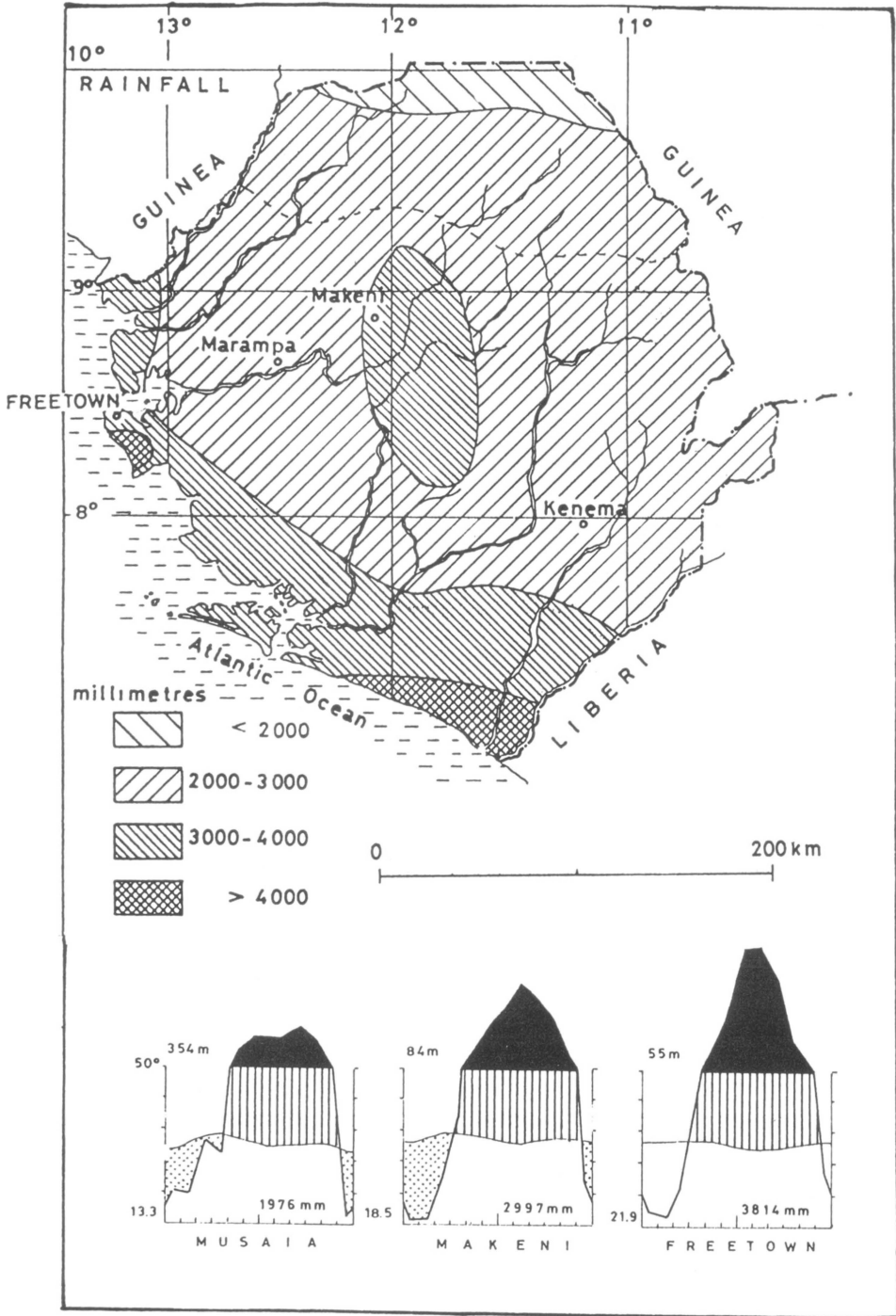


AFRICA REVIEW AN UP-TO-DATE GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SUMMARY OF THE AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Prepared by: F. Pauwels, P. Van Damme, D. Theeten, Chr. De Keyser,
S. Hoste, P. Wymeersch

SIERRA LEONE

1. Official name: Republic of Sierra Leone.
2. Geography:
 - 2.1. Situation: between 7°N and 10°N, 10°30'W and 13°W on the west coast of Africa.
 - 2.2. Total area: 71 740 km².
 - 2.3. Natural regions: deeply dissected high plateaux with average altitude between 300 and 600 m in the northeast. These plateaux are part of the watershed between the sources of the Niger and the rivers flowing directly into the Atlantic. The edge of the high plateaux with isolated hill massifs slope downwards to the sea. The narrow coastal plain is characterized by swamps and mangrove. The coastline is strongly indented.
 - 2.4. Climate: wet tropical. The temperature remains constantly between 25°C and 28°C. Storms, in May and October-November and heavy rainfall from June until September (southwestern monsoon) characterise the rainy season. In the dry season occasional bursts of an extremely dry easterly wind (the Harmattan), carrying desert sand, blows from mid-December till February.



