45 shows the interior of the UMHK electrical plant at Likasi.

Fig. 44: *Unmailed postcard with an overview of the UMHK plant at Panda-Likasi in the late 1920's, from further away than the previous views.*

Fig. 45: *Unmailed Nels postcard no. 87 showing the interior of the UMHK electrical plant at Panda/Likasi.*

A little later an entire new metallurgical plant with a capacity of 30,000 tonnes of electrolytic copper per year was built at nearby Shituru, and completed in 1929. That new plant at Shituru is shown in fig. 46. Shituru is on the Eastern side of Likasi; the site has now become part of the town. UMHK also had an open cast copper mine at Shituru, which closed in 1992. All mines and installations at Likasi are now owned by Gécamines and they raised investments to restart production in 2012.

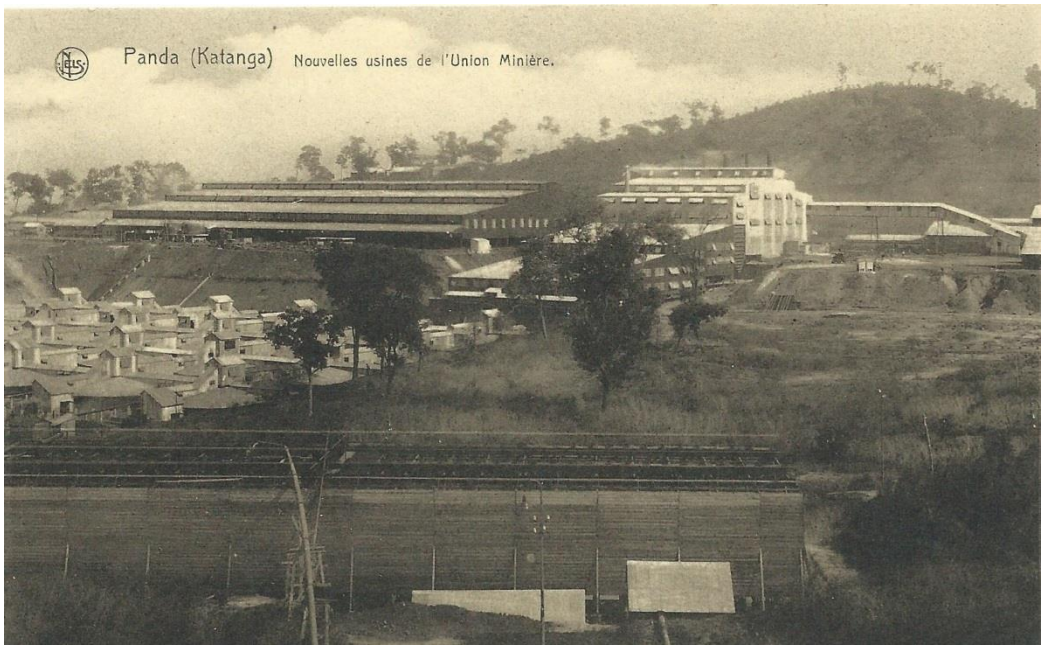


Fig. 46: *Unmailed Nels postcard of the UMHK electrolytic copper processing plant at Shituru in the early 1930's.*

In 1932, Likasi was renamed Jadotville, in honour of Jean Jadot, the retiring governor of the Belgian Société Générale and president of the UMHK, to honour the work he had done since the establishment in 1906 of the three key colonial companies: the UMHK, Forminière, and BCK.

Fig. 47a: *Front of a registered cover sent by an employee of the UMHK at Panda to Soerabaia in the Dutch East Indies. It bears a 20c vermillion Stanley stamp of 1928, a 50c green stamp of the set celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Congo, issued in 1935, and the entire set of 3 stamps commemorating the death of Queen Astrid in 1936, The cover was cancelled at Jadotville on 23 September 1936, and arrived in Soerabaia on 6 November of that year.*

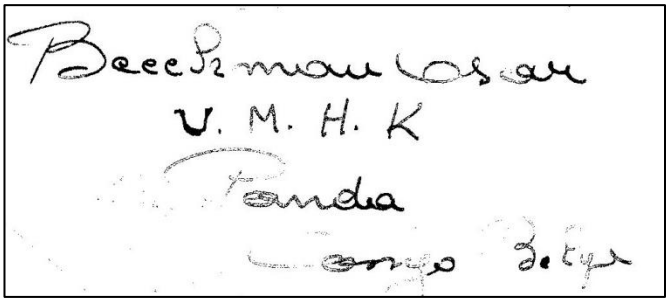


Fig. 47b: *Address part of the rear of the cover mailed to Soerabaia.*

Fig. 48a: *Front of an airmail cover mailed by an UMHK employee at Panda/Likasi to Lewisham, bearing three dark olive 3 Fr.50 stamps issued in 1942, cancelled on 20 March 1946 at Jadotville.*

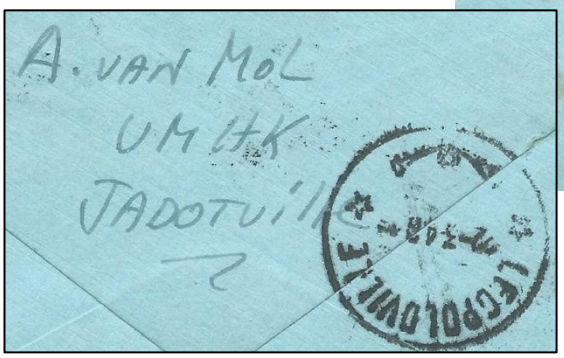


Fig. *48b: Rear of the same cover showing the sender and a transit cancel applied at Leopoldville on 22 March 1946.*

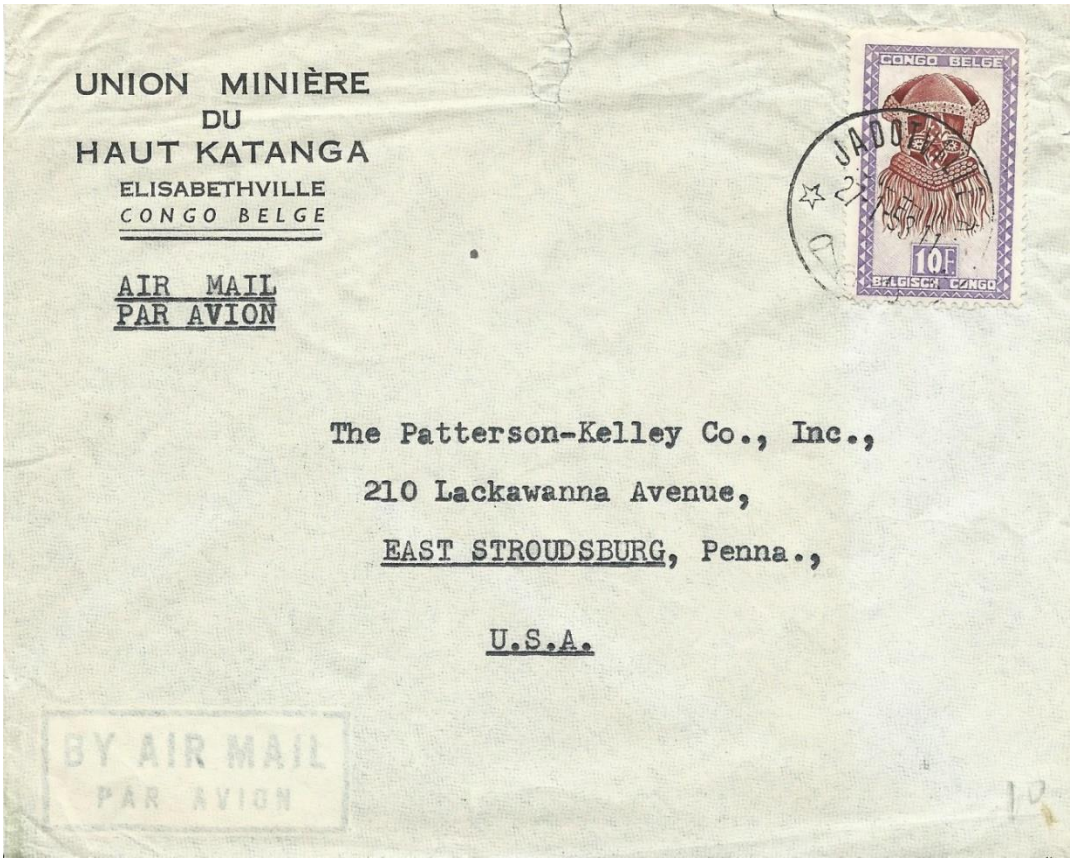


Fig. 49: *UMHK business cover mailed from Jadotville on 27 January 1953, bearing a 10 Fr. violet and lilac-brown mask stamp of 1948-51, to the Patterson-Kelley Co., a manufacturer of boilers and water heaters, at East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, USA. A transit cancel was applied in Elisabethville at the rear on the next day.*

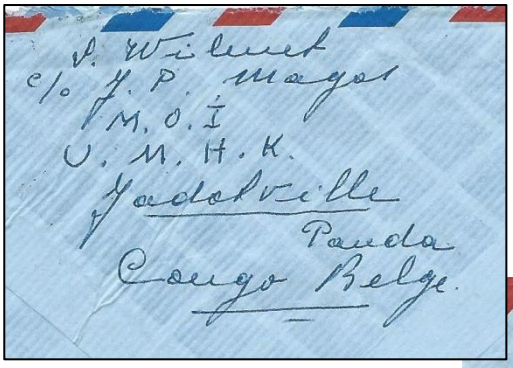


Fig. 50: *Partial scan of the rear of an airmail cover mailed to Knocke by someone at UMHK Jadotville.*

Fig. 50b: *Front of an airmail cover from someone at UMHK Jadotville, bearing a 6.50 Fr. carmine, pale lilac, yellow and brown flower stamp of 1952, cancelled on 21 December 1958 at 23.00 at Jadotville, to Knocke in Belgium.*

Old copper workings were first noticed in 1899 by George Grey at a place he called Kapondo, the actual Kipushi, only 600 m from the border with Rhodesia, WSW of what became Elisabethville. Buttgenbach also mentioned the workings in 1902. The site was only rediscovered in 1922. A mine was opened the next year, first as an open-air quarry we can see on the postcard in fig.51. Most copper mining in the Congo is opencast as the ore was relatively easily accessible and could be mined by increasingly larger machines such as diggers, and brought out on wagons running on narrow-gauge railway lines. Kipushi is an exception, because the richer deposits were underground, and a first shaft for deeper mining was sunk in 1925, and the main mining soon moved underground, with the first ore being sent to the Elisabethville smelter in 1925. The postcard in fig. 52 shows the underground mining plan. The mine was renamed Prince Leopold Mine at the occasion of a visit by the Crown Prince in August 1925.

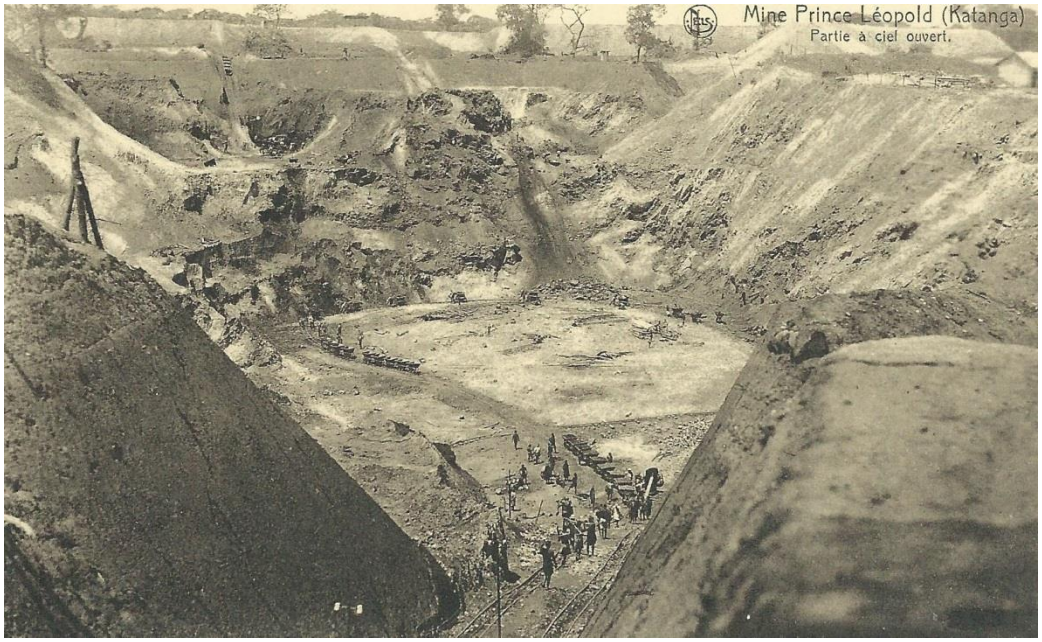


Fig. 51: *Unmailed Nels postcard of the opencast section of the UMHK's Prince Léopold mine in Katanga in the mid-1920's.*

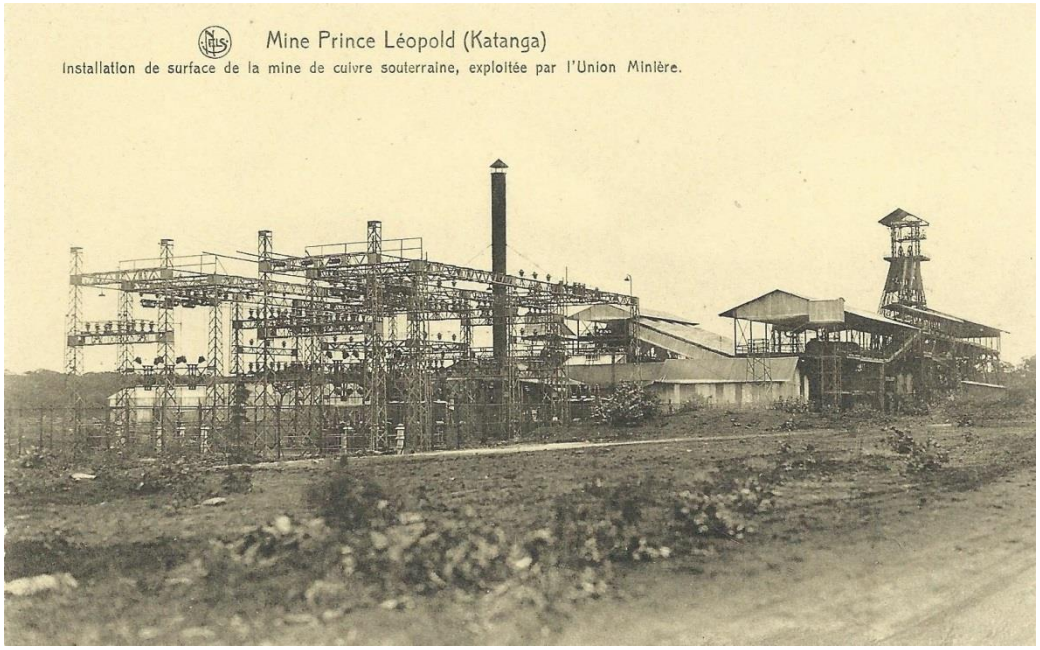


Fig. 52: *Unmailed Nels postcard of the surface installations above the UMHK underground copper mine at Kipushi, with the first shaft to the right.*

Fig. 53a: *Cover mailed from Kipushi to Hugglescote in Leicestershire. It bears 3 stamps of the 1942 definitive set, a 3.50 Fr olive and two 6 Fr blue. They were cancelled at Kipushi on 12 February 1946.*

Fig. 53b: *Partial scan of the reverse side showing that the sender was working at the UMHK Kipushi, and also that the cover transited Elisabethville on the 13th and Leopoldville on the 14th of February 1946.*

Fig. 54: *Registered airmail cover from an UMHK employee, bearing a 6 Fr. yellow-brown and dark blue mask stamp of 1948-51 and a 3.50 Fr. blue anti-slavery stamp of 1947, cancelled on 7 April 1948 at Kipushi, and sent to Bruges. A transit cancel was applied at Elisabethville at the rear the next day.*

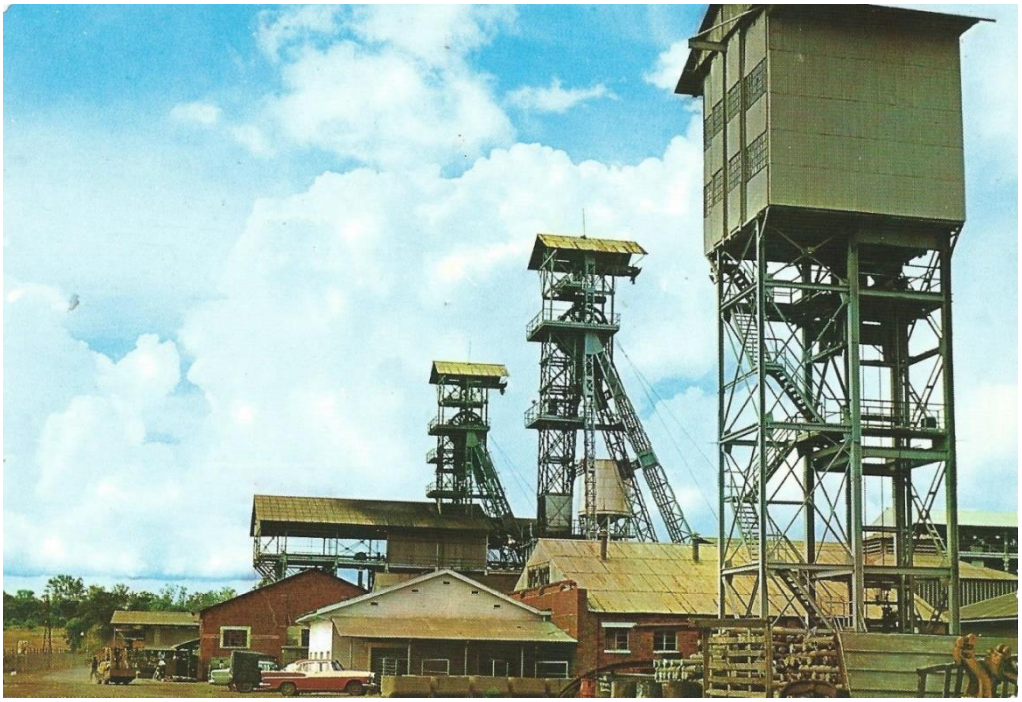


Fig. 55: *The picture on the unmailed colour postcard above is most likely from the 1950's. There is an elevator shaft to the right in the foreground, and to the left of that two much higher headgears, plus several workshops.*

After its start in 1925, the Kipushi Mine grew rapidly. In 1929, it produced 164,000 tonnes of ore, from which 39,000 tonnes copper were smelted. After Independence, production declined considerably, but it only halted in 1993. The mine was taken over by Ivanplats of Canada, which has since become Ivanhoe Mines.

After World War I, and certainly during in the Great Depression, copper prices worldwide fell, and the UMHK and others in the Congo had to scale down their production. But they got out of that slump somewhere in the 1930's, and production soon picked up again. Demand was at a peak during World War II, because copper is used so much in the production of armaments, bombs and bullets. Worldwide demand for electricity was growing too, which again demands lots of copper. And of course, a lot of what was destroyed by bombing, fire etc. needed replacing. Copper, therefore, became a very strategic material, and the Congo, Rhodesia as well as Latin America were amongst the regions who were relatively unaffected by the war, and could therefore supply. This was also recognised by the British Ministry of Information during the war, which produced a series of postcards praising the efforts made by the Congo to keep the war industry going.

Fig. 56: *The unmailed card above explains the crucial role of Congolese copper, zinc and copal in the British war industry. All of the 800,000 tonnes of copper produced by the UMHK during WW II went to the UK. Copal is a tree resin; it is found in the Congo and exported; but it is mainly used for incense and resins; it is unlikely that is can be used for shell cases. Perhaps the author mis-spelt the word cobalt, which is much used in armaments. Cobalt from the Congo supplied all the needs of the USA during the war, but how much went to Britain is unclear.*

Congo became an independent state on 30 June 1960. Soon after, on 11 July, Moise Tshombe declared the independence of Katanga, in which he was backed by Belgian mining and commercial interests. Although the Belgian governent did not officially support the secession, it still left over 6,000 Belgian troops on the ground, who also actively trained the Katangese Gendarmerie. The Congolese government called for UN interference, a UN Army was subsequently sent and slowly overcame Katangese forces and mercenaries. As far as possible, the UMHK remained active, through the fighting did affect mining results. On 27 January 1963, Tshombe conceded defeat. The cover in fig. 57 was mailed within that period.

