

CHAPTER THREE

CONCLUSION: TRIBUTE, TRADE AND POWER: AN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL SYNTHESIS

The Lunda kingdom of Mwata Kazembe is shown to have stretched from the Lububuri or Lualaba River in the west to the Chambeshi River in the east. Batista indicated the western boundary of the kingdom to have been the Lububuri River while Gamitto wrote of the kingdom having for its boundaries "in the northwest, east and south the countries obeying the Muembas, Auembas or Moluanes and the west the river Lualaba."¹ The river Lububuri referred to by Batista must be river Luburi which Frederick Arnot said flowed into the Lualaba River and which Robertson argued to be the western boundary of Mwata Kazembe's kingdom.² These unclear boundaries were not definite nor do they show a compact area under the Lunda to have been from the Lualaba to the Chambeshi but they give an indication of the strength of the kingdom of Mwata Kazembe at its height.

At the helm of this Lunda kingdom was a powerful Mwata or king whose exercise of power was sometimes observed to be absolute and arbitrary.

¹ Burton, *The Lands Of Cazembe*, pp. 176 and 209; and Gamitto, *King Kazembe*, vol. 2, p. 109.

² Ernest Baker, *The Life And Explorations Of Frederick Stanley Arnot* (London: Seeley, Service & Co. Ltd., 1921), p. 176 and Govan W. Robertson, "Kazembe And The Bemba(Awemba) Nation," *Journal Of African Society* (1904), p. 2.

Pinto wrote of how any junior chief who vomited when they drunk *pombe* (local beer) with the Mwata was “instantly put to death.”³ Batista described how the Mwata cast out his chiefs who did not wish to fight by cutting the ears of some, punishing others and turning them into slaves.⁴ Gamitto described how the Katamata (Mwata Kazembe’s chief executioner), on the Mwata’s signal violently kicked on the back of the knee joint of a prisoner of war and before the prisoner fell down, “he cut off his head with a single blow and held it by the hair in his left hand,”⁵ and Livingstone noted how the area after crossing Mandapala River was depopulated because its inhabitants had fled from the Mwata’s “severity in cropping ears and other mutilations, selling the children for slight offenses.”⁶ These observations by travellers in the Lunda kingdom confirm that, although the Lunda kings operated within a structure of governance and consulted their officials, they were overlords whose commands were obeyed by commoners, aristocrats and subject chiefs alike or they were punished if they disobeyed.

However, the unavoidable question a historian is confronted with when analyzing explanations that relate tribute and trade to power is, whose power? Is it the power of the king or the power of the kingdom (its governance structure)? Langworthy, for example, writes that “to a very

³ Burton, *The Lands Of Cazembe*, p. 126.

⁴ Burton, *The Lands Of Cazembe*, p. 188.

⁵ Gamitto, *King Kazembe*, vol. 2, p. 67.

⁶ Waller, *Livingstone’s Last Journals*, vol. 1, p. 253.

great extent the power of the Lunda kingdom depended on the monopoly of tribute and trade which Mwata Kazembe held,"⁷ while Gordon writes that "at the height of the Kingdom's authority, aristocratic appointments extended the rule of the Kazembe and collected tribute."⁸ Clearly, the power of the king is synonymous with the power of the state as the abilities of individual kings are not singled out.

The historians' dilemma on giving primacy to the individual or the kingdom can be illustrated in the following event: Ilunga Lukwesa, Mwata Kazembe 3 and Kibangu Keleka his successor are credited by historians with insight into Portuguese machinations by not allowing the Portuguese expeditions of 1798 and 1831 to pass through the kingdom to Angola because the Portuguese threatened their monopoly of tribute and trade.⁹ Apart from the fact that responsibility for the failure of the Portuguese to cross is put on the two Mwatas when the Portuguese were as much responsible,¹⁰ the real intentions of the Portuguese are indicated to have been centred on Katanga copper or resources in the western parts of the kingdom.

⁷ Langworthy, *Zambia Before 1890*, p. 40.

⁸ Gordon, *Nachituti's Gift*, p. 37.

⁹ See Langworthy, *Zambia Before 1890*, p. 62 and Roberts, *A history Of Zambia*, p. 112.

¹⁰ Note that the although Portuguese intrigues offended Mwata Lukwesa, he did not deny them permission to cross to Angola (See Burton, *The Lands Of Cazembe*, pp. 135, 138, 141, and 143-144), while the expedition led by Gamitto did not pursue the matter fervently.