3. Population:

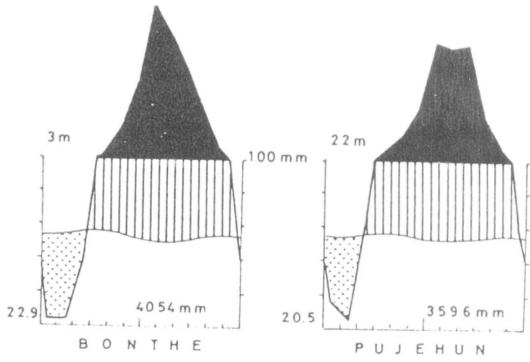
- 3.1. Total population: 4.3 mln (1991), urban population: 30%.
- 3.2. Population density: 58 per km².
- 3.3. Population growth rate: 2.6% (1985-1991).
- 3.4. Capital: FREETOWN, 470 000 inh. (1991).
- 3.5. Languages: English (official). Besides Krio -the language of the Creoles- all the languages belong to the Niger-Congo family subdivided in the West-Atlantic group (Temne, Sherbro, Krim, Gola, Kissi, Fula, Limba) and the Mende group (Kono, Kuranko, Loko, Mandinka, Mende, Susu, Temne, Tukolor).
- 3.6. Religion: Islam 39%, traditional religions 52%, Christian minority.

4. History:

It is extremely difficult to reconstruct with certainty the history of the 16 ethnic groups of Sierra Leone. The social and cultural anthropology has a fair knowledge of a few ethnic groups only. We lack serious studies of a lot of other ethnic groups.

In the 16th century the Portuguese met a *sapi* Confederation which englobed the Limba, Temne, Bailom (Sherbro), Baga, Landuma and Nalu. De Vai splitted from the Kono and migrated from the interior to their actual location. Meanwhile the Sussu were already established on the coast.

One of the most important events in the history of this country is the invasion, in the mid of the 16th century, of the Mani, a population who spoke Mende and who came from the interior of the Sudan after the collapse of the great Sahel empires. They destroyed the *sapi* Confederation, colonized the peoples of the north and finally get back south in order to rebuild the old Confederation into four new kingdoms (Boure with king Farma, Sherbro with king Selbora, and the kingdoms of the Boulom and the Logo or Loko)). May be the Loko and the Mende are the



descendants of the mixture between the Mani/Mende conquerors and the local 'indigenous' Temne/Bulom.

The Mende. This ethnic group is divided in Kpa-Mende, Sewa, and Ko-Mende. May be they are from Mandingo origin. There is a hierarchy of the social and political organization, starting with the smallest entity, the *mawei* or patrilineal household group (with about 30 persons) till the highest ranked chiefdom (the chiefdoms are numbered at sixty). Different *mawei* are grouped in the *kumwei* (local patrilineal groups) which all members form the *kuloko*, directed by the eldest man, the *kulo-kowui*. The chiefdoms, *ndomalia*, were in the hands of the eldest and most ancient lineages settled in the region. The chief is assisted by a council of elders.

The Mende are patrilineal and the marriage is uxorilocal. Mother's brother (*kenya*) still plays an important role in the family affairs. Polygyny is mostly an affair of rich men only.

The Mende believe in a supreme God (*Ngewo*), generator of energy or *hale*. In the world of the spirits we met four categories: the ancestors (*agafa*), the spirits of the masks which play an important role, the spirits of the natural phenomena, and the chthonian spirits, may be represented by the so called *nomoli*. These steatite figurines, discovered in the center of the land, are still an enigma for the scholars because they are not really of Mende origin.

Very important are the different associations. The *poro* association is for men only. The initiation and the ceremonies are held in secret in a holy forest, the *kameihun*. The roles of this association are: pedagogical (education of the youth), political (with the Great-Mask *gbini*), and economical (the organization of the markets and economical transactions).

