

## Early Records on Bantu

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This article gives a short outline of the early, sometimes controversial, records of Bantu peoples and languages. While the term **Bantu** has been in use since the mid 19th century, the earliest attempts at describing a Bantu language were made in the 17th century. However, extensive description of the individual Bantu languages started only in the 19th century (Doke 1961ab; Doke 1967; Wolff 1981: 21).

Scholars have made great efforts in trying to trace the earliest record of the peoples currently known as Bantu. What is considered as proven with considerable certainty is that the first person who brought the term Bantu to the knowledge of scholars of Africa was W. H. I. Bleek. When precisely this happened is not fully clear. The year given is sometimes 1856, when he published *The Languages of Mosambique*, or 1869, which is the year of publication of his unfinished, yet great work *A Comparative Grammar of South African Languages*. In *The Languages of Mosambique* he writes: «The languages of these vocabularies all belong to that great family which, with the exception of the Hottentot dialects, includes the whole of South Africa, and most of the tongues of Western Africa». However, in this context he does not mention the name of the language family concerned.

Silverstein (1968) pointed out that the first year when the word Bantu is found *written* by Bleek is 1857. That year Bleek prepared a manuscript *Zulu Legends* (printed as late as 1952), in which he stated:

«The word 'aBa-ntu' (men, people) means 'par excellence' individuals of the Kafir race, particularly in opposition to the noun 'aBe-lungu' (white men). [...] It appears, therefore, to be the best general term for that family of languages, of which the Kafir is known to be of the most original and therefore, for the purposes of philology, most important members. There has not yet been suggested any really appropriate name for this great family of languages and nations, nor any other come into general use. Besides, the word 'Ba-ntu' is common to almost all languages of this kindred.»

One year later, in 1858, Bleek published *The Library of Sir George Grey*, where he used the term **Bántu** at least four times, stating that among the languages of South Africa there are «Prefix-Pronominal Languages [including the] **Bá-ntu** Family, S. African Division». He further states: «The Languages of the **Bántu** Family occupy not only about nine tenths of South Africa, but also parts of the western portion of the

above described territory of the **Gor** Family.» The term **Bantu** was thus first used in *written* form in 1857, and it was *published* for the first time in 1858.

To claim that Bleek invented the term Bantu is, however, gross exaggeration. For him this term was a convenient name for all those people, who spoke one of the hundreds of such languages that have a number of linguistic features in common. The root **-ntu** is the oldest root for 'human being' found in all these languages.

Was this term used already earlier to denote the people using languages of that group? And was this term used by the Bantu people themselves for this specific purpose? These questions are difficult to answer, because oral tradition does not reliably extend beyond the time of Bleek, and earlier written records do not mention people having used this term in such a sense. The first linguistic descriptions of languages belonging to this group were made already two centuries earlier, but they do not illuminate this question. Since terms of the type **Bantu** usually emerge only when there is a need for ethnic and/or linguistic classification, it is likely that this term did not exist prior to systematic linguistic research. At least, it is not found in the sense discussed here in the earlier word lists of various Bantu languages.

**Early references to Bantu.** Against the background described above, it is surprising that Clement Doke, the famous linguist from South Africa, took a stand that the name *Punt*, mentioned in ancient Egyptian records from about 2500 B.C. as the «Land of the Blacks» or the «Sacred Country», would be related to the term Bantu.<sup>1</sup> In discussing this question two things should be kept apart. There is little doubt that the land referred to by the term *Punt* is located in the area where the Bantu people are currently living. But in the light of the present-day knowledge of Bantu migrations it seems impossible that this area could have been inhabited by Bantu people at that time. It is even more difficult to substantiate the view that *Punt* would literally refer to any of the realisations of the root **-ntu**. Doke (1961c: 1) stated, however:

«Judging from the fact that beyond Punt was the 'Land of the Shades, where dwelt the Dansas', dwarfs or Bushmen, it is reasonable to suppose that Punt represented the country of the primitive Bantu, where they lived before their prolonged migrations commenced. The name is suggestive. Is it the first Bantu

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<sup>1</sup> Clement Doke expressed this view in his article «The earliest records of Bantu», which was first published in *Bantu Studies* 12/2 (1938), and reprinted in *African Studies* 19/1 (1960). A revised version of this article was included in Doke & Cole 1961, and in Herbert (ed.) 1993. Desmond D. Cole (1971) took a critical stand to the suggestion of Doke and pointed out that on the basis of the current knowledge about Bantu prehistory it is not possible that people connected with the Bantu would have lived over 4,000 years ago in the areas mentioned.

word ever recorded? In Egyptian *p* and *b* are not clearly distinguished. It is highly probable that *Punt* stands for **bunt(u)**, the land of the people, the Bantu.»

Although formal similarities between *Punt* and **buntu** are apparent, they alone do not warrant the above conclusion, if other facts speak against it. The suggestion that *Punt*, or its extended form *Pwanit*, would refer to the Swahili word **pwani** (the root **pwa** plus the locative clitic **ni**), meaning 'coast', could perhaps be accepted if the historical facts allowed this. However, at that time Bantu people had not yet migrated to the area to which the ancient term *Punt* referred.

Nevertheless, there is strong evidence that more than 3,000 years later Bantu people had spread quite far to the east and north. Al-Mas'ûdî, an Arab writer, gives the following account of the Zing in his *Murûj ad-dhahab* («Golden Meadows»), written about 956.<sup>2</sup>

«[...] the Zing with other Abyssinian tribes spread themselves to the right of the Nile, down to the extremity of the sea of Abyssinia. Of all the Abyssinian tribes the Zing were the only ones who crossed the canal which comes out of the Upper Nile. They established themselves in this country and spread themselves as far as Sofala, which is on the sea of the Zing the furthest limit whither ships sail from Oman and Siraf. For, as the Chinese sea ends at the land of Sila, so the limits of the sea of the Zing are near the land of Sofala and that of the Wakwak, a country which yields gold in abundance with other marvels. There the Zing built their chief-town. Then they elected a king whom they called Falime (or Wafalime). [...] The territory of the Zing begins at the canal derived from the Upper Nile, and extends to the land of Sofala and that of the Wakwak.»

Here al-Mas'ûdî refers to the trade relations that existed between the southern part of the Arabic Peninsula and the Indian Ocean coast of Africa. Sofala is clearly identifiable as the trading port far south along the present Mozambique coast. Whether the term *wakwak* refers to the territory of Khoi-San people, or of Hottentots and Bushmen as Doke (1961c: 2) puts it, is not clear but possible. The administrative centre of the Zing close to Sofala and in a country with plenty of gold would refer to the area where later the Zimbabwe culture emerged. In any case the Zing reign, according to the quotation above, covered a vast area stretching from the Upper Nile to Sofala and beyond. The term **Falime** or **Wafalime** (pl.), which means a ruler, shows that Zing refers to Bantu people.

Where does the mysterious name Zing come from? Its form does not follow the phonotactic rules of Bantu languages, and would not make sense in them. We get further illumination from al-Hamadânî, who wrote in 902 in *Kitâb al-buldân* (p. 78) that in Zangîjah God is called لمكلوجلو **lmlklwglw**. Al-Mas'ûdî on his part wrote the same word in *Murûj*

<sup>2</sup> al-Mas'ûdî, Les Prairies d'Or. Texte et traduction par C. Barbier de Meynard et Pavet de Courteille. Paris, 1861-1877, Vol. III, p. 5.