The actions of the Mwatas (assuming they took those actions) can be equated to the official positions of their kingdom but equating the monopoly they were supposedly safeguarding to the Kingdom's monopoly carters not just for the king but for all citizens as well. Sometimes the achievements and genius of an individual king can overshadow the achievements of an ethnic group or kingdom. However, the difference in saying that the Lunda monopoly was threatened and that the Lunda kings' monopoly was threatened leads to different implications on the history of Mwata Kazembe's kingdom.

In Mwata Kazembe's historiography the role of the king in tribute and trade transactions has overshadowed the place of the majority subjects and the power of the king has been equated to that of the state. In line with the historians' treatment of Lunda history through the eyes of its leaders (bearing in mind this is an historiographical study), in this dissertation power refers to the power of the King equated to the power of the kingdom. As such, the power of the Mwata or of the Lunda people was seen from the existence of stability in the kingdom and control over tributaries and through the expansion of the kingdom. The aim of this chapter is to show how historians connect tribute and trade to power, and examine the nature of explanations that use tribute and trade as to explain power in the kingdom of Mwata Kazembe before 1890.

TRIBUTE AND TRADE VIS-À-VIS POWER

In historical works on the kingdom of Mwata Kazembe, tribute and trade are linked to power because it is argued that power depended on tribute and trade. Thus, Langworthy argues that the power of the Lunda kingdom depended very much on the “monopoly of tribute and trade which Mwata Kazembe held,” such that when these Lunda monopolies were broken, the basis of Mwata Kazembe’s power was broken.¹¹ Gordon, like Macola, argues that the Lunda kingdom relied on the distribution of goods acquired through trade and that the political economy of the kingdom “rested on the monopoly control over the trade of ivory.”¹²

Here, it should be noted that since historiography affords the historian comment and analysis on historical works, the generic use of the term ‘Mwata’ which has been shown in this dissertation as only promoting a static conception of the historical process, is only in line with the usage found in writings on the history of the kingdom of Mwata Kazembe.

The dependency of the Mwata and his kingdom’s power on tribute and trade is closely related to the complete control over tribute and trade which, historians argue, the Mwata had. However, since records of tribute and

¹¹ Langworthy, *Zambia Before 1890*, pp. 40 and 65.

¹² Gordon, *Nachituti’s Gift*, p. 19 and Macola, *The Kingdom of Kazembe*, p. 135.

trade transactions show that the Mwata was neither the sole receiver of tribute nor the sole trader in the kingdom,¹³ the use of monopoly by historians to show the dependency of the power of Mwata Kazembe and his kingdom on tribute and trade is questionable. What is also noticeable about the nature of explanations that show power to have been dependent on tribute and trade is that the explanations can be termed as sufficient condition explanations because they show that tribute and trade were a pre-condition for the existence and maintenance of power.¹⁴

Another way in which historians have explained the connection between tribute and trade to power has been through arguments that portray power as being gained, increased or maintained by tribute and trade. It is in this sense that St. John argued that the largesse from trade was used to maintain adherents. Langworthy also argued that tributary wealth and goods from trade were used to maintain the capital and ensure loyalty. Roberts equally argued that kings monopolized tribute and trade because these were the means of "recruiting and maintaining political support."¹⁵ Simply put, subjects remained loyal because of what was given to them from the tribute the Mwata received and merchandise he got from trading. The king only

¹³ Burton, *The Lands of Cazembe*, pp. 118, 119, 181 and 185; Gamitto, *King Kazembe*, vol. 1, p. 198 and vol. 2, p. 101; and Waller, *Livingstone's Last Travels*, vol. 1, pp. 253, 267-268 for some examples of evidence that the Mwata was not the sole trader in the kingdom.

¹⁴ R. F. Atkinson, *Knowledge And Explanation In History: An Introduction To The Philosophy Of History* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 104.

¹⁵ Langworthy, *Zambia Before 1890*, pp. 40 and 65; St. John, "Kazembe," p. 220 and Roberts, "The history," p. 242-243.

remained in power when he fulfilled this duty. The more subjects the Mwata attracted and ruled, the more powerful the kingdom was with stability and cohesiveness being achieved through paying the subject chiefs.