Fig. 57a: *Cover mailed by an employee of the UMHK at Jadotville to a ladt in Nice, France, mailed on 14 April 1962. The cover bears three green 1 Fr. stamps celebrating the Independence of the Congp on 30 June 1960, overprinted State of Katanga 11 July, plus a 5 Fr. green stamp issued by Katanga in 1961.*

Fig. 57b: *Part of the reverse side with the name and address of the sender at the UMHK.*

"La Générale des Carrières et des Mines" (Gécamines) was established in 1966 by President Mobutu, to take over mining industries that were gradually nationalised after Independence. That happened the following year to the UMHK, thus Gécamines became the owner of all mines and processing plants of the UMHK, including these for copper. Foreigners, including many Belgians, continued to work for the company still for many years to come. For a long time, Gécamines was the Congo's most important company, providing 85% of its export income in 1989, when its copper production was 440,000 tonnes, but the next year the slump started, to a low of only 16,000 tonnes produced by 2003.

Fig. 58a: *Headed airmail cover sent by the Belgian director-general for internal control of Gécamines at Lubumbashi to a family member in Zulte, Belgium, on 23 January 1973. It is an interesting case of mixed franking, with one multi-coloured definitive 3 kuta stamp of 1969, when the country was still called Congo, and three stamps from the same definitive set re-issued in 1971 under the new name of Zaïre: two 50 c.olive and black and one 14 kuta multi-coloured.*

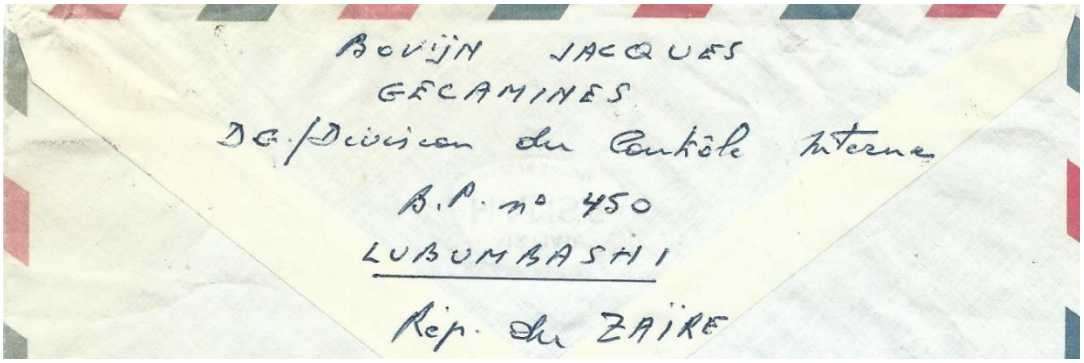


Fig. 58b: *Top haf of the reverse side, showing the sender, his function and his address at Gécamines.*

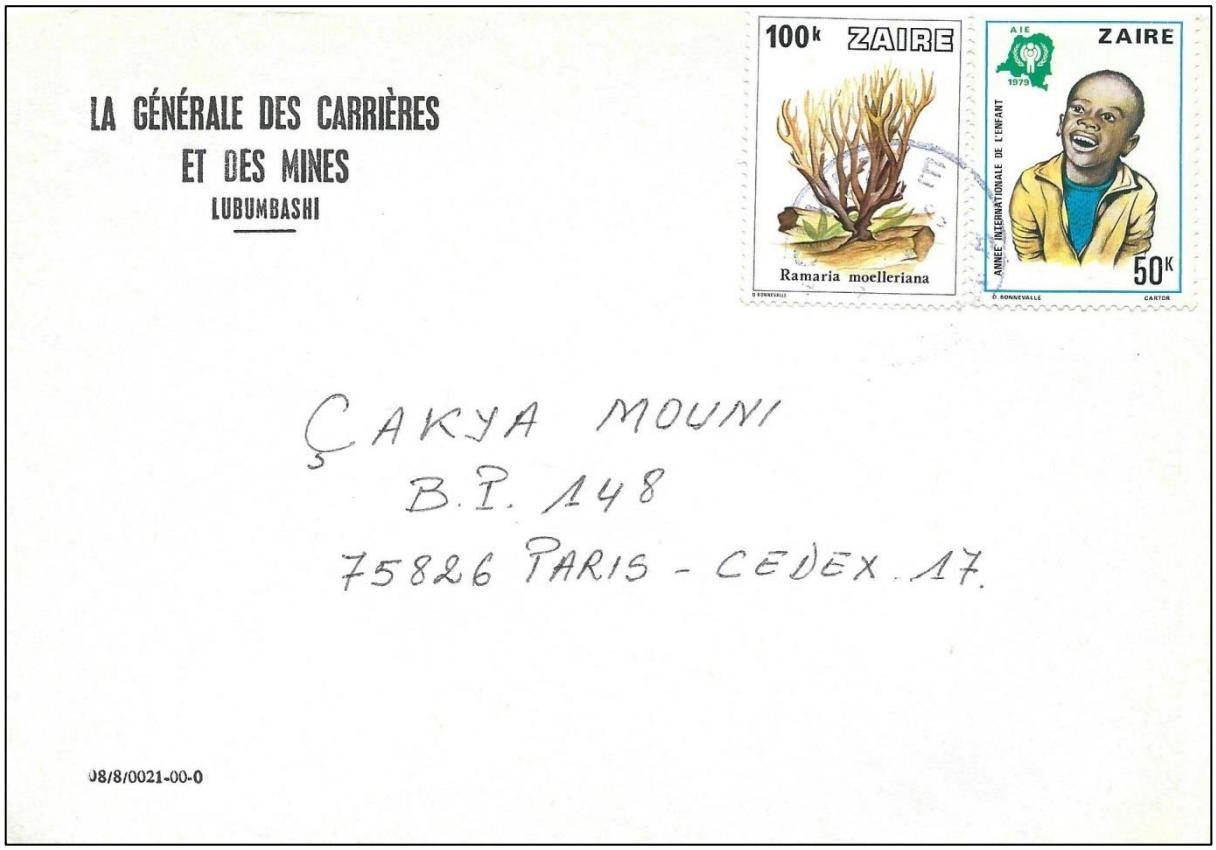


Fig. 59a: *Cover sent by someone working at Gécamines in Luilu, Kolwezi, to Paris. There was a large metallurgical plant in Luilu, processing copper and other metals. Kolwezi was about 300 km from Lubumbashi, yet a cover from the latter office was used. It bears a 100 kuta mushroom stamp issued in 1979 and a 50 kuta stamp of the International Year of the Child set of 1979, cancelled at Kolwezi E.*

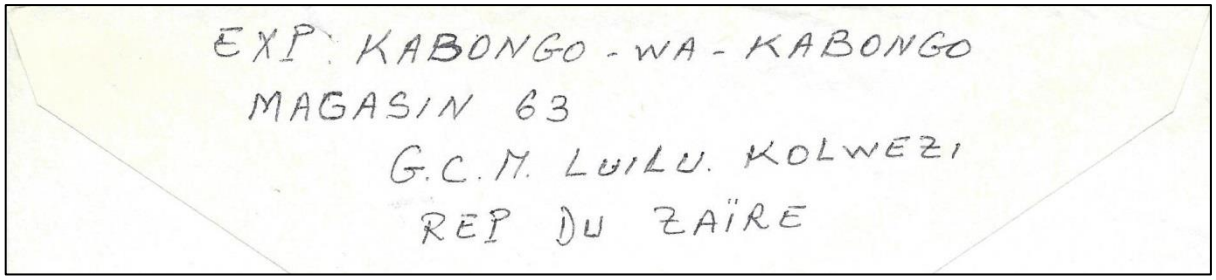


Fig. 59a: *Part of the reverse side showing the sender and his address at GCM.*

The Ruashi and Etoile mines both closed not long after Gécamines had taken over from the UMHK in 1967. But informal mining by artisanal miners continued at both sites and provides a lifeline for many till around the turn of the Century, when Gécamines put the mines up for sale separately. The Ruashi Mine was taken over by Ruashi Mining, a consortium owned for 75% by Metores and 25% by Gécamines. The company has explored the area further and developed a project to re-start mining. The concession at Etoile was taken over by Shalina Resources, itself established in 2002, who now also own the metallurgical plant at Lubumbashi. They managed to restore that by 2007 and to produce 20,000 tonnes of copper there in 2011. There are plans to expand that to 50,000 tonnes in a few years' time. Chemaf took over the mining operations at Etoile in 2003, and re-opened the mine in 2005. There is still a huge slag heap near the processing plant, in the centre of the city. The heap is rich in cobalt and the remains of copper, which Chemaf is now re-processing too. It can be seen in fig. 60.

Fig. 60: *Unmailed postcard, with a view probably taken from a small plane showing the main installations and a large tailings heap at the metallurgical plant of Elisabethville, when the UMHK still owned it.*

Cobalt

Since 1920, the Congo has been the world's dominant producer of cobalt. From 1913, large deposits of cobalt associated with copper were discovered in Katanga, e.g. at Luishia, extending from similar deposits in the Zambian Copperbelt. The earliest operating copper mine, originally called Kalukuluku mine, but soon re-baptised L'Étoile du Congo, on the ENE outskirts of Elisabethville (the current Lubumbashi), had cobalt as a major by-product, as had the nearby Ruashi mine. The former, owned by the UMHK stopped operating in 1969, but it was nationalised as all mines in the Congo and taken over by the state-owned Gécamines. In 2003, Chemaf purchased it and started producing again. Because of the high grade of cobalt in the ore, that actually provides more than half of the revenue of the mine.

Early copper mines, such as the Étoile, also led the UMHK to establish a metallurgical factory along the Lubumbashi river, just South of the towncentre. This factory started refining copper from 1911, using for that time innovative "water-jacket" kilns, but years later was able to refine cobalt too. Pictures of the installations at this metallurgical plant have been shown as figures 31-35 and 60 before.

Copper production at the refinery led to a huge 150 m high slag heap, called the "Big Hill", in the middle of Elisabethville. That slag still contains lots of cobalt; it is now being processed by SLT in an electronic arc furnace into cobalt concentrate for the OM Group of the United States. From Elisabethville, it is exported to the OMG refinery in Kokkola, Finland. OMG holds 20% of the world's market share in refined cobalt. The same furnace also processes cobalt from a mine in Luiswishi, owned by CMSK.

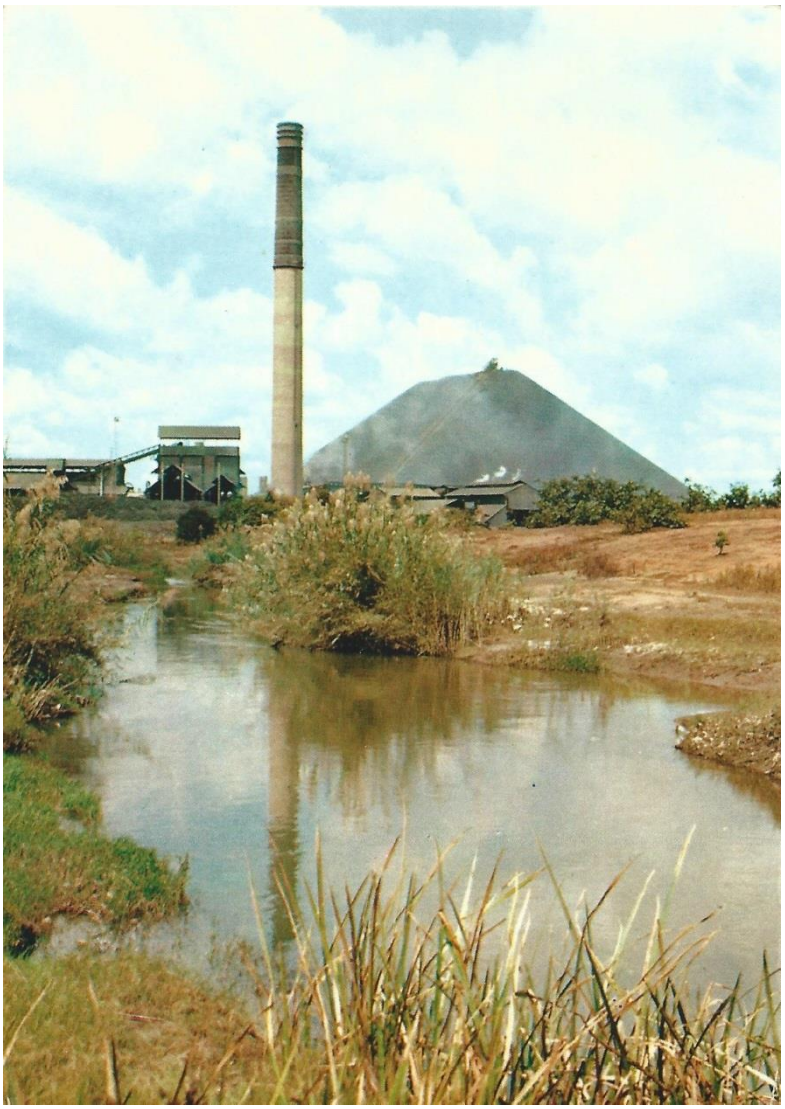


Fig. 61: *Unmailed colour postcard produced after Independence in 1960 of the tailings heap of the metallurgical plant at Lubumbashi, the former Elisabethville. In the foreground the Lubumbashi River, with the chimney of the copper works reflected in it.*

In 1915, another copper mine was opened at Likasi, in the far West of Katanga, which ultimately became the end point of the Katanga railway. That mine also was rich in cobalt, enough to warrant research into its extraction in 1920. That led to the adoption and installation of electric kilns soon after. In 1924, 1,000 tonnes of cobalt was produced, increasing to nearly 4,000 tonnes in 1929. That was sufficiently encouraging to start building an entirely new electrolytic factory at Shituru that same year. During the Great Depression, demand reduced, but it picked up again hugely in the run-up to World War II. The mine and cobalt refinery are now closed.

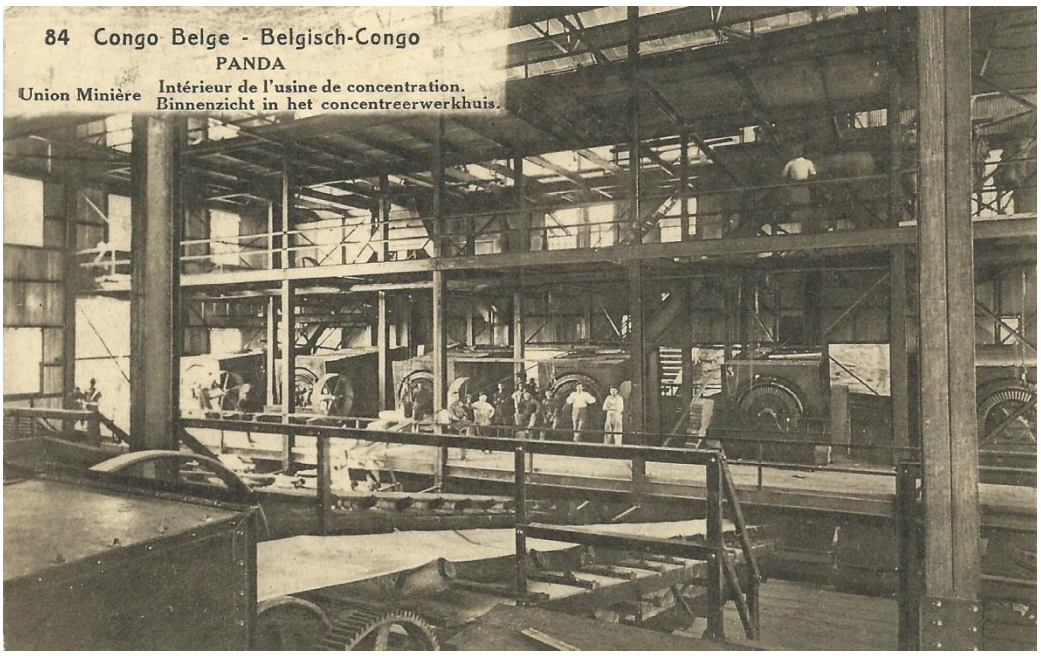


Fig. 62: *The electrolytic kilns at Panda are shown on the above postcard dating from 1922. It is view 84 of postal stationery card Stibbe type 61, prepaid with a 15 c blue-green stamp on cream card. The card was mailed from Elisabethville to Boom in Belgium on 26 April 1924.*

Uranium

Congo became a very strategic country during World War II. It was an important producer of copper, zinc and cobalt, used for ammunitions. As recognised by the previous British postcard. But its uranium perhaps had the most important impact on the war, as it was used in the USA to produce the atomic bombs dropped on Japan, accelerating the end of the war in the East. This uranium came from a mine in Shinkolobwe, a small town in Katanga, about 150 km NW of Elisabethville. It was discovered in 1915, and production started in 1921.

Shinkolobwe was so small that it never had a post office till 16 November 1954, when a principal post office was established, but this was downgraded to a sub post office on 4 December 1956. During the colonial days, it only ever had a single canceller of type 8A1, with a 30 mm diameter single circle. All the stamps below were date-stamped with that canceller:

Shinkolobwe
27 July 1955
on 1 Fr. 25 light blue
flower stamp of 1952

Shinkolobwe
21 October 1955
on 20 c. grey
flower stamp of 1952

Shinkolobwe
23 May 1956
on 50 c. blue-green
flower stamp of 1952

Shinkolobwe
1956
on 6 Fr. yellow-brown
mask stamp of 1948/51

Shinkolobwe
October 1959
on 6 Fr. 50 red-brown
kings stamp of 1958

The uranium ore at the Shinkolobwe site was pitchblende. The deposit was discovered in 1915 by the English geologist Robert Sharp. The mine was exploited from 1921, with the ore being sent to Olen in Belgium for the extraction of radium and uranium. With a 65% uranium content, it was unusually rich; such a rich source was never found again. During the colonial period, no stamps were issued to commemorate the important mining industry of the Congo, though there were several prepaid postal stationery cards with images taken from the mining industry. After Independence, that changed. A minerals set was issued in 1983 that includes uranium as pitchblende, and a miniature sheet of 1997 also shows it. A full sheet of the multi-coloured 1 Zaïre pitchblende stamps issued in 1983 is shown in fig. 63.

