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University of Pennsylvania *Year* 2007

Ambassadors, Explorers, and Allies: A Study of African-European Diplomatic Relationships, 1400-1600

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University of Pennsylvania

AMBASSADORS, EXPLORERS, AND ALLIES: A STUDY OF AFRICAN-EUROPEAN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONSHIPS, 1400-1600

A senior thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Honors in History

by

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Philadelphia, PA
March 23, 2007

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To Mom, Dad, and Peter

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PREFACE

This thesis is an exploration of the diplomatic relationships that developed between various African kingdoms and Europeans between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, with a focus on African experiences and agendas.

For my undergraduate honors history thesis I had originally intended to explore statecraft in the Mali Empire. I have my advisor, Dr. Lee Cassanelli, to thank for inspiring my change in topic. During the course of one of our many long conversations, I recall him asking me what languages were used in the early African-European contacts and through whom did people communicate. Consulting two of my favorite works challenging popular conceptions of early African and Atlantic world connections, Northrup's *Africa's Discovery of Europe* and Thornton's *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, I saw numerous examples listed of Africans in Europe.[1] From these intriguing examples, I was prompted to begin my search for detailed documentation of their experiences and to attempt to reconstruct the motives of the African rulers who sent these ambassadors. Aside from sincere thanks to these two authors for alerting me to the possibilities of this topic, I wish to acknowledge several other historians for their work in collecting valuable documents. My initial research has been greatly aided by the compilations created by Hans Debrunner, who surveyed all the documented cases of Africans in Europe from the medieval period to the present, and

[1]David Northrup, *Africa's Discovery of Europe 1450-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Antonio Brasio, a scholar who, at the turn of this century, collected, transcribed and finally published much of the essential documentation collected in the Portuguese archives on early relations with Africa.[2]

My own research has taken place over the course of the last year and a half. I have used both published materials consulted at the University of Pennsylvania and archival resources in Lisbon, Portugal. Assistance from a Derish Wolff Undergraduate Research Grant and from the undergraduate division of the Penn Humanities Forum for 2006-2007 on Travel greatly helped with travel and research expenses.

The primary goal and challenge of my project has been to highlight African perspectives on the early encounters between the continent and Europe. Accordingly, I have sought to use African titles for rulers over European given equivalents and to include, when possible, direct quotation from the important documents, so readers can actually see the words of the participants. Although many of these documents were originally in Portuguese, for the ease of readers I have included in the text translated versions in English or French. When the translations are my own work I have included the original Portuguese in footnotes. I also frequently use the terms "African" and "European" to discuss collective experiences of various kingdoms. This, while done for practical stylistic reasons, should not imply a premature Pan African or cohesive European identity during the era in question. Lastly, I should note that while I am attempting to document the relationships of four important African kingdoms with the Portuguese over two centuries, this study cannot claim to be a comprehensive history of all facets of this era or a general history of any of these kingdoms. I have sought

[2]Hans Debrunner, *Presence and Prestige, a History of Africans in Europe before 1918* (Basel: Basel Afrika Bibliographien, 1979); Antonio Brasio, *Monumenta Missionaria Africana* (Lisbon: Agencia Geral do Ultramar, 1952).

throughout my three chapters to provide references noting useful works on many of the issues that were beyond the scope of this study, but shed light on the overall era.

I wish to finish with several other essential acknowledgements. I wish to thank Briane Bharkhda and Casey Robbins for their respective translations of Italian and Latin documents, along with Priya Agarwal who helped proofread the entire draft version. Additionally, Professor Mercia Flannery in Penn's Romance Language department was very helpful in checking my Portuguese translations and explaining some of the early clothing conventions. Lastly, I wish to thank Dr. Julia Rudolph and my honors history class for being incredibly supportive and helpful throughout this process, and of course Dr. Lee Cassanelli, who over the last four years has inspired my love and dedication to the field of African history and has been an amazing mentor.

INTRODUCTION

An Often Forgotten History

For many, the era of European exploration starting in the fifteenth century, conjures up images of pioneering seamanship, exotic glimpses of foreign coasts and the eventual conquest of the Americas. It is often a Eurocentric story. On the shore of the famous Lisbon harbor today there stands a "Monument to the Discoveries." Here immortalized in stone are depictions of Henry the Navigator, Vasco da Gama, Gil Eanes, Pedro Alvares Cabral, Diogo Cão, Governor Albuquerque of Goa, royal chronicler João de Barros and many others. These are well known characters in the typical history of Portuguese innovation and early world exploration. Over one thousand miles northeast there is another monument, built in honor of a lesser known traveler. Here at the Vatican in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore lies a life size funeral bust of the Kongolese diplomat Antonio Manuel Marchio ne Vunda, who died upon reaching Rome in 1608. Few know his story.

These two monuments may be understood to frame a history both familiar and largely unknown, of the alliances between Portugal, Rome and various African kingdoms that developed in this era of exploration from the early fourteen hundreds to sixteen hundreds. This thesis moves beyond narratives of Portuguese exploits by analyzing the African side of these exchanges, highlighting the diplomatic relationships pursued by Ethiopia, Kongo, the Fante states and Benin with Portugal and Rome, and placing these

elite ties in the greater context of the era. In this thesis, I argue that initial African-European relationships generally were beneficial to the African leaders. African leaders were willing to pursue these links beyond their own kingdoms to the courts of Portugal and Rome through frequent diplomatic embassies. The treatment these ambassadors received reveals the initial efforts of Portugal and the Vatican to maintain positive exchanges. Lastly, I seek to show that these elite relationships occurred within a larger context of many other African-European encounters ranging from confrontational to the beginnings of long-term partnerships.

Motivations

My primary motivation has been to fill a significant gap in African and early modern European history. Works in African history as well as general public knowledge, often do not adequately discuss the initial African-European relationships.

The early image of Africa among Europeans and likewise the early African impressions of Europeans have become popular topics for African historians. A trend highlighted by well-known works such as Northrup's *Africa's Discovery of Europe* and the earlier *L'Occident et L'Afrique* by Francois de Medeiros. These studies have built upon the revisionist history of both Africanists and European historians who have sought to chronicle Africa's significant early role and contributions in Atlantic and world history. John Thornton's work *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, exemplifies this trend.[1] In such works the most frequently discussed dimensions of Africa's encounters with Europe and the Americas have remained African cultural

[1]David Northrup, *Africa's Discovery of Europe 1450-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Francois de Medeiros, *L'Occident et L'Afrique XIIIe-XVe siecle* (Paris: Karthala, 1985); John Thronton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

influences on the Americas and Africa's economic role, from the nature of early trading connections to a renewed focus on the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.[2] The concurrent political and economic connections between African and Europe are less often mentioned, except through discussions of the early African presence in Europe. Here, Hans Debrunner's *Presence and Prestige: A History of Africans in Europe before 1918* and Ivan van Sertima's edited collection, *African Presence in Early Europe*, deserve much praise for providing a comprehensive overview of the documented cases of African visitors and residents throughout Europe.[3] These works compellingly demonstrate the extent of pre-colonial African and European contacts. Yet, the question of the various African motivations still is largely absent from the discussion.

The specific topic of the development of African-European political alliances is briefly mentioned in comprehensive surveys of pre-colonial African history, but the sheer scope of these works leaves out much analysis. The one major exception is the treatment of the long-term ties between Kongo and Portugal. Formerly, many authors used the Kongo-Portuguese relationship as an example of Europe's early exploitation of Africa, anachronistically arguing that the later Portuguese imperial ambitions defined relations in the fifteenth century.[4] This inaccurate view has been soundly refuted by the works of

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[2]See, for instance, the recent articles Ivana Elbl, "The Horse in Fifteenth-century Senegambia," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 24, no. 1 (1991): 85-110 and Eugenia W. Herbert, "Portuguese Adaptation to Trade Patterns Guinea to Angola (1443-1640), *African Studies Review* 17, no. 2 (1974): 411-423.

[3]Hans Debrunner, *Presence and Prestige, a History of Africans in Europe before 1918* (Basel: Basel Afrika Bibliographien, 1979); Ivan van Sertima, ed., *African Presence in Early Europe* (Oxford: Transanction Publishers, 1985).

[4]For example, the introduction to Georges Balandier's, *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo: From the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), claimed in the foreword: "Relations between Kongo and Europe foreshadowed those that would be established in the colonial period and later. They operated to the advantage of the most powerful partner. The Portuguese sovereigns and their agents quickly sought the economic advantages, defended their commercial monopoly, and even entered into war in order to reach gold and silver mines that were largely imaginary. Economic interest

historians Jan Vansina, John Thornton and Anne Hilton.[5] Aside from general histories of Nigeria, Ghana or Ethiopia, it remains difficult to find mention of their similar political links with the Portuguese in this era. This study seeks to contribute a more comprehensive analysis of the many and varied diplomatic relationships that were deliberately sought by African rulers in the fifteenth and sixteen centuries.

As my research progressed for this project, I grew more aware of this study's importance for the general public along with non-Africanists. Many are likely to know a general chronology of Portugal's exploration as it expanded from a small European kingdom to a rich overseas trading empire through initiatives such as the voyages of Henry the Navigator in the 1440s, Vasco da Gama's circumnavigation of Africa in 1498 and Cabral's accidental discovery of Brazil in 1500. However, few are aware that African kingdoms actively exchanged ambassadors with Portugal and the Vatican, sought and achieved political alliances, and at times benefited from these relationships, much less that they were able to do so as respected sovereign kingdoms.

Although this thesis is not primarily meant as a critique of early Portuguese agendas or a description of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade's origins, the detailed discussion of early African-European experiences does much to qualify prevalent stereotypes of this era. The early Portuguese were motivated by many factors, but they did not have a nineteenth-century social Darwinist sense of racism, nor did their initial encounters with Africans result in colonial conquest or widespread exploitation. This

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engendered political domination: foreign colonists intervened in the domestic affairs of the kingdom, advisers from Lisbon took pains to keep the Kongo is a state of 'obedience.'"

[5]Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforest: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison: Wisconsin Univresity Press, 1990); John Thornton, "Early Kongo-Portuguese Relations: A New Interpretation," *History in Africa* 8 (1981); Anne Hilton, *The Kingdom of the Kongo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

research shows that Portuguese notions of Africans were influenced almost exclusively by their religious world views and sense of social class and not by skin color. Although the Portuguese pursued a variety of strategies on the coast of Africa, from conquest to adherence to African customs, their later imperialist policies were not a predictable result from their first coastal contacts. Nor was the capture of slaves the main Portuguese economic endeavor before the sixteen hundreds. As this study shows, exchanges involving slaves were initially fueled by more complicated motivations (on both African and European sides) than a view to supply labor for the Americas.

Another broad misconception addressed in this thesis is the view of the early Portuguese approach towards Africa. This study challenges attempts to minimize and simplify Portuguese involvement with various African kingdoms. Some historians have argued that the Portuguese Crown saw their actions in Africa as a mere side-note to their quest for the East Indies. The Portuguese Crown made considerable efforts to honor and maintain positive relations with African leaders, a detail often left out of discussions of European exploration and Atlantic world histories that only include Africa when discussing colonial America's sources of labor. This study suggests that Portuguese aspirations varied greatly depending on the individual's personal motivations, place in Portuguese society, and proximity to the African elite. Royal Crown directives were often at odds with the personal agendas of Portuguese settlers, traders, missionaries and other participants who envisioned different relations with the African kingdoms. The same was true of African actors in different positions in their own social hierarchies, although these perspectives are frequently difficult to discern in the predominantly European sources from the period.

Lastly, this study hopes to demonstrate that the generally respectful exchanges between African kingdoms and the Portuguese were not isolated instances in the first period of contact, but one of the general characteristics of this era. By deliberately choosing a wider geographic focus for my research and moving from a case study of one relationship, such as Kongo-Portugal relations, to a multiple kingdom approach, I hope to reveal that these relations were paralleled by a number of others elsewhere on the African continent. The Kongo-Portugal relationship was not an isolated example but a marker of a different era of African-European dynamics.

Methodology

The essential challenge in my research has been to portray and analyze African perspectives towards new European contacts while using documents mostly in European collections. My choice of the four main kingdoms discussed – the Kongo, Benin, Ethiopia, and the Fante states – was influenced mainly by the availability of surviving sources relating to these kingdoms. The major sources included accounts both from the Portuguese participants and letters and orders from the African rulers and their diplomats which survived in the Portuguese archives. Whenever possible, I have first sought to examine documents from the African rulers, their representatives, or oral histories of early contacts over a European narrative of the same events. For the Kongo and Ethiopia many letters from their rulers did survive and were available to me, some in published form in such invaluable compilations as Brasio's *Monumenta Missionaria Africana* or in published Portuguese travelers' accounts, including the Hakluyt Society's many volumes. Other documents remained in the Portuguese archives such as the Torre do Tombo National Archives, the Bibliotheca National and the collection at the Palacio da Ajuda,

which I visited in the summer of 2006. The use of these predominately diplomatic records requires special caution, for diplomatic statements, even in this era, did not always match real intentions. I have chosen to cite many of these documents, for they often provide a unique African voice. However, I also evaluate the statements in the context of the actual historic events to ensure that written intentions were matched by corresponding actions. Written sources for the rulers of the Fante states and Benin were scarcer. In these cases I have sought additional perspectives from oral histories and artwork from that era.

Of necessity, another body of sources was Portuguese documents from royal directives from the Portuguese Crown, travelers' accounts written largely for the Crown, and letters from Portuguese participants. Overall, the authors of these documents strove for accuracy and detail of the events they recorded. Writing before the eighteenth and nineteenth-century popularity of exotic travel accounts, these authors were largely conscious of their duty as accurate observers of strategic details to relate to their rulers. Thus, while much of their terminology for African rulers and understanding of the motives behind African actions must be carefully weighed with an understanding of the African kingdoms, many of the direct observations appear reasonably accurate. Other important accounts came from the royal chroniclers, who were also the inventors of the early Portuguese archives. The style of these chronicles reflects their concern with the glorification of the ruling family, yet some of the chroniclers did make an apparent effort to interview the returning captains of expeditions and to record African encounters at Portuguese courts. Some of these royal chroniclers, such as Fernão Lopes (c.1370-1460), João de Barros (c.1496-1570) and Damião de Góis (c.1502-1574) deserve praise for their

perception of the value in using and preserving many documents. Unfortunately, other intermediary royal archivists, such as Gomes Eannes de Zurara (c.1410-1474) preferred a narrative form that did not bore readers with diverse sources.[6] Later archivists also decided to purge the early records of non-essential documents. Due to problems such as these, coupled with the tragedy of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 which resulted in the loss of many early records, it is worth emphasizing the limitations of the documentation for many of these events. Personal reflections of the African ambassadors or their more private letters, if they existed, are not available to us, nor are a wider range of perspectives on many of the Portuguese actions. It also remains difficult to determine if the present volume of Portuguese-African correspondence represents the bulk or merely a fraction of the original extent. This study hopes to highlight more of the motives, agendas, and details of the early African-European relationships for a better understanding of this unique era, yet readers must weigh this study's conclusions with the knowledge that not all the details of this era survived.

Chapter Overviews

This investigation is divided into three chapters. Chapter One establishes the African context and chronicles reactions to the Portuguese arrivals, starting in the late fourteen hundreds. The key focus is an analysis of the ways in which leaders of Ethiopia, Benin, the Fante states, and the Kongo used their ties with Portugal to their initial political advantage, and why generally respectful political relationships developed in this era between Portuguese representatives and their African counterparts.

Chapter Two examines the pursuit of African agendas beyond the borders of the

[6]P. E. Russell, "Archivists as Historians: The Case of the Portuguese Fifteenth Century Royal Chroniclers," in *Portugal, Spain and the African Atlantic* (Norfolk: Variorum, 1995).

various African kingdoms, evaluating the experiences of African diplomats who traveled to Portugal and Rome. This chapter briefly mentions some of the individual experiences of the better documented African ambassadors. It then centers on the collective experiences of these ambassadors and what they reveal about the nature of diplomatic exchanges in this era. Together these experiences qualify negative characterizations of this era's African-European encounters. The major criteria used to evaluate these relations are the types of hospitality, receptions, gifts, and lodgings provided for the visiting Africans who traveled to Portugal and Rome.

The third and final chapter discusses the meetings between the Portuguese and Africans in Africa itself, starting with an analysis of the earlier period which preceded the development of elite diplomatic ties. These encounters primarily involved African captives used as informants and guides, Portuguese settlers in Africa and the developing Luso-African culture, and African artists in West Africa who produced commissioned ivory carvings of the visiting Portuguese. These examples represent the significant development of other relationships in this period. Additionally, they show both the greater context of interaction that included the elite diplomatic exchanges, and the context framing the development of the respectful elite encounters occurring between African and European leaders.

Together the chapters of this study highlight an often overlooked but important period characterized by respectful African-European relations, a period that remains of fundamental importance to a greater understanding of pre-colonial African and world history.

CHAPTER ONE

AFRICAN AGENDAS
IN AN EARLY WORLD OF EUROPEAN CONTACTS

Introduction

To some artists in early medieval Europe, Africa was Europe's foil. Vases and religious paintings would use African and European faces to portray polar opposites. Other artists would use them to show two sides of the same coin. Many scholars today still approach the history of pre-colonial Africa during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with the assumption that African politics were vastly different from those of Europe. Yet this was seldom the case. More often than not, close parallels can be drawn between African and European rulers' ambitions during this time of consolidation and expansion.

This study begins with the early period of direct African-European contact in the late fourteen hundreds. In the preceding centuries, neither continent was wholly isolated from the other. Most of southern Europe and the Italian city states, in particular, had a wide degree of contact with the Middle East and North Africa. Aside from the well known examples of the various European crusades, and the thirteenth-century attempted alliance between the Papacy and the Mongols, the proximity of southern Europe and North Africa meant that throughout the Middle Ages a small number of Africans came to

Europe. Some came as esteemed courtiers and visitors, others as enslaved laborers.[1] Most of these Africans, along with captured Muslims, lived lives similar to other European subordinates, with some legal limitations. A number of cases illuminated the existing possibilities of some social mobility.[2] Early European views of Africans were without the taint of the racism that developed in later centuries. Wealth, the appearance of nobility, and good manners appeared to be the main criteria in determining social ranking, along with religion. Hostility was most pronounced toward those considered to be Muslim, not towards those of darker skin coloration.[3]

The continent of Africa in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries was home to a variety of kingdoms, expanding empires, and decentralized communities termed by anthropologists as stateless societies. The degree of regional contact varied. Mostly only North African kingdoms and traders had direct contact with Europe.