*adh-dhahab* (III, 30) alternatively as ملكنجلو *mlknglw*, مكليحلو *mkliḥlw* and مكليخو *mkliḥw* meaning 'the Great Lord'. Taking into account the defective marking of vowels in Arabic script, the word may be rendered as \**mukulugulu*, cognates of which are found in several southern Bantu languages. Again, we find the connection between the non-Bantu term Zang (Zangġjah), which is phonologically close to Zing, and the Bantu languages, but no explanation of this connection. Also, the view of Doke (1961c: 2) that Zing would refer to Bantu people and Zang (or Zangġjah) to the Bantu language(s) does not get support from Bantu morphology.

Further references to Zing are found in Yâqût's *Geographical Dictionary* from 1228, which contains the statement that «Langġjah is a large island in the land of Zing, in which the seat of the Kings of Zing is situated.» The place name refers to Unguja, the current Swahili name for Zanzibar, as the location of Zing rulers. When we remember that the first written records of the term Zanzibar from about 1326<sup>3</sup> were in the form Zangabâr, meaning the coast of the Zang, we see that the terms Zing and Zang may have nothing to do with any Bantu language. Rather, they are terms once used by Arab and Persian traders, who operated on the Indian Ocean coast and probably had, at best, only scanty knowledge of any Bantu language.

The historical notes referred to above also suggest that the Zing rulers had more than one administrative centre. Freeman-Grenville (1988: 6-7) in fact thinks that Zing was not a single administrative entity but that it possibly had several kings. Zanzibar, because of its strategic location, was obviously the place for central administration. In addition, there was at least one more place further to the south, probably in Sofala, for handling trade goods between the coast and the interior. It is also likely that there was an administrative centre further west in the area of gold mines, as the report of al-Mas'ûdî suggests.

It is useful here to take a closer look at the various forms of the names used to refer to the island known as Zanzibar and also the mainland west of it. The island has currently two distinct names, Zanzibar and Unguja. The former is generally viewed as a name of Arabic origin that is used by foreigners, while Unguja is considered an indigenous name that follows the phonotactic rules of the Bantu languages, including the noun class prefix *u-* of Class 11. Although these names today sound very different they are genetically related. And what is most surprising is that the name Unguja despite its form may not be of Bantu origin. The following brief historical review will illuminate this point.

<sup>3</sup> This fairly late date for the first occurrence of the term **Zanzibar** does not mean that it was not in use earlier. Historical documentation from the period concerned is extremely scanty. We have to remember that the term **Zangġjah** mentioned by Hamadânî is from as early as 902.

Already ancient Greek and Roman authors were aware of the land of Zinj or Azania. Pliny (d. 79) writes about the Azanian Sea off north-eastern Africa and of people called Zangenae. *Geography*, composed originally in Alexandria around A.D. 150 and attributed to Claudius Ptolemy, appears to use the name Azania for the whole coast south of the Gulf of Barbaria, a name known to be used by Arab writers for the northern seaboard of Somalia (Freeman-Grenville 1988: 5). *Geography* also mentions the promontory of Zingis and the mountain of Phalangis, which are said to be located soon after Opone, the present Ras Hafun. *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* from c. A.D. 120-130 (the author not known) also mentions Azania as a name of the long cliffs of Somalia, and of the long stretch of coast down to the market town of Rhapta, and speaks of people called Ausanites. A writer who uses a pseudonym Cosmas writes later (c. 547) about Barbaria as «the land which begins where the land of Ethiopians terminates: beyond it is situated Zingion, the Mouth of the ocean».

Later we find references to this area especially in the writings of Arab travellers and historians. Al-Hamadânî is one of the earliest to mention the name Zangîjah in 902. Whether this is a name of a place or a language is not sure, but the form clearly has phonetic similarities with Unguja. Jean-Vincent Morice, a ship's surgeon of the former East India Company, wrote: «The Arabs and Moors (i.e. Swahili) write and say Zanguébar, European sailors say Zanzibar.»