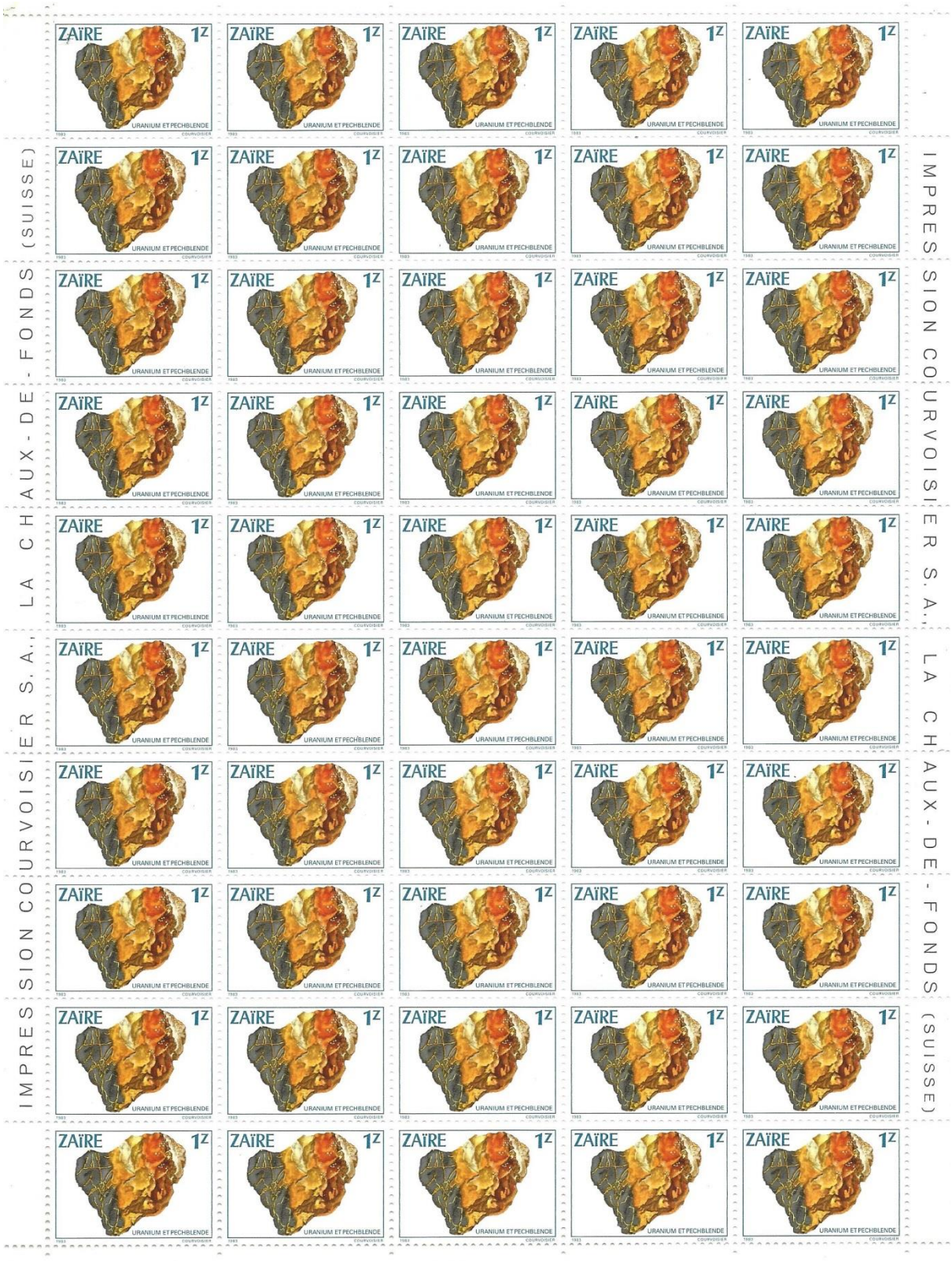


Fig. 63: *The 1 Zaïre stamps showing the uranium ore pitchblende were issued by Zaïre in 1983 as part of a minerals set. They were printed in sheets of 50 by Courvoisier S.A. of La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland. A full mint sheet is shown here in a slightly reduced size.*

Fig. 64: *Airmail cover from Gombe in Zaïre to Antwerp in Belgium, mailed at Kinshasa in 1985, bearing two 1 Zaïre stamps of the 1983 minerals set, showing uranium and pitchblende, as well as a 3 Zaïre Christmas stamp of 1981, and a 20 Zaïre stamp commemorating 25 years of Independence in 1985, with the national flag.*

The pitchblende of Shinkolobwe became hugely important in World War II. The USA used it for its Manhattan project, developing the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and forcing Japan to end the war in the East. Edgar Sengier, a director of the UMHK, had the foresight of stockpiling 1,000 tonnes of uranium ore on Staten Island, New York, as he feared it could fall in German hands in Europe, after a British scientist had warned him in 1939 that the Germans were actively pursuing nuclear fission. He sold this ore to the project in 1942, followed by a further 3,000 tonnes stored at Shinkolobwe. Without those stocks, the project would not have had sufficient uranium to justify building enrichment plants. For this service, in 1946 he was awarded the Medal of Merit by President Truman, the highest award given by the USA, and the first to a foreigner. The Congo continued to supply the USA with uranium ore after the war, but by Independence, the UMHK had sealed the mine with concrete, and it was officially closed in 2004 by presidential decree.

In 1933, another deposit with uranium ores was discovered at Kalongwe in Katanga. This contained dark green, flat-bladed crystals that were strongly radio-active. It was named cuprosklodowskite after Marie Curie (née Maria Sklodowska), in the mistaken belief that this mineral was the copper analogue of sklodowskite, named after her. In reality, it was a secondary uranium mineral. Associated with it were similar yellow crystals of uranophane, also called uranotile, a rare calcium uranium silicate. Both these minerals appear on a miniature sheet issued by Zaïre in 1997, with several comets; it is unclear what the link is between these.

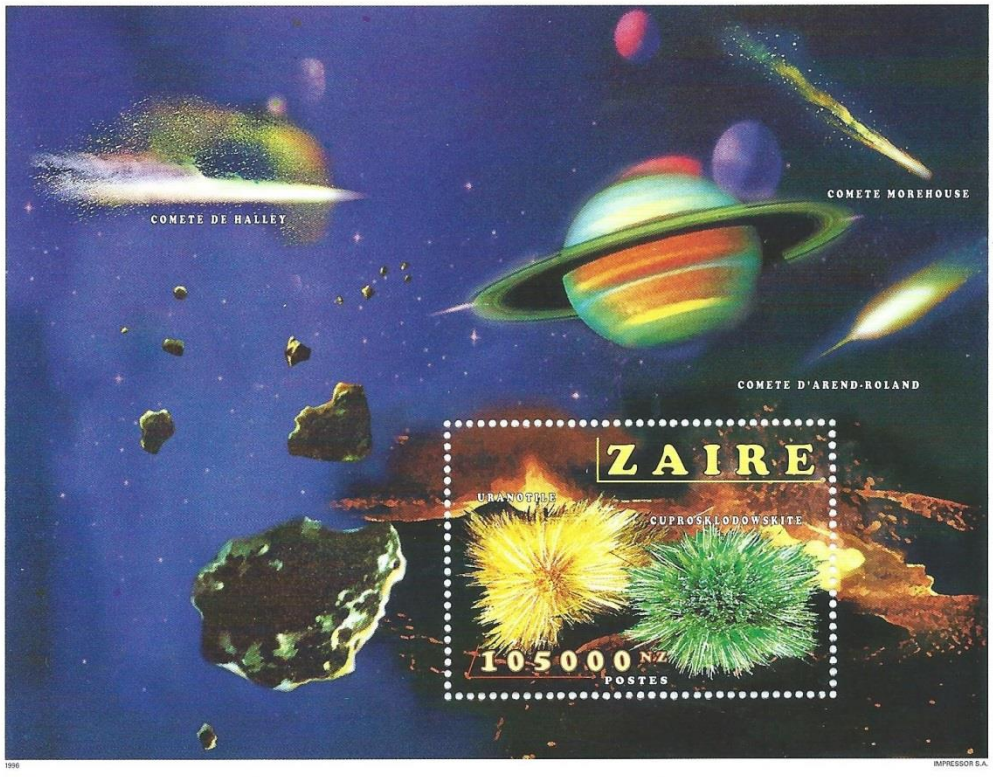
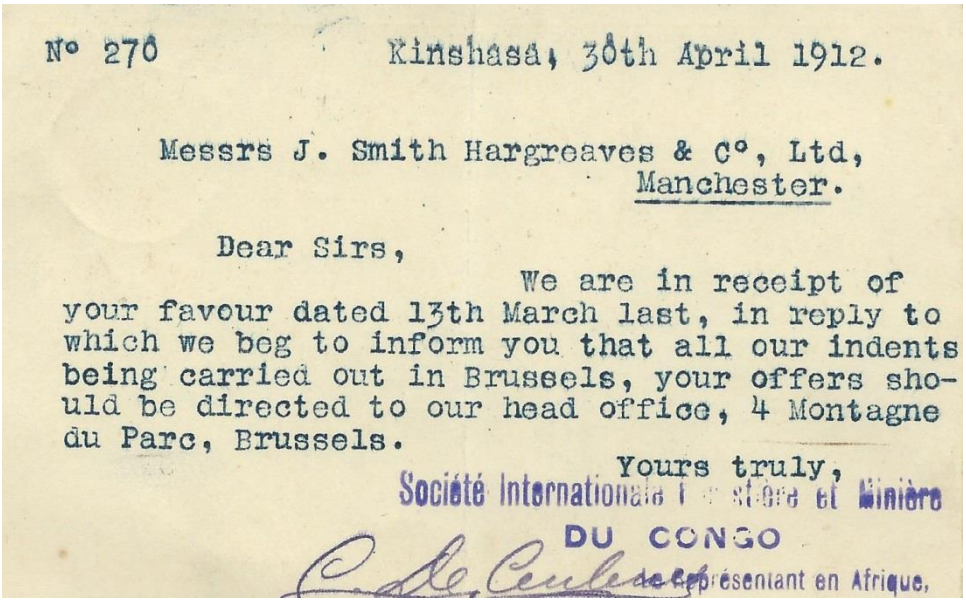


Fig. 65: *Mint miniature sheet of a value of 105,000 New Zaïres, issued by Zaïre in 1997, which includes a stamp with a yellow uranotile crystal to the left, and green cuprosklodowskite crystal to the right.*

Diamond

The Société Internationale Forestière et Minière du Congo (International Company for Forestry and Mining in the Congo, Forminière for short) was established by Jean Jadot in 1906. The company started mining diamonds in the Kasaï in 1913. Later, they also mined gold and silver, and besides were active in cotton, rubber and palm oil. Just before Congo's Independence, in 1959, their diamond production was 425,234 ct./y.



N° 270 Kinshasa, 30th April 1912.

Messrs J. Smith Hargreaves & C°, Ltd,
Manchester.

Dear Sirs,

We are in receipt of your favour dated 13th March last, in reply to which we beg to inform you that all our indents being carried out in Brussels, your offers should be directed to our head office, 4 Montagne du Parc, Brussels.

Yours truly,
Société Internationale Forestière et Minière
DU CONGO
Représentant en Afrique.

Fig. 66a: *Reverse side of a prepaid postal stationery card Stibbe type 37, issued in 1910, 10 c orange on beige, mailed by the Africa representative of the Forminière at Kinshasa on 30 April 1912, to a towel manufacturing company in Manchester, established in 1909 but dissolved in 2004. Its message is asking them to address their commercial mail to the head office in Brussels.*

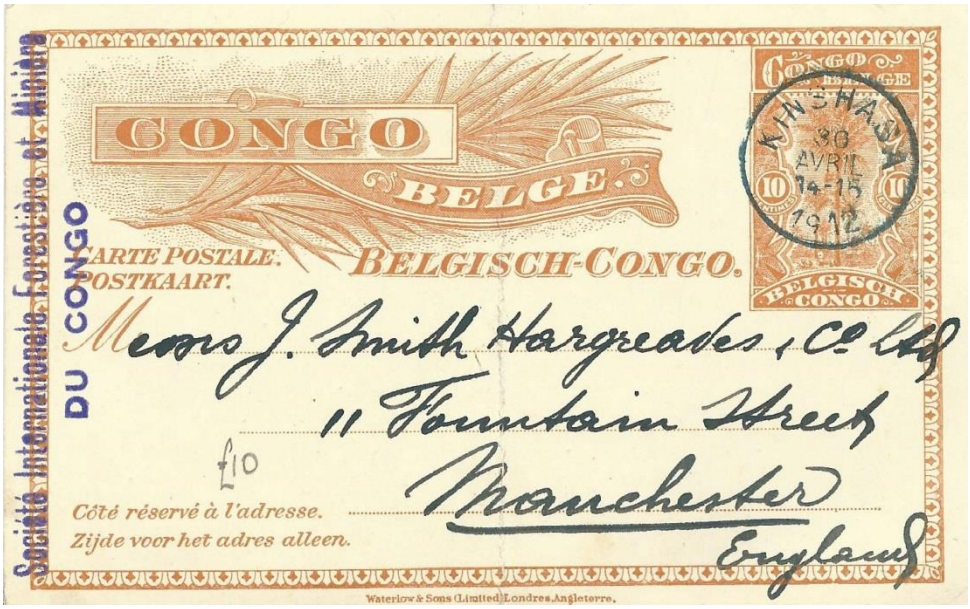


Fig. 66b: *Address side of the same postal stationery card.*

Fig. 67: *Postal stationery card Stibbe type 66 of 1927, prepaid 45 c. blue-green on beige paper, with an additional brown 15 c. definitive stamp of 1923, mailed from Irumu to Paris on 7 February 1929. The card shows alluvial diamond mining in the Kasaï, with labourers digging up diamond-bearing gravels using hoes and other hand tools.*

Alluvial diamonds were mined not far from the town of Bakwanga, near the confluence of the Bushimaie and Kanshi Rivers, where kimberlite pipes had been eroded and the diamonds washed down and deposited in the plains along the rivers. After Independence, Bakwanga's name changed to Mbuyi-Mayi; it still is the main diamond producing area of the country.

Fig. 68: *This postcard shows miners washing diamond-bearing gravels; diamonds remain on the sieves once the finer materials have been rinsed through. The card bears a written text, but no stamp of address, and may have been sent in a cover. It is therefore impossible to determine when this picture may have been taken.*

In 1944, the Belgian Government in exile in London issued a decree that effectively froze financial assets and shares in Belgium, as the German occupying forces had been printing money freely and there had been other forms of deceit and mismanagement. This was called Gutt's Law, after the then Finance Minister. The decree required that all bearer bonds and shares had to be replaced by new ones, in colours differing from the ones used before. The Forminière had to comply with this decree as well, and fig. 69 shows its share issue of 6 October 1944. As can be seen, its Congolese headquarters was at Tshikapa, at the centre of a scattering of mines it owned. At that stage, the company was half owned by the Belgian State and half by American investors.

Fig. 69: *New share issue for the Forminière dated 6 October 1944.*

Fig. 70: *Airmail cover from the office of the Forminière at Bakwanga to a War Pension Fund at Brussels. The cover was machine-franked 6 Fr.50 and mailed at Bakwanga on 20 April 1959.*

The diamond production of the Forminière had been steadily rising till about the time of this letter, reaching a peak of 669,000 carats in 1958. After that, it declined rapidly due to the post-Independence troubles in the Kasaï. The company was dissolved in 1966, when the Congolese State proved to be unable to manage it effectively, and a lot of diamonds were smuggled out of the country towards Angola.

Diamonds were the main reason for the declaration of Independence of South Kasaï on 8 August 1960, not long after the Congo itself had become independent. The man behind that was Albert Kalonji. He belonged to the same political party (MNC) as Patrice Lumumba, who became prime minister of the Congo and made Kalonji a minister. But the two fell out and the MNC split in two: the MNC- Lumumba and the MNC-Kalonji. The latter also was a personal friend of Moise Tshombe, who set the example with the secession of Katanga. Kalonji followed suit, gained control of the diamond fields around Mbuji-Maji, which he made his capital. He became president and was declared King Albert I of Kasaï in 1961.His state was not really recognised internationally, but gained some support from Belgium and from mining and commercial interest groups. The state de facto continued to exist till October 1961.

Initially, the Post of South Kasaï used remaining Belgian Congo stamps or stamps that had already been overprinted CONGO. Then they started overprinting Belgian Congo stamps, initially with ETAT MINIER SUD-KASAI (mining State of South Kasaï, a clear reference to why the state existed), but these were never formally issued, as the name quickly changed to ETAT AUTONOME DU SUD-KASAI (Autonomous State of South-Kasaï), and the overprints changed accordingly. A rare and valuable example of such a set are two Olympic Games stamps with a surcharge for youth works issued by the Belgian Congo in 1960, overprinted and re-valued by South-Kasaï in 1961:

2 Fr. on 50 + 25 c. ultramarine

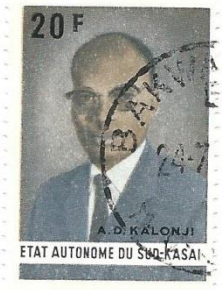
5 Fr. on 1 Fr.50 + 50 c. red

Towards the middle of 1961, South-Kasaï managed to have its own sets of stamps printed, A first set, featuring leopard heads in between the legs of a large V was issued on June 20, 1961, but taken out of use on 20 October 1961. On 10 September of that year followed another set, featuring King Albert I (Kalonji) of South-Kasaï himself; it was also taken out of circulation on 20 October. It is not even listed in all catalogues, and is very rare on mail or cancelled. The set below is actually mint, but has been cancelled to order.

6 Fr.50 grey

9 Fr. brown

14 Fr.50 olive



20 Fr. violet

Another company to get involved in mining diamonds in the Kasaï was Beceka *(*La Société Minière du Beceka, *o*r Mining Company of the Beceka). It was only established in 1919, but rapidly became more important than the Forminière in terms of mining the diamonds of the Kasaï, near Bakwanga, which became Mbuyimayi after Independence. In 1961, the company transferred its assets to a new company, MIBA (*"*Société Minière de Bakwanga, or Mining Company of Bakwanga). Its production in 1959 was 14.1 million carats, going up to a record 16 million in 1961. A rapid fall in production occurred, to 1.4 million carats of (mainly industrial) diamonds by 1963, due to unrest resulting from the establishment of the Independent Mining State of South-Kasaï. The informal production of diamonds at that stage was much larger, with an estimated 4-6 million carats, smuggled out of the country, indicating that the company and the state had lost control of a sector that was previously strongly supervised.

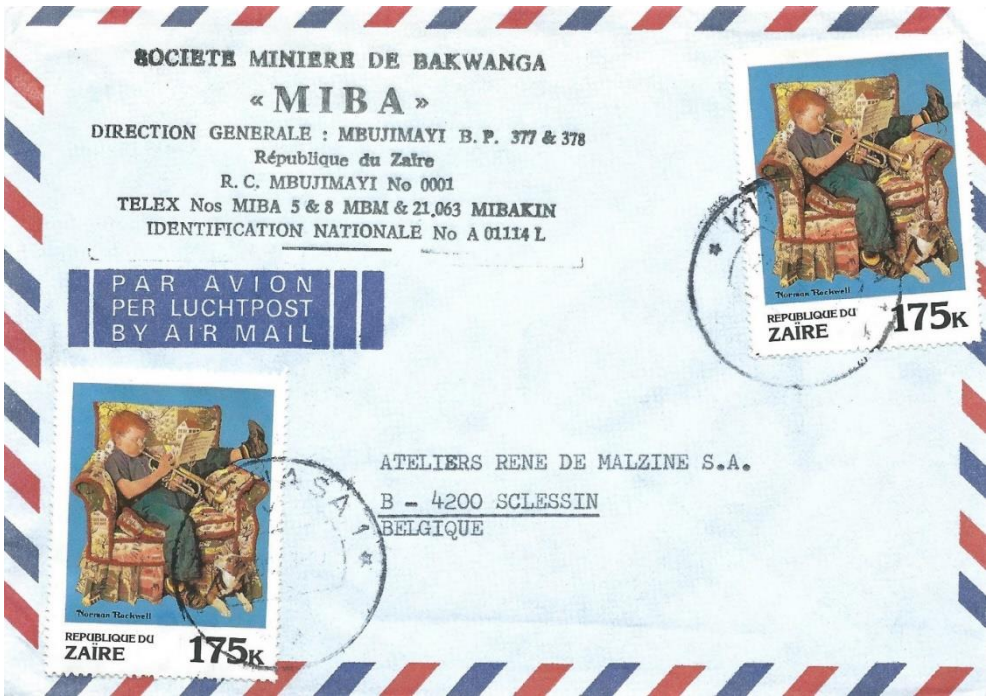


Fig. 71: *This cover was sent by airmail from the MIBA office in Kinshasa to Sclessin in Belgium in 1982. It bears two 175 kuta stamps from the set commemorating the American illustrator Norman Rockwell issued by Zaïre in 1981. The Ateliers of Rene de Malzine in Sclessin were a producer of industrial gearing mechanisms.*

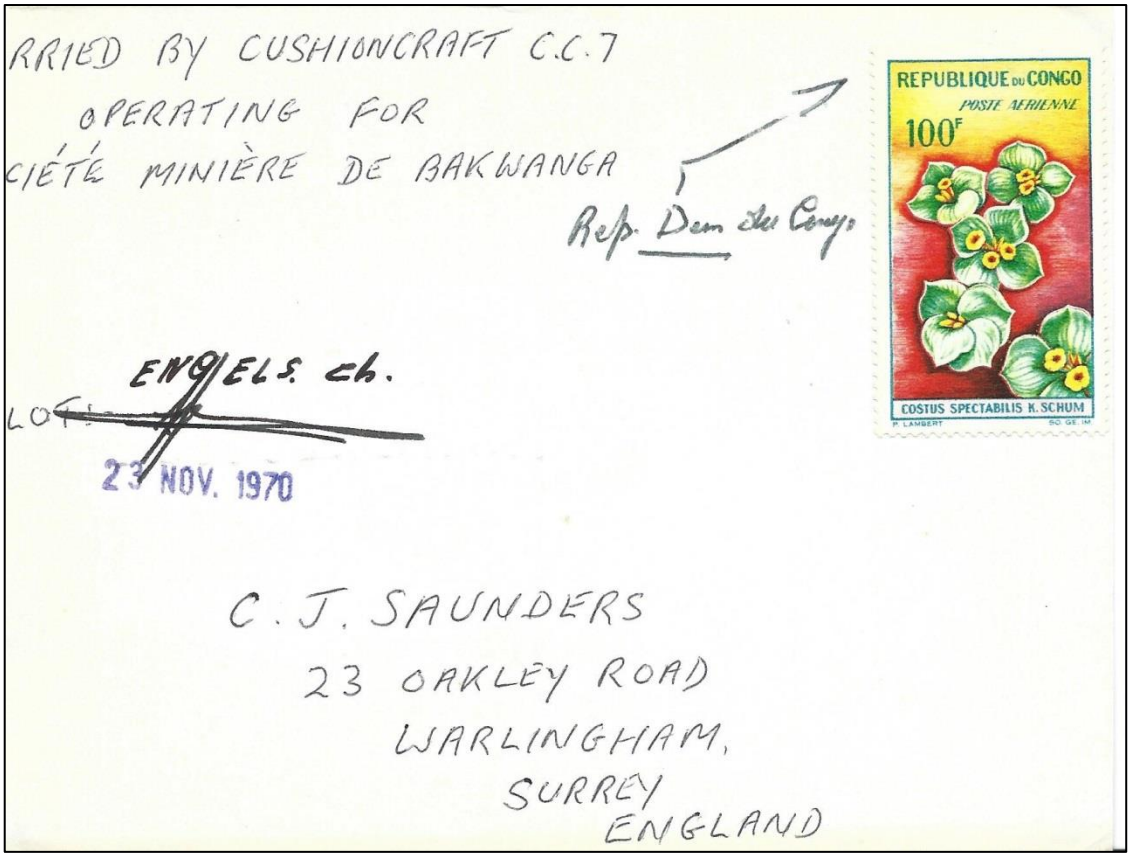


Fig.72: *Cover said to have been carried by cushioncraft for the MIBA, with signature of the pilot on 23 November 1970, mailed to Warlingham. It bears, however, a 100 Fr airmail stamp issued by Congo-Brazzaville in 1963, which has not been cancelled. This cover may be fake; I would appreciate to receive readers' opinions on it.*

Some sources claim that the Congo is the fourth largest producer of diamonds, after Angola, and now exports 8% of world production. But production suffered many ups and downs since Independence, largely because diamonds were a valuable commodity and therefore attracted war-faring parties who financed their arms supplies with them, not unlike what happened in e.g. Angola and Sierra Leone. In 2004, for instance, much of the diamond producing areas of the Congo were in rebel hands, and the country was struck off the register under the Kimberley Process, for exporting blood diamonds. That diminished trade considerably for a while, until re-admission in 2007. Much of the production to-date is small-scale and informal, not unlike what happened in the 1920's, e.g. at Dipumba and Matimbu, where villagers work those mines in very dangerous conditions, sometimes underground. The one major producer in the formal sector nowadays is the MIBA, owned for 80% by the State and for 20% by SIBEKA of Belgium, in which De Beers had a one-fifth share.

