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Musumb et ses empereurs face aux puissances coloniales (XVIIe-XXe siècle) un laboratoire historique des villes et des pouvoirs en Afrique centrale

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Summary

I opened this study by wondering about “*Musumb and its Emperors facing the Colonial Powers (17th-20th century). A historical laboratory of towns and powers in Central Africa*”. This doctoral dissertation is part of the vast field of urban and rural history of sub-Saharan Africa in general and the history of pre-colonial cities in particular. If many studies have been devoted to the history of cities in Africa, few of them focus on the pre-colonial cities of Central Africa and the city of Musumb has not had the attention it deserves yet. Although the *Africa's Urban Past collection*, under the direction of David Anderson and Richard Rathbone, promotes urban history in pre-colonial Africa, as does the journal *Afrique et Histoire* which also devoted a dossier linked to the problems of the cultural history of the city, Musumb's peculiarities have received little attention.

In *Africa's Urban Past*, apart from the study that John Thornton devotes to the ancient capital Mbanza-Kongo (Sao Salvador) of the Kongo kingdom, central Africa is barely present. In the introduction, David Anderson and Richard Rathbone allude to cities that expanded dramatically in the 19th century under the influence of long-distance trade along the Congo River. These river towns were remarkable for their size in that they could reach a population of over 5,000 and could even exceed 10,000 people. This doctoral dissertation also follows Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch who, in her work *History of the cities of black Africa, from the origins to colonization*, underlines that Africanist and African historians have written relatively little on the especially ancient cities of the continent.

The town of Musumb appears little in this literature, where it is simply mentioned occasionally. However, as a meeting place for the region's multiple populations and a crossroads for exchanges between traders from the Luso-African coast and the various interior markets, Musumb has strong pre-colonial roots, having played a pre-colonial role dominant in this long distance trade.

In any case, this doctoral dissertation intends to show the importance and role of the city of Musumb in the history of the Lunda state in Central Africa from 1600 to 1960. This role is examined through the analysis of the reigns of different Lunda Emperors who succeeded each other to the throne during the pre-colonial and colonial periods, as well as the

political and social dynamics which pushed the movements of this capital into the Lunda State. During the pre-colonial era, Musumb was the capital of the Lunda state, a commercial crossroads and a nomadic or mobile city. It became fixed during the colonial period but it was reduced to the rank of a simple capital of the Mwant Yav Chiefdom, recognized by the Leopoldian and Belgian colonial administration. During the postcolonial period, Musumb is still fixed and once again becomes the center, the cradle of identity reference and the capital of ethno-cultural decisions and customary administrative functions of the Lunda of Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia. A detour through an etymological analysis of the term *musumb* also allows us to grasp unexplored parts of this history.

Relative written and oral testimonies were gathered as part of this research: the written corpus is made up of the stories of explorers, agents of the colonial administration, missionaries, traders, etc. while my oral investigations carried out on the sites where the city of Musumb was anchored constitute the oral sources. Regardless, the oldest written records mentioning Musumb are found in the travel accounts of Joaquim Rodrigues Graça and the Portuguese major Henrique Augusto Dias de Carvalho. There are also notices from the various Territorial Administrators, District Commissioners and Catholic and Methodist Missionaries who worked in the territory of Kapanga, in the former district of Lualaba and in the former province of Katanga, such as Mr. Lemaire, Mr. Lady, Mr Léon Duysters, Mr Van Den Byvang, etc.

This written documentation, which includes biases common to archives and stories produced in a colonial context, offers multiple and abundant data which was useful in defining a general historical framework. The biases it contains have been circumvented by the use of other sources, such as objects, places of memory, oral tradition. It should be noted that the information collected orally contains contradictions and many gaps such as the chronology of events as well as the lack of precision in certain facts. To analyse them, I used three methods: historical, comparative and immediate history. These two methods are supported by archaeological, linguistic, onomastic and humanist or cultural geography approaches.