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[1]Pope Gregory X and Mongol Il-khan Arghun met in the late 1200s to discuss the development of positive relations with Rome. Several other embassies followed, although the alliance was ultimately unsuccessful. For details, see J. R. S. Phillips, *The Medieval Expansion of Europe*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 122-124, 131. Paul H. D. Kaplan's article on "Black Africans in Hohenstaufen Iconography," *GESTA* XXVI, no. 1 (International Center of Medieval Art, 1987), reveals an early instance when Frederick II's esteemed African trumpeters were documented in the art of the late 1100s.

[2]Hans Debrunner, *Presence and Prestige, a History of Africans in Europe before 1918* (Basel: Basel Afrika Bibliographien, 1979) presents the example of Juan Latino, a slave brought to Andalusia who studied with his master's grandson, Gonzalo Fernandez, at the University of Granada, soon after Juan Latino became a lecturer in Greek and Latin and continued his studies for a BA in 1546, and a Master of the Arts in 1557, beginning his academic career soon after. He eventually fell in love with Dona Ana, his Latin student and a Portuguese noble, and was helped to win his freedom. They couple happily married and their story dramatized later by Diego de Encisco, 39. He also mentions the prominent populations of free blacks who created religious and welfare associations which included the welfare of black slaves in Lisbon, Barcelona and Seville, 39, illustrating another indication of the complexity and variety of social classes occupied by Africans and those of African descent in parts of southern Europe. For a more general study of slave status in Portugal, see A. C. de C. M. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal 1441-1555* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982); lastly for Portuguese religious and philosophical views on slavery, consult Robin Blackburn, "The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, vol. LIV, no. 1 (January 1997): 65-102.

[3]Annemette Kirekegaard, "Questioning the Origins of the Negative Image of Africa in Medieval Euope," in *Encounter Images in the Meetings Between Africa and Europe*, ed. Mai Palmberg (Uppsala: Nordiska, 2001). For an overview of Medieval views of Africans, see Francois de Medeiros, *L'Occident et L'Afrique (XIIIe-XVe siecle)* (Paris: Karthala, 1985).

However, much of West Africa was widely integrated in the Trans-Saharan trade network. Similarly, much of coastal East Africa was part of the Swahili trading network, trading with the Middle East, India, and China. Specific customs ranged widely but the more centralized African kingdoms had highly elaborate court systems and protocols governing diplomacy and trade, along with effective means of defense ranging from local militias to organized armies.[4]

At this point in history, many kingdoms in Africa and Europe were centralizing and exploring new potential allies. This chapter seeks to analyze the initial relationships that developed between African kingdoms, Portugal, and the Vatican. Unlike more Eurocentric histories of this era, here the perspective highlights African agendas and their attempts to direct the nature of the ensuing relationships from the late-fourteen hundreds to the early sixteen hundreds, focusing on the Kongo kingdom, the Fante states, and the empires of Benin and Ethiopia.

This chapter starts with the chronological development of each African kingdom's relationship with Portugal before moving to a more holistic analysis of the era. One of the most prevalent misconceptions about initial relations between African leaders and exploring Europeans was that these encounters resulted in quick European exploitation and coastal conquest, a stereotype that the historian John Thornton has called "one of the most durable myths of the history of central Africa."[5] In this early period, the case of the

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[4]For one of the most comprehensive studies on pre-colonial African diplomacy and war amongst the African states, see Robert Smith, *Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-colonial West Africa* (United States: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1976).

[5]John Thornton, "Early Kongo-Portuguese Relations: A New Interpretation," *History in Africa* 8 (1981), 1. For an example of the older view of Kongo-Portugal relations, consider Basil Davidson, *The African Slave Trade* [1961] (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), which casts the relationship in a tragic light, with a well intended Christian king, Manikongo Afonso Mvemba Nzinga being misled and monopolized by the Portuguese Crown under the influence of the São Tomé slave traders.

Kongo was not so much the exceptional case of African control over these encounters, but the general rule. This chapter only discusses the relationships developed by four kingdoms, chosen because they represent the best documented cases and the longest-term relationships. Other contacts and cases of cooperation also developed between the Portuguese and Africans rulers elsewhere, some of which are elaborated upon in chapter three. Chapter three also expands on the initial years of Portuguese-West African contact, which were initially characterized by Portuguese belligerent policies and coastal attacks. Given Portugal's initial approach to West Africa, that close to fifty years later, their policies had changed to cooperation with African norms and an outward respect for African rulers shows that each side found enough commonality and mutual advantage to pursue elaborate ties. This chapter examines what prompted these relationships to happen.

The Fante Coast

The experience of the Portuguese along the coast of West Africa involved an initial period of activity north of modern day Senegal in the early fourteen hundreds, where the Portuguese sought to continue their experiences in Morocco and frequently raided the African coast. After repeated confrontations with African counterattacks, the Portuguese switched policy and began to attempt to follow some African trading customs.[6] By the late 1460s, the Portuguese had established several island bases of settlement by force on the Cape Verde islands and Araguim, near today's Senegal.

[6]That in this era, African military defense was often on par with the Europeans, is often forgotten. Even small coastal states, such as the Fante states had community militias known as *asafo* companies which could be mobilized to protect the town. Numerically the Portuguese were also at a significant disadvantage. Only after they developed their colonial base in Brazil and expanded settlements on the São Tomé islands could they mobilize sufficient forces to threaten the more centralized African kingdoms.

However, establishing settlements on mainland Africa first required dialogue with coastal rulers.[7] The voyages of the Portuguese in the 1460s and early 1470s represented a turning point in their approach, as they sought to establish friendly trading contacts with the coastal rulers. The history of the fortress of São Jorge da Mina (later called simply Elmina) offers a prime example.[8]

Portuguese settlers on the coast of today's Ghana sought permission to build a fortress to monopolize the lucrative gold trade. They met with the local ruler, Kwamin Ansa [known as Caramança in Portuguese records] to get his permission.[9] Their famous meeting was related by royal chroniclers Ruy da Pina and his successor João de Barros, as well as contemporaries such as Pacheco Perreira, and it is widely quoted in studies of Ghana's coast. Although some details vary, the essence remains the same.[10] According to Barros, writing a half century after the foundation of São Jorge da Mina, the Portuguese

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[7]Cape Verde soon developed a substantial Luso-African population that sought a high degree of independence from the Portuguese Crown. A number of other Portuguese settled on the African coast and interior with permission from African rulers, as elaborated in chapter three. See Jose da Silva Horta, "Evidence for a Luso-African Identity in 'Portuguese' Accounts on the 'Guinea of Cape Verde' (Sixteenth-Seventeenth Centuries)" *History in Africa* 27 (2000): 99-130 and George E. Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003).

[8]Most Ghanaians would disagree with the classification of the kingdom surrounding Elmina as one of the Fante states. At the time of initial Portuguese contact, the local ruler Caramança was a vassal of the nearby Fante state, with local control but not independence. However, after several centuries of trading contact and commercial prosperity, the politically independent state of Elmina developed. Due to Elmina's later trading ties with the Fante rival, the inland Asante Empire, and the state's creation after the original Fante settlements, its identity is problematic. See H. N. Feinberg, "Who are the Elmina?" *Ghana Notes and Queries* no. 1 (June 1970) for details. Since this paper examines the period before the independence of Elmina, I have chosen to consider it as a representative example of the Fante states' politics.

[9]Suggested original name by David Northrup in his article "Vasco da Gama and Africa: an Era of Mutual Discovery," *Journal of World History* 9, no. 2 (1998), 191.

[10]The historian P. E. H. Hair, one of the major compilers and editors of sources from this early era, published a detailed comparisons of these two royal chroniclers, *The Founding of the Castelo de São Jorge da Mina: an analysis of sources* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1994). Aside from several differing account details, one of the major differences between the two chroniclers is their tone. Ruy de Pina, writing at the actual time of the events, seems to have slightly more respect for the African leaders. Barros, by contrast, frequently adds rather derogatory comments, such as describing the Fante coast, "the savage land of Guinea" and the attire of Caramança's retinue as "all were so hideous in their fancies, designed to convey warlike ferocity, that they provoked laughter rather than fear," English translation in Freda Wolfson, *The Pageant of Ghana* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 38 and 40.

under Captain Diogo de Azambuja and his men were received well: "When Caramança was among our people, he went to meet him and Caramança took the hand of Diogo de Azambuja, and letting it go again said *bere, bere*, which means 'peace, 'peace.'"[11] Although surprised by the Portuguese request to live on his shores, Kwamin Ansa eventually agreed to grant permission to build a fort: "He would be pleased to permit him to build the house as he wished, warning him that peace in truth must be kept, for should our men act otherwise they would cause more harm to themselves than to he, because the land was great and he and his men could build another abode there with a few sticks and branches, of which they had plenty."[12] Initial Portuguese attempts to keep the peace failed rather dramatically when they inadvertently chose the site of the most holy shrine in the area for construction of their fort, and were attacked by the local militia, but later relations were more stable.

The decisions of rulers such as Kwamin Ansa, who allowed the Portuguese to establish a fort provided they followed Fante trading customs, gave frequent tribute and advantageous trading terms, demonstrated an astute combination of economic motives and political control.[13] At this time the Fante occupied many autonomous states along the central part of modern Ghana's coast. These states had a common culture and language but remained politically independent. Leaders would cooperate in times of crisis or to regulate advantageous trade. Most of the people were traders and farmers, uniquely situated on the coast between two valuable commodities, salt and inland sources of gold.

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[11]English translation of João de Barros, *Asia* [1552], trans. G. R. Crone (Hakluyt Society, 1937), in Wolfson, 40.

[12]Ibid., 43.

[13]John Vogt's study, *Portuguese Rule on the Gold Coast: 1469-1682* (Athens: Georgia University Press, 1979) highlighted some of the instances of gift giving, adopting an African custom to encourage trade, 84-79.

Thus, these states soon expanded in influence due to their lucrative role as trade middlemen.[14] The Fante mostly sought trading relationships with the arriving Europeans (over more elaborate political alliances) and permitted them to construct costal forts. Their relationship was unique in that it continued on good terms well into the eighteen hundreds, without the Europeans gaining territorial control or local Fante rulers deciding to break ties.[15] The Europeans were unable to penetrate the interior to discover the sources of gold, and thus had to trade for it on Fante terms. As the number of European traders grew to include the Dutch, Spanish, British, French, and briefly the Prussians, the Fante became adept at refusing various monopolies aimed at controlling trade terms to their advantage. This strategy allowed the Fante both to increase their own trade profits and also to maintain their political leverage through these encounters.[16]

The coastal Fante case is illustrative of some of the trading politics of other coastal African states. However, when the Portuguese encountered the kingdoms of Benin, the Kongo, or later Ethiopia, their relationships with these more centralized kingdoms were more elaborate and entailed more than mutually profitable trade.

Benin

The Kongolese and Ethiopian diplomatic relationships with the Portuguese and

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[14]For a detailed view of Fante economy and culture before and during their interaction with Europeans, consult, John Kofi Fynn, *Oral Traditions of the Fante States*, vols. 1-6 (Legon: Institute of African Studies & Ghana University Press, September, 1975).

[15]In the mid-eighteen hundreds, colonial desires of the British and Dutch, the two remaining Europeans powers on the coast, led to significant changes in the relationship. Efforts by the British to increase their control over Fante affairs prompted a reaction in the Fante Confederation in the late 1860s. This early constitutional unification movement sought to unite most of the coastal Fante states and their neighbors and inaugurate a modern state with planned education, infrastructure, and trading projects. Although the movement ultimately failed, it remains illustrative of how long it took any of the would-be colonial powers to actually establish effective control on the coast.

[16]For a survey of the various European merchants on Ghana's coast and their activities, see Albert van Danzig, *Forts and Castles of Ghana* (Accra: Sedco Publishers, 1980).

Rome were the longest in duration. Unlike Kongo or Ethiopia, Benin was at the height of its power in the late fifteenth century when it first encountered the Portuguese, and in the subsequent meetings sought less from them.[17] Prince Ena Eweka, who wrote one of the well-known histories of the Benin Monarchy using a number of oral histories, saw the Portuguese presence in Benin as primarily an affirmation of the Oba's status at this time. Oral histories of Oba Esigie remember him as "the Oba who introduced Christianity into the kingdom and exchanged ambassadors with the King of Portugal . . . his son was the first accredited black envoy to the Portuguese court. He recruited Portuguese soldiers who fought in most of his military expeditions."[18]

During the reigns of Oba Esigie and his son, Benin developed a political relationship with Portugal. From a political and military perspective, Benin did not necessarily need European allies. The Oba's rule was not threatened by regional rivals or in need of bolstering due to internal disputes. During the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Benin was the paramount regional power in the Niger River region. According to some later estimates, the kingdom could field over 100,000 soldiers at short notice.[19] The Oba's highly centralized bureaucracy, key ministers, and network of informants and messengers further enhanced his power. That Benin chose to develop diplomatic ties with Portugal and accept Portuguese military aid during the Idah war (1515-1516) was due more to their willingness to test and accept a new ally than a dire need for one. The

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[17]The Benin Empire can justifiably be considered the regional power in this era. In political, military, or trading terms the Oba, ruler, of Benin had a high degree of control throughout the very centralized empire. Some trade interactions of Benin extended as far as the Fante coast of today's Ghana. For more background on Benin, see Elizabeth M. McClelland, *The Kingdom of Benin in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) and R. E. Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking Peoples of South Western Nigeria* (London: International African Institute, 1957).

[18]Prince Ena Basimi Eweka, *The Benin Monarchy (Origin and Development)* (Benin City, Nigeria: Soben Publishers, 1992), 23-24.

[19]McClelland, 46.

acceptance of Christianity by Oba Esigie may have been more an attempt to humor the Portuguese than a sincere passion to spread the new faith, given the short duration of the faith and the Oba's lack of enthusiasm for its promotion throughout his kingdom. He allowed some churches to be built and was baptized with a number of his ministers, but to the disappointment of the Portuguese, that was the main extent of Christianity in Benin. Unlike in the Kongo kingdom, no apparent attempt was made to eliminate overt aspects of traditional worship.

Concurrent with the addition of Portugal as one of Benin's allies or vassal states depending on one's perspective, trade also developed through the Benin town of Guantun near the Benin River's intersection with the Atlantic Ocean. [20] This trade lasted well into the eighteen hundreds. It is important to note that in its initial centuries the Oba tightly regulated trade and protocol both internally and externally with the Europeans. [21] Within Benin, previous rulers had monopolized the production of many of the artisans and craftsmen, creating the royal guild system in Benin City, the capital. Aside from the famous brass casters who created a dynamic visual record of this period, other guilds served political purposes, such as the Oba's body guards and information collectors (the *avbiogbe*). When European traders arrived, the Oba insisted that messengers first inform him of the ships' arrival, then a welcome group of two to three chiefs and key merchants would greet the ships and give them presents of food and drink. [22] Trade would only commence the following day.

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[20]Written as Ughoton in Portuguese texts.

[21]See A. F. C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans, 1485-1897* (New York: Humanities Press, Inc., 1969) for later history and Egharevba Ikponmwosa, *The Guild System in Benin Kingdom 900-1700: A Study of its Social, Economic and Political significance* (Bendal State University, Research Essay, September 1990), see 4 for discussion of Oba's security related guilds.

[22]McClelland, 39.

The pattern of reception, gift exchange, and trade commencing only after the observance of certain protocols is revealing for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that the Portuguese were required to adhere to Benin trading customs. Secondly, the Oba of Benin and his merchants chose to impose their trading customs instead of creating a special case or adapting to European trade patterns. This result should not be seen exclusively as the product of Benin's geographic location with a coast unsuitable for fort construction, neither of Benin centralization, nor Portuguese willingness or necessity to adapt to African customs. More probably it is a sum of all these factors. As the previous case of the Fante states revealed, even where the degree of centralized ruler control or defendable coastline was considerably less, the African leaders and traders were largely able to maintain their policies up through the seventeenth century.

Kongo

The Kongo-Portuguese relationship remains one of the most well known but often misrepresented cases, and for that reason merits a lengthier discussion. Because the Portuguese established settlements on the islands of São Tomé and Principe in Luanda in the early sixteen hundreds in defiance of Kongolese authority, and by the late seventeen hundreds claimed Angola as their colony, many earlier historians claimed the initial Kongolese-Portuguese relationships were dominated by European exploitation or slave raiding. Others briefly portray Kongolese goals, but discuss this period in the context of the next two centuries, losing sight of initial positive Kongolese-Portugal relations in an overall narrative of exploitation.[23] Viewing the relationship from the Kongolese

[23]Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade: 1730-1830* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1988) and authors, such as James Duffy, *Portugal in Africa*

perspective and not from an anachronistic imperial view, the relationship was quite different.

Before the Portuguese arrival the Kongo was in a process of consolidation. As opposed to smaller autonomous communities seen elsewhere, the Kongo kingdom was headed by the *Manikongo* chosen by four electors from different areas. The Manikongo's power was balanced by a twelve member *mbanda* council which included key members of the royal household and important relatives, male and female. The Manikongo was chosen along matrilineal lines and typically on a rotating basis from the elite families.[24]

One of the major results of the Manikongo's close relationship with the Portuguese Crown was the Manikongo's subsequent consolidation of ruling power, reducing the influence of the *mbanda* council and changing the nature of royal inheritance. Formerly this was the choice of the regional electors, now it was at the Manikongo's own discretion.[25] The Manikongo Nzinga Nkuwu, (known in Portuguese records as João I), was the first to encounter the Portuguese in 1483. He received much attention because of his conversion to Christianity in 1491. This conversion was a significant aid in achieving the shift in ruling power. The following ruler, Manikongo Afonso Mvemba Nzinga (called Dom Afonso by the Portuguese) used his Portuguese support to defeat his rival claimant who was not a convert to the new cult of Christianity. Manikongo Afonso Mvemba Nzinga continued the trend established by his predecessor in developing close relations with Portugal, sending diplomatic embassies, initiating the

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(Boston: Harvard University Press, 1962). See for example, the discussion in Basil Davidson, *The African Slave Trade* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1961) and to an extent in Jan Vansina's early writings, such as *Kingdoms of the Savanna* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1966), although his later works take a different standpoint.