Forms that are already fairly close to Unguja are recorded by Jarir b. Atiya (d. 728), who uses the form Langûjah, and much later by Yâqût b. Abdallah al-Hamawi (c. 1228), who speaks of Lanjuia. It is also worth mentioning that Arab geographers (Ferrand 1913) used the terms Barr al-Zanj (sg.) and Barr al-Zunuj (pl.) for referring to the area in question, i.e. the island and the adjacent continent.

When looking at the chronological list of names used for Zanzibar by various writers (cf. the Table below), it is possible to see that the relevant items are composed of two constituent parts: *Zinj*, *Zing*, *Zanj*, *Zang*, *Lang*, or *Lanj* in the beginning, and *ûjah*, *îjah*, *uia*, *abâr*, *uêbar*, or *ibar* in the end. It seems that all the variants of the first constituent derive from the same root. The variant with **i** as a vowel seems to be older, and this **i** changes into **a** later. The second constituent has two underlying roots: **barr** ('land, continent'), coming from Arabic, and **ja**, the origin of which is not known. The forms with **ja** as the second constituent have a modified first constituent which meets the requirements of the Bantu phonotactic rules, including the old **l**-initial prefix of Noun Class 11. The element **ja** appears at a time, when the vowel of the first part has already changed into **a**. Thus, we get the forms **lang** and **lanj**. In the next step the vowel **a** is changed into **u**, as required by Noun Class 11, and the morphological rules of Swahili force the initial **l** to be elided. The result is

**Unguja.** We may conclude that, despite its suitability as a Bantu name, **Unguja** is of foreign origin and not a Bantu word.

**Table. Chronological list of names used for Zanzibar and the adjacent continent**

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| Zangenaë      | Pliny (d. 79)  |
| Azania        | Pliny, Ptolemy ( <i>Geography</i> 150-400), Periplus (120-130) |
| Ausanites     | Periplus (120-130)   |
| Zingis        | Ptolemy (150-400)  |
| Zingion       | Cosmas 547   |
| Langûjah      | Jarir b. Atiya d. 728  |
| Zangîjah      | al-Hamadânî 902  |
| Barr al-Zanj  | Arab geographers   |
| Barr al-Zunuj | Arab geographers   |
| Lanjuia       | Yaqut b. Abdallah al-Hamawi 1228                               |
| Zangabâr      | 1326   |
| Zanguébar     | Jean-Vincent Morice 1776                                       |
| Zingibar      | 1890   |

The Portuguese crossed the Equator for the first time in 1471, but for over a century after that date we have very few records of the Bantu peoples or languages written by them. The interest of the Portuguese was in establishing a safe trade route to India, and in order to achieve this goal they had to get the trade posts occupied by the Arabs under their control. The only Bantu words found in their reports are names of people and places, and there is much uncertainty in how they are written. For instance, in a letter written by Diogo d'Alcaçova to the King Dom Manuel on November 20, 1506, the name of Zimbabwe was written both as **Zumubany** and as **Zunhauhy**, and the name of the ruler was written variably as **Qesarimgo**, **Quesarymgo**, **Quecarynugo**, **Quecarimugo**, **Queçarinuto**, and **Queçarinugo** (Doke 1961c: 3).

Duarte Barbosa wrote in 1516 about **Zimbaoche**,<sup>4</sup> which had many houses of wood and straw. He also wrote that «These Moors [...] speak Arabic, and the others use the language of the country, which is that of heathens».<sup>5</sup> The title of the Zimbabwe ruler in the local language was given by Diogo d'Alcaçova as **Menamotapam**, and by Barbosa as **Benametapa**, while Affonso d'Albuquerque in his letter of November 25, 1514, uses the form **Benamotapa**. Later, in 1552, Joaos de Barros rendered it as **Benomotápa** and **Monomotápa**.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The noun root **-imba** means 'a house', and **zimba** in the Karanga language is an augmentative form meaning 'a big house'. The noun root **-bwe**, rendered by the travellers as **-bge**, means 'a stone' or 'a rock'. Thus, the name Zimbabwe would be a contracted form of **zimba za mabwe** > **zimbabwe**.

