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Mark Anderson
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Dear Sirs,

I would like to introduce myself as a Brazilian who thinks he wrote a novel that may be of interest of your House. I beg your attention to read what follows:

The letter you will find bellow, it was published at the “Africa Update”, Vol. VII, Issue 1 (Winter 2000): The Mazrui - Gates Debate

The letter

The Mysterious African Prince of Porto Alegre, Brazil

Research Notes by José Luiz Pereira da Costa, Porto Alegre, Brazil

An African gentleman who called himself a Prince, lived in my hometown, Porto Alegre, South Brazil, from the early days of the twentieth century until the year of 1935, when he died. Some old people know a bit about him including the following:

1 - He used to say that he was part of the Royal Family of Benin, overthrown by the British in 1897.

2 - In Brazil, he adopted the name of Custódio Joaquim de Almeida.

3. He used English as his language of communication

He was considered a wealthy man, at a time when Afro-Brazilians were very poor, living massively in slums. Indeed he acted as a rich person. Apparently he could afford the ownership of race horses at the local Jockey Club a place where then Afro- Brazilians were not admitted. People used to say, as well, that each month, until he died, he collected at the local branch of a London bank, a pension in sterling pounds.

If as historians claim, Oba Ovonramwen of the Benin Empire was exiled to Calabar (Nigeria), and died there in 1914; and, since the gentleman that lived here in Porto Alegre died in 1935, for sure, Mr. Custódio Joaquim de Almeida was not the overthrown Oba. But then, who was he? Was he a brother or a son of Ovonramwen, who left Calabar and moved to Brazil, and was rewarded with a pension for life? Note that during the nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries there were regular ships between Bahia, Brazil and the West Coast of Africa.

About that date (Winter 2000), I was finishing the romance Benin. The romance was not published, but I would like to know if there is any chance that a reader from your House, capable to read Portuguese language, would be interested in knowing the book's content, and if considered of interest, to translate it into English language, and publish it.

I will present briefly, herein, a summary of the plot, and the historical sources that was used to structure the African background for the plot. I remark that, it aims to be purely a novel, so it has no intention to be a historical book. But it tries, in fact, to be as much truthful as possible to the events that represents the plot's background.

I will appreciate very much if you kindly could inform if there is any interest of your House, so that I will then ship a copy for the reading. In any case, my electronic address for your position is: kofi@dacostaex.trix.net

THE PLOT

With four chapters, and 364 pages, the novel explores, in its first chapter, the early days of a boy named Idugboa, son of Adolo, Benin's reigning Oba. It shows as well Idugboa's youth, his training; introduces the court people, and the intrigues they live in. Various characters living around the court, each one, portrait, somehow, how the life was in Benin at that time. So, will play an important rule across the story Obaro, the younger brother of Idugboa; Kotou, the first friend of Idugboa, which will be in the ripe days of his youth, the Master of Metals, *iguneronmwan*. In connection with the religious behave of the society, will play an important rule the priestess Emotan, *ogwega*, and later a powerful witch, Azonye. To act as a ruler for the political scenario, the main character is Obayemi, the chief *uzuma*, head of the council of the Oba's Makers. He acts along the whole plot, with the power prime-ministers use to have. And counter-act to him, the mayor of Ughoton, Abiola, the *enogie*. There is corruption and sectarianism, across the voices of the characters in Benin at the end of Nineteenth Century.

Since the actual history of Benin leads to her conquest by the British, some important British characters are acting along the novel, as Cranfield, the British Preacher, kind of intelligence agent to the British Empire. As well, plays important role the Official of H. M. Navy, Captain of Frigate Henry Levingson Sauer.

In the plot there is the initiation rituals for the youth future Oba, the dead of his father (Adolo), and his ascension with new name, Ovonramwen, or Overami.

The plot displays moments of War and Peace:

War lead by Oba's young brother, Obaro; and by the final and depressing deposition of Ovonramwen.

Peace, by a romance between Ovonramwen and Edim, the astonishing twin daughter of a rich man of the caravans, in which woman a seed is laid connecting her with the future events both in Calabar, place of Ovonramwen's exile, and Brazil where a Beni Prince will live and die.

The plot marches on to Calabar where new characters came into the scenery. And it all leads to a final, both in Porto Alegre, the Brazilian city, and in Harlem, New York.

All the characters, but Ovonramwen and his father are fictional names.

Support books:

Benin and the Europeans – 1485-1897, by Ala Ryder (Humanities Press Inc, New York, NY)
 The Kings & Chiefs Of Old Calabar – 1785-1925, By Ekei Essien Oku (Glad Tidings Press Ltd.)
 Edo – The Bini People Of The Benin Kingdom – By Chukwuma Azounye (The Heritage Library Of African Peoples)
 Benin Kingdom, of West Africa – By John Pepper-Engels (The Rosen Publishing Group)
 Art, Innovation, and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Benin – By Paula Girshick Ben-Amos (Indiana University Press)
 Dom Obá II, D'África, o Príncipe do Povo – By Eduardo Silva (Companhia das Letras – Brazil)
 Fluxo e Refluxo – By Pierre Verger (Editora Currupio – Brazil)
 Vínculos de Fogo – By, Alberto Diniz (Companhia das Letras – Brazil)
 A Lança e a Enxada – By Alberto da Costa e Silva (Editora Nova Fronteira - Brazil)

While preparing the book, I have exchanged, for a long period, letters with Paula Girshick Ben-Amos, author of one of the books listed above, and a top researcher in African issues. She has helped strongly in various historical issues.

I have traveled, myself, for more than twenty years along various African Countries in the West Coast, and East Coast.

Yours faithfully,

JOSE LUIZ PEREIRA DA COSTA