[24]Anne Hilton, *The Kingdom of the Kongo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 36.

[25]Hilton, 67.

practice of sending missionary students to study at the convent of Santo Elòi in Lisbon, and requesting financial and personnel support to spread Christianity in the Kongo.

The authenticity of this religious conversion has received much debate, with views ranging from arguments that the Manikongo did not understand the significance of his conversion to those who argue that his Christian sentiments were genuine. Kongolese historian Anne Hilton suggests instead that the conversion should be understood from the context of Kongolese religious beliefs. Christianity was seen as a new and powerful religious cult emphasizing the dead spirits (believed to be white and to come from the sea). This meeting between the worlds of the dead and the living was often represented in Kongolese artwork by crossroads imagery, usually as simply a cross. That the Portuguese missionaries arrived from the sea, from a mysterious land, bearing items with cross symbolism reinforced this belief.[26] Certainly the Manikongo Nzinga Nkuwu's behavior, such as his insistence on following the rites of conversion in secret, his name change, and his attempt to limit conversions initially to only the upper nobility, support the argument that he and others viewed Christianity as a new form of religious cult. Some authors have gone further, claiming that all the Kongolese viewed the Portuguese as departed spirits and not ordinary men. I would argue that an important distinction must be made between the Kongolese elite who had regular interaction with the Portuguese, traveled to Portugal and probably saw similarities to the Kongo, and others in the Kongo kingdom who only briefly glimpsed the Portuguese and more plausibly viewed them as denizens of the spirit realm, as many Europeans at this time attributed unexplainable phenomenon to the works

[26]See Hilton, 50-51 and chapter one for background on social and religious context.

or God or the devil.[27] It is important to also remember that the Kongolese and Portuguese at this time did not make clear distinctions between religious diplomacy and politics. Spreading Christianity was a key goal for the Portuguese. Many Kongolese viewed their Manikongo as embodying political and spiritual power, so it is quite probable that participants on both sides were aware of the political-religious connections of this diplomatic encounter.

With this in mind, regardless of whether one views the conversions of Manikongo Nzinga Nkuwu and his son as genuine or simply pragmatic, the creation of this religious link with Portugal was a useful political tactic, and one well utilized by Afonso Mvemba Nzinga and his successors to solidify their growing power in the Kongo kingdom in the early fifteen hundreds. It is clear, as well, that Manikongo Afonso Mvemba Nzinga understood the importance of his allies and the new symbolism of Christianity. In an address to his notables in 1512, he recounted his victory over his rival brother who was never willing to embrace Christianity. [28] He then continued and introduced the new worship of Christianity, the destruction of the old shrines, and explained his choice in a coat of arms. All were powerful symbols of his political power and the changes in events.

Although Manikongo Nzinga Nkuwu and Afonso Mvemba Nzinga shrewdly used the new religion to bolster their power, their early relationship with Portugal also

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[27] Wyatt MacGaffey, "Dialogues of the deaf: Europeans on the Atlantic coast of Africa" in Stuart Schwartz, ed., *Implicit Understandings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) presented both the early and more recent conceptions of the initial Kongolese-Portuguese encounters and remarked "both had similar standards of agricultural productivity and standards of living. Each would recognize in the other a monarchy dominating a political system organized by relations of kinship and clientage among the aristocracy . . . in short the level of practical intercultural understanding was considerably higher than the available texts would indicate," 260-261. The reactions of the average Kongolese to the Portuguese are discussed in chapter three.

[28]"Carta do Rei do Congo aos Senhores do Reino, 1512," in Antonio Brasio, *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, vol. I (Lisbon: Agencia Geral do Ultramar, Divisão de Publicões e Biblioteca, 1952), 256-259, original Bibliotheca National, Cartas Missivas. 297, fl. 149v-150v.

solicited Portuguese military assistance. The Kongo kingdom was then growing in power, but it was by no means the only centralizing kingdom in the area. Similar to the customs of feudal Europe, the Manikongo typically requested military support from its allies, in this case Portugal. In the tradition of African diplomatic and military customs this is not surprising; what was less predictable was the enthusiastic Portuguese military response. The Portuguese Crown reportedly sent:

> Douze bombardiers, six calfats, trois charpentiers et six pilotes. En comptant tous ces officiers, il devra avoir 180 hommes pour les six navires . . . Votre Altesse lui prêtera 40 armes a feu avec leur support, deux bombardes de calibre moyen, douze quintaux de poudre, 1000 boulets pour cette artillerie, 50 arbalètes, 300 hallebardes, 300 quintaux de biscuits, 100 vieux tonneaux pour les réparations, si on en trouve qui ne servent plus dans le dépôt, 150 cottes de maille et équipement. En plus de ces armes, V. Altesse lui donnera 100,000 reis en argent.[29]

The success of this and several other military expeditions helped affirm Afonso Mvemba Nzinga's reforms and new allies.

Manikongo Alfonso Mvemba Nzinga and his successors were quick to use this new relationship for their advantage and requested a number of missionaries and related religious items to construct churches in the Kongo. Many letters detailing Kongolese requests and the Portuguese Crown's orders providing for various gifts and missionary expeditions survive from this period.[30] One such royal order included clothing (religious and the latest fashion from India), cooking ingredients, a pair of greyhounds, four donkeys, two carts, a Venetian mirror, a pair of swords, a tent, hangings, tablecloths, two high alters and decorations, a half dozen of torches, and a sampling of citrus fruits to

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[29]"Expédition de Goncalo Rois Pour le Congo, 1509," in Louis Jardin and Mireille Dicorato, *Correspondance de Dom Afonso, roi du Congo 1506-1543* (Brussel : Academie royale des sciences d'outre-Mer, 1974), 18-19, original ATT-Cartas Missivas, parte II, doc. 142.

[30]See for instance, "Carta Do Rei Do Congo a Dom João III, 18-3-1526," in Brasio, vol. I, doc. 140, 459-464, from ATT-CC-I-33-121. Here the Manikongo requests that King Manuel send fifty missionaries, including his six Kongolese students at Santo Elòi, a Lisbon convent.

attempt to plant on São Tomé. This seemingly eclectic combination showed a variety of items that were considered appropriate status gifts by the Portuguese and apparently valued by the Kongolese. The Portuguese King recommended that this assortment of items be accompanied by craftsmen, weapons smiths, artisans, tile-makers to decorate the churches, a rope-maker, a worker to make lime, a cattle expert to introduce cattle rearing, a tailor and a hairdresser.[31] Considering this assortment of items, one is reminded both of later colonial enterprises and a naïve underestimation of the advanced state of agriculture and construction skills of the Kongolese. The selection of items demonstrated the determination of the Portuguese not only to baptize new converts but also to construct churches. Other items, such as the inclusion of test citrus fruits, showed a Portuguese willingness to expand the resources on their station on São Tomé. The more fashion and status-oriented gifts indicated the perceived need for gifts and appropriate clothing for the Kongolese royal court, showing a Portuguese awareness of the importance of status gifts to Kongolese diplomacy.

The elaborate array of personnel and items sent to the Kongo was partly the consequence of efforts by the Portuguese Crown; however, many of the items were directly requested by the Manikongo.[32] After the first series of his embassies had returned from Portugal, it is quite probable that the Manikongo and key members of court had acquired a good sense of Portuguese elite lifestyles and some of the basics of the religious worship. Soon after, the Manikongo arranged to have a number of the children

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[31]"Envois a Faire au Congo 1512" from PT-TT-Cartas Missivas, III, 370, French translation in Jardin and Dicorato, *Correspondance de Dom Afonso, Roi du Congo*, 49-50.

[32]Letters such as "Le Roi Dom Afonso a Dom Manuel Ier, Banza Congo, le 31 Mai 1515," in Jardin and Dicorato, 102-104, original ATT-CC-I-26-24, contained requests for more aid in church construction including carpenters to construct a school and other religious items.

of the Kongolese nobility educated in Portugal to return as the kingdom's missionaries and serve as ambassadors to the Pope. Creating similar churches and requesting comparable gifts from the willing Portuguese would certainly enhance the Manikongo's status, both in the eyes of the Kongolese and for the Portuguese seeing familiar markers of their standards of civilization. These churches also served as a visible marker of the Manikongo's power throughout the kingdom.

With the growth between the late fourteen hundreds and early fifteen hundreds of frequent diplomatic exchanges, also came the growth of trade relations between the two kingdoms. Some of this trade was under the royal direction of the two sovereigns, but as the Portuguese expanded their settlements on São Tomé and began to frequent the inland Kongo kingdom, an increasing amount of trade was conducted by merchants, not all to the approval of Manikongo Afonso Mvemba Nzinga. The discovery of Brazil in 1500 coupled with the Crown's *Regimento of 1512*, which declared their economic intentions for São Tomé, signaled the start of complications in the good political relationship enjoyed by the Manikongo and the Portuguese Crown. Tensions are highlighted in a 1526 letter presenting the Manikongo's chief concerns that merchants were despoiling the land and kidnapping royal relatives as slaves, calling for more priests instead of more merchants.[33] As historians such as Jardin have concluded, ultimately Afonso Mvemba Nzinga decided that the most prudent course would be to seek to retain his control over trade and not seek its entire abolition. In either case, the Portuguese Crown replied that a dramatic reduction of trade was impractical.[34] While Afonso Mbemba Nzinga's

[33]"Carta do Rei do Congo a D. Joao III, 6-7-1526," in Brasio, vol. I, doc. 142, 468-471, from ATT-CC-I-34-94.

[34]See introduction in Jardin and Dicorato, *Correspondance de Dom Afonso, roi du Congo*, 10-11.

correspondence did reveal a concern for the slave trade, at least when it involved his relatives, his central complaint was the challenge to his ruling authority more than humanitarian concerns. Not only were the Portuguese traders and some missionaries not fulfilling their instructions but they were ignoring Kongolese trading protocol as well, which was undermining the Manikongo's perceived authority.[35] Yet, the Manikongo was not entirely powerless to act. Afonso Mvemba Nzinga increased his control over the major shipping centers and harbors in an attempt to thwart illegal trading. He also attempted to increase his direct involvement in the trade and reduce the troublesome middlemen merchants, writing to Dom Manuel that he wished to purchase his own ship for trade or instead waive all taxes that the merchants insisted he pay when they shipped Kongolese goods.[36]

Despite the growing antagonism between a number of São Tomé traders and the Manikongo, the correspondence between the two kings remained respectful and positive throughout much of the fifteen hundreds.[37] Although, with diplomatic correspondence one should be careful to not assume that such correspondence revealed actual motives, it is significant that despite their increasingly conflicting goals, both rulers chose to continue this convention of polite, elite exchanges. The Portuguese Crown could have simply ended relations or attempted to use military force to take over trade stations, yet

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[35]One episode that illustrated grounds for Manikongo Afonso Mvemba Nzinga's frustration was documented by the investigation of Goncalo Rois, a trader tried on São Tomé for causing the deaths of a number of Kongolese along with other crimes. He had formerly led a successful military expedition for the Manikongo. The account of his trial was recorded in "Enquete au Sujet de Gonçalo Rois, São Tomé, le 11 decembre 1511 et le 15 janvier 1512," in French translation in Jardin and Dicorato, 21-27, original document ATT-CC-III-4-98.

[36]"Le Roi Dom Afonso au Roi du Portugal Dom Manuel, Banza Congo, le 26 mai 1517, in Jardin and Dicorato, 125-126, original ATT-CC-I-21-109.

[37]As the next chapter elaborates, the elite relations between Kongo and Portugal were very different from later paternalistic colonial dialogues. Letters followed the custom of other European royal correspondence, beginning with greetings from one king to another.

the Crown did not choose to do so until the early seventeenth century. That diplomatic protocol and elite exchanges continued until the end of the sixteenth century reveals that the respective rulers perceived advantages in maintaining their existing relations. Privately, the Portuguese King Dom Manuel also instructed his ambassadors to take special care not to have any more incidents. In his detailed instructions to Portuguese ambassador to the Kongo, Simão da Silva, he warned, "You are not permitted to allow any of those accompanying you to cause any problems or injustices among the people of that country or among yourselves. You, on the contrary, must see that they remain well disciplined, receive any blacks [Kongolese] in a pleasing manner, so that no scandal is allowed to ensue. This I give as your special responsibility."[38] Unfortunately, ambassador Simão da Silva died upon his arrival in the Kongo, and according to the Manikongo's later letters, the problems with some of the other Portuguese persisted, one even going so far as to strike a Kongolese judge.[39] While the Portuguese Crown appeared to see many advantages in respecting Kongolese protocol and laws, some of those sent to the Kongo did not or simply chose not to, instead illegally trading and circumventing Kongolese laws. Thus, tensions continued to arise over Portuguese behavior.

Additionally, the Portuguese Crown, although refusing Kongolese requests to end trade and urging instead its increase, was not entirely unsympathetic to Kongolese problems on São Tomé. Aside from having a number of perpetrators investigated for

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[38]"Instructions du Roi Dom Manuel a Simao da Silva, 1512," my translation from French in Jardin and Dicorato, 35. Original ATT, Leis, livre 2, fol. 25. "Vous ne permettrez pas a ceux qui vous accompagnent de causer le moindre mal ou une injustice quelconque aux gens du pays ou a leurs biens. Vous veillerez, au contraire, a ce qu'ils soient en tout bien disciplines, de telle façon que les noirs les reçoivent avec plaisir et qu'aucun scandale ne puisse s'ensuivre. Nous vous confions spécialement cette responsabilité."

[39]"Le Roi Dom Afonso au Roi Dom Manuel, Banza Congo, le 4 Mars 1516" in Jardin and Dicorato, 109-112, original ATT-Gaveta 15, maco 14, n. 40.

crimes during the early fifteen hundreds, the Crown also attempted to regulate conditions on São Tomé. In 1526, when some of the significant Kongolese complaints were sent against slave raiding and the merchants at São Tomé, the King João III received a petition from the Kongolese on the island asking to found a religious society. According to his chancellor, he responded to the request favorably, granting them a number of favors.[40] Here again, although some of these concessions to the Kongolese working against the interest of the plantation owners on São Tomé, may have been token gestures, it remains significant that the Crown felt a need for these gestures.

That said, the Portuguese Crown also ignored many opportunities to rule in favor of the Kongo over the trade interests on São Tomé. Towards the middle of the fifteen hundreds, both the Manikongo and the Portuguese Crown began to seek other diplomatic options. On Portugal's side, that meant developing their growing economic interests on Sao Tome and particularly in Brazil, and beginning to contact other nearby rivals of the Manikongo to establish relationships with them. The Manikongo likewise began to seek relationships with potential allies, including the Vatican and, later, the Dutch. However, their success in contacting Rome for the establishment of a political relationship was delayed until the early sixteen hundreds with the arrival of Ambassador Antonio Manuel Marchio ne Vunda.

Perhaps what is most unique about Kongo-Portugal relations at this time was that the Manikongo and the Portuguese King appeared to allow two very different types of activities on São Tomé. The frequent gifts of ivory and, at times, slaves from the Manikongo to Portugal were creating a new market for these items, and traders on both

[40]"Carta de El-Rei D. João III, 9-7-1526," in Brasio, vol. I, doc. 143, 472-474, from ATT-Chancelaria de D. João III, liv. 12, fl. 134v.

sides appeared to be unwilling to adhere to the strict trading rules imposed by both the Portuguese and Kongolese monarchs. During the same period, the Manikongo had plans for São Tomé that dramatically differed from the growing plantation society. A letter to Dom Manuel in 1514 recounted his difficulties with the Portuguese traders and missionaries and delineated his plans to establish a school for young Kongolese on São Tomé. He ended with a request for Portuguese support for this endeavor.[41] In the Kongo kingdom, some of Afonso Mvemba Nzinga's most visible reforms had included the establishment of churches and schools throughout the kingdom. That he wanted to implement a similar policy on São Tomé, nominally under the control of the Portuguese at the time, showed his desire to increase his influence over the island. Although this endeavor was ultimately unsuccessful, it is significant in revealing the Manikongo's understanding of the Portuguese traders' motives on São Tomé and his deliberate use of diplomatic tactics in an attempt to bolster his situation.

Ethiopia

Prester John, the mysterious stalwart defender of Christianity had been sought as an ally by various Europeans throughout the later Middle Ages.[42] Only in the early fifteen hundreds did the Prester John become synonymous with the Ethiopian Emperor in the minds of the Portuguese. The Emperor of Ethiopia, however, had been well aware of various kingdoms in Europe since the thirteen hundreds. The rulers of Ethiopia had

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[41]"Dom Afonso au Roi Dom Manuel, Banza Congo, le 5 octobre 1514," in Jardin and Dicorato, 77-101, original ATT-CC-I-16.

[42]One interesting exception to this is a letter from "Henry IV to the Emperor of Abyssinia" praising his "magnificent work" fighting against the "powers of ransoming enemies." English translation of letter by Casey Robbins, Latin version in F. C. Hingeston, ed., *Royal and Historical Letters During the Reign of Henry IV*, vol. I 1399-1413 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1869), 421.

sought to maintain key Christian connections as a symbol of their legitimate authority since Emperor Yekuno Amlak's proclamation of the Solomonic dynasty in 1270.[43] As the next chapter on traveling ambassadors delineates, Ethiopia was often in contact with Europe, particularly the various Christian Italian city-states. Frequent embassies participated in conferences with Vatican leaders, such as the Council of Florence in the 1440s, and visited other leaders in Venice, Florence, and Rome before the sixteenth century. Ethiopia also maintained a listening post was maintained in Jerusalem.[44] The custom that the high ranking bishop of Ethiopia, the *abuna*, had to be from outside the kingdom, kept Ethiopia connected to the Coptic Church in Egypt. Later as the Muslim Mamluk dynasty gained regional power, it became problematic both to receive an *abuna* from Egypt but also to send delegations to Europe, leading Ethiopia to be open to new routes to reach Europe, such as by sea with the Portuguese.[45]

Like Portugal, Ethiopia in the fifteenth century was undergoing a process of both expansion and Christianization.[46] These processes had begun a century earlier. The Ethiopian history, the *Glorious Victories of 'Amda Seyon*, chronicled some of the Emperor's victories against enemies in rebellious provinces.[47] "King 'Amda Seyon defeated them, subjected them to his dominion, and destroyed them all through the power of Jesus Christ; and he gave peace to his people, who rejoiced with great joy." Emperor

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[43]See Steven Kaplan, *The Monastic Holy Man and the Christianization of Early Solomonic Ethiopia* (Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1984).

