

## **Adventures in Africa: A very unlikely national hero**

**Italian explorer Pietro Savorgnan di Brazza stands out among colonialists - a man of integrity still lionised in the land he once ruled. Now his remains are to be reburied in the Congolese city that bears his name**

**By Peter Popham**

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When Pietro Savorgnan di Brazza was growing up in Italy in the 1850s, there was a map of Africa on the wall of his home with a large white space in the middle, indicating the vast area where no white man - merchant, missionary or cartographer - had ever set foot. Brazza's father had scrawled by the side of the white space, "This would be an interesting place to visit." Brazza was of the same opinion.

"When he was growing up he wasn't interested in learning Latin or Greek, only in geography and history and botany, all things that had to do with the environment," said Idanna Pucci, his great-niece. "He read about a mythical river called the Ogoué that ran through that white, unexplored space. Quite a few people before had attempted to go up the Ogoué, but none had succeeded and some of them never came back. And Brazza was absolutely certain he was going to meet this challenge. It was as far-fetched as someone saying, 'I'm going to cross the Indian Ocean on a windsurfer', but he did it."

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