<sup>5</sup> The English translation is from G. M. Theal, *Records of South-eastern Africa*, Vol I, p. 67.

**Early literature in and on Bantu.** *Doutrina Christãa*, the first book written in an African<sup>7</sup> language, appeared in Lisbon in 1624. It contains a catechism, written originally in Portuguese by Marcos Jorge and Ignacio Martinz, and an interlinear translation into Kongo. This translation was prepared, together with local language speakers, by Matheus Cardoso, and the whole work was compiled by three Jesuit priests. The title page of this book reads:

«DOVTRINA CHRISTAÃ.<sup>8</sup> Composta pelo P. Marcos Iorge da Companhia de IESV Douter em Theologia. Acrescentada pelo Padre Ignacio Martinz da mesma Companhia Doutor Theologo. De nouo traduzida na lingoa do Reyno de Congo, por ordem do P. Matheus Cardoso Theologo, da Companhia de IESV.»

[Translation:] «CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE. Composed by Father Marcos Iorge from the Company of IESV, Doctor in Theology. Additions made by Father Ignacio Martinz from the same Company, Doctor in Theology. Translated anew to the language of the Kingdom of Congo, by the order of Father Matheus Cardoso Theologo, from the Company of IESV.»<sup>9</sup>

The orthography employed in the translation is typically Portuguese, with **cu** for **ku**, and **qui** for **ki**. The translators recognized the stress by placing a circumflex on top of the stressed vowel in a word. The most remarkable detail in this translation is that the division of words is very close to what it came to be in conjoining writing of Bantu languages. Because the translation was done interlineally, the author(s) apparently had a tendency to follow the word order of Portuguese. A couple of lines from the beginning of this book, with interlinear translation in Portuguese, are given below.

|              |             |               |           |                   |
|--------------|-------------|---------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Doutrina     | Christãa,   | ordenada      | a maneira | de dialogo,       |
| Mulongui     | achristão,  | ù'aludiquilua | mumuânu   | acubôbayacuutôla, |
| pera ensinar | os mininos. | Capitulo      | primeiro  | que quer dizer    |
| munâ culonga | o alêque.   | Lufûma        | luantete  | quiâquiûma        |
|              |             |               |           | o christão?       |

The much more publicised book by Hyacinthus a Vetralla (better known as Giacinto Brusciotto) that appeared in 1650, appears to be a revised edition of the *Doutrina Christãa*. In it the author presented the

<sup>6</sup> It is likely, as Doke (1961c: 3) suggests, that the word was originally **mjene-mutapo** (pl. **βene-mitapo**), and its meaning was 'Owner or Lord of the mine(s)'. One of the meanings of **umutapo** is 'metalliferous ore'.

<sup>7</sup> By «African» is here meant the area south of the Sahara.

<sup>8</sup> The circumflex is wrongly placed on the last *a*.

<sup>9</sup> «The Christian Doctrine, organized in a manner of a dialogue, to teach the children. The first chapter: What does it mean to be a Christian?» The English translation of this as well as of the subsequent Portuguese passages was made by Riikka Halme.

catechism in four languages—Kongo, Portuguese, Latin and Italian—in separate columns.

The second book to appear in a Bantu language was *Gentio de Angola*, produced by the Jesuit Fathers Francisco Pacconio and Antonio do Couto. The title of the book reads:

«Gentio de Angola sufficientemente instruido nos mysterios de nossa Sancta Fé. Obra posthuma composta pello Padre Francisco Pacconio da companhia de Iesu. Redusida a methodo mais breve e accomodado á capacidade dos sogeitos que se instruem, pello Padre Antonio de Couto da mesma Companhia.»