[44]Hans Debrunner, *Presence and Prestige, a History of Africans in Europe before 1918* (Basel: Basel Afrika Bibliographien), 28. For details see E. Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina*, 2 vol. (Rome, 1943).

[45]Mordechai Abir elaborated in *Ethiopia and the Red Sea: The Rise and Decline of the Solomonic Dynasty and Muslim-European rivalry in the region* (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1980).

[46]Background details see Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1994) and Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Borderlands* (Asmara, Eritrea: The Red Sea Press, 1997).

[47]G. W. B. Huntingford, trans and ed., *The Glorious Victories of 'Āmda Seyon King of Ethiopia* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1965), 96.

‘Amda Seyon worked to expand the empire’s physical boundaries, consolidate ruling power, and spread Christianity, a trend that was emulated by his successors. The Christianization efforts of Ethiopia, however, were not solely led by the Emperor and nobility. In Ethiopia, priests and monks played a prominent role in spreading the religion and the fourteen hundreds witnessed the growth of several new monastic movements. While the Ethiopian Emperor was attempting to expand regional control throughout the empire, other nearby empires were also expanding.[48] The growth of Ottoman influence across the Red Sea and the rise of regional Muslim leaders dissatisfied with their incorporation into an Ethiopian Empire began to pose problems for Ethiopian hegemony.

The Ethiopian interest in developing a closer relationship with Europe stemmed from strategic motives in reaction to these changing regional politics and from its desire to remain connected with European Christendom. Former Ethiopian embassy to Portugal led by Ambassador Matthew in 1512 reflected some changes in policy. Initial embassies to parts of Europe had primarily been interested in religious issues, either undertaking pilgrimages to Rome or visiting various city-states in Italy to participate in discussions of Christianity and the unification of its doctrine. In the late fourteen hundreds, embassies from Ethiopia sent by Emperor Zara Yakob solicited various scholars and technicians (such as masons and artists) to join the Emperor’s court. Father Alvares’ account of Dom Rodrigo’s return embassy to Ethiopia in the 1520s, reported several Italian scholars who remained in Ethiopia.[49] This interest from the Ethiopian Emperor and his court in new

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[48]The details of such expansion and the spread of Christianity are well documented in the Ethiopian Royal Chronicles. For an English translation, see Richard K. P. Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles* (Addis Ababa: Oxford University Press, 1967).

[49]Father Francisco Alvares, *The Prester John of the Indies*, vol I, ed. C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1961). The case of Pero de Covilham, who traveled to

inventions (such as the more accurate mappamundi) and the wider world was reflected in their appreciation of various gifts from the Portuguese and in some of their discussions recounted by Father Alvares.[50]

Issues of prestige and status also played a role in the Ethiopian desire to exchange ambassadors with Portugal and Rome. Since all three tended to divide the world into religious, not racial or national, categories, creating closer alliances with the other key Christian civilizations certainly had an important appeal in shaping their policies. To an even greater extent than with the Kongo kingdom, the centralized nature of Ethiopia's ruling structure and social hierarchies, coupled with the pre-existence of Christianity meant that Ethiopians and visiting Portuguese could relate on many levels. This long-term tradition of Christianity placed Ethiopia on a comparatively equal status with other European kingdoms in the Portuguese world-view. Although in later years, the smaller differences in Christian practice and doctrine would become sources of conflict, initially, having a religion in common helped foster relations and some mutual respect.

Beginning in 1527, the Ethiopian rationale for an alliance was more strategic and urgent: the empire was at war and losing ground to a Muslim campaign for expansion led by Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim El Ghazi, nicknamed Grãn (the left handed). *The Chronicle of Galawados* highlighted the crisis:

> At this point victory favoured the Muslims . . . They dominated the church of Ethiopia. They were the victors in all fights to the east, west, north and south, and destroyed all the churches . . . they put to the sword a great number of Christians

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Ethiopia in 1494 and was forced to remain there is recounted, 369-377. These also included the Italian painter Niccolo Brancaleone, Marcus, 27.

[50]While the fact that Father Alvares was a priest and undoubtedly delighted to frequently discuss and explain the details of European worship, it does appear that the Ethiopian Emperor was quite interested in the differences in doctrine, see Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, vol. I, 357. Other discussions ranged from making arrangements to establish a trade in carpets, Ibid., 362, and having the Portuguese guests translate a world map for the Emperor, Ibid., 415.

> and led into captivity young men and women and children of both sexes and sold them as slaves. Many of the faithful moreover renounced the faith of the church and embraced the religion of the Muslims; it is doubtful if one in ten retained his faith . . . the King was chased from his throne and wandered from desert to desert facing hunger, thirst and cold in complete destitution. [51]

A letter from the Ethiopian Emperor Lebna Dengel to Dom João Bermudes, the Portuguese representative who had recently returned to Portugal, requested aid:

> I sent you on my embassy from this [E]tiopia, and by the will of God you never rested, undergoing troubles for the love of me, and chiefly to exalt the faith of Christ. All my chiefs have rebelled against me to help the Moors, and have wasted and violently taken possession of my countries; in fear of this, I asked the King, my brother, for men and you tell me he has granted me three hundred trained men . . . I beg you to bring many pioneers. Rest, for I know that you do not sleep in my service, but keep it in your thoughts.[52]

Portugal did indeed sent soldiers, 400 of them under the command of Dom Christovão da Gama. After many battles in which the Portuguese leader Dom Cristobal and Ethiopian Emperor Lebna Dengel were killed, the combined military forces eventually prevailed in 1543. Their "glorious exploits" received much contemporary attention from the chroniclers of both parties in Castanhoso's *The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia* and in the Ethiopian royal chronicles of Lebna Dengel and his immediate successor Galawedos.[53] The high praise both sides recorded for each other in their court chronicles shows that the high praise given to each other in royal correspondence, went further than a diplomatic gesture.

By contemporary accounts and later evaluation, the period surrounding the

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[51]"The Chronicle of Galawados" in *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles*, ed. Richard Pankhurst (Addis Ababa: Oxford University Press, 1967), 50.

[52]"An Undated Letter from Lebna Dengel, King of Abyssinia, to D. Joao Bermudez. Written in 1540," Correa, vol. IV, 138 in English translation in R. S. Whiteway, ed., *The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia in 1541-1543 as Narrated by Castanhoso with some contemporary letters* [1902, Hakluyt Society] (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint Ltd., 1967), 107-108.

[53]See R. S. Whiteway, trans and ed., *The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia* and Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles* (Addis Ababa: Oxford University Press, 1967).

Portuguese-Ethiopian defense of the Ethiopian Empire was probably the highpoint in relations. Before the death of Dom Christovão da Gama, Emperor Lebna Dengel had written to the King of Portugal, then Dom João III, to thank him for his help. Praising Dom Christovão, he wrote, "This Miguel showed much attachment to Ethiopia, and fought for Christ against the Musalmans, exposing himself freely until his left arm was broken by a matchlock bullet . . . treat him well, remembering the love of Christ, and also the love of us."[54] Several years later, Dom João III wrote to Emperor Galawados, son of Lebna Dengel:

> Most powerful King, I D. João, by the grace of God King of Portugal, send you much greeting. I have seen the letter you wrote to me in which you give me an account of the condition of your affairs, and of the death of the King your father, which grieves me deeply . . . As to what you say I should help and assist you against your enemies, I rate your affairs so highly, and I am well disposed towards them, that you will never need my help and assistance but you will obtain it from me or my commanders.[55]

While the respective Ethiopian emperors and Portuguese kings declared, at least in their letters, their intention of having close, lasting relations supporting each other, issues of religious sovereignty would lead the Ethiopians to end relations in the 1630s. Hints of the problems to come could be seen in the figure of João Bermudes, a priest sent to Ethiopia, who was appointed by Emperor Lebna Dengel as his ambassador to bring letters back to Portugal. Unfortunately for diplomatic relations, João Bermudes decided his appointment as ambassador and later *abuna* of the Ethiopian church gave him the right to dictate religious observance in Ethiopia and make all aspects of worship

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[54]"Undated Letter concerning Miguel de Castanhoso, written by the King of Abyssinia to the King of Portugal," in Whiteway, 109-111. Whiteway speculated that the letter was written late in 1543 or 1544. That is unlikely since according to most other sources Dom Cristovão had died before that year. The letter itself, however, appears genuine despite its missing date.

[55]"Letter dated 13 March, 1546, from D. João III, King of Portugal, to the King of Abyssinia," trans Whiteway, 110-112. Original in Portuguese edition of Andrade's *Vida da D. João de Castro*.

consistent with Rome's Catholicism. Emperor Galawados was not pleased. Neither was Dom João III, and he apologized for João Bermudes' behavior: "As to what João Bermudez has done there, whom the King your father sent to me as his Ambassador, I disapprove greatly, for they are things contrary to the services of Our Lord . . . nor do I know more of him than he is a mere priest."[56]

As seen earlier with problems arising in Kongo-Portuguese relations due to settlers' actions on São Tomé, it was often those serving abroad who sought to increase their power over African territories or leaders and not initially the Portuguese Crown's stated intent.[57] The overt cooperation and respect shown by the Portuguese Crown to African leaders may have been genuine, but was in any case, a pragmatic tactic. The Portuguese Crown was quite emphatic about promoting its own trading monopolies, willing even to risk criticism from the African leaders to make profits, as seen with the Kongo kingdom and early slave trading. However, until the late sixteenth century, the Portuguese Crown did not openly condone interference or blatant challenges to African rulers' authority for such actions had a negative effect on trading relations. The Portuguese Crown was also not in a position to enforce such challenges militarily, until the seventeenth century. Settlers and Portuguese representatives, however, could profit more by seeking to circumvent the trading taxes imposed by the African and Portuguese rulers, turning to illegal trade or seeking African court positions in the hopes for greater participation in trade. The actions of others, such as Bermudes, reveal political ambitions

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[56]Ibid., p. 111.

[57]Similar problems between the Portuguese Crown's desired policy and the actions of its settlers are found in the case of the Cape Verde islands and Portugal's many failed attempts to regulate their illegal trading with the mainland, see Jose da Silva Horta's discussion in "Evidence for a Luso-African Identity in 'Portuguese' Accounts on the 'Guinea of Cape Verde' (Sixteenth-Seventeenth Centuries)" *History in Africa* 27 (2000): 99-130.

as well, some probably assuming advancement in African courts would lead to corresponding benefits upon their return to Europe. Although such personal motives were damaging to diplomatic efforts, they were understandable given the new situations that many Crown representatives and traders experienced.

Unfortunately for pan-Christian relations, the conflict over Bermudes' actions foreshadowed later tensions to come in the 1620s. The chief Portuguese diplomatic goal had been to persuade the Ethiopian Emperor to convert to the Roman form of Christianity and pledge his obedience to the Pope, two actions in direct contradiction with the Emperor's ultimate sovereignty and Ethiopian tradition of religious independence from Christian Europe.[58] With the immediate military threat thwarted but border dangers remaining, the succeeding emperors, accepting the reality of the rising Ottoman power, sought to reduce the empire's size for defensive reasons.[59] The reigning Emperor in 1603, Za Dengel, secretly converted to Roman Catholicism, but was discovered and deposed by Emperor Susneyos (r. 1607-1632). The Portuguese ambassador and author of a detailed study of the empire, Pedro Paez, convinced Emperor Susneyos to convert as well in 1612. This decision was successfully announced in 1622.

Problems again arose when Paez's successor, Afonso Mendez, sought to reform Ethiopian worship and ban all non-Catholic practices. Emperor Susneyos, perceiving the widespread resistance to Mendez's policies, decided to abdicate. The new Emperor

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[58]There were a number of significant differences between the Ethiopian and Catholic forms of Christianity. Leaving some of the more complicated questions of doctrine aside, the major areas of distinction were in Ethiopian tradition: the Sabbath began Friday night and ended Saturday night, instead of Sunday. Additionally circumcision was practiced and pork was forbidden. For the Portuguese, having recently expelled their Muslim and Jewish populations and with many religious leaders attempting to establish orthodox forms of worship, this similarity to Jewish practice made them quite uncomfortable. Other differences in liturgy and in worship such as the prohibition against women entering the church created discussion but less religious tension.

[59]Marcus, 37.

Fasilidas (r. 1632-1667) marked the beginning of different Ethiopian relations that abandoned close European connections and focused on regional diplomacy in the Horn of Africa.[60]

Portugal

Although there is little need to restate the chronology of Portugal's involvement with the African kingdoms discussed above, it is useful to consider several aspects of Portuguese world-views that influenced their mostly respectful relationships with African kingdoms over these 120 years. The political realities of the African coastal kingdoms which were willing to incorporate the Portuguese as trading partners and, at times, political allies contributed much to the resulting Portuguese actions. However, African agendas were not solely responsible for shaping the Portuguese mentality in this period. Many assume that the Portuguese developed colonial ambitions after their relative success in Morocco in the early fourteen hundreds and that the Portuguese world-view mirrored the racial imperialistic mindsets of later nineteenth-century colonizers. One can speculate at length on the Portuguese private feelings regarding these new partnerships, however, the combination of documents and actions from this earlier era belie assumptions of a racial or colonial view. The Portuguese willingness to follow African protocol in trade and African political receptions during their encounters in Africa speaks much about the willingness of the Portuguese in charge to accept the African elite as respected equals.

This respect for the African elite did not extend universally throughout Portugal. Although many of the problems highlighted by the correspondence of the Manikongo

[60]Ibid., 39-43.

became serious issues leading the kingdom to search for other allies, the Portuguese rationale for these abuses was probably not so much influenced by a sense of racism or imperial motivations, but more by the economic incentives of greater profit. Similar problems can be seen in cases of settler communities on Cape Verde or those at the Castle of São Jorge de Mina, involving Portuguese official complaints that their agents were also ignoring Portuguese laws by illegally trading. Together these cases show that, hardly surprisingly, discrepancies existed between royal Crown agendas and those of their agents and representatives abroad. Towards the later fifteen hundreds the Portuguese Crown came under increasing pressure from these traders.

The Portuguese world-view in this era made major distinctions along social class and religion lines but such mindsets did not involve what we term today race or ethnicity.[61] Indeed, the sense of a greater African or European identity at this time was quite nebulous. African kingdoms certainly had a sense of identity among their own people, and in cases of slavery, would usually only enslave members of their own kingdoms because of debt or certain heinous crimes. Neighboring kingdoms in times of war, however, were seen as justifiable targets for enslavement.[62] Similarly, until the seventeenth century, cases of European enslavement of rivals during wartime also occurred. The few challenges to slavery in this time were only concerned with the legality of certain cases, not on humanitarian terms, but whether slaves were captured in a

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[61]Cf. James Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (1997).

[62]Most of the pre-colonial African kingdoms had some form of indigenous slavery. See Akosua Adoma Perbi, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana* (Legon: Sub Saharan Publishers, 2004). For a more general survey, see Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

legitimate war.[63] In general, the Portuguese classified 'others' by whether they had recognizable elements of Portuguese civilization such as the presence of their Christianity religion, a hierarchical structure of society, a capital city, and a king or similar ruler. In basic societal terms, the kingdoms of the Kongo and Portugal were quite similar with parallel social hierarchies, methods of taxation, agriculture, and elaborate court societies.[64] These similarities no doubt facilitated early relations. The Portuguese also frequently demonstrated a dual tolerance of new civilizations based on their religion. Although they appeared to recognize the strength of Muslim empires, most coastal African kingdoms that appeared to be Muslim were either avoided or attacked soon after discovery. Likewise, chroniclers appeared to record with relief that coastal people were pagans and could thus be potential converts. That the Portuguese developed the closest relations with the more centralized African kingdoms which were already Christian or which chose to convert was hardly a coincidence. African rulers were also quick to learn the respective Portuguese notions of civilization and use this to their advantage in forming political ties.

Relations in the Seventeenth Century

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries thus witnessed the development of close, mutually beneficial diplomatic relations between Benin, Kongo, Ethiopia, and Portugal.

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[63]See Robin Blackburn, "The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1997), for background on legal justification.

[64]MacGaffey discussing the Kongolese-Portuguese relationship added that "both had similar standards of agricultural productivity and standards of living. Each would recognize in the other a monarchy dominating a political system organized by relations of kinship and clientage among the aristocracy . . . in short the level of practical intercultural understanding was considerably higher than the available texts would indicate," Wyatt MacGaffey, "Dialogues of the deaf: Europeans on the Atlantic coast of Africa" in Stuart Schwartz, ed., *Implicit Understandings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 260-261.

Yet by the seventeenth century these positive relations had stagnated**.** The seventeenth century should not be seen as the definitive turning point heralding imminent European colonization. Yet this approximate time did represent a realization, by many of Africa's kingdoms, that their relationship with the Portuguese was no longer in their best interests. The responses of the African kingdoms to this problem varied. In the cases of the Fante states and Benin, where trade rather than political alliances was the prevailing tie, African leaders often chose to continue trading but to reduce their political contact. The Fante states invited other European traders to build forts on Ghana's coastline, ending the Portuguese trading monopoly to the great consternation of the Portuguese traders. By allowing the Dutch, Spanish, briefly the French and Prussians, and later the British to construct their own trading forts, the Fante gained greater control over the terms for trade, controlling both access to the valuable trade items and trading privileges.[65] In the eighteenth century this early 'free trade zone' came to be monopolized by the so-called 'merchant princes,' wealthy merchants who acted a trading agents for the various Europeans, often serving several of them at once. [66] A high degree of Fante control over regional trade continued well into the nineteenth century. Their autonomy ended with the dispersal of the Fante Confederacy, a constitutional unification effort in the late 1860s, formed to demonstrate their independence to the British and Dutch. Soon after, the British claimed colonial control over most of present day Ghana.

The Kongo kingdom at this time attempted a similar strategy of seeking new

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[65]Summaries of this trading period can be found in K. Y. Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600-1720* (London: Clarendon Press, 1970) and in Van Danzig, *Forts and Castles of Ghana* (Accra: Sedco Publisher, 1980).