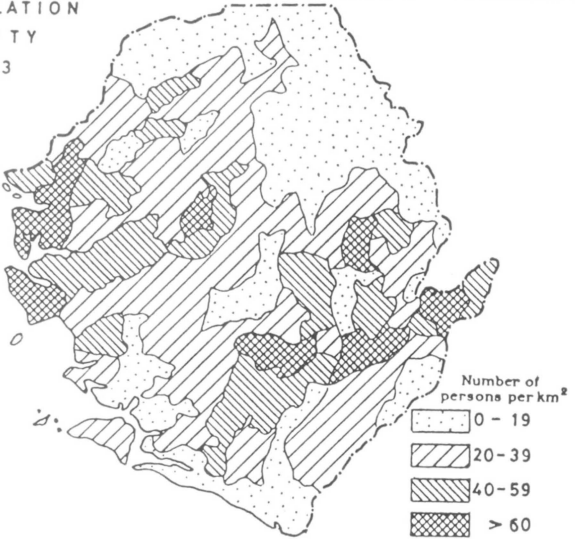
Another association is that of the women called *sande* or *bundu*. The magnificent *sowei*-helmet masks used in this important association are well known to every africanist.

The Temne. In the 16th century the Temne formed a powerful empire (with a divine king, the *bai*) which was based on the slave trade. Nowadays among this people the paramount chief has still a sacred character and is not to be compared with the Mende chief. This king, chosen in a royal lineage, is surrounded by a council of ministers: the *kurambai* or first minister, the *kapr masim* or guardian of the skulls of the deceased chiefs, the *kapr gaboro* or chief of the hunters etc. The sub-chiefs of the villages are called *santigi*.

The Temne are patrilineal.

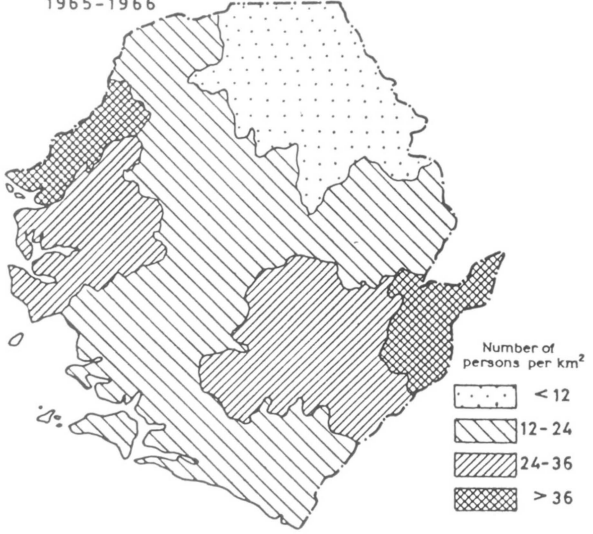
The Bulom, Sherbro and Krim. The political organization is a mixture of Temne and Mende values without being sacred. The kinship system was matrilineal until

POPULATION
DENSITY
1963



0 200 km

DENSITY OF FARM POPULATION
1965-1966



a recent epoch. There are still exogamic matrilineal (*ram*) and the heritage gets along the line of the females and maternal uncles. Today the majority of the people are patrilineal.

The *poro* and *bundu*-associations are also of great socio-political significance. The Kono and the Vai. The social organization of the Kono is based on the territorially localized exogamous patrilineal (*dambi*). There is a preferential marriage between cross-cousins. The great originality of the Vai is the existence of a typical alphabet composed by about 100 syllabic signs and invented around 1850 by Moamu Dualu. It is still used.