After Independence, several stamps were issued featuring diamonds:

9.8 kuta blue and gold mint stamp of 1969 issued at the occasion of the Kinshasa International Fair, showing a rough diamond

480 FC light blue and grey mint stamp of 2002 with a rough diamond and a pendoloque cut gem diamond

Fig. 73a: *Cover sent from Kinshasa to Merville Franceuille Plage in France, mailed on February 13th, 2002, with 3 stamps showing a rough diamond on the front and another 6 on the back. These were issued in 1996, when Congo was still called Zaïre, and over-printed some years later with the new name Democratic Republic of the Congo, and a new value of 45 FC.*

Fig. 73b: *Most of the reverse side of the same airmail cover.*

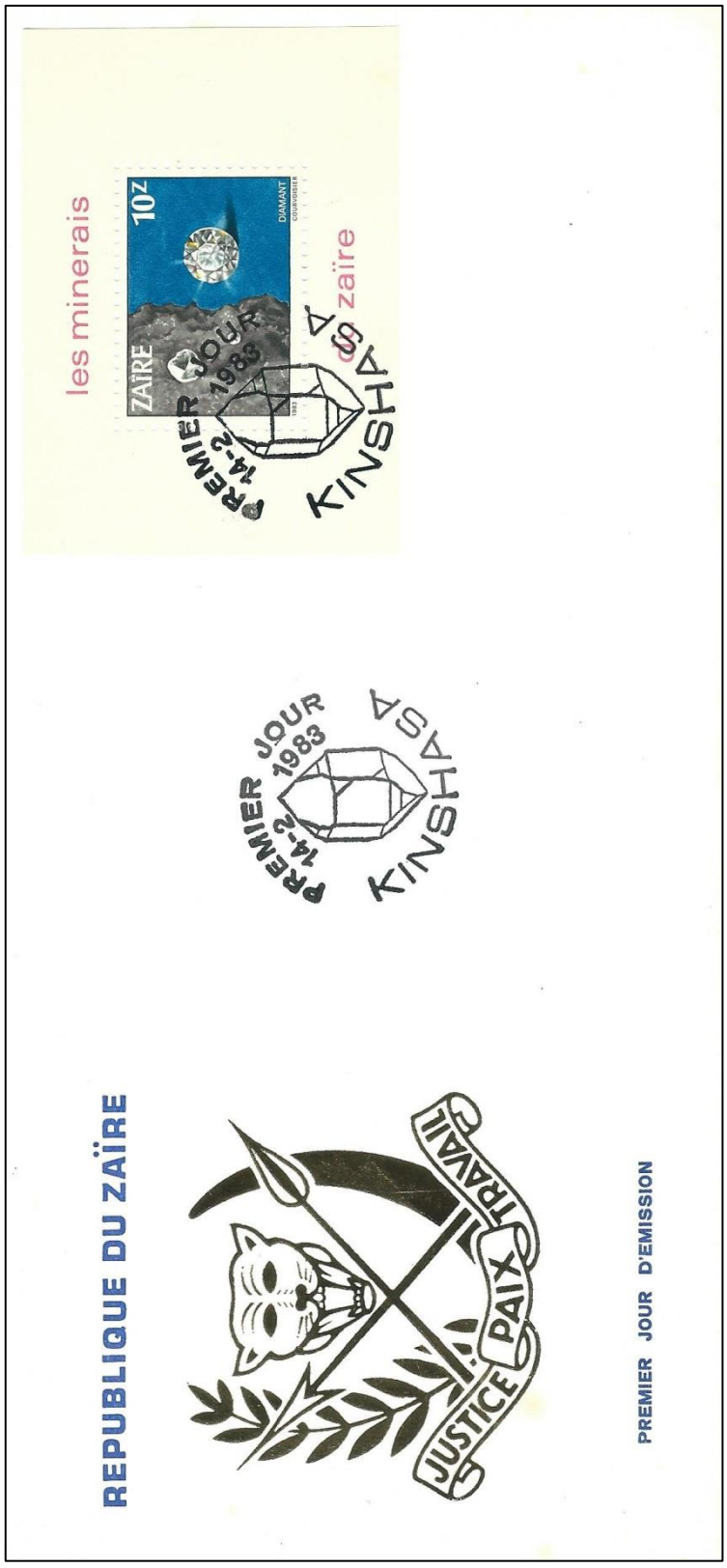


Fig. 74: *On 14 February 1983 Zaïre issued a set of 8 minerals stamps. None of the regular stamps showed a diamond; that happened instead on the miniature sheet issued at the same time. Quite appropriately, it had the highest value, 10 Zaïres. It appears on this unaddressed First Day Cover. The stamp in the sheet pictures rough diamonds in kimberlite on the left, and a brilliant cut gem against a blue background to the right.*

Gold

Early explorers such as Livingstone mentioned the occurrence of gold in the Congo. In 1903, the prospectors Hook and Burton discovered a deposit of gold, also containing platinum, at Ruwe near Kambove in Katanga. Extraction there started in 1904, and after a few years was taken over by the UMHK. Also in 1903, other prospectors discovered gold in the Ituri river in NE Congo. The first small gold mine near Kilo in that area started working in 1904. 200 km away from there, a second gold deposit in Moto near Watsa, was being worked from 1910. Although the Ruwe mine was significant, the Kilo-Moto goldfields became one of Africa's largest, and produce about two-thirds of the Congo's gold, partially from alluvial mining, but even more from underground mining.

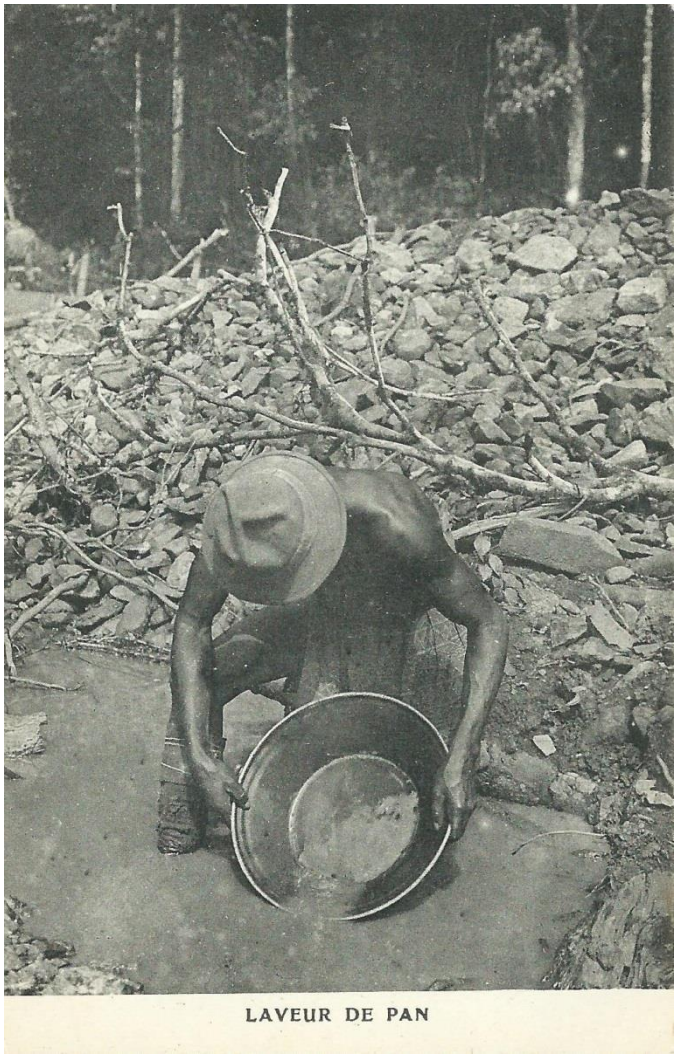


Fig. 75: *This unmailed postcard shows a gold panner at work in a small stream somewhere in the Congo. This is the simplest form of gold prospecting and mining and can be done individually. Using gravity, the miner washes out the lighter soil and gravel with circular movements, leaving the gold grains in the pan. Gold is often washed down from veins in the soil, and deposited in river beds. By working their way upriver, prospectors may discover those veins and extract more gold by digging.*

Gold panners can really only work comfortably near the shores of a river. Where gold is deposited deeper down, nearer the centre, other means of extracting are required. Dredges are one options; they are not just used to win gold from rivers or other water bodies, but other minerals too, e.g. tin or diamonds.

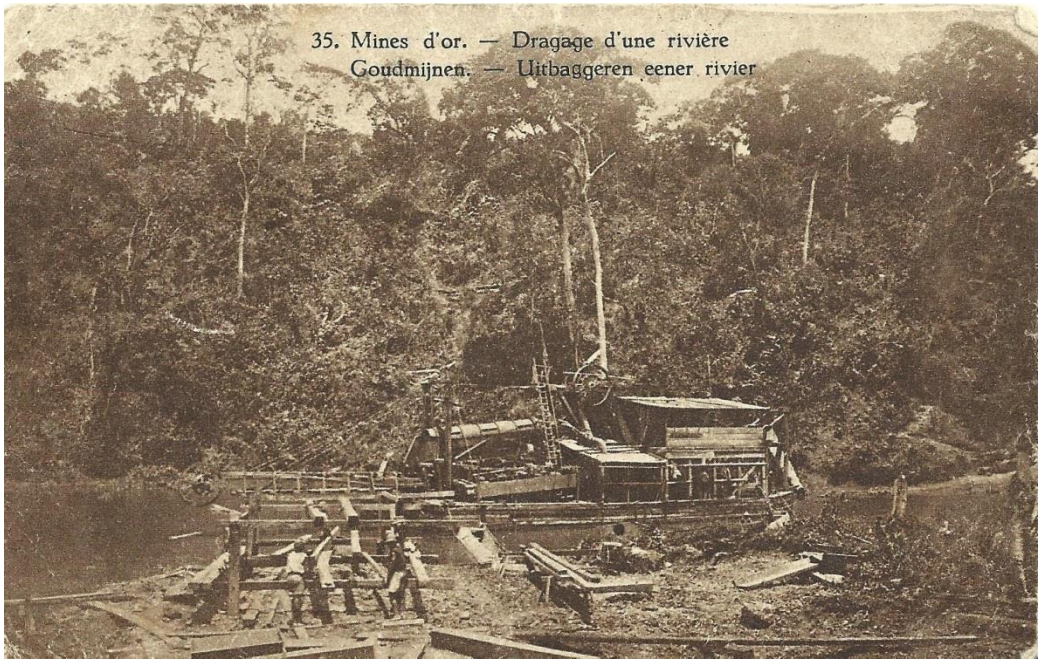


Fig. 76: *Postal stationery card Stibbe type 67, issued in 1927, prepaid 1 Fr. carmine-red on beige card; view 35 shows a small dredge extracting gold ore from a narrow river. The legend does not indicate a location, but this is almost certainly in the Kilo-Moto area. This card was mailed on 1 August 1929 from Elisabethville to Hainaut in Belgium.*

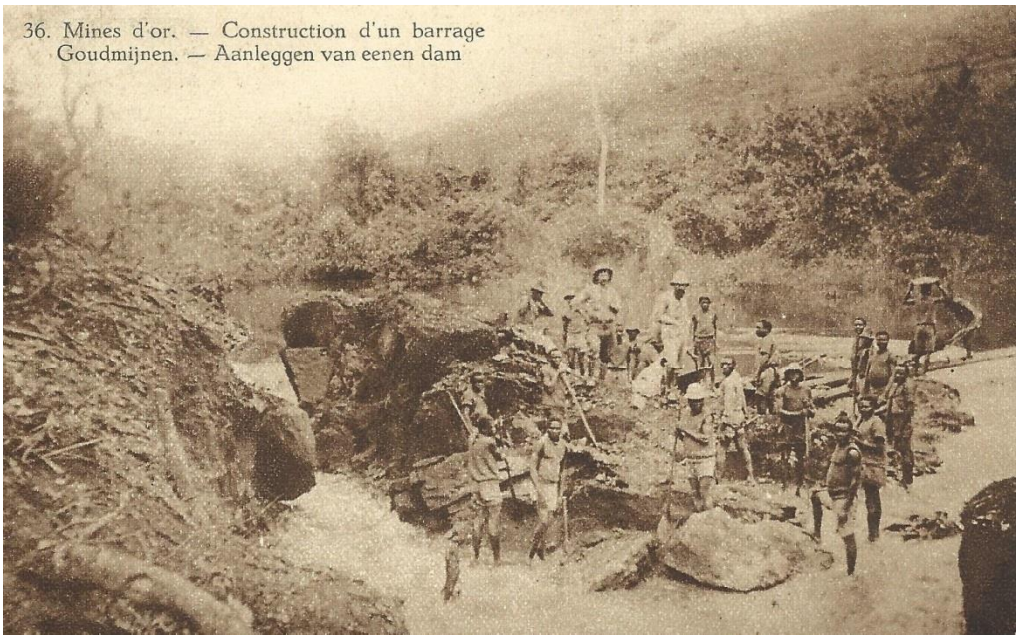


Fig. 77*: Unmailed postal stationery card Stibbe type 66, issued in 1927, prepaid 45 c. blue-green on beige card with an additional 15 c. brown definitive stamp of 1923. It shows a dam being built in a gold mine, perhaps to retain water for washing out gold, or to protect a mine from being flooded.*

When gold is washed down in water courses, it can be found as nuggets. A large gold nugget is shown on the 75 kuta yellow and brown mint stamp to the left, issued by Zaïre in 1983 in a minerals set.

In the North East of the Congo, gold mining had started at Kilo in 1904 and at Moto in 1910. The mines of various types in this huge area were owned by the State. To manage them, it created the Régie Industrielle des Mines de Kilo-Moto in 1919. Mines in the Southern Kilo section included Mongbwalu, Makala, Sincere and Adidi where gold occurred in high-grade veins. In the Northern Moto section it appeared as impregnation deposits in schists in the mines of Gorumbwa, Durba and Agbarabo. Besides extraction from those mines, gold was also recovered from river gravels, mainly by dredges:

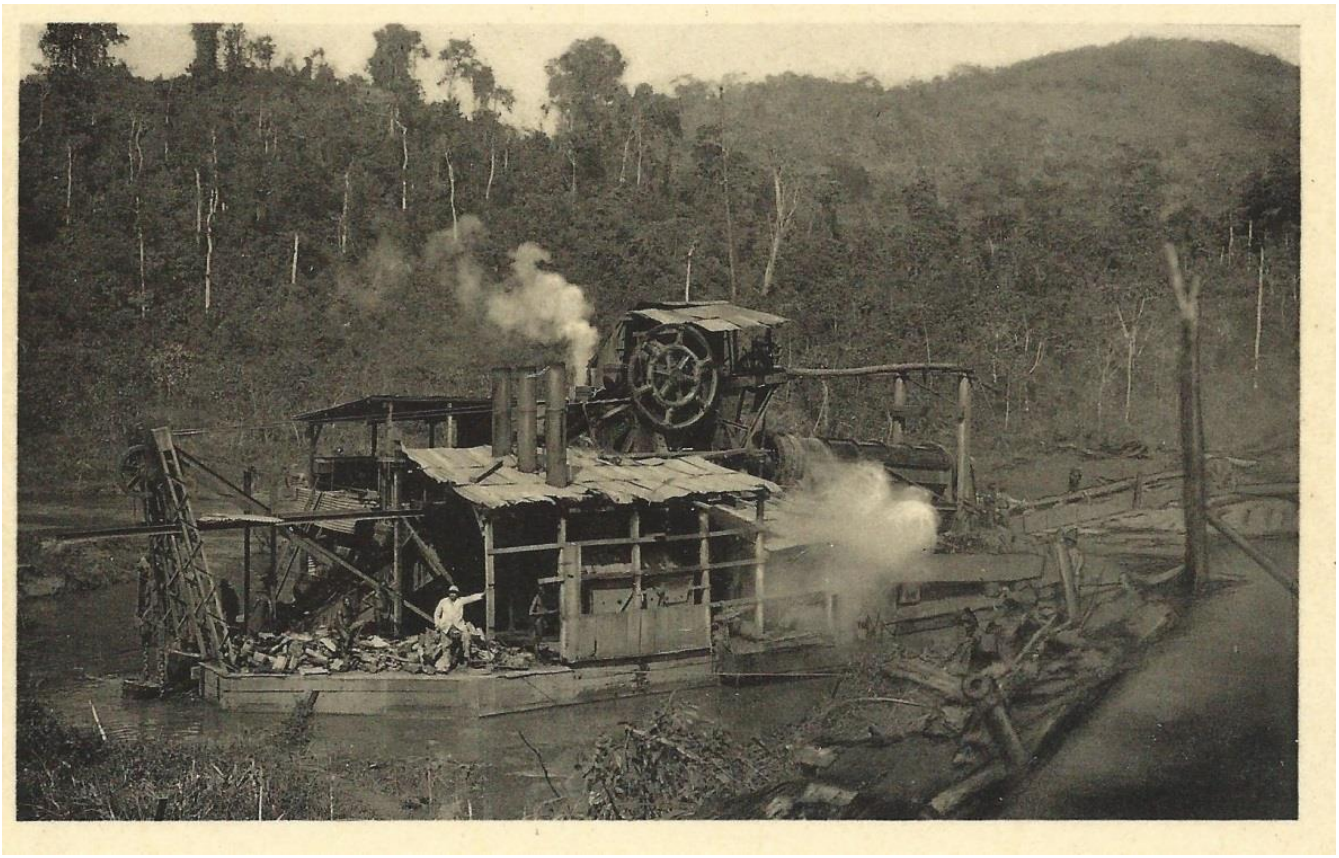


Fig. 78: *Unmailed postcard of a gold dredge used in the mines of Kilo-Moto.*

A post office was opened at Kilo on 1 May 1917, and closed again on 20 January 1927, but Moto never had one. The postcard in figure 79 was mailed from there to Chartres in France. The sender gives his address as being at Kilo in the Ituri, to be reached via Cairo and Khartoum on the Nile route, but writes next to it: or to find out which route is the quickest. This card actually took a different route, via Uganda to Mombasa, where it received a transit cancel on 8 September, and must have gone up through the Suez Canal. Other mail did travel via the Nile route into the Sudan and reached the Canal that way. And some must have taken the Congo route to the harbours on Congo's West Coast, and from there mostly to Antwerp.

