



MAKING THE GABUSI LUTE (COMOROS)

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“**Gabusi**” (Comoros) and “**Kabosy**” (Madagascar) are the most explicit wording for monoxyle lute in the S-W Indian Ocean. The Yemeni rootword “Qanbus” possibly traces this back to the presence of Hadhrami sailors and migrants in the Swahili & comorians harbors. The introduction of the Yemeni qanbus to Dar Es Salaam, Zanzibar & Nzuani Isl is obvious but hardly defined in time... ; moreover this echoed another , later Swahili word, namely the “**kibangala**” (Zanzibar & Mombasa).

Musics speaking, the lute possibly was introduced by the hadhrami sailors & settlers. They possibly imported some musical genres that are nowadays under extinction. Some of such old songs have been found indeed, namely in Kenya (Mombasa & Lamu Isl) and in Nzuani isl, Comoros (Domoni and Sima). The comorian style “Twarab Ya Gambus” possibly traces back to the hadhrami songs, and this is usually accompanying a slow choreography, much in the tye of the Arabian Zafin dance steps.

Indeed the instrument survived strongly in the Comoros (Mwali, Ndzuani and Mahore), but as a substitute of the malagasyan Kabosy, in the context of the popular music: the traditional Mgodro music players still used to play it, either in the context of dance parties or possession ceremonies (rumbu sessions for the “Trumba” spirits). This tradition possibly revived after the evacuation of the Comorian settlers from Mahajanga (N-W Madagascar) in 1976. The absence of the gabusi in the musics of Ngazidja Isl is a noticeable fact.

Organology speaking , such a lute appeared in five significant era:

1. –The **Kibangala** lute, a monoxyle short necked lute, under extinction in Zanzibar, Kilwa & Mombasa after the 1960's. The body is very narrow (doesn't exceed 100 mm) Some very few examples now visible at Mombasa Museum (Kenya) , House of Wonder (Zanzibar) and various collected items in Musee Branly (Paris) too.

2 – The **Gabusi**, now a.k.a. “**Gabossa**”, “**Gaboussi**” a monoxyle / monocave short necked lute, still in use in Ndzuani Isl, Mwali Isl and Mahore Isl. Various manufacturing technologies. So far an orthodox constrction preserved the “monocave” feature. Some few makers still in activity in Domoni (Ndzuani Isl), Nyumakele area (Ndzuani Isl), Fomboni (Mwali Isl), Chiconi (Mahore Isl) and Mtsangamouji (Mahore Isl).

3- The **Kabosy**, in spite of its ethymology, this is a local guitar/ fretted lute, much widespread everywhere in Madagascar: mostly among the sakalava, the antanosy, the Vezo, the betsileo, the mikea, the merina... If some early items feature an ovoid body, the modern lutery frozeit as a distinctive guitar, feat. a trapezoide-shaped soundbox & mandoline pegs. In this regard, this one can no longer be held as a descent from the Yemeni qanbus. The technologies vary a lot, especially in the West of the island.

4- The **Gabusi**, not to be mistaken with the local fretted lute, a.k.a. **Kabosy**. According the findings of the colonial troupes, the monoxyle **Gabusi** of the Comorian settlers seems to have been present in the region of Mahajanga (N-W Madagascar), possibly among the numerous migrants. Some examples now visible in Musee Branly (Paris) too. No longer ITEMS reported after the riots and evacuation of the comorian settlers in 1976.

TRENDS IN THE GABUSI MAKING

No doubt that the Swahili lutery changed a lot, and the collected examples of the early colonial period all differ of the recent production. Among the recently observed Items, the most typical design possibly survives in the lutery of Domoni (Ndzuani Isl) and the surrounding Nyumakele. Possibly the domonian instruments were introduced then so in the close Mwali Island. Having said that, the quantity of observable examples is very short. First, the performance of the “twarab Ya Gambus” have become a rarity, that can be seldom observed, and only in Domoni, Ouani and Sima. The lute survives there, as it has been adapted to alternate performances.

Today such lutery survives in a context of modernization/ westernization of the Mgodro music performance. In Mahore and Ndzuani, the Mgodro definitely adopted electric guitars and keyboards as soon as the early 2000's. Then the rivalry with imported musics (Zouk, Zouklove and US Rn'B) now rages on everywhere in the archipelago. Some mainstream can be noticed in the modern lutery of the comorian **Gabusi**:

1. The progressive evolution of the pegbox construction. The comorian users seem to have prioritized the strength and usability over the original aesthetics of the Yemeni qanbus. The hook-shaped pegbox vanished in the Comoros, even in Domoni.
2. Would any hollowed neck be needed, the monoxyle structure of the qanbus lute turned optional.
3. The new trends in music playing caused also a reduction of the quantity of strings.
4. Hard following the monoxyle / monocave structure in Domoni (Nzuani), Fomboni (Mwali), and Chiconi (Mahore)
5. Adaptating the framedrum's goat skin : every islands. The use of alternate materials is very rare, but was observed among some few makers from Mwali Island when arriving Mahore.
6. High variability in size and technology. The local makers substituted the bone-made clips with nails and screws. More changes are noticeable within the junkiyard lutery, much widespread from the 1970's in Mahore. Today the trend survives among some few migrants from Mwali, as some skilled players / makers make the occasional performance (possession, parties) an occupation.