The immediate point to realize is that although the means of increasing and maintaining power involve quantifiable assertions, there is no quantifiable data which can be used to affirm them. Again, the fact that the kingdom of Mwata Kazembe expanded mostly through conquest, the attraction of the largesse from tributary and trade wealth of the Mwata cannot be used to explain the increase of the power of the kingdom. The establishment of a Lunda kingdom on the lower Luapula (which was already settled by other peoples) and the expansion of that kingdom through the acquisition of more land was not done by giving of exotic goods to subjects and would be subjects of the kingdom but through conquest.

The using of tribute and trade to explain the means of increasing and maintaining power rationalises the concept of power in Mwata Kazembe's kingdom. The historical explanations that result are rational explanations of power because they describe the determining conditions of power.¹⁶ This is because in as much as these explanations describe the motives and expectations behind tribute and trade transactions, they rationalise tribute

¹⁶ Stover, *The Nature*, p. 100 and Dray, "Rational," p. 107.

and trade, and when they describe the functional role of tribute and trade in the existence of power, they rationalise the power of the Mwata.

However, rational explanations make historians to commit the linkage fallacy or the post hoc propter hoc fallacy.¹⁷ The fact that the king received tribute and engaged in some trade transactions did not make his power dependent on tribute and trade. It has been asserted above how distribution of tributary and trade wealth was not the way the kingdom was established and expanded. However, after the establishment and initial expansion of the Lunda kingdom when peace reigned, one source, recorded anonymously from unknown informants, asserts that the Mwata gave a woman for every tusk he received.¹⁸ The source reads:

Peace reigned in the land until the death of Lukwesa [Mwata Kazembe 3]. Tribute was paid in ivory and women by all the conquered tribes including the wena Chishinga, waitawa, walungu, wasila and wamambwe. For every tusk of ivory brought to the chief, he gave a woman in return in exchange on the understanding that should the woman have children, they were to be handed over to Kazembe as slaves.¹⁹

The above quotation which seems to describe Mwata Lukwesa's breeding method of his slaves cannot be taken literally. The reader is first informed that Lukwesa received tribute in form of women and ivory, and then when he received ivory he gave a woman in return whose children were

¹⁷ Tosh, *The Pursuit*, p. 117 and Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies*, p. 166.

¹⁸ National Archives Of Zambia, KSG 3 Vol. 2 and NP 2/6/10.

¹⁹ National Archives Of Zambia, KSG 3, vol 2 and NP 2/6/10.

Lukwesa's slaves. It is not clear if the women Lukwesa received as tribute were slaves, but even on assuming the women Lukwesa gave in return for ivory were slaves, this passage cannot be generalized without considering the expanse of the kingdom and situational logic or practicality of the assertion. The imprecision that will result from any extrapolation from the above passage will involve unlimited generalization; unclear circumstances when the described exchanges took place; and doubtful application when quantification of the process is done.²⁰ These limitations will still preclude goods exchange as a prerequisite of power.

The theoretical basis of the historian's conception of power in connection with tribute and trade in Mwata Kazembe's kingdom is based on the principles of reciprocity and redistribution. For example, Langworthy shows redistribution as a means of encouraging loyalty while Roberts argues that reciprocity and redistribution underpinned the kingdom of Mwata Kazembe.²¹ Macola has also discussed the importance of distribution in Mwata Kazembe's kingdom while Gordon has emphasized the reciprocal and redistribution basis of economic and political relations between the King on one hand, and the aristocrats and subject chiefs on the other.²² That is, the

²⁰ Gardiner, *The Nature*, p. 94.

²¹ Langworthy, *Zambia Before 1890*, pp. 40 and 65-67; Roberts, *A History Of Zambia*, p. 95; and Roberts, "Abdullah," pp. 242-243.

²² Macola, *The Kingdom Of Kazembe*, pp. 104 and 134; and Gordon, *Nachituti's Gift*, pp. 19-60.

social, economic and political stability in the kingdom was achieved through the redistributive and reciprocal attribute of tribute and trade.

Although reciprocity and redistribution/distribution can be reduced to carter only for officials in the kingdom, their connection to the king's monopoly over tribute and trade hinders this reductionist perspective because the king's monopoly covers all subjects of the kingdom. Moreover, even when reciprocity and redistribution is applied only to aristocrats, subject chiefs and various officials in the state, the Mwataship is reduced to middlemanship because the Mwata becomes only a person who received tribute only to give back goods which the givers were forbidden to obtain independently; or the Mwata is reduced to only a middleman who traded on behalf of his subjects. Only in this sense can the king gain or lose power with or without reciprocating or redistributing, respectively.