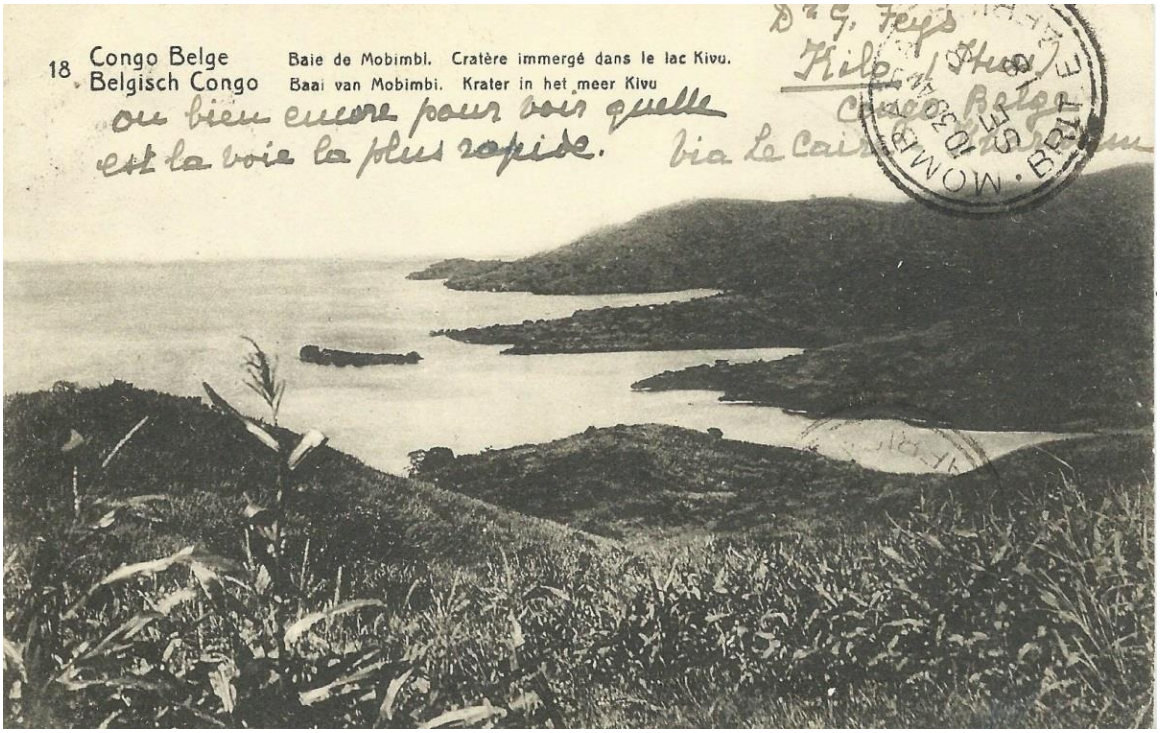


Fig. 79a: *View side of postal stationery card Stibbe type 43, issued in 1912, prepaid 10 c. carmine on beige paper. View 18 shows a submerged crater in Mobimbi Bay, Lake Kivu. The postcard was mailed on 24 August 1918 at Kilo, transited in Mombasa on 8 September, and sent on to Chartres in France.*

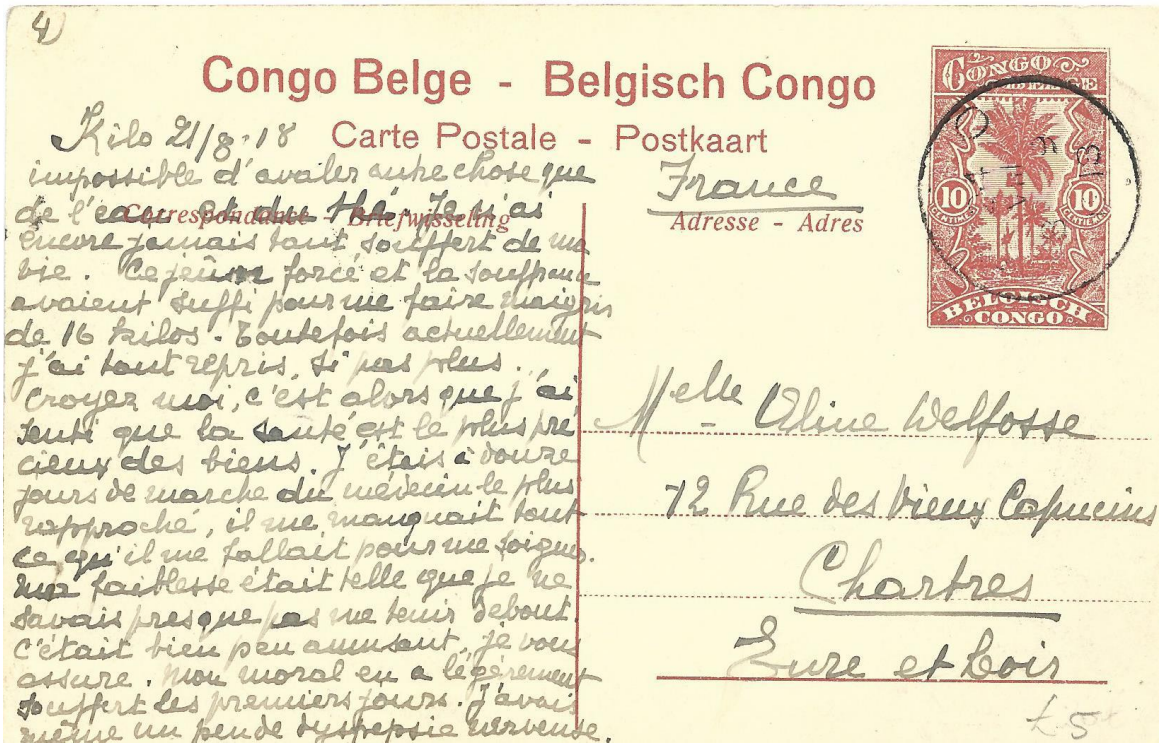
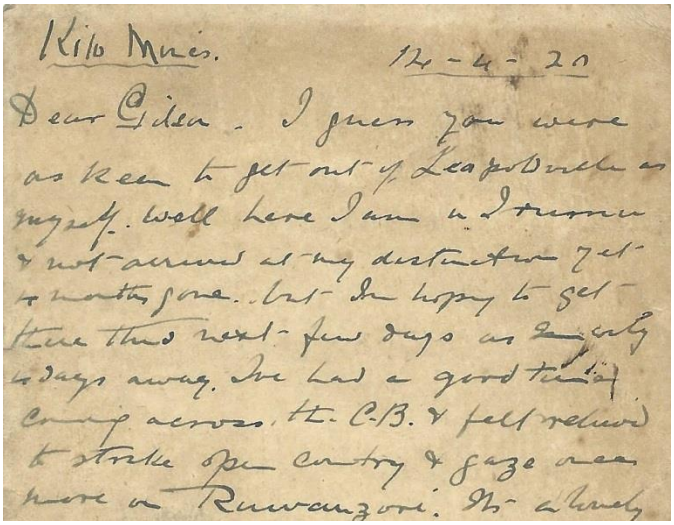


Fig. 79b: *Reverse of the above postal stationery card type 43, written at Kilo on 21 August 1918 and mailed to Chartres. The sender describes how ill he has been, and that at 12 days march from the nearest doctor.*


Kilo Mines. 12-4-20

Dear Gilson. I guess you were as keen to get out of Leopoldville as myself. Well here I am in Irumu & not arrived at my destination yet + months gone. But I hope to get there the next few days as I only 4 days away. We had a good time coming across the C.B. & felt relieved to strike open country & gaze once more on Ruwenzori. We already

The year after the Régie was established, a visitor passed through Kilo Mines and on 20 April 1920 wrote a postcard in English to a friend at the Huileries du Congo Belge in Kinshasa; part of his text is given alongside.

Fig. 80a: *Part of the reverse side of a postal stationery card Stibbe type 44 of 1915, written at Kilo Mines on 20 April 1920 and mailed to Kinshasa*

Fig. 80b: *Postal stationery card Stibbe type 44 issued in 1915, prepaid 5 c. yellow-green on yellowish paper, with an additional 5 c. green and black definitive stamp of 1916, written at the Kilo Mines on 20 April 1920 and mailed the same day from Irumu to Kinshasa*

By Independence in 1960, the Mines of Kilo-Moto are believed to have produced 300 tonnes of gold. In 1928, the Régie was converted into a company, the Société des Mines d'Or de Kilo-Moto (SOKIMO), with a concession area of 80,000 km², three times the size of Belgium. The company was domiciled in Kilo, but its administrative headquarters was in Brussels. This company issued shares, but all pre-war stock has to be replaced in 1944, at the end of World War II, into new shares of which there were: 60,000 free bearer preferred shares, an unknown number of bearer bonus shares, 200,000 free ordinary shares, and 1.4 million bearer beneficiary shares, of which an example follows in fig. 81:

Fig. 81: *A bearer beneficiary share of the Kilo-Moto Gold Mines, issued in October 1944.*

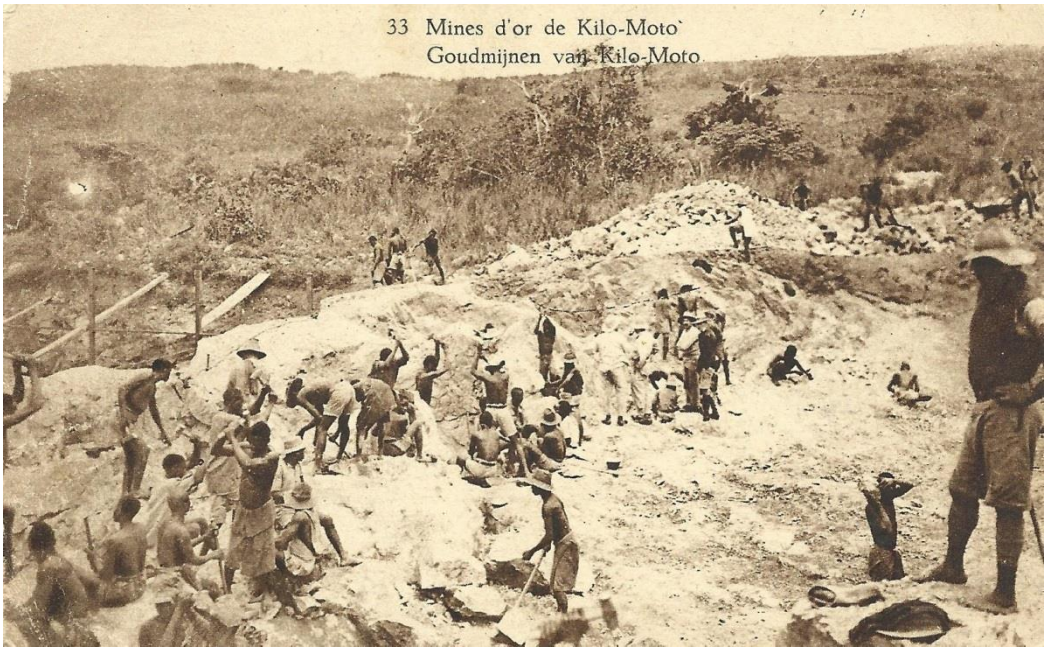
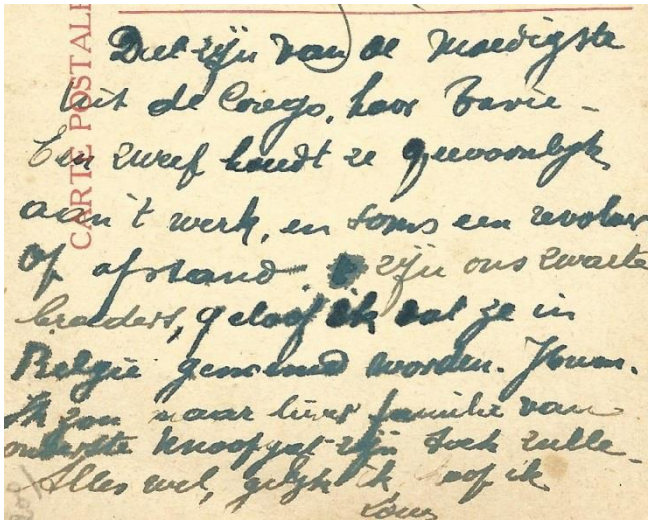


Fig. 82a: *Front of a postal stationery card Stibbe type 67, prepaid 1 Fr. carmine-red on beige paper, issued in 1927. View 33 shows surface diggings at Kilo-Moto. The card was mailed from the Congo to Belgium, but the cancel is faint and the address has been made illegible. It bears an interesting message in Flemish.*



The unknown sender writes:
"These are amongst the most courageous people of the Congo,…. They are usually kept under control by the whip, or sometimes a pistol from a distance. I believe that in Belgium we call them our black brothers, …
I would rather be family of the lowest rank, really. I hope everything is well at your end, as it is with me".

Fig. 82b: *Part of the reverse side of the above card, showing its message.*

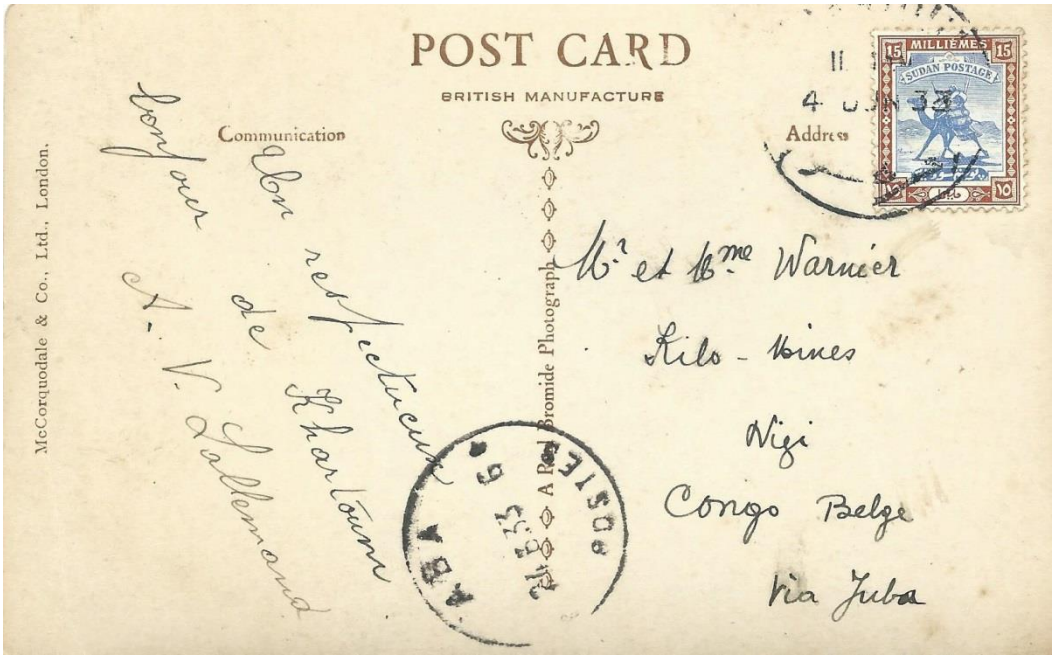


Fig. 83: *Reverse side of a postcard with a view of Government Offices in Khartoum with greetings to a family at Kilo-Mines. The card was mailed at Khartoum on 4 June 1933, bearing a 15 millièmes red-brown and ultramarine definitive stamp issued by Sudan in 1927-40. The card received a transit cancel at Aba on 24 June, 20 days later.*

Where the above card still took the over land and water route between Sudan and North-East Congo in 1933, another possibility of sending or receiving mail had become available to the inhabitants of the Kilo-Moto area in early 1932, with Imperial Airways starting to fly between London, Caïro and Cape Town, with a stop in Juba in Southern Sudan. Airmail to and from Kilo-Moto could reach Juba over land via Aba. That route was followed by the sealed cover below:

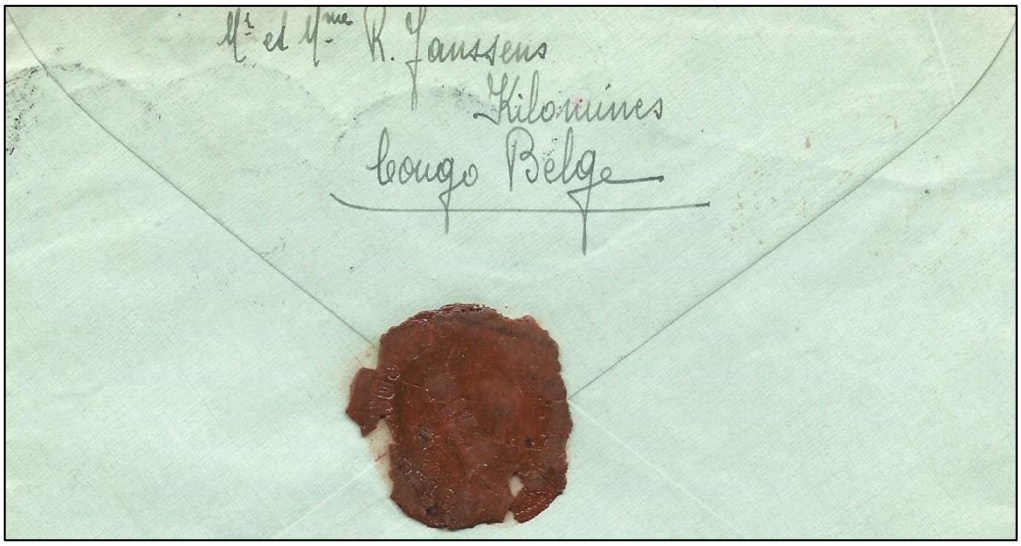


Fig 84a: *Partial reverse side of an early airmail letter from Kilomines to Brussels.*

Fig. 84b*: Airmail cover from Kilomines to Brussels, bearing a 5 Fr. green and black airmail stamp of 1921-30, and a 5 c. black and 20 c. vermillion Stanley stamp on 1928. The cover was cancelled at Aba, on the way to Juba and the Imperial Airways flight, on 29 April 1932.*

Fig. 85*: This postcard is unmailed and shows a gold miner in his work outfit at Nizi in the Kilo-Moto area. He carries a light in his right hand and wears a kind of helmet, a sign that he will most likely be mining underground.*

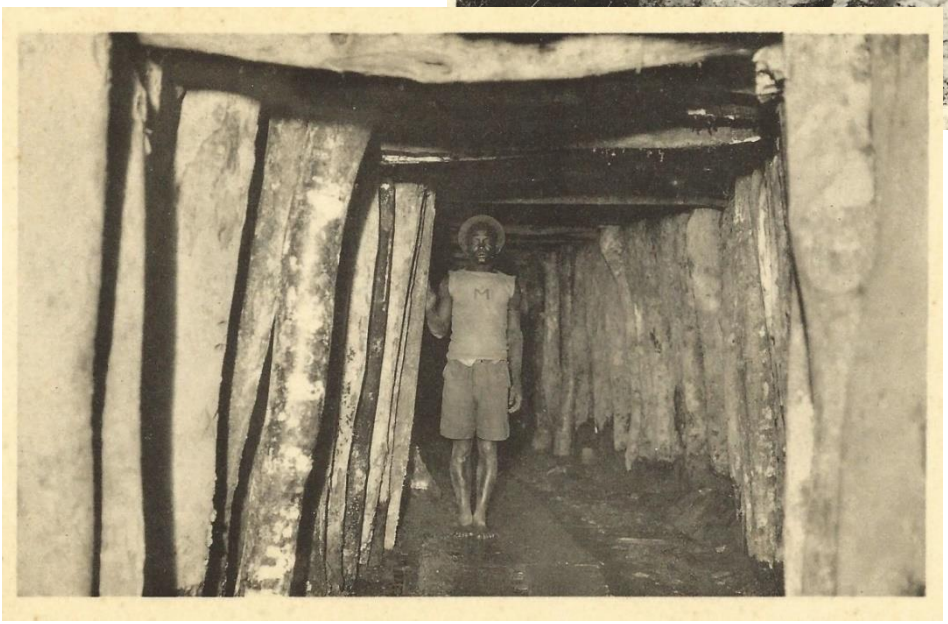


Fig. 86: *The unmailed postcard above is of the Owe gold reef in the Moku area of Moto. A corridor has been driven through, with round timbers holding up beams that support the corridor roof. The clothes worn by the miner in the corridor are similar to the previous one.*

Fig. 87a: *Front of an airmail cover mailed by someone at the Mongbwalu gold mine of the Kilo-Moto company to the director of the Special Mining Service in Brussels. It bears a 5 Fr. red-brown airmail stamp issued in 1934, cancelled at Aba on 22 January 1937, using a type 8A1 canceller. From there, the cover must have travelled overland to Juba, and then carried by Imperial Airways.*

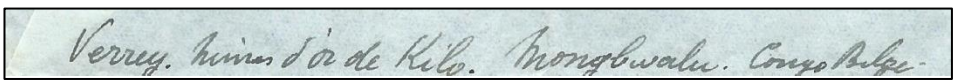


Fig. 87b: *Top part of the reverse side of the same airmail cover, showing its origin.*

Fig. 88a: *Front of a headed cover from the Kilo-Moto Gold Mines Company to President of the National Committee of the Kivu at Costermansville, franked with two 1 Fr.25 olive-brown anti-slavery stamps of 1947, cancelled at Nizi on 22 January 1948.*

Fig. 88b: *Part of the reverse side of the same cover, with a transit cancel applied at Irumu on 24 January at 09.00, and a smudgy arrival cancel at Costermansville for what looks like the same day at 15.00. This would only have been possible by airmail.*

After the post office at Kilo had closed in 1927, it took more than 30 years to open another one, this time a Sub Post Office at Kilomines on 15 September 1959, from where the cover of fig. 89 has been mailed:

Fig. 89a*: Front of a registered cover mailed from Kilomines to Chicago on 6 June 1961. The cover was mailed nearly a year after Independence, and has an interesting mixed franking, with two blue-grey 8 Fr. mask stamps issued by the Belgian Congo in 1948-51, and a (damaged) blue-green flower stamp, originally issued by the Belgian Congo in 1952, but overprinted CONGO in large black letters by the Republic in 1960.*

Fig. 89b*: Part of the reverse side of the same registered cover, showing an arrival cancel at the Chicago registry post office on 27 June 1961, then at the Prudential Plaza Station the next day.*

The Société Minière de la Tele (Mining Company of the Tele) was a subsidiary company of the "Forminière"; it was active around Lake Tele, a small lake in NE Congo. Forminière was established in 1906 to deal with mining, forestry and agriculture, and had its siege in Tshikapa. Together with the Société de l'Aruwimi-Ituri (Aruwimi-Ituri Company), the Tele Company was created in 1912 to deal with gold and tin deposits in Eastern Congo, allowing the Forminière itself to concentrate on diamond mining in the Kasaï. The Mining Company of the Tele produced gold and diamonds on some small rivers in the Mambasa area.