[66]See C. Darkwah's article, "John Kabes, the Dutch and the English 1680-1716" (Legon: Institute of African Studies, March 1967).

allies to offset Portuguese ambitions. They sent an important embassy, the religious leader Antionia Manuel Marchio ne Vunda, to Rome in 1608 and also made overtures to the Dutch in this period. These successful attempts occurred after the Portuguese blocked earlier attempts. The delegation of Antonio Manuel Marchio ne Vunda to Rome was not immediately fruitful due to the changing political situation in Europe which had left Rome in a comparatively weak political position. Eventually a growing number of Capuchin missionaries traveled to the Kongo, taking over, in part, the role of the Portuguese missionaries and teachers. The sixteen-hundreds Kongolese overtures to the Dutch were also briefly successful. Dutch military aid allowed the Kongo to break decisively with the Portuguese and occupy their base at Luanda in 1641. This victory was short-lived and the Dutch and Kongolese forces were driven out in 1648.

The rest of the century was marked by a civil war and an overall reduction of Kongolese regional power.[67] By the end of the seventeenth century, the Portuguese gained the upper hand but their territorial control was limited, with resistance continuing in battles with the Kongo and neighboring states, including the famous military resistance of Ngola Nzinga of nearby Mbundu (and later Matamba), which lasted until 1663.[68]

Ethiopia, as previously mentioned, moved away from their partnership with the

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[67]After the death of Manikongo Alvare II in 1614 a variety of succession crises arose. See John K. Thornton, *The Kingdom of the Kongo: Civil War and Transition: 1641-1718* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1983) for details. For later resistance efforts, see also his study of *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684-1706* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[68]Nzinga, the sister of the ruler of Ndongo, was well known for her shrewd diplomacy and military strategies which thwarted the Portuguese for close to half a century. Assuming the throne of Ndongo in 1624, she soon broke off relations with the Portuguese. Under attack she fled to Matamba. Assuming the leadership there, she formed a coalition of kingdoms in 1635 including Matamba, Ndongo, Kongo, and Kassanje which resisted the Portuguese. A notable feat, given that these states in earlier years were often rivals. In 1671 the Portuguese captured the capital of Ndongo and supported a ruler which favored their trading interests, then primarily centered on the slave trade.

Portuguese and became more involved in regional trade, particularly with the Oromo kingdom and some of the Middle Eastern trade networks. Other societal changes occurred as well. A capital, Gondar, was established in 1635 and, according to the Ethiopian historian Marcus, the ensuing period was best characterized by a growth of the aristocracy and Ethiopian culture.[69] Unlike the case of the Kongo, in the later centuries Ethiopian borders often changed, but its sovereignty remained unchallenged by any Europeans until the nineteenth century.

The Benin Empire, although sending only a few embassies to Europe in the seventeenth century, continued to actively trade with the Portuguese throughout the coming centuries, becoming more involved with the slave trade in later years. Although Portuguese authors were disappointed that interest in Christianity appeared to decline after the sixteenth century, the period of diplomatic relations with Portugal found commemoration in a series of bronze castings decorating the Oba's palace. Other memories of the Portuguese were not as positive. A children's story dating back to the Benin Empire describes a poor orphan boy Agebeye receiving a magic box which grants him a huge house, riches, and a canal to the sea. He trades with the Portuguese and is given a Portuguese bride. Against the advice of his friends, Agebeye marries her and she steals his magic box and all his riches vanish. Fortunately Agebeye's friends come to the rescue and recover his magic box. Agebeye wishes again for a big house, riches but this time not for a canal to the sea.[70] While the rulers of Benin, Ethiopia and the Kongo probably all wished by the seventeenth century for non-Portuguese political allies, the outcome of this period of relations should not obscure the fact that generally positive

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[69]Marcus, 41-43.
[70]Joseph E. Sidahome, *Stories of the Benin Empire* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

partnerships did occur earlier.

Conclusions

Even by the seventeenth century, the idea of an Africa or a Europe in a modern sense was yet to be invented and none of the cases discussed in this chapter should be mistaken for representing the entire scope of either continent's relations. Nevertheless, these cases of extended African-European diplomatic ties reveal a number of characteristics that marked the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The leaders of the Fante states, Benin, Kongo and Ethiopia all sought relations with Europeans and in many ways directed their initial course. The leaders of these kingdoms developed intentional and long-lasting relations with the Portuguese. The majority of their encounters, whether trade based or diplomatic, were conducted using the established protocols of the specific African kingdoms. In political, diplomatic, and economic relations, Portuguese adherence to the prevailing African standard was the norm. The later Portuguese attempts to change the nature of these relationships, to assert greater control over the running of the kingdoms or acquire substantially greater profits than their African counterparts in trade, prompted many of the African rulers to begin to sever their connections.

African motives for choosing these political relations varied greatly. Many of the cases above demonstrate pragmatic political choices. African rulers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries typically made political and diplomatic decisions to best maintain their kingdom's power. Likewise, they asserted control over trade and expected trade to be conducted on their terms. Such trade with the Portuguese was not needed in material terms, since African economies produced mostly equivalent or superior materials to what the Portuguese offered; however, trade with the Portuguese was seen as an affirmation of

the African rulers' status. Additionally, genuine curiosity cannot be discounted as a motive. African rulers and their subjects benefited by knowing the customs of far-off kingdoms and the primary accounts from this era reveal a vivid interest in different lifestyles, forms of worship, crops, and politics.

Knowing that by the eighteenth century the Portuguese had established a degree of territorial control near the kingdom of the Kongo and played a dominant role in supplying the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, it is important to consider the immediate impacts of the African-European relationships. While there is evidence of sporadic slave trading even in these early years, Portuguese contact with Benin and the Fante states established precedents for relatively peaceful trading of other commodities, a trend that continued in later centuries. Although the willing participation of traders on both sides in the slave trade which escalated during the sixteen hundreds is difficult to comprehend from our present day perspectives, it is important to recognize that such trade occurred largely under the cooperation and regulation of the African rulers on these coasts. While the nature of the trade does not inspire praise, it is worth noting that the political structures of these kingdoms were durable enough to thwart any European attempts at greater coastal control until the nineteenth century. Benin and some of the Fante states also occasionally continued elite diplomatic relations with parts of Europe through the exchange of embassies. For the most part, though, their European contacts were restricted to trade. The long-term involvement with the Fante region surrounding São Jorge da Mina resulted in the eventual creation and independence of the state of Elmina. Likewise, some African historians argue, the involvement of Benin with the Trans-Atlantic slave trade further bolstered its regional power. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,

however, what is most apparent is that Fante and Benin rulers integrated their relations with Portuguese into pre-existing diplomatic and economic structures. Portugal had become a new ally and trading partner for Benin and the Fante states, but it did not fundamentally alter their structure or goals.

The question of the impact of Portugal's relations on Ethiopia and Kongo is also quite significant. Unlike the case in the Kongo, the Portuguese in Ethiopia did not try to develop settlements or create substantial trade agreements. Part of this was due to practical considerations. At this time the Portuguese already were developing a trading base at Goa and probably preferred to be farther away from their rival Muslim traders along the Red Sea coasts. In addition, the frequent sea battles between the Portuguese and Muslim ships along with the Ethiopian custom of detaining certain Europeans also placed the Portuguese embassies on less sure footing. Aside from these practical differences, I would argue that the fact that Ethiopia was already Christian made a key difference in what advantages the Portuguese might attempt to gain. Portuguese visitors were quite willing to disagree on doctrine, worship practices and attempt to convert the Ethiopian Emperor to their brand of Catholicism; however, none of the available sources indicate desires to develop an East Africa slave trade or even strong economic relations with Ethiopia. The long tradition of Christianity among Ethiopians placed them on a higher status meriting Portuguese respect or at least caution. This caution was, no doubt, also prompted by the fact that Benin, Kongo, and Ethiopia also had substantially stronger armies than the Portuguese at this time.

For Ethiopia, initial contact with Portugal offered the possibility of a new, needed ally as politics in Egypt and the Arabian coast changed, but it was only after the

Portuguese rescued them from potential conquest, that subsequent Ethiopian emperors contemplated agreeing to some of Portugal's primary requests, mainly the conversion to Roman Christianity and abolition of certain customs seen as heterodox. Like the Kongo kingdom, by the early sixteen hundreds, the Ethiopian Emperor could easily perceive the growing Ethiopian opposition to the Portuguese and the danger they posed to his reign. Yet, unlike the Kongo, Ethiopia was able to dispel the Portuguese with relative ease and become more integrated in regional trade with their former rivals in the Middle East and restore relations with Egypt. Here geography and proximity to formidable Portuguese opposition such as the Ottoman Empire made a significant difference. A similar attempt in the Kongo was not as successful and, as previously described, frequent clashes with the Portuguese characterized the seventeenth century.

With the advantage of hindsight of the more confrontational centuries to come many authors have wondered why these African leaders sought relations with Portugal in the first place. Many narratives of the first period of direct contact cast the developing diplomatic relationships in a tragic light, highlighting the misled and rather naïve African rulers who were swayed by promises of aid and soon became the exploited vassals. This chapter has sought to demonstrate that such a narrative is too simplistic to encompass the actual circumstances of these early relations. While by the seventeenth century the closer political alliances had largely ended, the initial decision of these African rulers to ally themselves with the Portuguese was a sound tactic and helped bolster the positions of their kingdoms. Instead of seeing the end of these relationships as merely a tragic loss, I would argue that the conflicts highlighted the retained ability of African rulers to extricate themselves from the disadvantageous relationships and redefine the terms to

their advantage, despite the growing power of the Portuguese. The Kongo is perhaps an exception to this observation; however, the kingdom was able to resist the aggrandizement sought by São Tome traders for over a hundred years through a variety of diplomatic and military strategies. Given the internal conflicts the kingdom was also facing, this was a notable accomplishment.

Overall, what these events underscore is the need to recognize that some aspects of fifteenth and sixteenth-century relations between Africans and Europeans foreshadowed later more imperial and exploitative centuries, but in many instances they did not. In terms of African agency, the establishment of some genuinely respectful diplomatic relations and comparatively equal African and European trading relations make this era quite unique. Although the slave trade and attempts at exploitation also originate in this time, other aspects of the era revealed a very different series of relationships, and a different trajectory that later relations might have taken. The detailed discussion of African-European elite diplomatic exchanges explored in the following chapter underscores some of these key differences and trajectories.

CHAPTER TWO

TRAVELING AFRICAN AMBASSADORS AND ENCOUNTERED HOSPITALITY

Introduction

The 1529 world map drawn by Diogo Ribeiro labeled the southern part of the Atlantic Ocean, the *Mare Ethiopicvm*. Later, of course, the entire ocean was renamed the Atlantic, however, its brief history as the Ethiopian Sea reminds us of the importance that regions of Africa played in political relations of the fifteenth and sixteenth-century world. Many outside the field of African history have viewed the initial era of African-European contact as a period marked only by the origins of Trans-Atlantic slavery, exploitation, and imperialism. As demonstrated in the first chapter, actual early African-European relations involved a relatively high degree of peaceful, respectful encounters, with the elites on both sides acknowledging the comparative equal status of their counterparts. Another revealing aspect of relations in this era was the high number of African diplomatic embassies deliberately sent to parts of Europe, especially Portugal and Rome. Instances of Africans abroad in the medieval era, and various encounter images in initial meetings between Africans and Europeans, have recently received much attention in a number of studies.[1] However, the actual experiences of African ambassadors deliberately

[1]The most prominent of these studies, which also served as invaluable background for the author, include the following: John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*. 2ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and David Northrup, *Africa's Discovery of Europe: 1450-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), on African and early European encounters. For the experiences of Africans in Europe, A. C. de C. M. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and*

sent to parts of Europe are seldom discussed in the same detail. Using examples from Ethiopia, Benin, and the Kongo, this chapter examines the era of initial contact from the mid-thirteen hundreds to sixteen hundreds, comparing gifts exchanged, diplomatic receptions, hospitality, and lodgings given to visiting embassies. Together these diplomatic exchanges provide important insights into this era of elite exchange.

The elite diplomatic exchanges analyzed in this chapter are termed "elite" for they typically involved exchanges between the rulers' chosen representatives on both African and European sides. The diplomats themselves, in the tradition of both Portugal and African kingdoms, were usually also members of the ruler's family or trusted lesser nobility. Other representatives were important religious officials, or were chosen from outside the kingdom to ensure that they lacked loyalties to factions within. Although Portuguese court life and social rankings were becoming more elaborate and regulated in the early fifteenth century, it is fair to say that for Portugal, Rome, and the African kingdoms, the concepts of court life and diplomatic exchanges were nothing new. Most African kingdoms, including the three focused on in this chapter, had established customs for hospitality, the protection of visitors, and the exchange of gifts between ambassadors and the kingdom's rulers. Chosen diplomats were typically expected to have safe conduct, and most of the more centralized African kingdoms had systems for organizing local militias and informants to protect and watch visitors.[2] Thus, the decisions of the African kingdoms to dispatch diplomats to their potential new ally, the Portuguese,

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Freedmen in Portugal 1441-1555 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Hans Debrunner, *Presence and Prestige, a History of Africans in Europe before 1918* (Basel: Basel Afrika Bibliographien, 1979), Ivan Van Sertima, ed., *African Presence in Early Europe* (New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1985) were quite helpful.

[2]Robert Smith, *Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-Colonial West Africa* (USA: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1976).

should be understood as a predictable extension of typical African diplomacy.

Although this chapter focuses more on aspects of the exchanges than on the actual ambassadors, the large number of embassies sent over the whole period should be emphasized. Benin sent official embassies to Portugal in 1486, 1514, 1516 and 1540. The best documented cases of embassies from the Kongo include the 1484 arrival of the Prince Kasuta, known in Europe as Dom João da Silva.[3] Prince Kasuta returned to Kongo in 1485 and led an official delegation back to Portugal from 1488-1490. In 1493 Dom Pedro, another royal relative, journeyed to Portugal. He was later joined by Dom Henrique, son of Manikongo Alfonso, who became the first ordained Kongolese bishop. Another embassy to Rome was sent in 1535. The Holy city also received a visit in 1606 from one of Kongo's key religious officials.[4] The Ethiopian Empire maintained the most frequent and long-term contacts with Europe, with the earliest recorded embassy arriving in 1306.[5] In 1452 an ambassador named Jorge reportedly visited Lisbon. Soon after, the Duke of Milan, Francis Sforza, received a visitor in 1459. Rome reported a visit of two monks and an ambassador in 1481. Ethiopian destinations were not confined to Lisbon and Rome. The kingdom of Valencia in Spain was visited by eight Ethiopians in 1515, and Venice was another popular destination.[6] Most often, each of these embassies was

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[3]Debrunner, 42-43.

[4]Debrunner, 46-47 and in Richard Gray's article "A Kongo Princess, the Kongo Ambassadors and the Papacy" *Journal of Religion in Africa* 29, fasc. 2, Special Issue in Honour of the Editorship of Adrian Hastings 1985-1999 and his Seventieth Birthday 23 June 1999 (May, 1999).

[5]See Appendix III "An Ethiopian Embassy to Western Europe in 1306" of O. G. S. Crawford's *Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400-1524 including those collected by Alessandra Zorzi at Venice in years 1519-24* (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society University Press, 1958), 212-215.

[6]Debrunner compiled one of the earliest comprehensive studies on Africans in Europe and documented the European arrival of many Africans, 50-52. Another interesting encounter was King Alfonso of nearby Aragon receipt of a proposal in 1428 for a double royal marriage between his daughter and Ethiopian Emperor Yishak and Alfonso's son to Yishak's daughter, Northrup, 4. However, the marriage proposal was never completed. In 1402 the Doge of Venice was presented with a tiger and spices, Northrup, 4. A detailed study on Ethiopian Venetian relations is Tadeschi's *Nouva luce sui rapporti tra Venezia e l'Etioopia (secolo XV)* (Addis Ababa, 1974). Zorzi who published a study on Ethiopian

not only composed of the recorded ambassadors and envoys but also had a number of accompanying attendants, servants, and sometimes spouses. Less can be determined about their individual experiences, but the appearance of each ambassador with a small entourage likely helped confirm their status as important visitors, both in African and European eyes.

The following sections center on the collective experiences of ambassadors sent from the kingdoms of Benin, Kongo and Ethiopia. While these three examples remain the most frequent and best documented cases, other accounts indicate the desire of many other rulers to send their representatives, demonstrating that such exchanges were indeed a prevalent African diplomatic custom. In the early sixteenth century, for instance, a number of city-states on the Swahili coast discussed sending representatives with the visiting Portuguese, a dynamic that is discussed further in chapter three. In later centuries, as well, a growing number of ambassadors from kingdoms on the West African coast traveled to parts of Europe.

Presents and Hospitality

The relationships between Benin, Kongo, Ethiopia and the Portuguese varied widely in political success and outcome; however overall the reception and treatment of their African envoys at Portuguese and Vatican courts appeared to have been mostly positive. This can be inferred from a review of the various gifts presented, diplomatic receptions, and general hospitality arrangements made by the hosting kings and sometimes popes. For both sides, one of the fundamental parts of these diplomatic exchanges was the reciprocal presentation of various gifts between guest and ruler. Aside

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itineraries also mentioned interviewing Ethiopians in 1519 and 1523 while staying in Venice, Debrunner, 51. See Crawford, trans., *Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400-1524*, Zorzi's discussion of his sources, 25.

from showing generosity and an adherence to the prevailing societal etiquette, such gifts also indicated a ruler's power, influence, and preference for possible trade items. The Portuguese gifts to African royalty and visiting ambassadors ranged widely: items of ceremonial importance were combined with practical items such as weapons, and intellectual items including a mappamundi and ecclesiastical books that were highly sought by the Ethiopian rulers, as well as by other leaders.[7] Religious objects were also highly valued by both sides. Frequently ambassadors from Ethiopia and Kongo presented European kings and popes with ceremonial crosses. The Emperor Lebna Dengel in a 1540 letter to Jesuit visitor Dom João Bermudez personally thanked him for Indian Viceroy's present of "three images of Our Lady" and "a book of David."[8] Dom Rodrigo's embassy to Ethiopia in 1520 assembled the following items, after their original presents were lost in India: "These were the goods which we took to the Prester John: first, a rich sword, a rich dagger, four pieces of tapestry, some rich cuirasses, a helmet and two *berços* [short cannons], four gun chambers, some balls, two barrels of powder, a map of the world, some organs."[9] The Governor of India also reportedly sent gifts, including "a string of seed pearls and a cross of rubies for Empress Elèni, incense, pepper, silk, a bell and material for monks' habits for Bizan, and made gifts to Matthew."[10] While accounts suggest that the kings, the royal court, and some of the governors understood the importance of lavish gifts and hospitality as a diplomatic

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[7]One goal of many African rulers in their relationships with the Europeans was to gain access to better weapons and allies to aid their state-building and expansion efforts. Alvares later noted that some of his fellow Portuguese's weapons were later 'missing' or 'borrowed' by Ethiopians they encountered, see, Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, vol. I, 129-130.