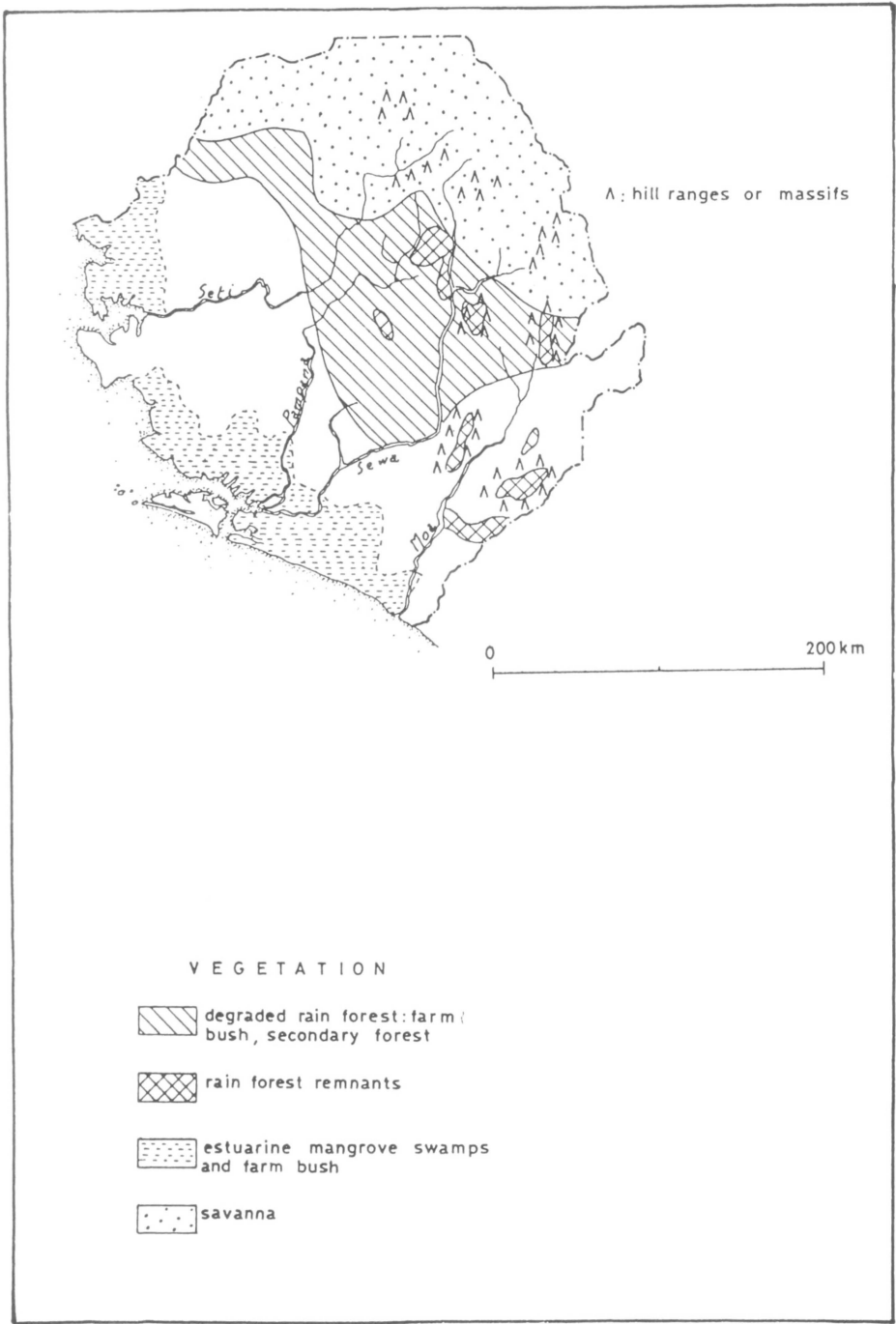
Although discovered in 1460 by Portuguese sailors who gave the country its present name (Lion mountain), contacts with Europeans were limited to trade settlements and military posts along the coast. In 1787 the Freetown province was created as a new home land for liberated slaves. They were called Krio, i.e. the creoles with a typical mixture of 'British' and 'Afro-American' culture, religion, and language.

British rule. Sierra Leone became a British colony in 1808 and the rest of the country became a British protectorate in 1896. The inhabitants, known as creoles, comprising a well-educated elite, became British subjects. Some of them even occupied senior posts in the government administration before installation of the colour bar. In 1951, a unitary Constitution was approved and Milton Margai, leader of the Sierra Leone People's Party, became chief minister.

Since independence. Milton Margai became Prime Minister when Sierra Leone acquired independence in April 1961. Margai died in 1964 and was succeeded by his half brother. Accusations of corruption made him lose the 1967 elections. The winner of these elections, Stevens (All People's Congress (APC)), took over power. A military coup led him into exile to return in 1971, declaring Sierra Leone a Republic and becoming the first president. In 1985, Stevens decided to retire in favour of J. Momoh. Neither he nor his predecessor could tackle the economic decline. The situation provoked civilian unrest and led to a military coup by Capt. Strasser (1992), who suspended the constitution.