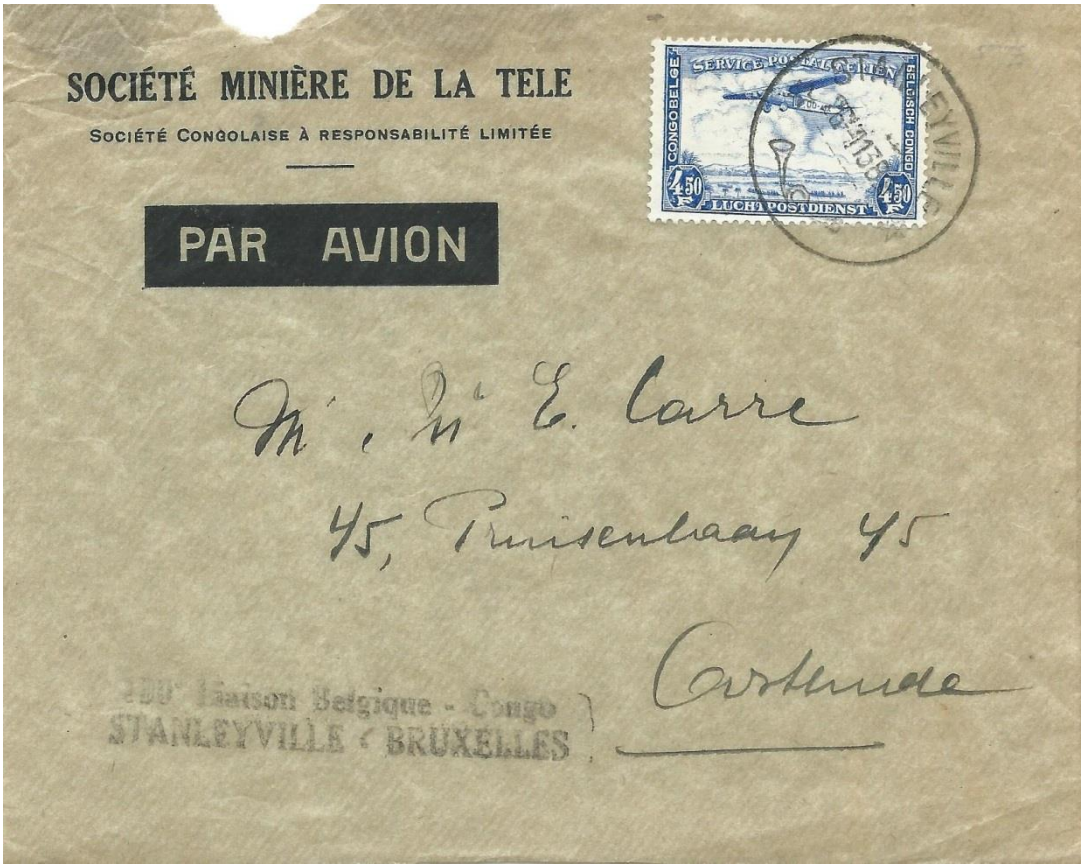


Fig. 90: *Front of an airmail cover from the Société Minière de la Tele, mailed on 26 November 1938 from Stanleyville to Ostend, bearing a 4 Fr.50 ultramarine airmail stamp of 1934. The cover also bears a commemorative cancel of the 100th flight from Stanleyville to Brussels.*

In 1931 the Mining Company of the Tele joined forces with the Empain Group in creating the Compagnie Belge d'Entreprises Minières (Cobelmin, the Belgian Company of Mining Enterprises) to explore for minerals in the domain of the CFL (Railway Company of the Great Lakes), in the former Eastern Province of the Congo. As a result of that merger, Cobelmin became the managing enterprise of the following subsidiaries: Minerga in the Urega region; Milupa, along the Lualaba River; Kinoretain, having tin mines at Kindu; Kundamines in the Urega region; and Phibraki in the Urega. Cobelmin was actively prospecting for and mining a range of minerals, not just gold, but also e.g. tin, wolfram and colombo-tantalite.

At Kima, just East of Punia in the Shabunda sector, Cobelmin owned a gold mine, from which the cover in fig. 91 came. The company was still mining there at Independence in 1960, but that got interrupted by subsequent fighting.

Fig. 91a: *Front of an airmail cover from an employee at the Kima Gold Mine of Cobelmin, mailed to his wife at Brussels. The cover bears a 1 Fr. dark brown and black, a 3 Fr.50 dark olive and a 10 Fr. dark brown stamp of the 1942 definitive set, cancelled at Yumbi on 12 November 1946.*

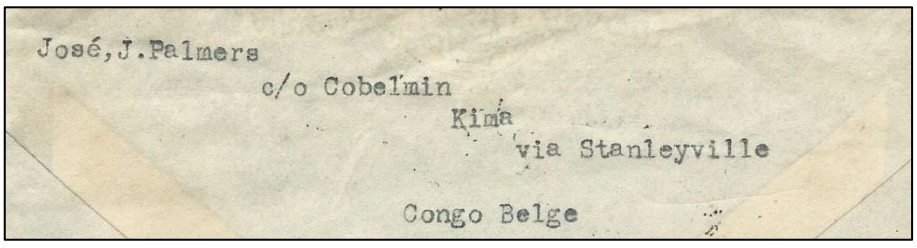


Fig. 91b: *Upper part of the reverse side of the same airmail cover with the address of the sender.*

For its efforts in creating the CFL, the Empain Group was subsequently allocated mining rights in an area of 49,000 km², exploited by the "Compagnie Minière des Grands Lacs Africains" (Great African Lakes Mining Company – MGL) established in 1923, with its headquarters at Goma in the North Kivu. By 1955, this company had extracted 22,000 tonnes of cassiterite (tin ore), including some wolframite and colombo-tantalite, as well as 54 tonnes of gold. One of their gold mines was at Kamituga:

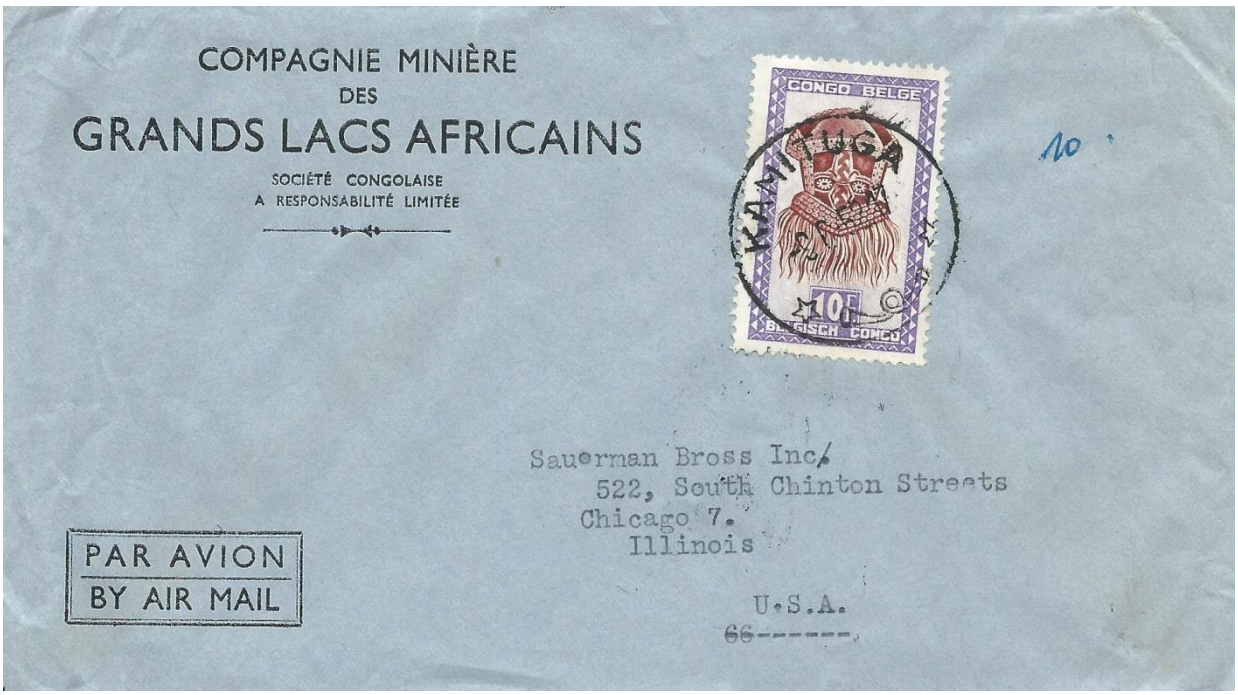


Fig. 92a: *Front of a MGL airmail cover mailed from Kamituga to Sauerman Bros. in Chicago. The cover bears a 10 Fr. violet and lilac-brown mask stamp of 1948-51, cancelled at Kamituga on 9 June 1952 at 17.00. Sauerman Bros was a company producing construction and quarryins equipment.*

Fig. 92b: *Reverse side of the airmail cover, showing a transit cancel applied on 10 June 1952 at 10.00, and an arrival cancel from Sauerman Bros. in Chicago on June 16.*

Gold was discovered at Ruwe in Katanga as early as 1903 and there subsequently was some gold mining in the area. The cover that follows was mailed by the wife of a mining engineer by the name of Dessart who in 1938 and 1939 prospected for gold on 21 sites in the Kasaï and SW Katanga, belonging to the companies Beceka, EKL and Forminière. These included sites at Sandoa, where he may have lived for a while, and Dilolo.

Fig. 93a: *Front of an airmail cover sent by the wife of a mining engineer at Sandoa to Dilbeeck bear Brussels. The cover bears a 4 Fr.50 ultramarine airmail stamp of 1934 and two 1 Fr50 lilac-brown stamps of the 1935 set commemorating the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Congo. The cover was date-stamped at Sandoa on 17 April 1938, with a type 5dmty canceller.*

Fig. 93b: *Large part of the reverse side of the above airmail cover mailed on 17 April 1938 by the wife of mining engineer Dessart at Sandoa to Dilbeeck. She has indicated for the cover to be sent via Lobito in Angola, which would have meant via the Benguela Railway, and then either by ship or by aier from Angola. But the cover received transit cancels at the rear at Dilolo on the 19th and then at Elisabethville on the 23rd. Therefore, it would not have travelled via Lobito, but caught a plane at Elisabethville.*

Following the Wall Street crash of 1929, the Belgian colonies started to fall short of funding for their development work. To help overcome that, the Belgian Government established a Colonial Lottery in 1934, all the income of which was destined to its colonies. The Lottery was suspended during World War II, but resumed in 1945. It continued till two years after the Congo's Independence. In 1962, it was changed into a National Lottery, with some of the income going to rural development work in Third World countries, and some to public works in Belgium.

Fig. 94: *Unmailed postcard showing the gold that could be won in the Colonial Lottery.*

Tin

Tin was discovered in Katanga in the early 20th Century, and years later in the Kivu too. It quite frequently occurs with other minerals such as wolfram or Colombo-tantalite, and companies involved in mining tin therefore often extend to other minerals too. Tanganyika Concessions Ltd started mining tin at Busanga in Katanga from 1904. But sleeping sickness as well as supplies were a big problem in that area, and by 1908 production was halted; few tonnes had been produced. In 1906, the UMHK took over most mining activity in this part of Katanga, obtaining a tin concession which stretched along the Eastern bank of the Lualaba River from just North of Kolwezi to Lake Upemba in the centre of Katanga. The town of Bukama was in the middle of that zone, and some tin production was just South of there. The Katanga Railway reached Bukama in 1918, which facilitated tin mining, which was restarted at Busanga in 1920. It reached its peak during World War II, when demand for tin was high and the UMHK exhausted nearly all its cassiterite deposits.

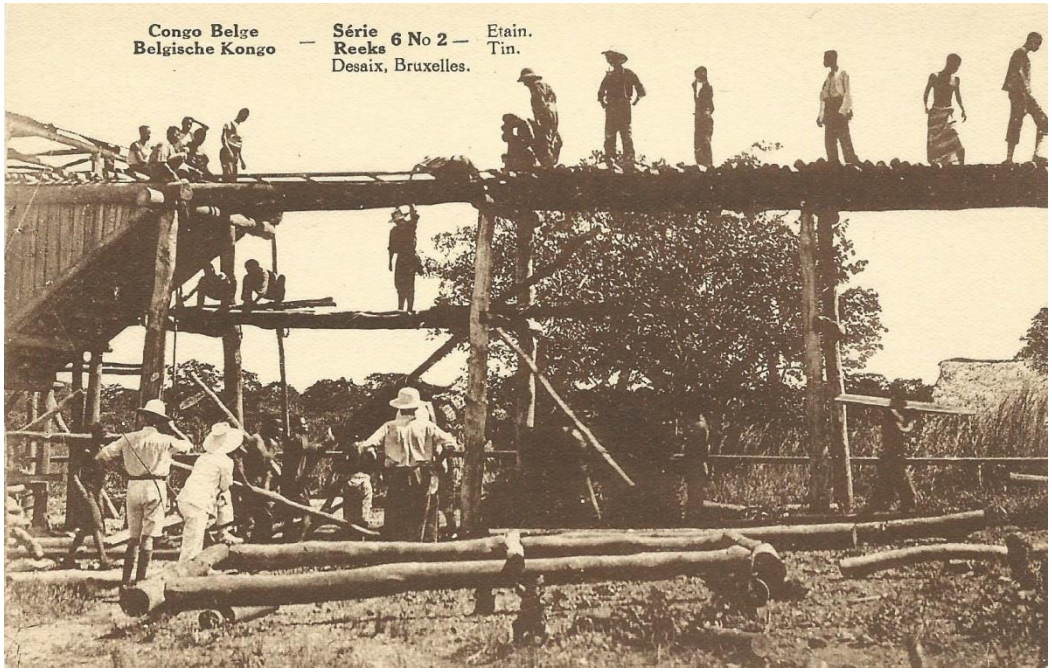


Fig. 95: *This is a very old unmailed postcard of tin production in the Congo. There is no indication of a location, but it may have been the UMHK mine at Busanga.*

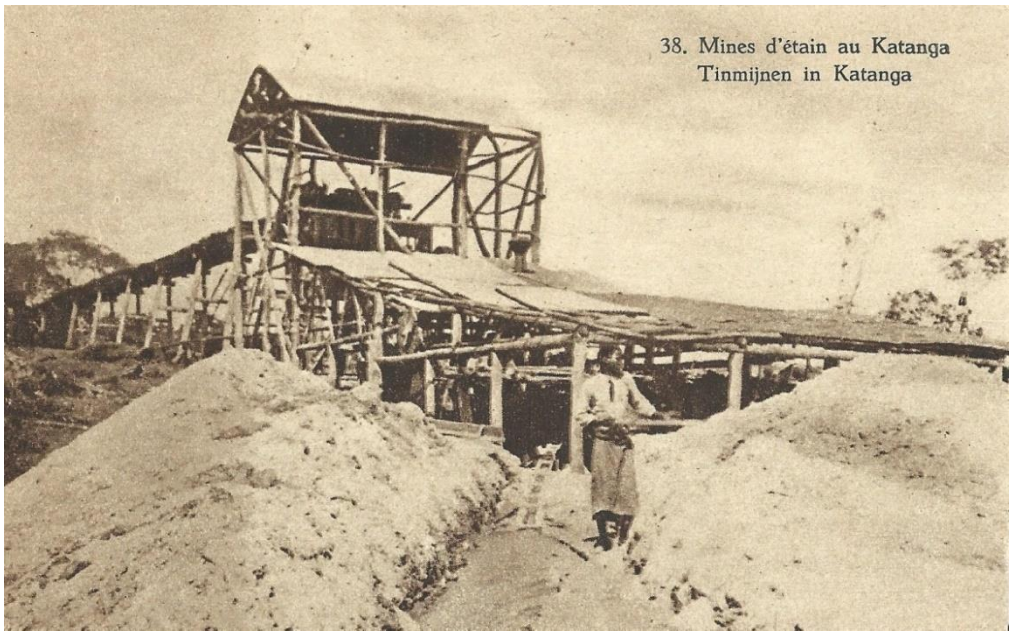


Fig. 96a: *Postal stationery card Stibbe type 67, issued in 1927, Prepaid 1 Fr. red on beige paper. View 38 features tin mines in Katanga.*

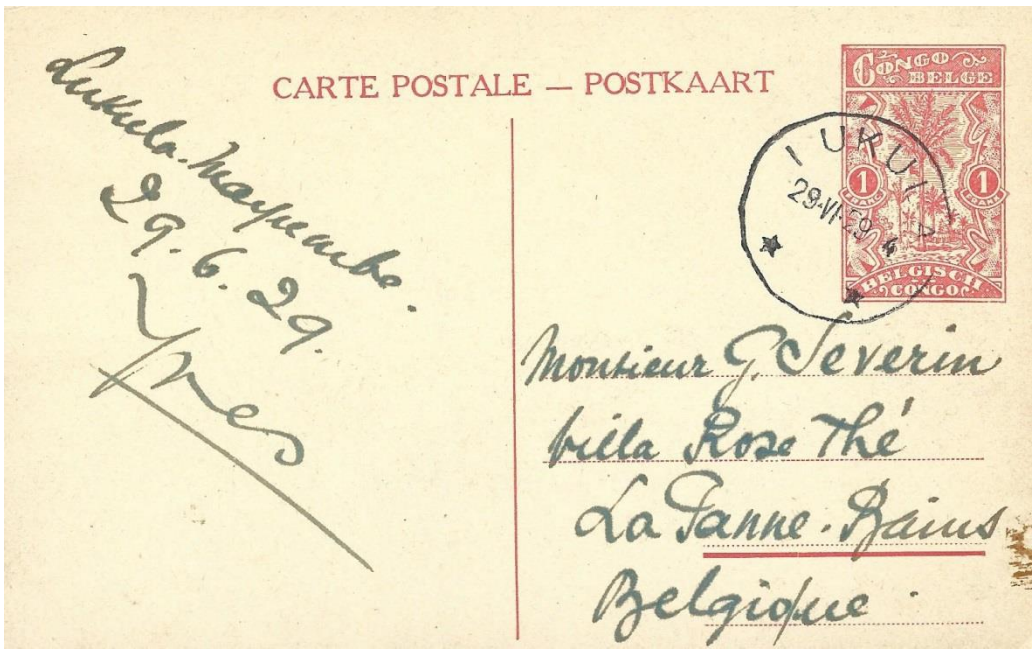


Fig. 96b: *Rear of the same card, mailed at Lukula in the Mayumbe on 29 June 1929, to La Panne-Bains in on the Belgian coast.*

During the Congo's colonial period no stamps were issued showing minerals. Zaïre made up for that by issuing a set of minerals stamps in 1983. The multi-coloured 3 Zaïre stamp of the set, shown mint alongside, features cassiterite ore.