This doctoral dissertation shows that the term “Lunda” is not practically linked to an ethnicity, but rather a cultural and political term. According to tradition, the term *aruwund* comes from the *Urund* word which means friendship. While linguists, for their part, show that these two words are different lexical radicals and therefore, the etymology is folkloric rather

than historical. This allows us to make a distinction between “Lunda” as a political term and “*Ruwund*” as an ethnic term. This thesis also shows that the Lunda State was a land conducive to existence, because its physical aspects (soil, subsoil, fauna and flora) facilitated human, animal and plant life. Due to a lack of currency, the Lunda used the barter system. The symbol of the chief was the skin of a fierce animal: the lion, the leopard and the relatively more recent ivory.

In the Lunda conception, the death of a *Mwant Yaav* is not of particular importance, because his power is embodied by the new *Mwant Yaav* who succeeds him and who becomes one. We don't need the statuettes of ancient emperors. The current holder is considered the incarnation of his predecessors. The succession to power of the *Mwant Yaav* is elective, but eligibility is hereditary without being very limited. He is elected according to his paternal or maternal line among all the descendants of the *Ant Yaav* without regard to the number of generations. The inauguration ceremonies take place at Nkalaany where the *Mwant Yaav* is officially inducted by the *Atwubung*. These investiture myths date from the origins of the Lunda state and political power. They have been perpetuated from generation to generation until our time.

Central Africa had real urbanization well before the colonial period. As contemporary historians that we are, particularly Africans and Africanists, we have a duty to update it. Like Dubois and Frérot, I identified three periods of city development: pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial. I showed that the development of cities in Africa must be linked to the global context. Thus, I distinguished the share of intracontinental exchanges and influences from outside the African continent in the evolution of African urban networks.

Although the urban phenomenon in Central Africa is an ancient reality, it underwent great evolution during the colonial occupation and especially during the post-colonial period. Musumb, capital of the Lunda Empire, is one of the large pre-colonial cities of Central Africa which managed to bring together numerous populations to the point of appearing like real metropolises. Thus, the network of the first urban districts in Africa is not, overall, a colonial innovation; colonization reorganized what already existed in pre-colonial times for the benefit of its socio-economic interests.

However, this colonial reorganization led to the disappearance of the commercial monopoly held by these pre-colonial cities like Musumb, less well located in relation to these new exchange networks and the birth of colonial cities which replaced them. Musumb was a

very mobile pre-colonial city in central Africa, because each new emperor erected a new capital which was always called Musumb. This city is still made up of a fenced palace where the *Mwant Yaav* (the Emperor) lives with his wives, his children and the notables. In front of this royal palace, there is a vast empty space, the *diibur* (Grand Place), which serves both as a gathering place for the people and as a market square. The city of Musumb is therefore a model pre-colonial city in Central Africa.

The community of meaning of the lexeme *musumb* among the Bantu and among the Lunda in particular, has an etymology which probably goes back to a protolanguage. The retention of this word *musumb* to designate the capital where the *Ant Yaav* reside (plural of *Mwant Yaav*, that is to say Emperors) is only a historical fact which is explained firstly by the movements successive then the definitive establishment of what was initially a hamlet, a camp linked to the nomadism of ancient peoples. Thus, the term *musumb* has a narrower semantic field among the Lunda than among the other Bantu. In this thesis, this word *musumb* is used to designate the city or capital where *Mwant Yaav*, the Emperor of the Lunda, resides. This detour through linguistics is used to analyse the form of the building plan of the city of Musumb which allowed me to understand its urban organization.

From the creation of the first city of Musumb until the last, its building plan gives it the shape of a turtle projected onto the ground. The urban space of the capital Musumb therefore appropriates the characteristics of the fully socialisable animal. The turtle is always associated with the python, one of the guardians of the imperial pantheon. She is the symbol of wisdom, cunning, resistance and above all longevity. She has qualities essential to the exercise of royal power most esteemed by the Lunda.