[Translation:] «The pagans of Angola to whom the mysteries of our Holy Faith are sufficiently introduced. The work compiled by Father Francisco Pacconio from the company of Iesu. Reduced to a shorter model and accommodated to fit the capacity of the learners by Father Antonio de Couto from the same Company.»

This 90-page book was published in Lisbon in 1642 or 1643, and it contains a catechism or Christian doctrine in the **Ndongo (kiMbundu)** language, with a Portuguese translation on the facing page. It includes the Pater Noster, Ave Maria, Salve Regina, Credo, The Ten Commandments, etc., at the beginning, and then an exposition of the Christian doctrine in the form of a dialogue, where the *Discipulus* asks a question and the *Magister* replies it (Doke 1961b: 11). It also contains hints on pronunciation and grammar, thus indicating an elementary attempt at linguistic analysis.

A second and enlarged version of this work was prepared by the Capuchin Frater Antonio Maria de Monteprandone Amici and was published in Rome in 1661. A third column in Latin was included throughout the book. More notes on pronunciation and grammar were added to this edition, including a paragraph that deals with the correct placement of the «accent» in words that otherwise are similar. Frater Antonio demonstrated the importance of the correct «accent» by giving examples of minimal pairs, thus showing that he had recognised the linguistic phenomenon we now know to be tone.

The second edition of *Gentio de Angola* was prepared upon the appeal of Queen Nzinga to send missionaries to her kingdom. Queen Nzinga had been baptised, after a very short instruction, in 1622, but she had soon lapsed back to paganism and joined the man-eating Jaga. Decades later she showed interest in returning to Christianity, rejoined the Church in 1648 and invited missionaries to her country. Maria de Monteprandone was in the mission sent to her country in 1653, but he subsequently returned to Rome, where he was given the task of revising Couto's work.

The additions and corrections made by Maria de Monteprandone to the second edition include three pages of «Observationes in legendo



idiomate Angollae» in the preface, and two pages explaining the «cases» of nouns, pronouns and numerals near the end of the book. There are also some other very interesting notes, including idiomatic contractions, which he calls «synalepha». Examples of these are: **mac amba ami** > **mac'ami** 'my friend'; **m'ona uetu** > **mon'etu** 'our child'.

Of major importance is the de facto identification of grammatical tone, although Maria de Monteprandone was not able to formulate the issue correctly. The passage below, as reproduced in Doke (1961b: 11), speaks for itself:

«Finally it should be noticed that it is of great importance to pronounce a noun or verb with an accent on the final (syllable), when there is an accent; also to refrain from pronouncing the accent when it is absent. For nouns and verbs are frequently found, that differ in meaning from those that bear the final accent, e.g. Mùcua and mucuà. Mùcua is a fruit; mucuà means 'native to' or 'born in such and such a part or region'. Thus, mucuà Ndongo, native to or born in the kingdom of Donghi; mucuà Matamba, native to or born in the province of Matamba. Cùlua, to stand by one who eats in the hope of getting something (just as the Italian poor sometimes do, so that they may receive something from the diner; for this reason they stop or linger) a practice that is also called Vincar in the Congo; and culuà, which means to fight or quarrel.»

In the years 1643-1660 several other manuscripts were prepared on Bantu languages, but most of them were not published and have disappeared. One of these was the quadrilingual Kongo dictionary compiled by Brusciotto in 1650. Frater Antoine de Tervelli is reported to have prepared three manuscripts: a Kongo-Spanish dictionary (ca. 1652), a grammar of Kongo in Spanish (ca. 1652), and a quadrilingual Italian-Latin-Spanish-Kongo dictionary (ca. 1657). A Latin-Spanish-Kongo dictionary was also prepared (ca. 1652), but there is no certainty about its writer.