In the same vein, the contradiction in the concept of monopoly vis-à-vis reciprocity and redistribution cannot be dismissed easily. While reciprocity and redistribution can form motivating factors for monopolising tribute and trade, the processes equates the parties involved. But power to monopolise denotes a position of domination bordering on exploitation. The power of Mwataship observed first hand by the Portuguese and Livingstone, was not

nominal and the exercise of which included mutilating officials aroused fear and respect from Lunda subjects.

Clearly, the above attributes of reciprocity and redistribution subtracts from Mwataship as a position of power as the position becomes too dependent and indebted to subjects. Toning down reciprocity and redistribution to acts of generosity, salaries or various forms of incentives to satisfy conquered chiefs, aristocrats and other officials in the kingdom, however, puts the Mwata in charge but adversely severs reciprocity and redistribution as determinants of power. This is because since the Mwataship as a reciprocating and redistributing party is in a position of power, the acts of generosity, payments and any gift overture are not a sacrifice of power. The parties involved in resulting transactions will retain their status. The Mwataship retaining its position of power and the ability to use it while the receiving groups will remain subordinates. In this way, reciprocal and redistribution attributes of tribute and trade (with their practical limitations) cannot be major factors in the gaining, increasing and maintenance of power.

Simply put, the theoretical basis of tribute and trade for substantiating political authority in pre-colonial Mwata Kazembe's kingdom is blurred by an unclear definition of roles of the king and subjects, the nature of political

authority, and private entrepreneurship which was cardinal in the survival of subjects of the Lunda kingdom. In as much as historians aim to provide comprehensive explanations of events, processes and structures, the theories they use “must be empirically verifiable, both singularly and collectively.”²³ That is, theories in history should not only be able to explain part of the evidence under consideration but should also account for all available evidence such that (in order to avoid committing the reductive fallacy) the “data omitted must not be essential to the understanding of data included.”²⁴

When the historian is engaged in reconstructing tribute and trade transactions in connection to power in pre-colonial Mwata Kazembe’s kingdom, they engage in reconstructing structures and cultures which were not static but which were in “a constant state of becoming.”²⁵ In capturing this process, anachronism or the “importing into the past of concepts which only have reality in the present,” has been the major hindrance to reconstructing an objective history.²⁶ The anachronistic tendencies in describing this process has not been the importing of concepts from the historian’s present into the reconstructed past, but the importing of succeeding concepts into earlier periods of history of the kingdom of Mwata

²³ Othmar F. Anderle, “A Plea For Theoretical History,” *History And Theory*, 1, 4(1965), p. 52.

²⁴ Tosh, *The Pursuit*, p. 157 and Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies*, p. 172.

²⁵ Thomas Spear, “Oral Traditions: Whose History?” *History In Africa*, 8(1981), p. 174.

²⁶ Marwick, p. 146.

Kazembe. Although “an understanding of the sequence of actions and events within and between societies is necessary [when postulating] causal relationships”²⁷, clear dating of the history of Mwata Kazembe’s kingdom is almost unattainable. But, even without a clear chronology, historians can achieve ordered explanations without anachronisms by avoiding generalising available evidence.

Consequently, the problem for the historian has been to buoy in between problems of grand generalization and pervasive uniqueness in historical reconstruction. This is because to cater for the regular and irregular factors, concepts or events within a historical process requires the historian “to spell out linkages of causation” whilst maintaining the pragmatic aspect of explanation-that of making others understand clearly what is explained.²⁸

CONCLUSION

This historiographical dissertation has been based on the understanding that historiography is the study of the writing of history and not simply the writing of history. In examining the writing of the history of the kingdom of Mwata Kazembe before 1890, emphasis has been on specific explanations

²⁷ David P. Henige, *The Chronology Of Oral Tradition: Quest For A Chimera* (London: Oxford university Press, 1974), p. 1.

²⁸ Carey B. Joynt and Nicholas Rescher, “The Problem Of Uniqueness In History,” *History And Theory*, 1, 2(1961), p. 155-158.

that involve tribute and trade in relation to power and not the overall historical orientation or tradition of the historians whose works have been cited. Singling out tribute and trade was in no way done to show these concepts as the only ones historians have used in explaining pre-colonial power dynamics in Mwata Kazembe's kingdom, but was done bearing in mind that historians deal in multiple causes.