[8]"Undated Letter from Lebna Dengel, King of Abyssinia to D. João Bermudez. Written in 1540," in Correa, vol. iv, 138, trans in R. S. Whiteway, *The Portuguese Voyages to Abyssinia in 1541-1543 as Narrated by Castanhoso with some contemporary letters* (Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint Ltd, 1967), 107.

[9]Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, vol. I, 63.

[10]Ibid., Beckingham and Huntingford in note quoting Correa.

practice, it appears that others did not, such as the short-term Governor Lopo Soares who apparently lost or kept the gifts intended for the Ethiopian Emperor or earlier the scandal caused by Vasco da Gama's arrival on the coast of India with presents valuing less than the possessions of the poorest merchant.[11]

It is difficult to discern from just their correspondence whether the Portuguese kings genuinely respected the African leaders or merely believed a show of outward respect was in their best interests. What is clear, however, is that the Portuguese kings felt a need to follow the general African (and European) convention of honoring ambassadors with frequent presents and hospitality. Written orders from Dom Manuel I and certain governors indicated plans to make sure these arrangements happened. Father Alvares arriving in Portugal escorting Ambassador Zara za Ab, recounted a favorable exchange of gifts between the then reigning João III and the ambassador:

> Prester John's Ambassador presented to the King our lord a crown of gold and silver . . . and two letters folded like books on parchment, each written in three languages, namely Abyssinian [likely Ge'ez according to Beckingham], Arabic, and Portuguese . . . And as up to this time we all ate as well traveled, the King ordered a regular allowance and riding animals to be given to the Ambassador, namely three mules, one for him, and two for the monks who came with him, and two *cruzados* each day for his table . . . and a rich bed and bedding for him to sleep on, silver plate for his table, table cloths, and all he needed.[12]

Such provisions from the Portuguese monarchs were not unique. Examining the surviving

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[11]The original gifts for Ethiopia sent with Governor Lopo Soares and amounting to 30,000 *cruzados* were likely appropriated by him during his brief tenure as Governor of Goa. (He was replaced after two years). The unfortunate instance was not without precedent. The much acclaimed Vasco Da Gama's reception in India was seriously marred by his hubris in not presenting any gifts. Forewarned by a local official at Calicut that his intended gifts for the ruler were less than what "the poorest merchant from Mecca" gave, Da Gama chose to give nothing. "The king asked if he had come to discover 'stones or men?'" quoted in Robert S. Wolff's article "Da Gama's Blundering: Trade Encounters in Africa and Asia During the European 'Age of Discovery,' 1450-1520," *The History Teacher* 31, no. 3 (May 1998). The early Portuguese actions in the Middle East were not fondly remembered either. The *Hadrami Chronicles* of the Portuguese arrival has the following as a typical memory: "They took about seven vessels, killing those on board and making some prisoner. This was their first action may God curse them," R. B. Serjeant, *The Portuguese off the South Arabian Coast: Hadrami Chronicles* (Beruit: Librairie du Liban, 1974), 43.

[12]Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, vol. II, 494.

royal records, Dom Manuel I ordered a number of gifts of clothing and other items sent both overseas to Benin and Kongo and presented other gifts to the diplomats and their retinues while they were in Portugal.[13] This effort towards hospitality and proper custom by the Portuguese Crown was significant.

While frequent gifts of clothing may seem today a minor gift, from a Portuguese perspective gifts of clothing had several significant aspects. At this time in Portugal the clothing and styles of dress were becoming increasingly regulated by social class and royal privilege, thus the frequent gifts of clothing, often described as "suitable for a prince or noble" were a gesture towards placing the African visitors into the Portuguese conception of class and privilege. From the available accounts, it appears that the key ambassadors, especially those from royal families, were given clothing equal to members of the Portuguese court, with their attendants and relatives receiving suitably lesser gifts. Given the primacy of clothing as a major marker of sophisticated civilization and social distinction, the Portuguese Crown's frequent gifts can be seen as another indication of their acceptance of the relative status of these African diplomats. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the exchange of status gifts such as fine clothing was a common diplomatic custom in many African kingdoms. Similarly, according to the research of European historians Piponnier and Mane, it appeared that this custom had been paralleled in Europe since the Middle Ages. [14] Textiles and decorated weaponry were common

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[13]A sample of gifts sent to the Portuguese representatives to give to the Manikongo, Afonso I, can be found in "Alvara de D. Manuel Para Rui Leite, 15-9-1514" in Brasio, vol. I, doc. 82, 291-293. Here the list included: "dez pecas de panos" (ten bolts of rich cloth), "dez pecas de seda de cores" (ten bolts of colorful silk), "dous pares de borzegui[n]s" (two pairs of boots), and "dous pares de camysas pera sua persoa, dolamda grosa" (two pairs of thick wool shirts for him), 291.

[14]The gifting of presents of clothing to the African diplomats was not new custom for Portugal or Europe. "In the Carolingian and early medieval period kings would receive presents of sumptuous silks from ambassadors from the Orient and the best of Western woolen cloth would be given to them in exchange. As late as the fifteenth century textiles and richly decorated pieces of weaponry were exchanged

items exchanged between European leaders and outsiders. Although, based on the level of current research, one can only speculate whether the Portuguese decision to present African ambassadors with gifts of fine clothing was due to their own experiences along the African coast or to the earlier precedent of medieval and early modern European use of such gifts. That said, it was probably that when they met in the late fifteenth century both sides perceived the gifts of clothing as expected and appropriate parts of diplomatic encounters.

Accordingly, the nephew of the Manikongo, Dom Pedro, sent to Portugal for his religious education and as one of the Manikongo's key ambassadors, received many gifts on his journey to Portugal. A directive from the Portuguese Crown to the Royal Treasurer ordered in 1493 that Dom Pedro and his three assistants be given newly-made clothing imported from Holland and Italy, along with other clothing items:

> Ruy Gil (the royal treasurer), is ordered to give to Dom Pedro, who comes from the Manikongo, this hood and trousers from Flanders and a robe of soft cloth and four shirts from Holland and this leather belt and boots, and a square hat and a dozen silk clasps and another dozen of leather and also give to the three blacks who accompanied him caps and trousers from Antona, Italy, and thick robes and pairs of shirts made locally and leather belts and pairs of shoes and square black hats and everything newly made.[15]

Several months later, João II ordered a departure gift of additional clothing to be given to him, and to the Manikongo, his wife, and other members of Dom Pedro's retinue. In 1515

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between Christian and Muslim princes, from one side of the Mediterranean to the other," explained Francoise Piponnier and Perrine Mane in *Dress in the Middle Ages*, trans. Caroline Beamish (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 33.

[15]Author's translation, original Portuguese: "Ruy Gil, mandamosuos que de[i]s a dom Pedro que veeo de Manycomgo, hum capuz e pelote e calcas de pano deipre [Ypres, Flandres] e hum jubam de catym . . . e quarto camjsas de me[i]a olamda e hũm cymto de coiro e huus borzeguy [n]s e huume barrette dobrado e me[i]a duzia datacas de seda e hua duzia e me[i]a de coiro e asy dares a tres negros eus senhos capuzes e pelotes e calcas damtona [Antona, Italia] e jubaaos de fustam e senhores pares de camjsas de pano da terra e senhos cymtos de coiro e senhos pares de capatos e senhos barrettes pretos dobrados, tudo fejto e tirado da costura [feito de novo]" "Alvara de D. João II a Rui Gil, 18-7-1493," Archivo da Torre do Tombo (ATT)-Corpo Cronologico (CC)-I-2-34, in Brasio, vol. 1, doc. 35, 150-151.

a similar set of clothing was sent to him by Dom Manuel I, the new monarch.[16] The Portuguese royal chronicler Damião de Goẽs also recorded Dom Manuel's gifts and advisers sent to the Manikongo, including men educated in sacred theology, as requested, to teach reading, writing, and matters of the church along with religious books, silk, silver crosses, and other necessary items for worship.[17] Close to this date, royal orders also provided gifts of clothing to Ambassador Matthew, one of the first Ethiopian diplomats to reach Lisbon.[18] Other gifts of clothing were ordered for Pero Barroso, arriving from Benin bringing letters from the Oba to Portugal.[19] In his case he appeared to have formally requested such gifts in a letter to the King.[20]

Although the Portuguese Crown appeared to make a clear effort towards hospitality, it is likely that not all of the gifts were always received as planned, and some of the African responses suggested that they were not always well-received. Dom Pedro complained in a letter to the Crown in 1515 that he had received a mule instead of the horse he was entitled to as an ambassador and prince.[21] This may have been intended as a deliberate slight or the gift of a mule rather than a horse could reflect the differences in the perception of the status of diplomats by both sides. Those chosen from Portugal to go

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[16]"Alvara de João II a Rui Gil, 10-12-1493," ATT-CC-I-2-102, Brasio, vol. 1, doc. 37, 154-155; "Alvara de D. Manuel Para Rui Leite, 28-12-1515," ATT-CC-I-20-142, in Brasio, vol. 1, doc. 92, 344-345. Note that João II's successor Dom Manuel continued his gift giving.

[17]Damiao de Goẽs, *Chronica D'El Rei D. Manuel*, vol. I (Lisboa: Escritorio, 1909), 119.

[18]"Alvara de ElRey D. Manoel para Ruy Leite dar ao Mattheus Embaxador de Preste Joan, a seu Sobrinho, certos vestidos . . . 30 de Outubro de 1514" PT-CC/1/16/92, microfilm, 1-4, Corpo Chronologico, Archivo da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, Portugal. This Royal order stated that Matthew, ambassador of the Prester John and his nephew were to receive certain clothes. A similar order followed the next month, "Alvara de ElRey D. Manoel para Ruy Leite dar ao Mattheus Embaxador de Preste Joan, a seu Sobrinho, certos vestidos . . . 30 de Outubro de 1514" PT-TT-CC/1/16/92, microfilm, 1-4, Corpo Chronologico, Archivo da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, Portugal.

[19]"Alvara de D. Manuel Para Rui Leite [the treasurer] 20-12-1515," ATT-CC-I-19-62 in Brasio, vol. I, doc. 91, 342-343.

[20]"Carta de Pero Barroso a El-Rei, 1515," ATT-Gav. 15-I-49 in Brasio, vol. I, doc. 94, 348.

[21]"Carta de D. Pedro Embaixador do Congo, 1515?" ATT-Gav. 20-4-5 in Brasio, vol. I, doc. 95, 349-350.

to the Kongo were typically of lesser nobility. Traveling for them offered the potential for upward mobility. In contrast, the ambassadors chosen initially by the Kongo kingdom were closely related to the Manikongo and expected to be treated as visitors of high rank.

The giving of gifts and lavish hospitality to visitors were probably familiar to the African visitors. The Portuguese embassies to Ethiopia, Kongo, and Benin discovered that hospitality was an integral part of relations and visitors would be well-hosted. Father Alvares, who described Ambassador Matthew's return to Ethiopia with Dom Rodrigo's Portuguese embassy, later chronicled the hospitality they received from the Ethiopian Emperor. The Portuguese embassy was received by the regional governor, the *Bāhr nagās*, who gave them supplies and guides for their journey inland. After several months traveling with the Emperor's moving court, the members of Rodrigo's embassy prepared to leave and were presented with many gifts including silk, ounces of gold, a silver cross for Father Alvares, a staff representing the granted Portuguese control over several Red Sea islands and thirty mules with Ethiopian escorts to help carry their food supplies to the coast.[22]

The Portuguese reaction to African gifts appeared to vary. Some contemporaries, such as Father Alvares recorded with much detail the various presents of food, gold, horses and supplies given to Dom Rodrigo's company. Other reports of visitors to Portugal expressed more concerns about the possible consequences of the visit, especially the potential for more African conversions to Christianity and greater European access to the gold trade. For instance, when royal chronicler João de Barros, described the first emissary from the Benin kingdom, he was much more interested in a possible new source of pepper and the profits made exchanging slaves from Benin for gold on the Fante coast,

[22]Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, vol. I, 377-378.

than the actual ambassador.[23]

Until the mid-sixteen hundreds the Portuguese acquired slaves mainly when they captured them as guides or informants on new territory, received them as gifts, or traded them for more highly valued gold or spices. African slaves captured in wars were exchanged in the encounters between African rulers, Portuguese traders and kings.[24] The gifting of slaves to the Portuguese by African rulers caught the attention of the royal chroniclers, Ruy da Pina and João de Barros, who both recorded Prince Bemoy of the Jolof kingdom in today's Senegal's gift of slaves to the Portuguese Crown. The Portuguese description stressed Prince Bemoy's honor and integrity (despite the fact he was a Muslim ruler), mentioning that, even while in a war against his rival brothers, he eventually paid his trading debts and sent a nephew with the Portuguese captain Gonçalo

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[23]G. R. Crown, trans and ed., *The Voyages of Cadamosto and Other Documents on West Africa in the 2nd half of the 15th century* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1937), trans of Barros, *Da Asia*, book 2, 124. "This king of Beny [Benin] also sent to solicit the King to dispatch thither priests who might instruct him in the Faith . . . this emissary of the king of Beny came with João Affonso d'Aveiro, who . . . brought back the first pepper from these parts of Guinea to the kingdom." Barros added, in an aside that sheds light on fifteenth century Portuguese views on the commerce of slavery that the visit from Benin led to the development of a Portuguese trading factory at Gwato. There they were able to purchase slaves and sell them on the coast of Ghana. They "were bartered very profitably at the Mina, for which the merchants of gold gave twice the value obtainable for them in the kingdom."

[24]The issue of pre-colonial Africa's role in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade remains an uncomfortable topic. Most of the pre-colonial African kingdoms and communities had some form of indigenous slavery. People became slaves as prisoners captured in wars with rivals or as the consequence of serious crimes. While many African leaders and elite merchants, undeniably, sold and gave many slaves as gifts to European traders and visitors, protests were common when slave raids were conducted without the rulers consent. The Portuguese policy of randomly kidnapping coastal Africans, discussed in chapter three, was forced to shift to regulated coastal trading after repeated African military attacks. The few brief similar British attempts ended in disaster as their ships were attacked by poisoned arrows, see summary in P. E. H. Hair, "Attitudes to Africans in English Primary Sources on Guinea up to 1650," *History in Africa* 26 (1999): 43-68. Well-known, as well, are the letters from the manikongos protesting the indiscriminate slaving raids of the São Tomé merchants which were capturing Kongolese citizens. At least in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, that sale of a kingdom's own citizens in good standing with the rulers seldom occurred. For comparison, it is worth noting, that only in the sixteenth century in Europe was there a general consensus created that it was considered wrong to enslave fellow Christians, formerly a common practice in the aftermath of wars. In the fifteenth and sixteenth century, slaves were given occasionally as gifts, and more often in exchange of items considered important for military strategy. Firearms, although often desired, were initially not often traded, however, horses particularly on the West African coast north of Sierra Leone, were a key commodity. Ivana Elbl, "The Horse in Fifteenth-century Senegambia," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 24, no. 1 (1991): 85-110.

Coelho "to the king with one hundred good slaves taken in the war, and a thick golden bracelet, a customary credential."[25] A royal order from Dom Manuel to Gonçalo Lopes in 1515 gave him compensation for 78 slaves he transported to Portugal as a present from Manikongo Dom Afonso to the Portuguese Crown, showing that by this date the Kongo kingdom also occasionally sent slaves as gifts.[26] Slaves, usually captured enemies or criminals, were considered by the African elites acceptable gifts to allies such as the Portuguese. However, it is important to note that initially they were not the main economic commodity sought by the Portuguese. Until the mid-sixteen hundreds when slave trading became increasingly lucrative due to the development of the American colonies and the sugar revolution, the Portuguese sought any form of profitable commerce they could find.[27]

Receptions

For many African kingdoms and empires during this era, including Kongo and Ethiopia, court receptions involved elaborate processions, lengthy ceremonies, and the presence of many officials. Comparing the African receptions given to the arriving Portuguese and the Portuguese receptions offered to the arriving African diplomats it appears that both sought to honor these potential political allies with full ceremony. The following two accounts of receptions in Ethiopia and Kongo provide good comparisons to evaluate the Portuguese reciprocal hospitality with evident African standards and are

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[25]João de Barros quoted in Crone, ed., *The Voyages of Cadamosto and Other Documents*, 131.

[26]"Ordre Du Roi Du Portugal, Dom Manuel, A Gonçalo Lopes, Lisbonne, le 4 Octobre 1515," originally PT-TT-CC-I-18-16, trans in Louis Jardin and Mireille Dicorato, *Correspondance de Dom Afonso, roi du Congo 1506-1543* (Académie royale des Sciences d'Outre-mer, 1974), 105.

[27]While frequent slave shipments were made to Portugal, most often the Portuguese served as middlemen, shipping African goods along the coast, and trying to find a niche in the changing local markets. For a detailed discussion, see Eugenia W. Herbert, "Portuguese Adaptation to Trade Patterns Guinea to Angola (1443-1640), *African Studies Review* 17, no. 2 (1974): 411-423.

quoted below at length. Father Alvares, who accompanied Dom Rodrigo's embassy to Ethiopia in 1520, recounted his party's first audience with the Emperor:

> In front of these pitched tents were set up two rows of arches covered with white and red cotton clothes . . . there may have been quite 20 arches in each row . . . among these smarter people were many canons and ecclesiastics with caps like mitres, but with pointed peaks of silk . . . and a huge crowd of people, standing one behind the other . . . Those who conducted us did us a courtesy and we to them, for we had been taught already, and this courtesy is to lower the right hand to the ground. At this distance of a cross-bow shot from the red tent there came to us fully sixty men like courtiers or mace-bearers, and they came half-running, because they are accustomed to run with all the messages of the Prester . . . In the middle of the field, in the shade of the first arches, stood four honorable men . . . on reaching them we remained a good while without speaking to them, or they to us. Then there came an old priest . . . the title of this man is Cabeata [*āqābē sa'āt*] . . . on reaching him, the Cabeata asked the Ambassador what he wanted and where he was from.[28]

A similar description of an elaborate audience comes from the Portuguese royal chronicler, João de Barros, presented below in French translation.