The description given by my predecessors locates the town of Musumb from the West (*ku mazemb*, means the back) towards the East (*ku mes*, means the front), the *mukal wa Rukonkish*, that is say the free city guard is on the right and corresponds to the North as well as the *mukal wa Ruwej*, that is to say the free city guard is on the left and corresponds to the South. On the other hand, this doctoral dissertation positions Musumb from the East (*ku mazembe*) towards the West (*ku mes*); because expansion from the beginning is a march from East to West. While the *mukal wa Rukonkish* (the city guard) is located on the left corresponding to the South. The *mukal wa Ruwej* (the city guard) is located to the right of the city corresponding to the North. This location of the town of Musumb reflects that of the notables during the *chitentam* of *Mwant Yaav*, that is to say the National Assembly composed of the

high dignitaries of the Empire. Musumb is therefore a city in the most precise sense of the expression, because it results from changes introduced in the mode of production and depends largely on the tributes brought to it by the subject chiefs. It is a capital city of a political group with a strong tributary character, an urban model and an authentic urban invention of an exceptional character in Central Africa.

This thesis talks about spatial mobilities of the city of Musumb in four phases. The first phase corresponds to the period from 1600 to 1852. This period is marked by low mobility in the city of Musumb. Site movements are made according to the personal convenience of the *Ant Yaav*, either to demonstrate their dynamism, or to search for game-rich and fertile sites. The second phase includes the period from 1852 to 1885. It is marked by a series of emperors with relatively short reigns. For at least thirty-three years, the Musumb capital must have changed site more than five times for five *Ant Yaav* (emperors) who reigned during this period. The third period goes from 1885 to 1907. It is marked by a long interregnum characterized by political intrigues. As a result, the city of Musumb had to change site more than nine times for four *Ant Yaav* (emperors) who reigned during this period. Finally, the fourth phase corresponds to the period from 1907 to 1912. It is marked by a series of movements of the Musumb capital for a single reigning *Mwant Yaav*.

The causes of these spatial mobilities in the city of Musumb from the 17th to the beginning of the 20th century are both endogenous and exogenous. The endogenous causes are explained by the electoral process which is linked to the rules of succession and inheritance negotiations. Lunda custom does not clearly specify the rules governing the choice of *Mwant Yaav* and the criteria for assessing a candidacy do not give priority to the lineages of the rights holders. The fact of giving priority to only one of the candidates present at a time, with the exclusion of the others, often gives rise to struggles between the rights holders.

Sociological, political and economic factors clearly explain the distant and immediate external causes of these movements of Musumb from one place to another. First, the monopoly policy associated with the Lunda oligarchy which was in contrast to the “liberalism” of the trading companies on the Luso-African border. The Lunda economic organisation, assimilated to the political organization in terms of tribute, was the monopoly of *Mwant Yaav* alone who had the power to trade with Europeans. The Chookwe having a less ascriptive socio-economic organization were concerned about free trade, they could not bear to submit

to the commercial power of the *Mwant Yaav*. As the Chookwe already practiced long-distance trade, which allowed them to come into contact with the Portuguese, they managed to discover the firearm that would make them great warfighters.

The practice of long-distance trade and the possession of firearms also allowed M'Siri to defeat and subjugate certain Lundas from between Lualaba-Luapula by cutting them off from the influence of Musumb's power. The power of the *Ant Yaav* became unstable and thus led to the constant displacement of the capital Musumb. The occupation of this part of the southeast of Lunda State was not enough for M'siri. He also wanted to have a monopoly on everything else in this part but *Kazembe wa Kechila* (in the current city of Kolwezi) and *Kazembe wa Luapula* (in Zambia) constituted a great handicap.

During colonization, several decrees were signed and promulgated by the colonial authority, which sometimes strengthened or reduced the power of Musumb and his *Ant Yaav* (Emperors). Thus, the first decree of October 6, 1891 was not applied to Musumb, because the authority of the Congo Free State had not yet arrived there. Regardless, this decree had already announced the Leopoldian colonial policy of involving traditional authorities in the administration of natives grouped into traditional chiefdoms. This decree therefore was followed by those of June 3, 1906, May 2, 1910, December 5, 1933, November 7, 1940, etc. which caused the base of power of Musumb and his *Ant Yaav* to be modified each time. Generally speaking, Musumb and his *Ant Yaav* (emperors) were big losers of all these colonial decrees.

