

Dear Paula:
March 6, 2000

In your E-mail of 03/04/2000 you ask me about the source of my interest in Benin. I must say that by no means I can see unpoliteness in your question. I only beg your permission for an answer at the end of this E-mail.

Pension for the supposed Prince.

Ovonramwen was set in exile at Calabar. My reading says that, in the end of nineteenth century, and for long time before it, Benin already experienced commercial exchange involving the merchants of Calabar, the Efik people. Actually, Calabar was, at the pattern of that time, a very busy metropolis, with secret societies (as *Ekpe*) congregating men of commerce, men of religion (these men helped British Colonial Authorities to abolish human slaughter ritual's), and men of finance, indigenous and foreigners, inclusive Jews linked to Antwerp and Amsterdam. It is not difficult to assume that along the years of regional commerce, *uzamas*, for themselves or/and on behalf of the obas, large-scale traders, and even public officials -- all may have used Calabar as a kind of nowadays Switzerland. Ovonramwen lived in Calabar, as an exiled person, from 1897 until 1914, when he died, and the oral report says that he lived very well in terms of personal welfare.

Adu Boahen, in "*Topics in West African History*," Longmans 1968, pg. 120 refers: "*These new societies included the North German or Bremen Missionary Society, which operated in Togo, the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society from Switzerland in eastern Ghana, the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland in Calabar. . .*" and, in an interesting connection between Mission and Commerce, the same Boahen refers on pg. 121: "*The Basel Missionary Society in Ghana formed the Basel Trading Company (now known as the U.T.C.) In 1859, while the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) formed the West Africa Company in Nigeria in 1863.*" And, finally, Boahen sets the involvement as in commerce and religion, in local politics too(I have referred before from another source). Boahen says in the same paragraph quoted before: "*They tried to persuade Africans and their kings to stop some of their inhuman customs such as human sacrifice*".

I could not understand precisely in your E-mail if you present a concern of doubt about the "command of English," "by a Benin person, even a royal." I would like you consider the following, with no scientific ground: The early presence of Portuguese Catholic Missions, and lately the British Protestant Missions, may have taught both Portuguese and English for many people. You reveal, in your E-mail one loan word "*colher*". I know some few other loan words used in Benin. But indeed, I know dozens of Brazilian (Portuguese from Brazil) loan words in *Gã*, *Fanti*, *Ashanti* and *Twi* (Ghana's dialects) and *Youruba*. They have in Accra a full community called "*The Tabons*," from the Brazilian expression, "*está bom*" (all right). And the reason was not Brazilian Religious Missions that we actually never had, but the heavy transit of people and goods from Bahia and Rio de Janeiro to Africa's West Coast. If our exchange of letters moves on, there will be an interesting chapter about rich Brazilian merchants, ships owners (some of them mulattoes), during and after slaves' trade.

And moreover, maybe should be considered the need of Benin administrators to deal in a kind of commerce, somehow sophisticated, in the nineteenth century. It may lead to the supposition that English was more than *Lucumi* in many circles of the Benin life. Even if considered the fact that Ovonramwen was an orthodox Oba (and it seems the reason he gave to the British act in 1897 as they did, shows he was a very stiff person, specially in religious questions), I will not exaggerate if I accept the assumption that he, Ovonramwen, and specially some of his officials (as the *uzama* or the *iyase* of the Treasure) could deal both with foreign language and money.

It really seems to me that there is too much involvement for language and money to be out of it.

I'm not quoting authors too much, since almost all of what I'm saying is widely known. My doubts, I'm expressing them at the conditional tense. So, any historical support to clear up my doubts will be most welcomed.

CAVALRY

It was not of my knowledge the report of Sir Richard Burton. But then, and because of Burton's assertion, "*10,000 men and all the horses in the city were away at war,*" I must introduce here a new issue -- tsetse fly. And this is the big question, for me, concerning cavalry both in Benin and Dahomey. The issue will be different all together concerning the Oyo people, because of their different geographic position.

In Roland Olivier's book *The African Experience* - Icon Editions, 1991, pg. 139, he presents a map in which he delimits the infested regions "*by the tsetse fly, where transport was limited to canoe traffic and human portorage.*" If the book is not available in your library I may fax to you the page with the said map.

I will now quote Olivier, pg. 140 of his book: "*In general, the incidence of the tsetse fly dictates that the southern limit of the beast of burden occurs around Latitude 7 or 8 North. Beyond that, until the advent of merchandized transport, everything had to be carried either on the human head or else by dug-out canoe.*"

I'll translate (with no required permission to the author) a very short part of *da Costa e Silva's* book "*A enxada e a lança*" (previously referred) that say: "*The Arabic authors do not give us information about the usage of horses as a war animal, even if Al-Bakri tells us that the Ghana's equine is shortish, immediately after the description he made of their army.*"

As you may see, Burton's assertion does not easy my doubts.

Finally, answering you:

I'm by formation, a Lawyer. I was graduated at the Federal University of Rio

Grande do Sul, School of Law, 1965, in Social and Judicial Sciences. Before it, during the curse, and a bit after that, I was a reporter (In our universities one study a part of the day, or night, and work outside in spare time to earn money, if the one is not from a wealthy family). I wrote a lot about the African moment, when she was setting herself free from Colonial rule. My first window to the world was opened when, as editor of Politics in a major newspaper of my State, in 1971, I was invited by the Department of State to visit the USA. I traveled, as official guest, for thirty days in places as Washington, D.C., New York, New Orleans, Chicago, Lincoln (Nebraska), Los Angeles and San Francisco, and I visited in Florida the site for the launching of Apollo rockets to the moon, just a couple of days before one of those launching.

After my return from the USA, I became frequently involved in my legal firm, in a new path, which was the representation of Brazilian companies doing business in Africa. I've been from 1974, until the second half of 1980's years, going and coming to Senegal, Ivory Coast, Ghana (the whole Country, many times), Nigeria (Lagos and Calabar), Cameroon and Mozambique.

When the path leading and bringing me from Africa has ended, I have resumed the writing.

I have bought many discs and books (some in Africa, some in London, some in New York, some in Lisbon) and now I buy them (as yours Art, Innovation . . .) via Internet*. I write papers, I've made addresses in Brazil about Africa, and now I'm working in a personal project that may eventually end in a book.

That is it!

I do not know very much about academic work, and academic behave. If our exchange of experience, by any means lower your professional work and curriculum, be free in stopping our correspondence. I'll miss it, but I will understand. Just say it, if so.

Best regards,

José Luiz

* I'm waiting from Amazon Bookstore, since January 2000, the following out of print books:

1 - "Ovññonramwññen Nññogbaisi : an historical tragedy in English" Ola Rotimi; Unknown Binding;

2 - "Horse in West African History" Robin Law; Hardcover;

3 - "Benin and the Europeans, 1485-1897" A. F. C. Ryder;