5. Nature of political system:

By way of a national referendum, held in August 1991, a new Constitution was adopted, coming into force starting 3 September 1991. This Constitution established a multi-party political system. Executive power was vested in the President, chosen for a five-year term, once renewable. He chooses his Cabinet



including the vice-president. Legislative power was held by a unicameral parliament. Important was a 22-member state advisory council, consisting of 12 Paramount Chiefs - one out of each district - and 10 members appointed by the president. This council was entitled to give advice on legislation, referred to them by the President.

A military coup (April 1992) brought Capt. Valentine Strasser to power. He suspended the Constitution, dissolved parliament and established the National Provisional Ruling Council, which changed of name to become the Supreme Council of State (July 1992).

6. Economy:

GDP: agriculture: 44%, industry: 19%, services: 37% (1991).

Employment: agriculture: 70%, industry: 14%, services: 16% (1980).

6.1. Mining:

Sierra Leone is the seventh largest diamond producer in the world. Total recorded production has declined steeply from 850 000 carats in 1978 to 78 000 carats in 1983/84. It is believed that the apparent decline in production is partly due to the increase of smuggling. There are large bauxite reserves (70 mln t) and the production reached 701 000 t in 1983/84. The iron ore production increased to 417 000 t (1983/84). Rutile production started in 1979 and the aim is 100 000 t/year (which would be exceeded only by Australia).

6.2. Agriculture:

25% of the total area is arable land or cultivated with permanent crops (1984). The shifting cultivation system of slash and burn with a fallow period of 7 years is predominant. Upland farming is practised on savannas and forest bush. Rice, as the major food crop, is commonly associated with cassava, peas, okra, millet, sorghum and groundnuts. In the northwestern coastal swampland, rice is grown in pure stand, in rotation with sweet potatoes. Bananas, maize and plantains are also cultivated. Tree crops are concentrated in the southern and southeastern low plateaux. Over 90% are mixed groves with coffee or cacao as prevailing crops. Oil-palm, oranges, ginger and kola are commonly associated with coffee. Kola is important in the north while coconuts are widespread. Sierra Leone is also

a major world producer of piassava, the stiff fibre of the raphia palm (in the southwestern coastal lowlands).

6.3. Livestock:

31% of the total area is permanent pasture (1984). Livestock industry is poorly developed. Cattle breeding is concentrated in the drier northern regions. The tsetse resistant N'Dama is predominant.

6.4. Forestry and woodland:

29% of the total area (1984). Timber production, population growth and the slash and burn agricultural system reduced the forest area. Forests are mainly situated in the east and southeast. The main exploited species are: **Azelia africana**, **Entandromorpha spp.**, **Guarea cedrata**, **Khaya spp.**, **Lophira alata**, **Mimurops heckelii**, **Tarneta utilis** and **Terminalia spp.** Nevertheless most of the industrial timber is imported from Ghana.

6.5. Fishery:

Fish provides almost 80% of the animal proteins, mostly tuna and bongo herring. The annual catch is approx. 50 000 t. Most (93-97%) is taken from the sea with mollusc and crustaceans sometimes exceeding the freshwater catch.

6.6. Industry:

Is mostly based on the processing of agricultural products. A government program stimulating agro-industries is being executed. There is also a petroleum refinery, a cement factory, diamond cutteries and some chemical industries.

6.7. Weights, measures and currency:

pound, feet

1 Leone (Le) = 100 cents

1 US \$ = 476.19 Le (March 1992)

7. Trade:

Total exports amount to 137 mln US \$ (1985) of which minerals and metals represent 29% while agricultural products come second. Main clients are the EEC, the USA and Canada.

Total imports amount to 166 mln US \$ (1985) of which food represents 27%, fuels 35% and machinery and transport equipment 15%. Main suppliers are the EEC, Japan and the USA.

8. Miscellaneous:

World Bank classification: Sierra Leone belongs to the low-income economies with a GDP per capita of 350 US \$ (1985).

Membership of international organisations:

GATT, ILO, IMF, OAU, UN, UNESCO, WHO, African Development Bank, Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (recipient), Economic Commission for Africa, Economic Community of West African States, Islamic Conference, Commonwealth, World Bank.

Sierra Leone is a signatory to the Lomé Convention (EEC-ACP).

Embassy of Sierra Leone in Belgium: Tervurenlaan 410
1150 Brussel
Tel. 02/771.00.53

Belgian Embassy for Sierra Leone: Immeuble Alliance
ave. Terrasson de Fougères
01 B.P. 1800
Abidjan, Ivory Coast