Fig. 97: *Two of the above 3 Zaïre stamps of 1983 appear on this airmail cover, alongside a multi-coloured 1 Zaïre stamp of the Virunga National Park set issued in 1982, mailed on 16 November 1987 from Butembo in the North Kivu to the BBC Swahili Service in Kinshasa.*

The UMHK, involved in tin mining in the Southern half of Katanga, was of course the largest mining company active in tin mining in the Congo; its major shareholder was the Special Committee of Katanga (Comité Spécial du Katanga, CSK), a charter company established in 1900. But to the North of the UMHK concession, e.g. in Northern Katanga and the Kivu, tin ore deposits were often not that large and somewhat scattered, and therefore the companies involved in their mining tended to be a lot smaller. Perhaps the largest one amongst them, again with the CSK as major shareholder, was the Geological and Mining Company of Belgian Engineers and Industrialists (Compagnie Géologique et Minière des Ingénieurs et Industriels Belges, Géomines), established early in the 20th Century.

From the card in fig. 98, it appears that Géomines had a presence at Elisabethville as early as 1911, and most likely even a bit before that. The message on the card mentions boys arriving by Thursday or Friday, quite possibly from around Lukafu, straight North of Elisabethville in Katanga. This may well have concerned manpower to be involved in prospecting or mining.

Fig. 98a: *Postal stationery card Stibbe type 34, originally printed in 1909 prepaid 10 c. red on beige paper, then overprinted 5 c. and with waving lines across 3 lines of text in 1910 following tariff reductions. The card was written on 5 November 1911 and mailed on the 7th at Lukafu in Katanga, to a Géomines representative at Elisabethville.*

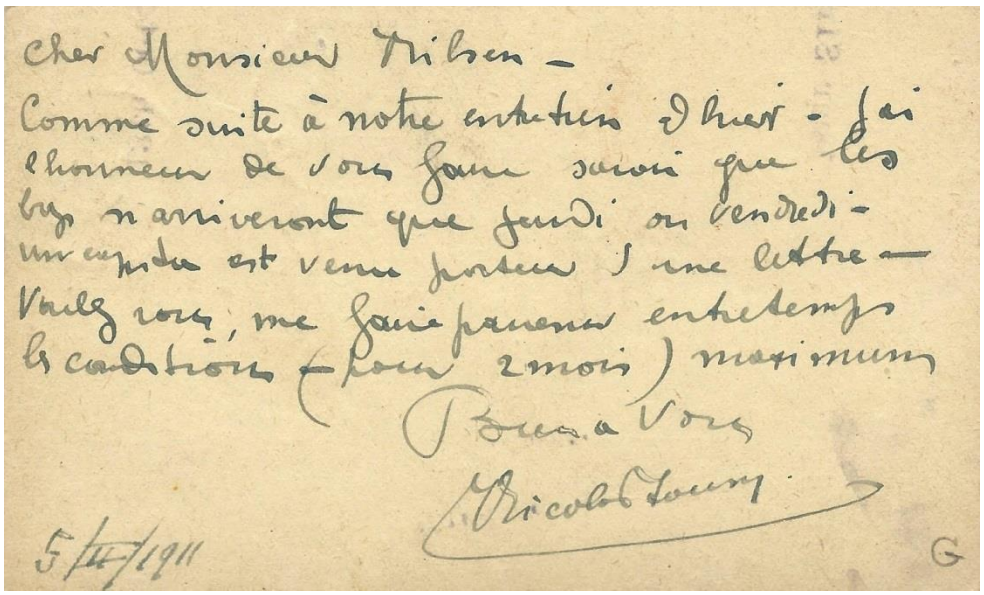


Fig. 98b: *Reverse side of the same card, written on 5 November 1911, bearing a message about boys arriving soon.*

Géomines was exploring and prospecting in Katanga, and in 1915-16 discovered deposits rich in tin ore in an area stretching between Kitololo and Manono in Katanga. The Lukushi River, a tributary of the Luvua River, passes along these towns, and malaria is a serious problem there. The company nevertheless started mining cassiterite (a major tin ore) and tantalum there from 1916, and established a plant and office in Manono. Mining here was interrupted due to fighting after Independence in 1961-62, then continued by Géomines till 1966. Zaïretain took over in 1967, under 50/50 shared ownership with Géomines. Zaïretain later became Congo Etain. The main mines in this area finally closed in the 1990's. Géomines was recently declared bankrupt by the Congolese government, and with that Congo Etain became fully government-owned.

Fig. 99a: *Front of a censored airmail cover from Géomines in Manono to the United States Rubber Export Company in New York, bearing a 10 Fr. dark brown and 5 Fr. orange-red definitive stamp of 1942, cancelled at Manono on 11 July 1944. The sender has indicated for the cover to be carried by Pan American Airways, which operated a Clipper Service during the war.*

Fig. 99b: *Top part of the reverse side of the censored airmail cover from Géomines in Manono to New YorkThe letter was censored at Leopoldville, sealed with censor tape and subsequently cancelled on 14 July 1944 and with a number 15. It was then again opened in the USA on the opposite side and sealed with censor tape with number 5943.*

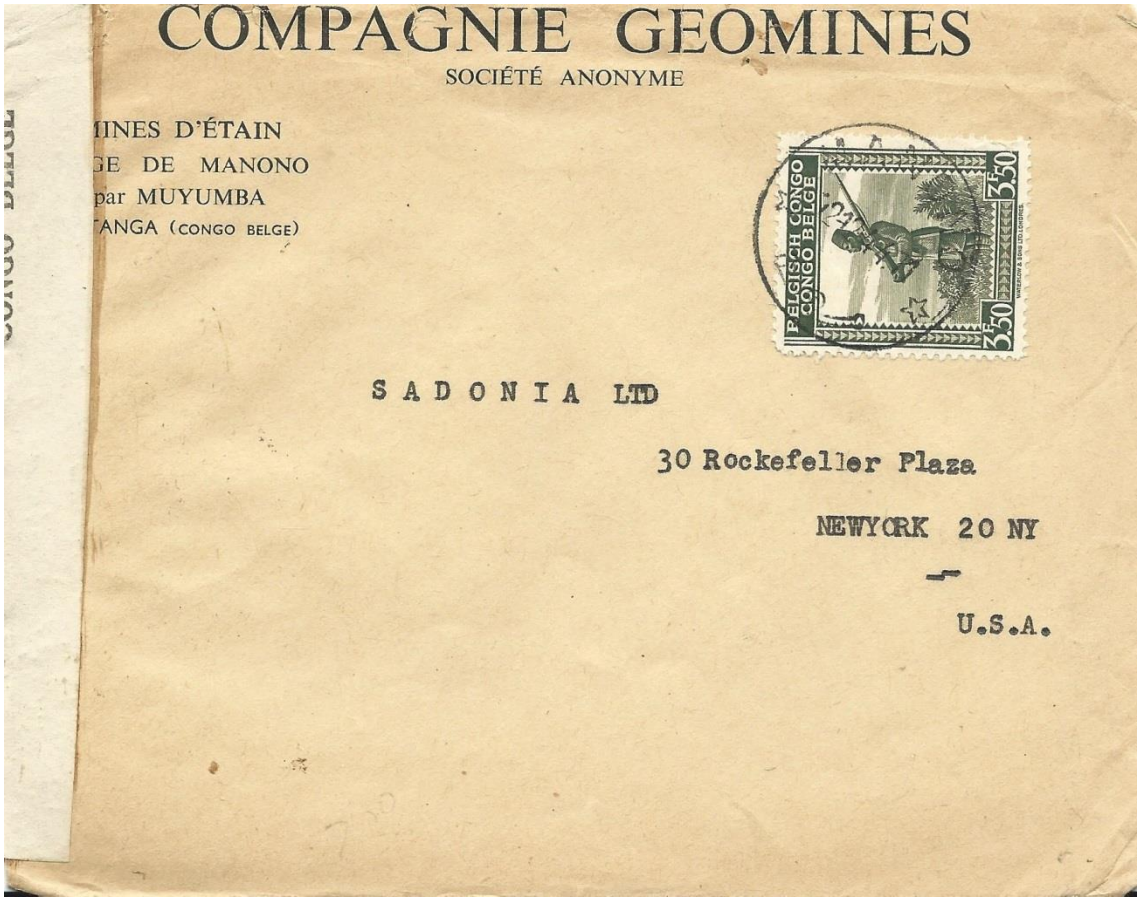


Fig. 100a: *Front of a cover from Géomines at Manono to Sadonia Ltd in New York, bearing a 3 Fr.50 dark olive definitive stamp of 1942 and mailed by mail steamer to New York on 12 December 1944. There now appears to be no more trace of the Addressee: Sadonia Ltd in New York; one reference mentions them supplying crockery to Kenya in 1948; it is unclear how such a supplier would relate to the tin industry. It is noteworthy that the addresses for Géomines at Manono differ somewhat between the airmail cover and this regular cover. Where this one says: Tin Mines with seat at Manono, via Muyumba, which is the land route, the airmail cover mentions: Tin Mines and Smelter at Manono.*

Fig. 100b: Part of the reverse side of the above cover, holding the censor tape. This time, the letter was censored at Elisabethville, before taking a train to Cape Town, a tape applied, stamped with a blue number 3 and then with an Elisabethville 2 cancel on 18 December 1944 at 18.00.

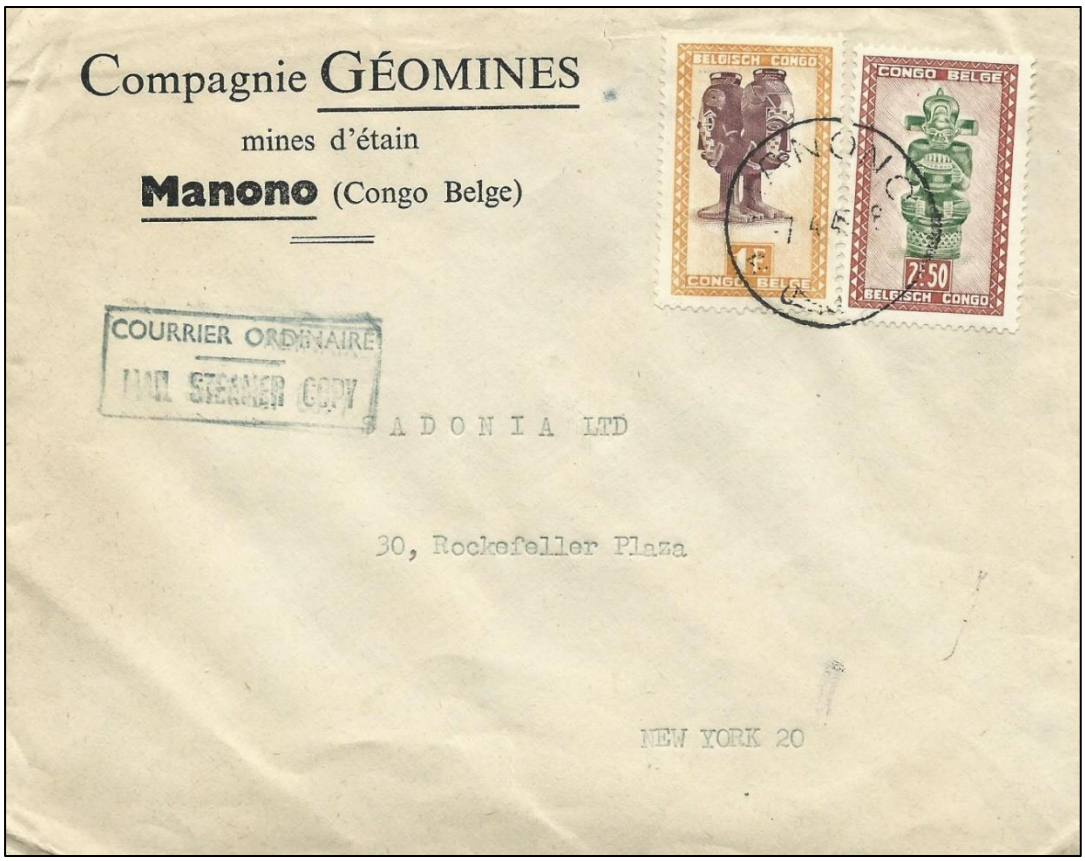


Fig. 101: *This is another cover from Géomines to Sadonia Ltd in New York, but mailed after the war, and therefore no longer censored. It bears a 1 Fr. yellow-orange and lilac and a 2 Fr.50 red-brown and green mask stamp of 1948-51 cancelled at Manono on 7 April 1949. The cover also bears a special cancel for it to be mailed by steamer. Within the past five years, the company heading on the regular cover has changed again. It still says Tin Mines at Manono, but no longer mentions via Muyumba.*

Fig. 102a: *Part of the rear side of an airmail cover mailed by the Géomines office at Manono to SEDEC in Leopoldville. SEDEC was initially created by Lever Brothers in 1913 to trade in palm oil, but became over time the general food trading arm of Unilever in the Congo. The cover was cancelled at Manono on 16 November 1951 at 12.00, received a transit cancel at the rear in Elisabethville at 17.00 the same day, to receive an arrival cancel at Leopoldville the next day at 17.00.*

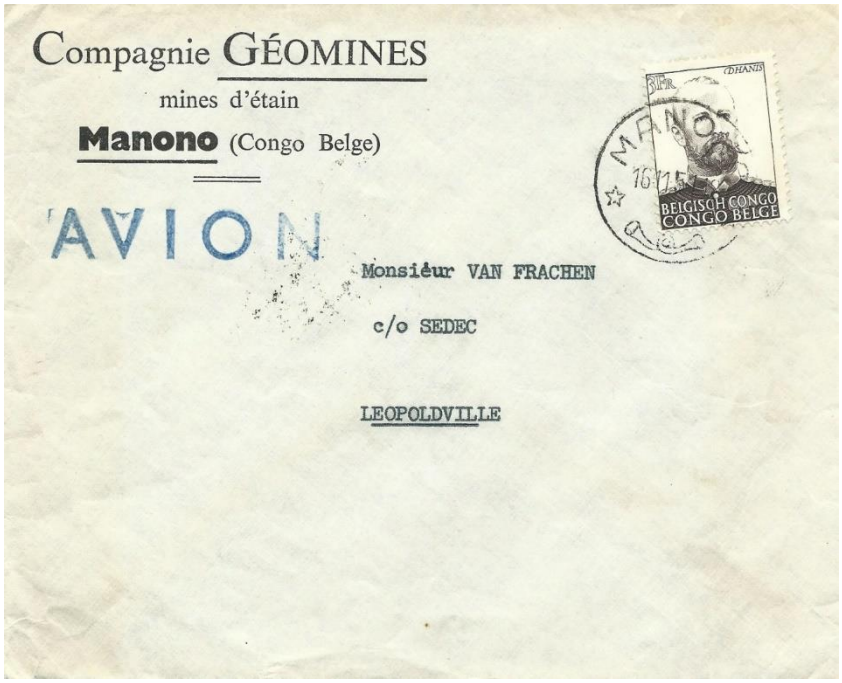


Fig. 102b: *Front of a cover sent by airmail by Géomines at Manono to SEDEC at Leopoldville. The cover bears a 10 Fr. dark brown anti-slavery stamp of 1951, cancelled at Manono on 16 November 1951 at 12.00. In 1951, the headed company cover is still the same as in 1949.*

Fig. 103a: *Part of the rear of an airmail cover mailed the next year by Géomines at Manono to Kirkcaldy in Scotland. It uses the same company heading as the previous two covers, but this has now moved to the back of the cover*

Fig. 103b: *Cover from Géomines at Manono mailed by air to Kirkcaldy in Scotland. It bears a 5 Fr. olive-yellow and lilac-rose mask stamp of 1948-51 and a 3 Fr. light and dark blue stamp of 1950 commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Special Committee of Katanga, cancelled at Manono on 19 June 1952. Michael Nairn & Co. was established in 1848 to produce floorcloth; in 1877 it diversified into linoleum. In 1920, it then joined forces with an American company producing a simulated wood-grain floor coverage known as "Congoleum", because the rubber it contained originated in the Congo. It is not clear what the link was between Géomines and this company.*

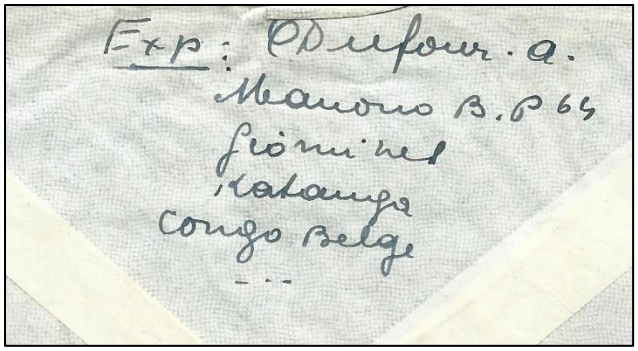


Fig 104a: *Part of the reverse side of a private airmail cover from Manono to Paris, indicating that the sender is an employee at Géomines; he does not use a company cover.*

Fig. 104b: *Front of an airmail cover mailed by an employee of Géomines at Manono to Paris, bearing two 6 Fr.50 carmine and dark brown stamps of 1950 commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Special Committee of Katanga, cancelled at Manono on 17 March 1952.*

In the end, the deposits at Manono and Kitololo proved to be not only rich in cassiterite, but also to contain wolframite, colombo-tantalite, spodumene, thorium, apatite, beryl fluorspar and zircon, plus a few minor ores. By 1972, the company mined around 1,000 tonnes of cassiterite, but this increased substantially in the 1980's. However, fighting then started and industrial-scale mining left the area in the 1990's. Now only some artisanal mining is left, producing a mere 900 tonnes in 2009.

The Empain Group had been invited by King Leopold II to develop the rail and river links between Stanleyville in the North East, Lake Tanganyika in the East, and Katanga. Th achieve that, it established the Compagnie de Chemin de Fer des Grands Lacs Africains (The Railway Company of the Great African Lakes – CFL). For its efforts, the Group was subsequently allocated mining rights in an area of 49,000 km², exploited by the "Compagnie Minière des Grands Lacs Africains" (Great African Lakes Mining Company – MGL) established in 1923, with its headquarters at Goma in the North Kivu. By 1955, this company had extracted 22,000 tonnes of cassiterite (tin ore), including some wolframite and colombo-tantalite, as well as 54 tonnes of gold. The MGL intervened in the creation of the Société Minière du Lualaba, Miluba, in 1932, and the Compagnie de l'Urega, Minerga, in 1933, the deposits of which were mnined by Cobelmin. Then followed in 1936 the Compagnie Minière du Nord de l'Ituri, Cominor, exploiting deposits in the Ituri and Nepoko areas. Like other Belgian or Belgian Colonial companies, it was forced by law to issue new shares at the end of World War II, in October 1944, in exchange for old ones. An example of those follows in fig. 105. It appears that by 1944, the headquarters of the MGL had moved to Kindu.