This study was limited to examining historical works on the kingdom of Mwata Kazembe but the sources that historians use to construct the history of the Lunda kingdom were also briefly critiqued. The written sources for the history of Mwata Kazembe's kingdom were also opted for when examining the historical works on the kingdom simply because they are the ones that have been used and misused by historians who, not knowing or knowing of the limits of these sources used them.

However, it has been shown that available evidence has not been the only basis for historical explanations on pre-colonial tribute and trade vis-à-vis power. Historians have also resorted to using theories in their explanations of tribute and trade in relation to power. This has been done for the lack of comprehensive data and the historian's need to fill in the blanks, or in order to simplify the issues of tribute, trade and power, or because of anachronistic tendencies of individual historians who project imagined perceptions on

available evidence. The limitation to the use of theory in history cannot lead to the rejection of theory but has shown that even theory has to be based on evidence because extrapolation from unknown facts can only result into speculative history.

The problem of using theories not based on recorded evidence has made historical explanation of tribute and trade vis-à-vis power to fail in one pragmatic aspect of historical explanation-that of making things clear. This is because the result of such explanations has been a history far removed from available evidence and a contradiction to the concept of power. The explanations have failed to put into context the place of the citizenry, the expanse of the kingdom and relations with surrounding ethnic groups. The pragmatic shortfall in historical explanations has been perpetrated by the use of generic statements which has only furthered telescoping in the reconstructed historical works.

While most definitions of historical explanation and causation concentrate on events, historical explanation in this dissertation has been about concepts of tribute and trade in relation to power. It has been observed that the concepts of tribute and trade are not static and thus processual reasoning and explanation must have been used by pre-colonial historians of the kingdom of Mwata Kazembe. The awareness of history as a process has been

lacking in explanations of tribute and trade vis-à-vis power which has resulted in the disregard for biography.

The conception of history in this dissertation is that history is not chronicle because the past itself is not history. The past provides the field from which history is reconstructed. Thus, historians do not just cut, copy and paste, but they provide meaning to what they cut, copy and paste from the past. Historians analyse and interpret the data they select from the past before they present it for the clear understanding of others. So historians have to finally explain their findings for others to understand. In this sense, explanation is embedded in the language of the historian such that even mere narratives implicitly explain.²⁹ In order to explain part of the past they are dealing with, historians show links in the data they select and so they cannot discard the problem of causation completely even when they may try to camouflage it.³⁰

The problem with the logic of explaining power using tribute and trade has been the connecting concepts of monopoly, reciprocity and redistribution vis-à-vis evidence. It has been shown in this dissertation that: the Mwata was not the sole trader and not the only receiver of tribute; expansion of the kingdom and thus of the Mwata's power was through conquest and not the

²⁹ Gardiner, *The Nature of Historical Explanation*, p. 68.

³⁰ Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies*, p. 165.

Mwata's largesse; there is no evidence of chiefdoms becoming part of the kingdom of Mwata Kazembe or breaking from the kingdom because of the Mwata's failure to reciprocate or redistribute; redistribution involves imagined scarcity and large scale goods exchange that cannot be quantified; local trade is overlooked and the different forms of tribute not taken into consideration while private entrepreneurship and initiative is replaced with dependency on the kingship; power is subtracted from the Mwataship which becomes equal to that of a middleman; and historians do not consider the situational logic of the evidence they use in their explanations.

Historians cannot discard explanation but their explanation has to be based on available evidence because history can only be written from what is known. The difficulty for the pre-colonial historian of African history is that evidence available for historical reconstruction is distributional.³¹ Data for the reconstruction of the history of the kingdom of Mwata Kazembe is no exception. Available evidence only covers partially certain aspects of the Lunda past and the implications these complications entail on reconstructing Lunda history is the basis of this dissertation. As historians have to cut or select information from the past, selection for Lunda history is limited to limited evidence available. But should the historian base explanations on

³¹ Herbert S. Lewis, "Ethnology And Culture History," Creighton Gabel and Norman R. Bennett (eds.), *Reconstructing African Culture History* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1967), p. 29.

suppositions? A limited history with unfilled blanks explains the past more clearly and is credible than a general history with grand generalisations based on the historical imagination.