> Le jour de son [Ruy de Sousa] entrée dans la ville, à deux lieues de celle-ci, il s'en présenta trios autres avec une plus grande troupe. Ils arrivaient en trois détachements équipes a leur façon, a grand fracas de timbales, de cornes et d'autres instruments barbares, ranges en files et chantant de telle façon qu'ils semblaient marcher dans l'ordre des processions faites pour invoquer et prier les saints . . . Les paroles de ce chant étaient des louanges adressées au roi du Portugal, pour les choses qu'il envoyait a leur souverain. Ces capitaines firent le chemin du retour dans l'ordre où ils étaient venus. Les nôtres, places au milieu d'eux, furent amènes devant le roi, qui était à les attendre sur une grande place [proche] de son palais . . . Le souverain était assis sur une estrade en bois si haute que de partout on pouvait le voir. Son siège était fait d'ivoire et de quelques pièces de bois très bien ouvragées, a la façon de pays . . . Sur la tête, il avait un bonnet haut comme une mitre, fait d'un tissu de palmes très fin et mine, travaille en relief . . . Arrive auprès du roi, Ruy de Sousa le salua a la façon de Portugal, et le souverain lui rendit son salut, a sa manière . . . Ces salutations d'arrivée étant terminées, Ruy de Sousa adressa quelques mots au roi.[29]

Despite the evident dislike of Kongolese music by the royal chronicler João de

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[28]Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, vol. I, 269-271. Account of first meeting with Ethiopian Emperor.

[29]João de Barros, *Década* I, livre III, chapitre IX in Willy Bal, *Le Royaume du Congo aux XVe et XVIe Siècles, documents d'histoire choisis et présentés en traduction française avec annotations* (Léopoldville, I.N.E.P., 1963), 51.

Barros or his informants, their accounts serve as useful introductions to court ceremonies revealing African standards for important receptions and providing comparisons for the African experiences in Portugal and Rome. As with the subject of status gift exchanges, it is difficult to determine whether the Portuguese receptions for the visiting African diplomats were inspired by their experiences in Africa. However, it is clear that in Portugal and across Europe diplomatic court traditions were undergoing change in this period. One of the main shifts was from the medieval tradition of occasional diplomats who stayed in courts briefly and held a lesser status to the formation of more elaborate court ceremonies and more permanent diplomats, no longer servants, but often members of their kingdom's nobility.[30]

João de Barros also described the arrival of Prince Bemoy of the Jolof kingdom in Lisbon. Bemoy, as mentioned above, had recently been deposed and sought military aid from Portugal promising to convert to Christianity in exchange. Upon his arrival:

> The King . . . sent word to Lisbon that he was to be well entertained, and escorted thence with honour to the Castle of the Town of Palmela. There he stayed some days, during which time he and his people were properly clothed and given riding animals that they might go before the King; for he was treated in every respect as a sovereign Lord, accustomed to our civilization, and not as a barbarous Prince outside the Law. He was similarly treated on the day of his arrival at the Court, for D. Francisco Coutinho, Count of Marialva, went to meet him, accompanied by many noblemen. On that day the King and Queen displayed great ceremony and pageantry, each of them with their household: the King in the state room on a high dais with a canopy of rich brocade, accompanied by the Duke of Beja, Dom Manuel, brother of the Queen, counts, bishops, and other notable persons.[31]

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[30]For details on the development of European court culture and elaborate receptions, the following sources were useful: Donald E. Queller, *The Office of Ambassador in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (London: The Bedford Historical Series, 1962), the early chapters in M. S. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450-1919* (London: Longman Group UK Ltd., 1993), and for an overview of the evolving high court life and protocol in sixteenth century Europe, Philippe Erlanger, *The Age of Courts and Kings: Manners and Morals 1558-1715* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976) and Rita Costa Gomes, *The Making of a Court Society: Kings and Nobles in Late Medieval Portugal*, trans. Alison Aiken (Cambridge: University Press, 2003) were both helpful.

[31]João de Barros, trans. in Crone, *Voyages of Cadamosto and Other Documents*, 128-129.

João de Barros added that after Prince Bemoy's baptism, "There were continual tournaments, bull-fights, farces, and great evening-parties, so pleased was the King with his conversion."[32] Barros also stated that "Bemoy was a tall man, strong and good looking, forty years old, with a long and bushy beard, so that he did not seem a negro, but a prince worthy of respect. He delivered his speech with such majesty of person, and with so many effects to arouse pity for his miserable banishment, that he was understood even before the interpreter translated his words."[33] There is a certain sense of over justification to Barros' account. When Prince Bemoy was returned with ships and military support to the Jolof kingdom the chosen captain for the expedition, Pero Vaz, killed him soon after they arrived, claiming Prince Bemoy had been plotting treason. More likely, several historians have argued, the captain wished to return to Portugal and feared the tropical diseases they encountered which had already claimed several men.[34] João de Barros reported that Pero Vaz "wrongfully killed him" and "the king was much grieved" but no clear punishment for Pero Vaz was mentioned. Lacking personal accounts from Prince Bemoy's surviving entourage the exact nature of his treatment in Portugal is more difficult to determine using simply royal chronicles. However, it is clear that a remarkable discrepancy existed between the respect and honor shown to Bemoy by the Portuguese Crown and the actions of the commissioned captain Pero Vaz.[35] A brief

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[32]Ibid., 134.
[33]Ibid., 132.
[34]Ibid., 140.
[35]The historian P. E. Russell goes further and argues, "What seems to be beyond dispute is that most of John's subjects were unable to accept the egalitarianism implicit in the doctrine of the *communitas fidelium* when this required them to defer to Black African kings and nobles who had accepted Christian baptism," in "White Kings on Black Kings: Rui da Pina and the Problem of black African Sovereignty," in *Medieval and Renaissance Studies in Honor of Brian Tate* (Oxford: Dolphin Book Co., Ltd., 1986), 161. Although there were many examples of respectful Portuguese encounters with Africans, the known

Italian account corroborating Bemoy's royal reception can be found in a letter from Pagholo d'Ulivieri who witnessed the ceremonies for Prince Bemoy. Awed by the possibilities presented for the greater conversion of Africa, he related to his nephews:

> About one month ago [there came] a great man and black King named Benmui, king of Giloffo, and led one son and one nephew and many other relatives and servants, numbering 40 people and asked this most serene king of Portugal, that he with all of his wanted to be Christians, with the agreement that he give his people Eucharists and other conditions to raise and lead in his land. So it followed, that all were baptized, and the king and queen of Portugal were with peers. Twelve ships were ordered for his service, that raised 300 men and monks and priests to build churches and other buildings for ministering the divine writ, and with the intention to return to the Christian faith all the black sects, in one part of the world, and who do not want to delay: that would be the most admirable thing that never happened, worthy of great memory and fame for this king, able to be esteemed upside down this land of great honor and celebration made for him . . . what a miraculous thing.[36]

Although African diplomat voyages to Rome are not discussed in as much detail here, a number of the Kongolese ambassadors also traveled overland to Rome during their stays in Portugal. Dom Henrique, the son of Manikongo Afonso I, was in fact ordained after studying in Rome, becoming the first and only African bishop for several hundred years. While no records are available to indicate Benin sent ambassadors to Rome, Ethiopian representatives were a frequent presence there. Reaching Rome was often quite an arduous trip and a number of embassies experienced a high mortality, such as Antonio Manuele ne Vunda who journeyed there in 1606-1608 only to lose most of his entourage and he himself die upon reaching the city. Yet the African experience once in Rome was generally positive. [37] Most African emissaries were similarly well treated.

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contrary examples suggest that certainly not all the subjects were comfortable with the egalitarian receptions of Africans.

[36]English translation by Brianne Bharkhda, original Italian in Zelina Zafarana, "Per la storia religiosa di Firenze nell Quattrocento," *Studi Medievali* IX (1968): 1109-10.

[37]Additionally, there is some dispute whether one of the reported embassies actually reached Rome. See, Francois Bontinck, "La Premiere 'Ambassade' Congolaise a Rome (1514)," *Etudes d'histoire africaine* 1 (1970): 37-73, who presented a detailed account of the 1514 embassy and its reception and

They were typically received by the Pope and other Catholic officials and treated to a tour of the Holy city's famous relics. Particularly with Ethiopian visitors, a number of their trips led to the publication of some of the earliest religious works in Ge'ez. According to Debrunner, the publisher John Potken from Cologne spent many years with Ethiopians in Rome and printed a *Psalterium Ethiopicum*, the first known European book in an Ethiopian language in 1513.[38] Certainly the goal of some of the Ethiopian visitors was as much scholarly and religious as political. A fuller glimpse of the Ethiopian experience in the Holy city can be determined through an analysis of the lodgings provided to these visitors.

Destinations and Lodgings

Seldom mentioned in other studies, the question of where these traveling African envoys actually stayed is both interesting and revealing as an indicator of the attributed status given by the Portuguese Crown and various popes. The above accounts of various receptions given to Prince Bemoy, visitors to Rome and the frequent gifts to Kongolese ambassador Dom Pedro and others, give an initial indication that the Crown made an effort to honor and provide for the African guests. As the frequency of Kongolese and Ethiopian delegates to both Portugal and Rome increased, two centers were created for religious study, lodging, and collection of knowledge about regions of Africa. These were the Roman hospice of St. Stefano Maggiore delgi Abissini at the Vatican and the

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Antonio Brasio, "Embaixador do Congo a Roma em 1514?" *Studia* 32: 51-79, who argued that this embassy did not arrive in 1514 and may not have reached Rome. The major point of dispute aside is the apparent lack of corroborating Roman records of the visit. Their departure plans and return are chronicled in both Portuguese chronicles and Kongolese letters, but unlike other visits no Roman letters remain. The recent death of Pope Jules II and his replacement with Pope Leon X may have influenced the lack of records.

[38]Debrunner, 51.

Convento de Santo Elòi in Lisbon.[39] Aside from demonstrating that the Portuguese Crown and, to an extent, the Vatican made efforts to support the long-term stay of these embassies for religious study, these examples also demonstrate various African motives for their sojourns to Rome and Lisbon.

The Hospice of St. Stefano Maggiore delgi Abissini

The Italian city-states and Rome itself had a long history as destinations for visitors from northeast Africa, especially Ethiopians. The earliest record of a visiting embassy from Ethiopia dates back to 1306. Comprised of thirty members, this embassy reportedly stopped in Rome and Avignon before their stop in Genoa on their voyage home. Their ultimate destination had been "to the 'King of the Spains' with an offer of help in his wars against the infidels" sent by Emperor Wedem Ar'ad. It is unclear whether they reached Spain or only Avignon. However, during their stop in Genoa, the cartographer Giovanni da Carignano compiled a treatise on Ethiopia which was apparently lost, but is referred to in a Bergamese chronicle by Foresti written in the late fifteenth century. Foresti's summary revealed that: "They also presented themselves reverently before Pope Clement V at Avignon and, instructed by many apostolic letters, came to Rome to visit the churches of Peter and Paul." Significantly this record indicates the apparent Ethiopian pursuit of a European religious-political alliance, over a century before the European response, depicts their favorable reception in Rome, which would

[39]A detailed study of the Roman hospice of St. Stefano Maggiore delgi Abissini is P. Mauro da Leonessa's *Santo Stefano Maggiore degli Abissini e le relazione Romano-Etiopische* (Vatican City: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1929). Detailed discussion of Santo Elòi in Lisbon can be found in Hans Werner Debrunner, *Presence and Prestige: Africans in Europe* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1979), an invaluable study listing the documented instances of Africans in Europe from the early medieval period to 1918. One of Debrunner's major sources on Santo Elòi was the earlier work by Eugen Weber, *Die Portugiesche Reichsmission im Koenigreich Kongo* (Schweiz: Xaveriusverlagsbuchhandlung A. G. Aachen, 1924).

parallel later African diplomatic experiences in the Holy city.[40]

In the following century, the growing number of Ethiopian ambassadors and visitors to the Vatican prompted Pope Sixtus IV to repair the church and attached house of St. Stefano Maggiore delgi Abissini in the Vatican as a hospice for Ethiopian pilgrims living in Rome.[41] This hospice, aside from housing diplomatic embassies, also frequently held a small Ethiopian community, typically numbering between twenty and thirty.[42] Debrunner's compilation of recorded Ethiopian visitors to Rome made it clear that while some of these visitors were sent as part of embassies for religious discussions, as for the Council of Florence, or as delegations to other kings, in other instances the visitors appeared to be religious pilgrims wishing to study and live in Rome.[43] The hospice of St. Stefano Maggiore delgi Abissini appeared to be a generally well known destination for Ethiopian travelers, as testified by the size of the community, and as a subject of later historical study.[44] However, it was not always well funded; records show only occasionally donations from several popes. St. Stefano Maggiore delgi Abissini was probably the center for a less regulated exchange by Vatican and Ethiopian leaders compared to Santo Elòi discussed below. The hospice, which unlike Santo Elòi survives today, is adjacent to the church of St. Stefano Maggiore delgi Abissini which has a long history dating back to the mid-medieval period, related in detail in Leonessa's study. The

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[40]A translated passage from the 1492 edition of Foresti is presented in Appendix III "An Ethiopian Embassy to Western Europe in 1306" of O. G. S. Crawford's *Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400-1524 including those collected by Alessandra Zorzi at Venice in years 1519-24* (Cambridge: published for the Hakluyt Society at the University Press, 1958), 212-215.

[41]Debrunner, 50. Establishment of the hospice at St. Stefano Maggiore delgi Abissini also mentioned by P. Mauro da Leonessa, *Santo Stefano Maggiore delgi Abissini e le relazione Romano-Etiopische* and Charles de la Ronciere, *La decouverte de l'Afrique au Moyen Age*.

[42]Debrunner, 51.

[43]Ibid., 43-44.

[44]Briefly mentioned, for instance, in Richard Pankhurst's historical overview of *The Ethiopians* (MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 80.

church and adjoining buildings appear to have been systematically repaired and renovated several times by the popes in Rome in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. The presence of the various Ethiopian scholars and visitors also inspired the brief existence of a college of Ethiopian studies primarily for the training of missionaries in the early sixteen hundreds.[45] In the relations between the Pope and various African diplomats, the majority of papal support appeared to have been directed towards obtaining funds for the establishment of missions and churches in the newly created dioceses of São Tomé and the Kongo. Later, relations also focused on funding various missionary groups including the Capuchins, a response to the Kongo's increased efforts to break with Portugal (then controlled by Spain) and ally itself with the Vatican.[46]

Although many Ethiopian visitors traveled and stayed at St. Stefano Maggiore delgi Abissini, it appears that the various Kongolese diplomats stayed elsewhere on their visits and there do not appear to be known records of a parallel development of a Kongolese enclave living in Rome for an extended time. With the exception of the 1613 appointment of J. B. Vivès, a native of Aragon, as the permanent Kongolese representative in Rome,[47] most of the Kongolese visitors to Rome stayed only for the

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[45]See Leonessa, 311 and Appendix I "Alunnato Etiopico del Collegio Urbano," 317-326.

[46]Based on Vatican records, it appears that one of the major sources for this funding came from donations from the Portuguese monarchy, for instance consider "Clement VII érige la cathedralé et nomme Diogo Ortiz Vilhegas comme premier évêque de S. Tome, Bologne, le 31 janvier 1533" in Cuvelier and Jardin, *L'Ancien Congo d'apres les archives romaines* (Rome: Academie royale sciences colon, 1954), 98. A donation of 200 to 220 ducats is to be obtained. Another record, "Dotation de l'évêque de S. Tomé, Rome, le 23 septembre 1534" mentions receiving 500 ducats from the Portuguese Crown, in Cuvelier, 99. As tensions between the Union of Portugal and Spain and the Papacy increased in the late sixteenth century, raising the needed resources without Portuguese support proved to be challenging and took many years. See Gray's article, "A Kongolese Princess, the Kongo ambassadors and the Papacy," *Journal of Religion in Africa*," 29, fasc. 2 (May 1999): 140-154.

[47]"Jean-Baptiste Vivès annonce sa nomination, Rome le 11 janvier 1615," confirmation of Vivès appointment in Cuvelier, 342. His appointment was part of the Kongolese attempt to find a new diplomatic ally after relations with Portugal had worsened. Portugal, now under the control of Spain, often blocked Kongolese attempts to travel overland to Rome. Having a European permanent representative in Rome helped ensure the Kongolese pleas for an alliance would be heard.

duration of their mission.

The Convento de Santo Elòi

Santo Elòi, originally a monastery governed by the canons of the Congregation of St. John, was transformed into a center for the education and religious instruction of Africans, primarily those from the Kongo. Its first students were the members of the delegation of Prince Kasuta, who arrived in Lisbon in 1484.[48] Both the Manikongo and the Portuguese Crown took an active interest in the students and both saw advantages in their instruction.[49] The Manikongo sent many nobles and other members of the royal family to be instructed and return as priests and missionaries. Aside from aiding the desired Christianization efforts in the Kongo by training his people, the Manikongo retained greater control of missionary efforts. It also served as a way to train Kongolese diplomats in European protocol and Latin language. Manikongo Alfonso's son, Prince Henry, studied at Santo Elòi from 1508-1518 and reportedly gained a perfect command of Latin. He led an embassy to Rome in 1513. Later in 1521, he was consecrated bishop of Kongo.[50] Aside from Prince Kasuta, Dom Pedro, and Bishop Henry, many other young Kongolese also studied at Santo Elòi. The historian Eugene Weber, who wrote a detailed account of Santo Elòi, stated that according to Francisco de Santa Maria's collected records of the convent, 266 Kongolese students were admitted there for a two year course of study, some also housed in the São Julião church nearby.[51] Others studied

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[48]Debrunner, 43-44.

[49]Manikongo Dom Alfonso complained to King Manuel that he should separate the Kongolese students in order that they learn faster in a letter "Dom Alfosno a Dom Manuel I, Banza Congo, le 27 mai 1517" in Jardin and Dicorato, *Correspondence de Dom Afonso, Roi du Congo*, 126. Original PT-TT-CC-1-21-102. Also in Brasio, vol. I, doc. 112, 406-407.

[50]Debrunner, 44.

