

Dear Paula:

03/02/00

As I promised earlier, I have a story to tell you. I don't know how and if it may have connection with your academic work. Nevertheless, since it may be related to Benin, I'm passing it on. Maybe it's, in part, one more oral story to handle.

The short story:

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. And, he spoke Portuguese with a heavy accent.

He was considered a wealthy man, at a time when Afro-Brazilians were very poor, living massively in slums, and indeed he acted as a rich person, so much that he could afford the ownership of race horses at the local Jockey Club -- a place where then Afro-Brazilians were not admitted. He was too a famous herbalist and medicine man, recognized by white powerful customers. 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.

As Custódio died at the age, some say, of one hundred years, in 1935, is more likely possible, if he really came from Benin's Royal Family that he may be brother of Adolo, Ovonramwen's father.

The way the story is above, was edited to be published in an academic publication, "Africa Update, Newsletter of African Studies," of Central Connecticut State University.

Then, I ask to you Paula the following: Has crossed through your reading material concerning an eventual immigrant from Benin's Royal Family to Brazil?

If you want so, you may take some time to comment the contents of today's first part letter. But there is a second part: I don't know if you -- because your last book frames the Benin's history on the eighteenth century, but roots to earlier history -- have material to discuss with me an issue that disturbs me somehow:

Benin's cavalry.

On pg. 56 of your book, you show an equestrian figure. And you say on pg. 54: "Equestrian figures were an important component of this period's artistic vocabulary of warfare and triumph. . ." and on pg 55, you assert: "In Benin today, such figures on horseback are often associated with Oranmiyan, the mythical founder of the Benin and Yoruba. . ." The question that annoys me is to know if, as Oyo, had Benin, at any time, and specially closer to nineteenth century a war cavalry?

That's all for today.

Best regards,

José Luiz

Note:

If for any reason (technical probably) any of your e-mail return not reaching me, you may always try another e-mail address on a different server, that is: dacostatur@dacostatur.com.br or my fax number: 55-51-2313366. My home address for mail is:

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