A set of factors acted on the weakening of the power of Musumb and its *Ant Yaav* to a certain extent, thus introducing some modifications on the social, statutory, hierarchical, political and economic levels in the capital Musumb. Furthermore, the Belgian colonial regime was noted for its lack of doctrine in matters of Lunda policy. This regime thought it had justified its action of systematic and intensive economic exploitation of the Lunda State by placing it under the symbol of recognition and consolation of all respectable institutions. However, Musumb and its *Ant Yaav* have been affected by deep socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic imbalances. These changes seemed to appear less perceptible to the extent that Musumb and his *Ant Yaav* kept their moral prestige intact and increased.

The Belgian colonial administration played a decisive role in accelerating the process of social disintegration by eliminating the old relationships that existed between socio-ethnic groups. With these new relationships that it introduced, it precipitated the movement of social

disintegration. It was therefore determined to destroy the hierarchical links which existed between notables and undermined customary relations between social categories by replacing them with relations of a new order based on colonial dependence. Thus, the Lunda political unit was dismantled by administrative divisions or territorial divisions, and the Lunda State was broken up into several more or less autonomous chiefdoms and sub-chiefdoms. Territorial legislators took precedence over Musumb and his *Ant Yaav*. As a result, on the eve of the independence of the Congo, most of the Lunda notables, their Emperor *Mwant Yaav* and their capital Musumb, found themselves in a state of isolation which could no longer understand the support of the Belgian colonial power.

Regardless, colonization played a dual role in the administration of Musumb and his *Ant Yaav*. On the one hand, it put an end to the spatial mobility of the city of Musumb and the instability of the power of its *Ant Yaav*. On the other hand, colonization reduced the capital Musumb to a simple capital of the Mwant Yav chiefdom, thus weakening the power of its *Ant Yaav*.

The Belgian Congo was a secular state, but because of the political and economic desires of the great powers, Belgium was forced to renounce the principle of free exercise of all religious faiths. Thus, the Belgian colonial administration began to almost favor Catholic Missionaries. This is what has been called the “Belgian colonial trilogy”. This fact allowed the Catholic Missionaries to have a monopoly on education. The Americans, for their part, landed like shepherds in the Congo and especially in Musumb. The English, who refused the offer of the explorer Henry Morton Stanley, regretted this fact. Finally, the issue is that the Belgians came as Catholic Missionaries, while the Americans and the English came as Protestant or Methodist Missionaries.

However, the city of Musumb, having first received on its soil, the first American Methodist Missionaries, it did not benefit from a great contribution from these Missionaries during the colonial period and especially in the field of education. As for the Catholic Missionaries, they arrived late in Musumb and they also did not do much there during the colonial period. For more than forty years, no educational structure was put in place to promote the emergence of secondary schools in Musumb; it was rather limited up to the primary level. It was not until the end of the colonial era that the first secondary schools emerged in Musumb; which explains the known delay in the training of intellectuals in this ancient city. Aware of the immeasurable delay caused by this state of affairs and to make up for it, the first

Missionaries began to send certain young people from Musumb to other environments to continue their secondary studies. The Missionaries thus left the town of Musumb and the entire territory of Kapanga in a deplorable intellectual void for a long time during the colonial period.

In Musumb as in the entire Kapanga territory, the Methodist and Catholic Missionaries, the Methodist and Catholic Christians, the Traditional Chiefs and the Missionaries have clashed several times and especially in matters of religious doctrine. However, to prevent new converts from entering into so-called pagan practices, the Missionaries have, from the dawn of their evangelization, created evangelical and social institutions: schools, dispensaries and hospitals, agricultural projects, etc. These evangelical and social works still operate to this day as powerful vectors for the development of the town of Musumb and the entire territory of Kapanga.

I showed that on a social and cultural level, colonization favored the diversification of habitat, the tracing of traffic routes, the water supply, the electrical connection, the construction of collective facilities and the emergence of new economic occupations which have even swallowed up those of the pre-colonial era. Thus, the juxtaposition of these two cities of pre-colonial and colonial Musumb is identical in terms of its form which is that of a turtle projected on the ground, but which has been reinforced by cultural and social interference. As for the relations of the city of Musumb with the Lunda of Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia, they are in good shape because all these Lunda consider Musumb to be the cradle of their identity reference and the capital of ethno-cultural decisions and customary administrative functions.