The first attempt at linguistic analysis of a Bantu language was made by Giacinto Brusciotto in his 98-page book *Regulae quaedam pro difficillimi Congensium idiomatis faciliiori captu ad grammaticae normam redactae*,<sup>10</sup> which was published in 1659 in Rome. Brusciotto was born in Vetralla in Italy, and he became a priest of the Capuchin Order. He is also known by his Latin name Hyacinthus Brusciottus a Vetralla, as well as by the Portuguese name Jacinto Brusciato de Vetralha. Two other books (as already mentioned above) are also credited to Brusciotto, but no copies of them have survived.

Brusciotto tries to explain the linguistic phenomena of Kongo by using the categories of Latin grammar, as was customary in his time and in years to come. He clearly identified features that were characteristic of

<sup>10</sup> This can be freely translated as «Some rules for the more easy understanding of the most difficult idiom of the people of Kongo, brought into the form of a grammar».

Kongo, and he tried to describe them with categories derived from Latin. The first chapter of the book dealing with the noun begins as follows (according to Doke 1961b: 16):

«Of the Declension of Nouns, or, as it is better expressed, their Principiation, and their Rules; wherein it is shown what Articles are to be attributed to each noun, both in direct and oblique cases, for their correct construction in themselves, or when they are joined to other words; and generally this is first to be noted, that in the present tongue we must not look for declensions, but rather Principiations, for which we have the following rules...»

As we can see, Brusciotto was aware of the noun class system, which he called «principiations», and also of the concord system. What is especially worth noting is, as Cole points out, that Brusciotto divided nouns into «principiations» according to their concord patterns, and not on the basis of their noun prefix forms, thus «revealing deeper linguistic insight than some of his successors up to the present day» (Cole 1971: 3). In the analysis of verbs he identified the perfect stem, the applied and reflexive forms, and the verbal conjugation.

Brusciotto arranged the «principiations» into pairs according to what prefixes each noun class takes in the singular and plural. In place of concords he spoke of «articles», which vary in form depending on the noun concerned. Altogether, he identified eight «principiations» in Kongo, each with a singular and a plural form. The basis of classification was not, as stated above, the form of the noun prefix, but the concord pattern of the noun. Of the first »principiation» he says (Doke 1961b:16):

«Nouns of this Principiation begin with **E**, and their article is **Ria**, as **Etondo ria n'Zambianpungu**, Praise of God. In plural they make **ma**, and their article is **ma**, as **Matondo ma n'Zambianpungu**, Praises of God».

Of the second «principiation» Brusciotto states:

«Nouns of this Principiation begin in **Mu**, **U**, or **O**: their article is **ua** [...] In the plural, those which begin in **U** and **O** are commonly without a plural: but if they chance to have a plural, those beginning with **U** will make **Ma** [...]

This passage reveals that the basis of grouping nouns into «principiations» is the concord pattern (**ua** in the above section is the genitive connector) and not the noun prefix, which may have up to three different forms in the singular.

A major achievement of Brusciotto is that in the Latin edition of 1659 he included two concord tables, which show the major concord forms of those word categories which the noun affects. The concepts used are from the Latin grammar, but the basic ideas of the concord system become obvious. Brusciotto writes:

«As has been said above, the language of the Congos, and others of Negro Lands, is not founded, nor forms its rules upon the declension of words, but on their principiation; therefore the rules which are distinguished and marked in this idiom, are chiefly taken from the various principiations of the substantives, and varied accordingly.»

Despite the inevitable defects that the modern grammarian would find in his Kongo grammar, Brusciotto was able to identify and present in a systematic way some of the basic features of Bantu linguistic structure. The noun classes and the concord agreement are valuable findings. He also made correct observations of several other areas of grammar, including extended verbal stems, derivation of deverbal nouns, and ideophones.

The 17th century saw exceptional activity in the study of African languages, especially Bantu languages. Brusciotto was only one of the contributors to the field in this great century, but as the author of the first grammar of a Bantu language he stands out as the most insightful and able person to deserve the name given by Clement Doke (1961b: 8-26) to that period, *The Age of Brusciotto*.

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