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19-20 mai 2006

Lectures d'images

*Images du pouvoir : portraits royaux et invention de l'histoire dynastique bamum*  
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This contribution explores the role and impact of the creation and deployment of royal portraiture in the form of sculpture, photography and painting by the Bamum palace in the historical constructions and inventions of a Bamum dynastic history.

It focuses on the visual presentations and self-representations of King Ibrahim Njoya (ruled c. 1887-1924, died in 1933) in different media and through various “intermediaries” among them European painters and photographers and Bamum artists. In collaboration with several of his courtiers (such as Nji Mama and Ibrahim Njoya) and through the intervention of colonials (such as the resident missionaries in Foumban) King Njoya, who was well aware of his audiences, constructed and enacted his role in the colonial state, inscribed Bamum dynastic history, seeking to legitimate the Bamum sub-imperialism within the colonial framework.

His son Sultan Seidou Njimoluh Njoya (ruled 1933-1992) continued these visual inscriptions – mainly through photography, now mostly the domain of Bamum photographers, and later on through video and film. Initially mapping out the Bamum's role under French colonial rule, the palace later exploited the visual in the framework of the independent Cameroonian state.

At first glance, early images of royalty seem to have been directed at foreign, i.e. non-Bamum, viewers, who consumed them in different ways and circulated them in various material forms. However, they found an equally enthusiastic reception in the palace and among the Bamum elite, and many have been preserved to this day. Image objects are constantly recycled both as photographic reproductions and in the form of contemporary historical paintings. An examination of these processes, which seem to deepen these inscriptions and solidify historical inventions, will conclude this presentation.

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