GABUSI LUTE:IN THE EARLY 2000'S - COMOROS

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02



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04



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ITEM n°01 by maker CHIRONTRO (Domoni, Ndzuani isl), n°02, 03 (Mwali Isl), n°04 by Kommandan, (Mahore Isl), n°05 (Msangamouji, Mahore), n°06 by SOUNDI (Chirongui, Mahore), n°07 by Colo HASSANI (Chiconi, Mahore)

GABUSI LUTE (MAHORE ISL) - SHAPING THE SOUNDBOX



Maker BAYNA (Kaweni, Mahore), while shaping the body with *Upanga* (sabre)

GABUSI LUTE (MAHORE ISL) - SHAPING THE SOUNDBOX



Maker Colo HASSANI (Chiconi), while shaping the body with *upanga* (sabre)



Maker Colo HASSANI (Chiconi, Mahore)



Colo HASSANI (Chiconi, Mahore) while shaping the body



Maker BAYNA (Kaweni, Mahore), while shaping the body with *Upanga* (sabre)

GABUSI LUTE (MAHORE ISL) - CARVING THE SOUNDBOX



Maker Colo HASSANI (Chiconi, Mahore), while carving the soundbox with the chainsaw



Maker Colo HASSANI (Chiconi, Mahore), while carving the soundbox with the chainsaw



Maker Colo HASSANI (Chiconi, Mahore), while carving the soundbox with the chainsaw



Maker Colo HASSANI (Chiconi, Mahore), while carving the soundbox with the chainsaw

GABUSI LUTE (MAHORE ISL) - CARVING THE SOUNDBOX



Maker Colo HASSANI (Chiconi, Mahore), while carving the soundbox with the chainsaw



Experiment of alternate body shapes by Maker Color HASSANI (Chiconi, Mahore), 2020



Maker BAYNA (Kaweni, Mahore), while carving the soundbox with the axe



Maker BAYNA (Kaweni, Mahore), while finishing the soundbox with the gouge

GABUSI LUTE (MAHORE ISL) - CARVING THE SOUNDBOX



Maker Colo HASSANI (Chiconi, Mahore), while bridging the soundbox



Maker Colo HASSANI (Chiconi, Mahore), while carving the soundbox with the chainsaw



Maker Colo HASSANI (Chiconi, Mahore), while polishing the soundbox



Maker BAYNA (Kaweni, Mahore) while building the pegbox

KIBANGALA/ GABOUSSI LUTE – SHAPING THE PEGBOX

01



02



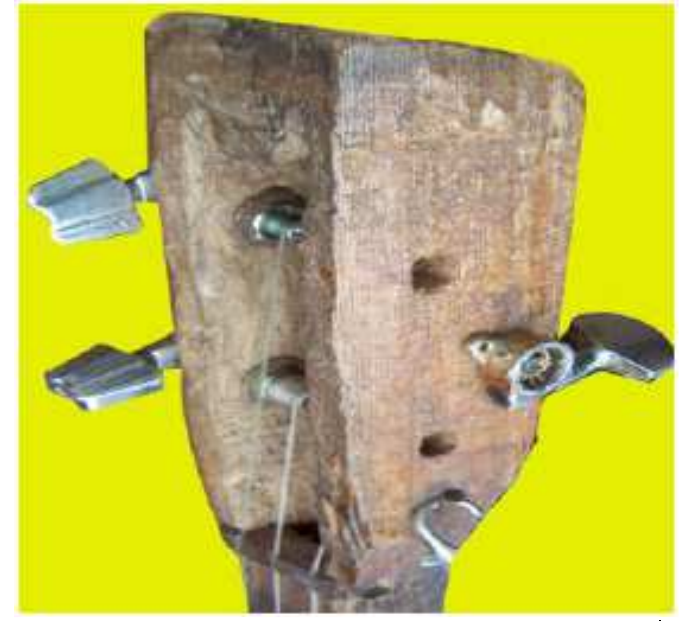
03



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ITEM n°01-02 early, possibly from Ndzuan Isl. ITEM n° 03 recent production from Mwali Isl. ITEM n°04: Swahili Kibangala. ITEM n°05:possibly by SOUNDI (Chirongui, Mahore)

ITEM n°08 & 12 (maker CHIRONTRO, Domoni, Ndzuan Isl.), ITEM n° 07 recent production from Mwali Isl. ITEM n°09 (BAINA, Mahore, circa 2014), ITEM n° 10 (LANGA, Mahore, 1999) and n°11 (Colo HASSANI, Mahore, 2011)

GABUSI LUTE (MAHORE ISL) - MAKERS



Former maker SOUNDI (Chirongui, Mahore)



Maker BAYNA (Kaweni, Mahore)



Maker CHIRONTRO (Domoni, Ndzuani Isl) .



Maker Colo HASSANI (Chiconi, Mahore) .