In short, this doctoral dissertation has not only reconstructed the past of Musumb as a model for the creation of cities in Central Africa, but it has also confirmed that the evolution and development of the city of Musumb are corollaries to the different reigns of the *Ant Yaav* who succeed one another to the throne. It has also just documented certain hypotheses put forward in the context of historical linguistics, archaeology, toponymy, urbanization, etc. thus paving the way for sustained research. On the cultural, social and economic levels, this thesis can guide and stimulate the customary, territorial, provincial and national authorities of the Democratic Republic of Congo as well as international organizations such as UNESCO, with a view to building and promoting these various ancient sites which sheltered the town of Musumb to make them tourist sites.

This doctoral dissertation has just fulfilled the desire that I have had for a long time, that of lifting the veil on the ancient history of Africa and in particular that of the city of Musumb, which remained obscured by its transmission mainly through orality. This allowed me to accumulate expertise in an innovative field that is little exploited by historians: the history of pre-colonial cities and especially the urbanization of rural areas in Central Africa. In doing so, therefore, allows me to constitute myself as a privileged witness of the transition from towns according to the progressive traditional African conception to modern cities according to the Western conception. As a result, I have the right to claim control over the twists and turns, the contradictions, the heaviness and the issues that prevailed and which prevail in the evolution and transformation of these pre-colonial towns and rural centers into modern towns at the dawn of the meeting and penetration of traditional African and Western civilizations.

From the above, this doctoral dissertation ends by saying that, if we want to properly safeguard the pre-colonial cities of Central Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo in general, and the city of Musumb in In particular, it will not only be enough to popularize them through the media but it will be up to African States in general and the Congolese State in particular to provide these pre-colonial cities with infrastructures worthy of their names that better meet international urban planning standards while respecting of course the forms of pre-colonial urbanization because it is said, urbanization can be universal but only the forms of urbanization which change according to time and space. And, to give the traditional Congolese chiefs in general and the *Mwant Yaav* in particular, the real power (that is to say that of Emperor of the Lunda) and the opportunity to guard and initiate the Lunda people to the rituals likely to contribute to the social, economic and cultural development of the Democratic Republic of Congo through the achievements of the city of Musumb, capital of the former Lunda state.

Furthermore, the last meeting in Musumb, during the inauguration of the current *Mwant Yaav* Mushid III in 2012, which inauguration brought together thousands of Lunda customary chiefs from Angola, Zambia and the former provinces of Bandundu, of Katanga, Western Kasai and Eastern Kasai, all together in the name of the Lunda State, not only confirmed the place and role of Musumb as being the bridge of Lunda unity and the cradle of the identity of the Lunda people, but it also challenged all the acculturated modernists who have already forgotten that the true identity card of a people is the one that personifies it. Hence, such meetings are to be encouraged.

To *Mwant Yaav*, Emperor of the Lunda, this thesis suggests respecting the limits of his royal power so that the politics of the country cannot hinder his administrative threshold and that of his relatives. He must possess his real imperial power and authority as Emperor which he held, which to enthrone and visit his notables who are in Angola, Zambia and in the former provinces of Bandundu, Katanga, Western Kasai, Eastern Kasai and central Kongo. He must also choose a commemorative date, which date must be celebrated each year in Musumb, thus bringing together all the Lunda chiefs of Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia. In doing so, it would contribute to the safeguarding of solidarity, fraternity and Congolese and African unity which would impact on lasting peace and security in the region through of course, the achievements of the city of Musumb.

To the Lunda people, this thesis suggests the construction of a new modern residential district in Musumb. The general idea is that Musumb is a pre-colonial city in the process of modernization and it must be truly modernized or have at least a new modern residential area which will be a point of attraction, beauty, tourism, etc.

Thus, this doctoral dissertation is not definitively concluded, but on the contrary, it has just opened up other perspectives for other researchers who will embark on this vast field of urban, rural history and pre-colonial towns of the Ancient Africa south of the Sahara. This dissertation is therefore a major asset for our postdoctoral research, the emphasis of which will be placed on the urbanization of rural areas in Central Africa, a field that was then innovative and little exploited by researchers in Historical Sciences.