Fig. 105a: *One-hundredth founder member share of the Compagnie Minière des Grands Lacs Africains, with a red cancel of valid title signed by the administrator delegate*

Fig. 105b: *Attached to the back of the share is a certificate of its declaration, required under the law of 6 October 1944, made at a private bank at 26 Rue d'Edimbourg in Brussels on 12 February 1946.*

Fig. 106: *Airmail cover from the MGL office at Goma to Paris, bearing a 2 Fr. orange-red and lilac-rose and a 6 Fr. yellow-brown and dark blue mask stamp of 1948-51, cancelled at Goma on 30 November 1949 at 16.00, using a type 8A1 cancelled.*

In 1931 the Mining Company of the Tele joined forces with the Empain Group in creating the Compagnie Belge d'Entreprises Minières (Cobelmin, the Belgian Company of Mining Enterprises) to explore for minerals in the domain of the CFL (Railway Company of the Great Lakes), in the former Eastern Province of the Congo. As a result of that merger, Cobelmin became the managing enterprise of the following subsidiaries: Minerga in the Urega region; Milupa, along the Lualaba River; Kinoretain, having tin mines at Kindu; Kundamines in the Urega region; and Phibraki in the Urega. Cobelmin was actively prospecting for and mining a range of minerals, not just gold, but also e.g. tin, wolfram and colombo-tantalite. Its main office was in Nya-Lukemba, a suburb of Bukavu in the Kivu. Amongst others, some of the mixed ores were mined in Kalima in the Kivu, some of the cassiterite in Maniema, and some of the gold in the Kamituga area of Maniema, whilst Shabunda provided tin, gold as well as tantalum. In 1968, Cobelmin merged with the MGL, to form Cobelmin-MGL. After a further merger, this became Cobelmin-MGL-Phribaki-Kivumines in 1974, and after a yet another merger with Symetain, the company became the Société Minière et Industrielle du Kivu (Sominki).

Fig. 107: *Airmail cover from the Cobelmin office at Nya-Lukemba to Brussels. It bears the 3 Fr. carmine and 7 Fr. blue stamps of the Kivu Festival set of 1953, cancelled at Nya-Lukemba on 2 June 1954, using a 8A1 type canceller.*

The Syndicat Minier Africain (African Mining Syndicat – Symaf), was another of the relatively small mining companies established between the two world wars to extract tin in the East of the Congo, in the Symaf case mainly in the Kivu. SYMAF was founded by the Compagnie Financière Africaine (FINAF), itself belonging to the Banque de Bruxelles Group. But in the 1940's, SYMAF did have an office in Elisabethville, which may mean that it was also active in tin mining in Katanga.

Fig. 108: *Airmail cover mailed in 1945 by an employee of Symaf to his wife in Brussels, bearing a 2 Fr.50 carmine and a 6 Fr. blue stamp of the 1942 definitive set. Unfortunately, the cancels are mostly illegible, so we do not know where the cover was mailed.*

The Syndicat des Mines d'Etain (Tin Mines Syndicat – Symétain) was founded in 1938 to undertake tin mining in the Bulega region of the Kivu. The author of the 4 Fr. type 1 aerogram in fig. 109 was based at N'Tufia near Punia. Amongst others, he describes the elections, held peacefully that day at N'Tufia; after all, Independence was near. He also states that he will be moving to a mine at Kalima soon.

Fig. 109: *4 Fr, prepaid aerogram written at N'Tufia by an employee of Symétain, mailed at Punia on 17 May 1960 to Hornu in Hainaut, Belgium.*

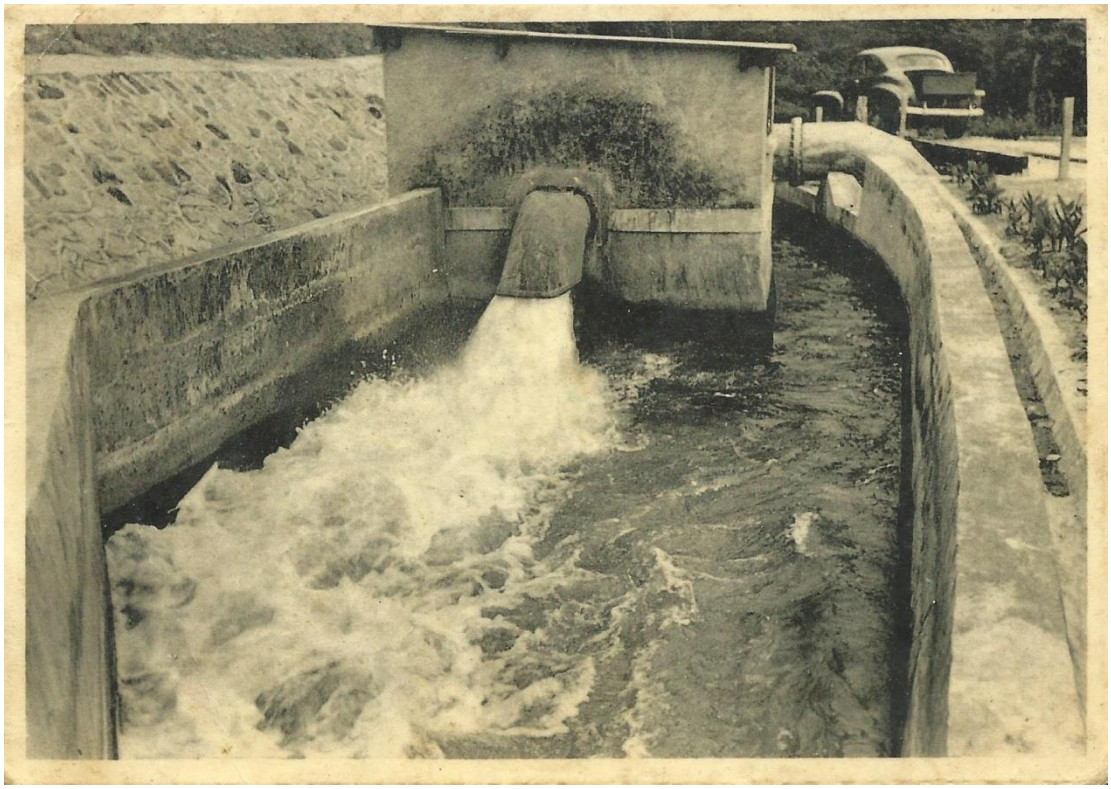
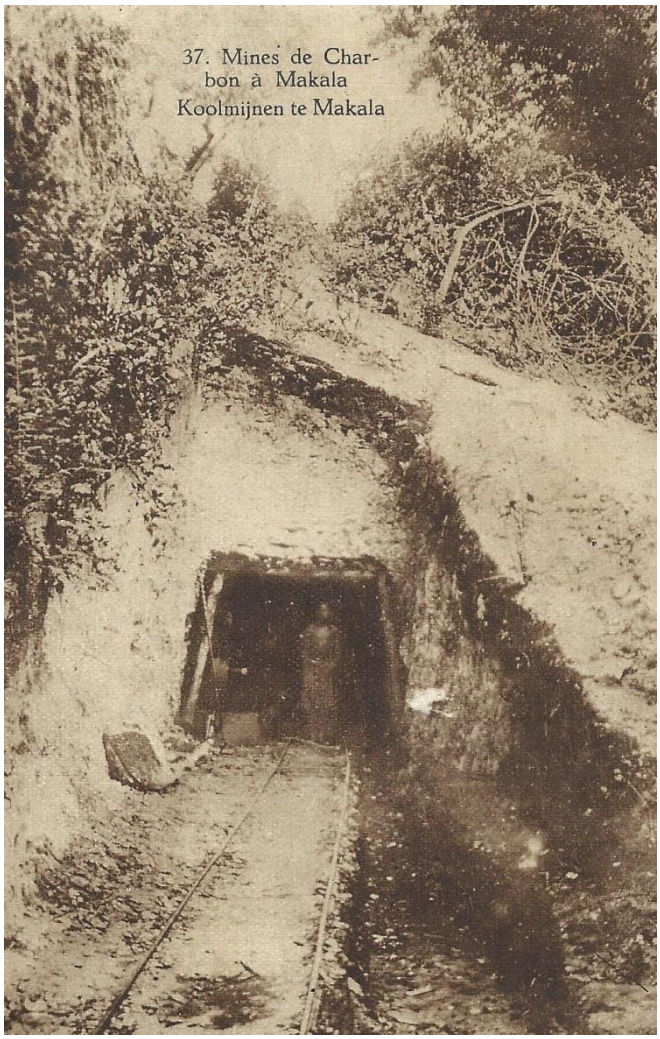


Fig. 110: *Postcard showing part of a 5,000 CV hydro-electric power plant of the Southern Mines of Symétain, using the force of a 300 m high waterfalls near Kalima. The card was written by a girl, probably the daughter of a Symétain employee at Punia, to a friend on 14 November 1957, but is not addressed nor bears a stamp; it may have been carried by hand or mailed in a cover.*

Coal



The Lukuga coal basin runs alongside the river of that name. The Lukuga River is the outlet of Lake Tanganyika and flows West from its start at Albertville (now Kalemie) into the Lualaba. One of the first coal mines of the Congo was started in 1914 at Makala, not far West of Albertville on the CFL railway line to the town, completed in 1915. This was a traditional room-and-pillar underground mine, leaving 6x8 m. coal pillars standing between 4 m wide corridors; thus, about 60% of the coal could be recovered, without having to invest in scaffolding to hold up ceilings. The railway was one of the users of the coal.

Fig. 111: *Postal stationery card Stibbe type 66, prepaid 45 c. blue-green on beige paper, issued in 1927. View 37 shows the entrance to the Makala coal mine, with a narrow-gauge railway line to bring out the coal. It was written at Kenge, in the Kwango district of the Lower Congo, on 28 February 1932 but mailed at Matadi, to Gand in Belgium. An additional stamp has been removed.*

Géomines was a medium-scale company, interested in mining and quarrying a range of minerals. Coal was an important requirement for their processing and transport. In 1916, they started extracting coal from mines in the Lukuga basin near Greinerville (which became Moluba after Independence), WSW of Albertville and not far from Makala.

Fig. 112: *Cover from the Géomines coal mines at Greinerville to a local court at Albertville. It bears a 25 c. red-brown definitive stamp of 1923 and a 75 c. pink definitive stamp issued in 1925-27. Greinerville never had a post office during colonial times, and the cover was therefore cancelled at Albertville, on 23 December* 1927 using a type 5C1 canceller.

Limestone

Limestone was not only useful as a flux for copper smelting, but could also be burnt to produce lime, or fired with clay to make the cement used to produce the concrete and mortars required in construction and infrastructure. There was an important limestone deposit at Lubudi, between Kolwezi and Likasi, where a cement factory was built. The factory is currently owned by EGMF and Gécamines.

Fig. 113: *Unmailed postal stationery card Stibbe type 19 of Ruanda-Urundi, issued in 1928, prepaid 45 c. blue-green on beige paper. This type is the same as type 66 issued in 1927 by the Belgian Congo, but was overprinted RUANDA URUNDI in black in two parallel lines at the top and bottom of the stamp in 1928. View 42 shows a relatively small-scale cement factory at Lubudi.*

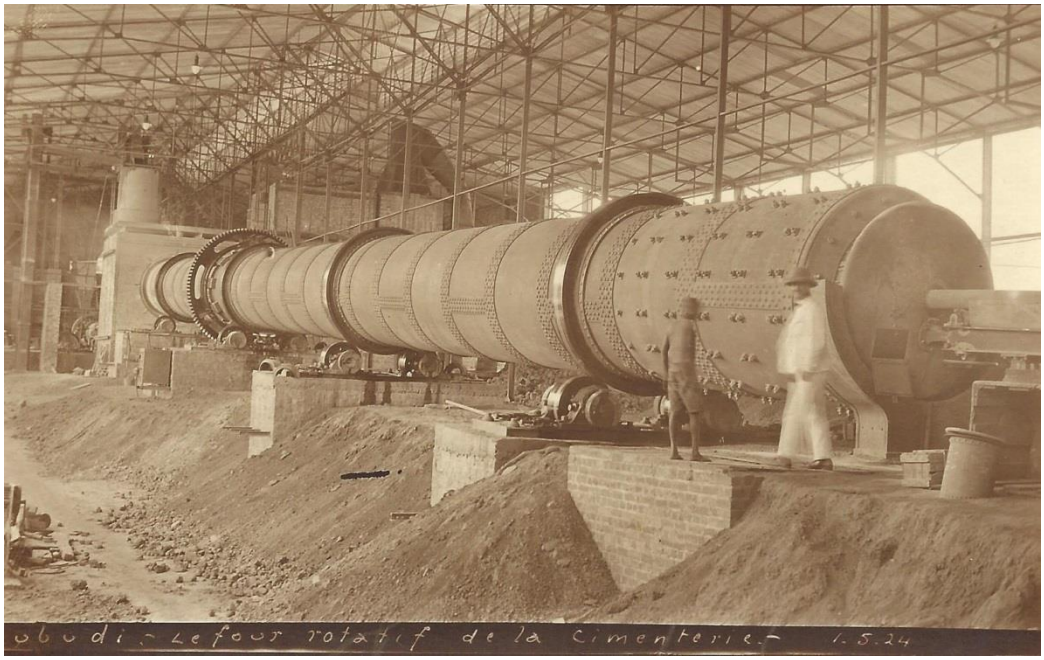


Fig. 114: *Unmailed picture postcard of the rotary kiln for producing cement klinker in the main hall of the Lubudi cement factory. This picture was taken on 1 May 1924.*

A cement factory uses a lot of power and heat. Temperatures in a rotary kiln need to reach 1,400-1,500 ºC, which are usually achieved only by high-grade fuels. In the Congo, that would most likely have been coal. But the grinding of the clinker into the fine powder that is cement is usually achieved with electric power, and Lubudi therefore had a hydro-electric power station.

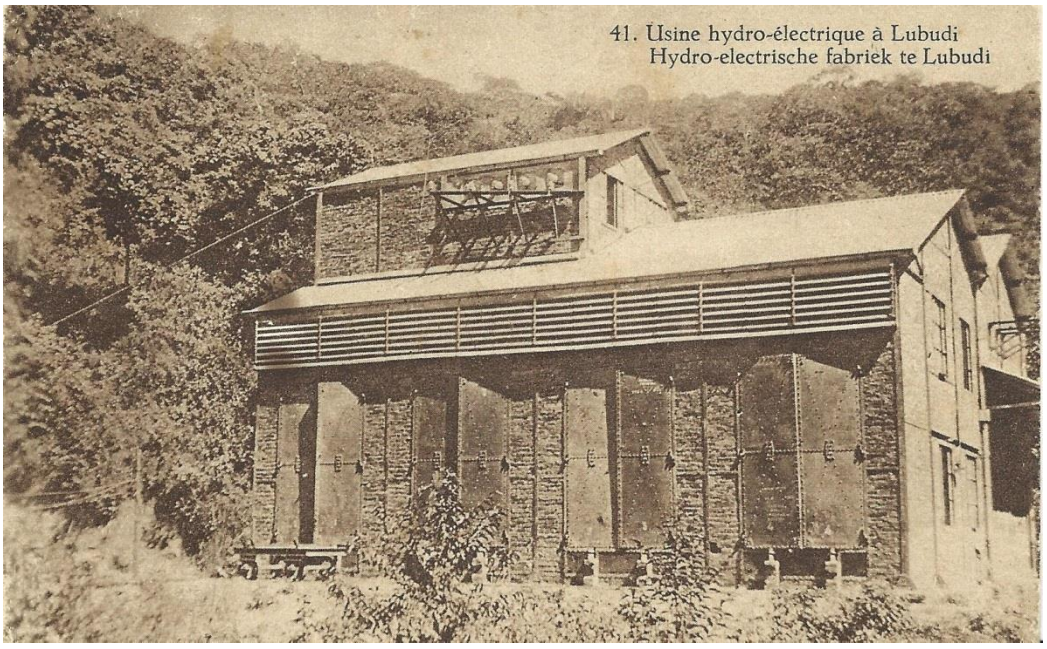


Fig. 115: *Unmailed postal stationery card Stibbe type 66, prepaid 45 c. blue-green on beige card, issued in 1927, with an additional 15 c. brown definitive stamp of 1923. View 41 features the hydro-electric power station at Lubudi.*

Fig. 116: *Cover mailed by someone working at the Katanga Cement Works at Lubudi to a lady at Alphington, Exeter. It bears two overprinted Stanley stamps of 1931: a 1 Fr.25/ 1 Fr. carmine-red and a 2 Fr./ 1 Fr.75 blue, mailed on 30 July 1931 at Elisabethville. The sender has written "Via Cape Town" on the cover, and it thus would have travelled there by rail, and taken a mail boat to Britain from its harbour.*

Cement was not only much needed in the mining industry, but also particularly in construction and infrastructure. In the Belgian Congo, its users would certainly have included the Société Coloniale de Construction (Colonial Construction Company, SOCOL) and Auxeltra-Béton. One of the parties taking an important interest in SOCOL was the Société Commerciale et Minière du Congo (Commercial and Mining Company of the Congo, Cominière), created by a Group consisting of the Josse Allard Bank, and the Nagelmachers & Fils Bank. The Cominière still exists, and e.g. is participating in lithium mining in the Manono-Kitololo area, but it is now a State-owned company. Auxeltra-Béton was founded in 1947 by the Société Belge des Bétons (Belgian Concrete Company). At some stage, Socol and Auxeltra were collaborating for a while.

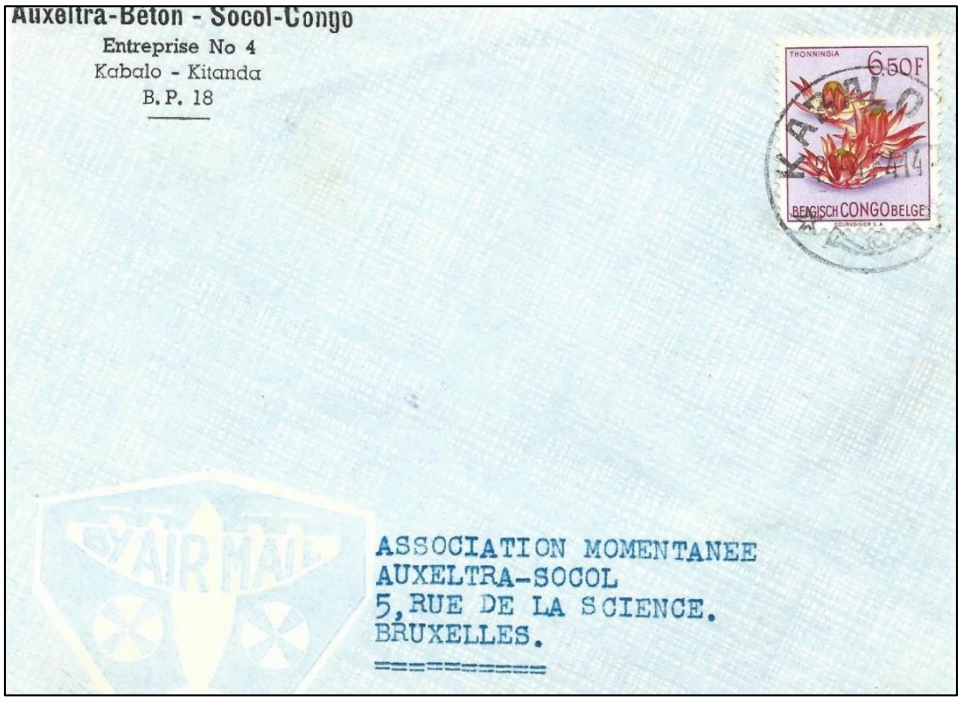


Fig. 117: *Front of an airmail cover mailed by Enterprise No. 4 of Auxeltra-Béton – Socol-Congo at Kabalo-Kitanda to the Association Momentanée Auxeltra-Socol in Brussels. The cover bears a 6 Fr.50 carmine, pale lilac, yellow and brown flower stamp of 1952, cancelled at Kabalo on 23 April 1954.*

P.S.

I have been looking now for some time for postcards or covers from the radium and/or uranium mine at Shinkolobwe, to fill a gap in my collection. The search has so far been unsuccessful, though I have seen at least one image of a postcard. If there are readers who could help me acquire such items, I would greatly appreciate that.

Theo Schilderman

N’oubliez pas de lire la revue sœur du Congolâtres consacrée à la philatélie du Maghreb.
Disponible gratuitement sur: http://www.philafrica.be/MAGHREBOPHILA/index.htm

			
mars 2013	juin 2013	sept 2013	dec 2013
numero #1	numero #2	numero #3	numero #4
			
mars 2014	juin 2014	sept 2014	dec 2014
numero #5	numero #6	numero #7	numero #8
			
mars 2015	juin 2015	sept 2015	dec 2015
numero #9	numero #10	numero #11	numero #12
			
mars 2016	juin 2016	sept 2016	dec 2016
numero #13	numero #14	numero #15	numero #16

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A cette occasion, une exposition internationale sera organisée à Stockholm.
S.M. le Roi Carl XVI Gustaf de Suède a gracieusement accepté d'en être le Parrain.

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