[51]Francisco de Santa Maria, *O Ceo aberto na terra. Historia das sagrados Congregacoes dos Conegos em Portugal* (Lisboa 1697), note in Eugene Weber, *Die Portugiesiche Reichsmission im Königreich Kongo*, 147 that (my translation): "Rather 266 were reported, that only later they were

at São João de Xabregas.[52] A statement from Father Francisco de Santa Maria, the congregation's seventeenth-century chronicler, described their instruction:

> [the Manikongo] ordered that with them [the Portuguese] would come some of the sons of the principal nobility of the Realm, who had been asking for missionaries, for them and their vassals, so them they would be instructed and baptized. More than two years these Africans studied in Lisbon, sheltered by order of the king at the Convent of Santo Eloy and instructed by the priests, so that with a lot of work and zeal such as that of saints, they overcame their ignorance and were introduced little by little to doctrine until they reached the state when they overcame their former opinions and became candidates for Baptism. This was celebrated with much pomp.[53]

The correspondence of Portuguese King Dom Manuel to his treasurers revealed the scale of royal funding for the center. The Portuguese Crown also saw key advantages to the training of the Kongolese students. It enabled Portuguese embassies and their assistants to have attendants conversant in African languages accompany them and certainly strengthened the connection between the two kings. A royal order from 4 January 1514 required the Lisbon treasurer Garcia Monis to use 4000 *reís* to provide for supplies, bedding, and other needs of the Kongolese students.[54] Aside from necessities, some of the Kongolese students also received religious gifts, such as ornamental crosses, in December 1490.[55] Departing students, including Dom Francisco, Francisco da Cunha,

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presented to the Portuguese Majesty in the Convent of St. Eloy so that after two years of instruction they could return to their homeland with Goncalo."

[52]Padre Francisco de Santa Maria, in Brasio, vol. I, doc. 23, 91.

[53]Padre Francisco de Santa Maria, "Os Primeiros Missionarios do Congo, 1490-1508," in Brasio, vol. I, doc. 23, 90-91. Padre Francisco de Santa Maria was the congregation chronicler writing in the late sixteen hundreds. The original Portuguese: "mandou com elles a Portugal alguns filhos dos principais homens do seu Reyno, pedindo ministros Evangelicos, dos quaes elle, & seus vassallos, pudessem ter instruidos, & bautizados. Mais de dous annos estivèão estes negos em Lisboa, recolhedidos por ordem del Rey no convento de S. Eloy, & entregues aos nossos Conegos, os quaes com summo trabalho & insigne zelo, qual pedia hũa obra tão santa, ihe forão desbastando a rudesa, & introdusindo pouco a pouco a doutrina, ate que os puserão em estado, que jà desmentião a opinião de brutos, & se mostravao capazes do Bautismo. Foi este celebrado com grande pompa."

[54]"Ordre Royal a Garcia Monis, Almeirim, le 4 janvier 1514," in Jardina and Dicorato, *Correspondance de Dom Afonso, roi du Congo 1506-1543*, 70. Document originally PT-TT-CC-I-14-44.

[55]"Prevenidas as cousas necessarias, & nomeadamente as que serve mao culto divino, em que entravaõ muy ricos ornamentos, calices, Cruzes, sinos, & tudo o mais, cõ que a Igreja se costuma ornar, e

Pero Rojz, and Amtonio Fernamdez de Manycomguo who studied in Santo Elòi, each received on their departure scriptures and clothing valuing two thousand *reís* to aid their return.[56] Later it appears that the Crown also received some compensation for the upkeep of the Kongolese students. In 1526, the Manikongo sent ivory and other items to defray the expenses of his students.[57] Earlier gifts of ivory, luxury items, and slaves were not explicitly described to meet expenses but as gifts, a sign perhaps of changing relationships and some of its unspoken tensions.

Before the end of the fifteen hundreds both the Portuguese Crown and the Manikongo saw students as a key source of priests and missionaries for the Kongo.[58] A letter from Manikongo Dom Afonso to Portuguese Dom João III in 1526 asked for Bishop Henry and six other padres to be sent to the Kongo from Santo Elòi.[59] However, by the end of the fifteen hundreds, fewer Africans studied at Santo Elòi, as a number of the chosen students had been captured and enslaved en route to São Tomé.

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servir, partirao os nosos Conegos a 19 de Dezembro do anno de 1490," account of Father Francisco de Santa Maria, congregation chronicler in Brasio, vol. I, doc. 23, 92. English translation: "Provided for their necessities and those items needed for divine worship, which included many rich ornaments, calices, crosses, bells and everything else, to decorate the church, and serve for the priests, on 19 December of the year 1490."

[56]"Mandamos a vós Bastyam de Vargas, noso thesoureiro da Casa de Guyné e aos esprivãees dese oficio que dees a Dom Framcisco e a Framçisco da Cunha e a Pero Rojz, que está em Samtaloy [St. Elòi] e a Amtonio Fernamdez de Manycomguo, a cada hũ hũũ vystydo que valha dos mjll reaes pero o mar, por quamto se vão agora pera sua terra," quoted in "Alvara de D. Manuel a Sebastião de Vargas, 30-8-1516" in Brasio, vol. I, doc. 102, 366-368, from TT-CC-I-20-90. "[The King] orders that Bastyam de Vargas, the royal treasurer of the House of Guinea and his assistants give to Dom Francisco and Framcisco da Cunha and Pero Rojz, who studied in Santo Eloy and to Antonio Fernamdez of the Manikongo, each an amount of clothing valuing 2000 reís for their return journey to their land."

[57]"Le Roi Dom Afonso a Dom João III, 25 aout 1526," in Jardin and Dicorato, *Correspondance de Dom Afonso, Roi du Congo*, 162-164. Original Portuguese in PT-TT-CC-1-32-99. Manikongo Afonso stated: "Seigneur, nous avons beaucoup d'ivoire et nous en recevons chaque jour davantage. Nous voudrions l'envoyer, par vos anavires en votre royaume, pour payer les dépenses que nous occasionnons a V. Altesse," 163.

[58]Jorge Cardoso, "Os Primeiros Missionarios do Congo, 1490," in Brasio, vol. I, doc. 22, 86-88. First published in Agiologio Lusitano, Lisboa, 1666, tom. III, provided a summary of missionary activity from Santo Elòi students and other members of the Conegos Azuis, as they were also called.

[59]"Carta do Rei do Congo a Dom João III, 18-3-1526," in Brasio, vol. I, doc. 140, 459-464, from PT-TT-CC-I-33-121.

The formation of such small communities for religious study and training provides a fascinating insight into the relations between African leaders, European kings and popes. Admittedly, both centers were designed to fulfill mutually desired purposes: to provide lodgings for visitors and centers for ecclesiastical education and the training of European and African religious missionaries and leaders. The far-reaching impact of such educational efforts and the exchanges of cultural, social and linguistic information must have been perceived as enormously important at the time. Taken as a whole, the education of diplomats, missionaries, and various translators and navigators in these centers influenced European interests in Africa and led to the publication of some of the earliest works in Ge'ez, and may have influenced the many subsequent seventeenth century histories of Ethiopia and south western Africa. The original site of the Convento de Santo Elòi appears to have been destroyed in the Lisbon earthquake of 1755; however, the Kongolese and Ethiopian diplomatic presence at the Vatican is evident in a number of reliefs, paintings, and decorations of the still existing hospice walls and church of St. Stefano Maggiore delgi Abissini.

Conclusions

Based on a strictly numerical comparison, instances of diplomatic travelers may appear insignificant in comparison to the growing number of Spanish and Portuguese settlers in the Americas in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, or the growing hundreds and later thousands of slaves shipped to Portugal and to the Americas. During these centuries, the Portuguese established colonies and plantations on the islands off the African coast, on the Canaries Islands, on São Tomé and Principe, and in Brazil. However, what these elite exchanges do represent is the existence of diplomatic relations

mutually sought by the rulers of Portugal, several popes, and the respective leaders of Ethiopia, Benin, and the Kongo. They occurred with a generally high degree of respect for the sovereignty and respective equal status of the African participants.

African diplomatic exchanges underscore the ability of African rulers to maintain relationships on their own terms throughout much of the initial period of African-European direct contact from the early fourteen hundreds to sixteen hundreds. That multiple African embassies not only reached Lisbon and Rome in pursuit of their political agendas, but were also honorably received and given, in most cases, the historic equivalent of diplomatic red carpet treatment, further demonstrates the extent to which various European leaders saw advantages in establishing relationships. To what extent these positive receptions grew out of European political expediency versus genuine respect for African sovereignty remains more difficult to determine. However, their overall treatment, receptions, royal gifts, and lodgings as stipulated by the Portuguese Crown and various popes appeared to parallel the treatment given to the European representatives in the African kingdoms and be consistent with the existing court hospitality given to other esteemed visitors arriving in these kingdoms.

African rulers sought a variety of outcomes in sending ambassadors to Rome and Lisbon. Certainly many desired new political alliances with strong military forces to bolster their efforts against regional rivals. Most African kingdoms also desired trade advantages and the introduction of new products, although many of these products were luxury and status items, not mass consumer goods. In terms of primary resources and manufacturing, Africa's markets were in many ways much more advanced than Portugal's during this era. Many of the African states were not opposed to allowing

lucrative trade to develop with the European merchants provided that such trade remained under their authority and in accordance with their customs. African rulers often requested informational items, in the form of maps, books, and religious symbols, as well as reciprocal luxury gifts.

Throughout all of these exchanges African agency in determining and regulating the nature of the encounters remained clear. Embassies to parts of Europe were sent with detailed instructions, and their treatment and studies (especially in the cases of the student missionaries), were frequently the subject of correspondence between rulers such as the manikongos and the Portuguese kings. The most telling demonstration of African rulers' pursuit of their own agendas throughout these first two centuries of contact was their ability to ensure European adherence to their modes of trade, at times with force if necessary, and their decision to switch allies if the actions of the Portuguese began to threaten their sovereignty. The ambassadors sent overseas in both cases played a major role in helping create these changes, seen in many examples from Prince Kasuta's arrival in Lisbon which instigated the start of close Kongolese-Portuguese ties or the arrival of Ambassador Matthew from Ethiopia, which helped prompt a return Portuguese mission. Their sojourns in Europe also established the early foundations for African-European intellectual exchanges and knowledge production, a history of its own, that has remained mostly lost in narratives focusing on a larger time-span. Thus, although these elite exchanges were only part of the story of the first centuries of African-European relationships, they illuminate a history that is often forgotten in the face of later African experiences of an escalated Trans-Atlantic slave trade and early colonialism. The results of these diplomatic exchanges were not always the desired ones, or always politically

significant, but the successful occurrence of these African-directed exchanges remains a key aspect of this era that differentiates the period from later relations and corrects misconceptions of initial African-European encounters.

CHAPTER THREE

THE OTHER AFRICANS

Introduction

Ambassadors Matthew, Zara za Ab, Dom Pedro, and Antonoio Manuel ne Vunda represent some of the most acclaimed elite visitors to Portugal and Rome in this era of African-European diplomatic relationships. However, they were not by far the only Africans to visit. As the preceding chapters illustrate, in many cases African rulers deliberately sought alliances with Portugal and Rome and were often initially successful in achieving benefits from these relationships and receiving treatment on par with that of other European nobles. Despite the vigilance of rulers, not all the African-European encounters occurred under the elite control of one or both sides. This chapter moves from the controlled encounters of the elite courts of Ethiopia, Kongo, Benin, Portugal and Rome, to examine a wider range of relationships that developed in this era. Since a full survey of all instances of non-elite encounters is beyond the scope of this study, this chapter focuses on three less commonly studied areas: the earlier involuntary encounters between captured coastal Africans and the initial Portuguese explorers, the responses of the African communities to groups of Portuguese settlers, and the unique perspective offered by groups of West African artists who depicted the new visitors in ivory artwork

sold to the Portuguese.[1]

Given the tendency of past European authors to record the actions of kingdoms and elites rather than those of average people, a tendency shared by oral African traditions, less documentation is available on specific individuals than for the elite participants previously described. Details in this chapter come from a compilation of passing references to the 'other Africans' found in the texts of Portuguese chroniclers, evaluated in conjunction with details from oral histories and letters. Additionally, this chapter incorporates valuable secondary studies on art history and also on European settlers which provide additional sources of documentation and visual evidence. While detailed accounts of the individual experiences of many of these participants – both African and European – remain elusive, by drawing from the available records this chapter provides a rough picture of the collective experiences of many non-elite Africans involved in the era between the early fourteen hundreds through sixteen hundreds. Despite the confrontational nature of some of these Africans' initial experiences with the Portuguese, overall the relationships that developed on each coast show a progression from an involuntary involvement to an often more positive relationship.

Initial Exploration on the West African Coast

The previous two chapters have discussed the mostly positive relations that developed between African kingdoms and the Portuguese from the late fourteen hundreds

[1]For instance, the topic of African-European economic and trading periods in this era has been quite widely studied in a number of illuminating articles and full length surveys. Some useful examples include Eugenia W. Herbert, "Portuguese Adaptation to Trade Patterns Guinea to Angola (1443-1640). *African Studies Review* 17, no. 2 (September 1974): 411-423 and David Birmingham, *Portugal and Africa* (Athens: University of Ohio Press, 2004). On the economic origins of the slave trade, see Ivana Elbl, "The Horse in Fifteenth-Century Senegambia," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 24, no. 1 (1991): 85-110 and Ivana Elbl, "The Volume of Early Atlantic Slave Trade, 1450-1521," *The Journal of African History* 38, no. 1 (1997): 31-75.

to the early sixteen hundreds. However, this leaves out a history of close to fifty years of Portuguese contact with coastal West Africa before they reached the Fante coast, Benin or the Kongo. These years on the West African coast represent an important time and geographic span of contact that deserves elaboration in this chapter. In this earlier period, Portuguese exploration tactics were more belligerent and small clashes between coastal Africans and the Portuguese were frequent. Aside from centuries of indirect contact with the continent, Portugal's first experience with continental Africa was their attempt to conquer Morocco, an outgrowth of the *reconquista* efforts in Portugal.[2] This military endeavor culminated in the capture of Ceuta in 1415.

This was a monumental event for the changing Portuguese court policies and culture of the nobility. It was characterized by the initial development of Portuguese elite interest in exploration and the dawn of their commercial monopoly. Additionally, the business of exploration opened up new avenues in Portuguese society for the advancement of the lesser nobility through knighthoods and participation in various new religious orders. The Portuguese experiences in Morocco also influenced their early notions of exploration. Early exploration of the coast was seen by some as another step in their conquest of the Moors, whom the Portuguese had assumed controlled much of coastal West Africa.[3] Unsurprisingly many of Portugal's initial actions involved attempted intimidation and raids against the coastal Africans, as documented by the early chronicles of coastal exploration. Vasco da Gama's chronicle of the first journey around

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[2]Portugal, like much of southern Europe, had been colonized by North African Muslims (the "Moors") for much of the Middle Ages, from approximately 711 to 1250. The more intense years of conflict when the Portuguese sought to conquer the southern part of their country, from approximately 850 to 1250 is termed the *Reconquista*. Afonso I or Afonso Henriques proclaimed himself King of Portugal in 1139, claiming independence from Spain in 1143.

[3]Francisco Bethencourt and Kirti Chaudhuri, eds, *Historia da Expansão Portuguesa* (Navarra, Espanha: Grafica Estella, 1998).

Africa, praised the cleverness of his men is scaring a group of villagers by firing their guns.[4] The Portuguese militant approach to Africa's coast in the early years was reinforced by the effective efforts of coastal Africans to defend themselves. The Royal Chronicler Gomes Eannes de Azurara recorded a dire encounter between a Portuguese expedition and Africans on the island of Arguim (near Senegal), who attacked and killed several of the Portuguese who, unable to swim, were stranded on a sandbar. After recording his surprise that the captain of this expedition, who should have been familiar with the military battles in Morocco and historically against Hannibal, instead treated the African coast so lightly, Azurara urged all future expeditions to take caution as if in enemy territory.[5] Later non-Portuguese arrivals, such the English, also ran into trouble when they attempted raids on the coast. In this period the English were only sporadically involved with African coastal trade; however, this brief example illustrates the continued ability of coastal Africans to defend against unwanted traders. A 1580s account of an English slave raiding expedition at Cape Verde reported that they were attacked by arrows from the angry villagers. They laughed at the weapons but two days later collapsed, "the strength of the poison was suche that it cawsed their jaws to shutt . . . about half died."[6]

By the second half of the fourteen hundreds, the Portuguese had begun to change their policies. The historian Malyn Newitt, one of the most prolific contemporary authors on the Portuguese empire, explained that the Portuguese soon made the "painful

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[4]English excerpts from Ravenstein's translation in Charles David Ley, *Portuguese Voyages 1498-1663* (London: Everyman's Library, 1947), 8-9.

[5]Gomes Eannes de Azurara in Charles Raymond Beazley and Edgar Prestage, eds and trans, *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, vol. I (New York: Burt Franklin, 1896), 87-94.

[6]Quoted in P. E. H. Hair, "Protestants as Pirates, Slavers, and Proto-Missionaries: Sierra Leone 1568 and 1582," in *Africa Encountered: European Contacts and Evidence* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1997), 211.

discovery that slave raiding would be bloodily rebuffed by the well-armed and well-organized black kingdoms south of the Senegal River. Within a few years of making contact with black Africa the Portuguese realized that these societies were too formidable to be raided with impunity. On the other hand, trade was not only possible but positively welcomed."[7] Thus two key factors motivating their change in approach were the firm military resistance to that the Portuguese met from many coastal Africans and, the second, the quick discovery that trade on African terms was more lucrative. Additionally, their discovery that many coastal Africans were not Muslim undoubtedly helped persuade them that antagonistic policies were not necessary, seeing friendly contact with the coastal Africans as beneficial for the spread of Christianity.[8] This change in tactics by the Portuguese and the willingness of coastal Africans to initiate peaceful trading transactions (once they were no longer attacked) allowed the later development of the African-European political alliances and elite diplomatic exchanges described previously.

Although the Portuguese accounts might suggest a passive view of coastal Africans who were surprised in a raid and rather helpless to resist, a view often echoed in past studies of this era, a careful reading of the documents shows that the coastal communities were not often caught by surprise a second time. From the African side of these encounters, their rather effective military response to the Portuguese raids shows the level of organization of the community militias on the coast, and also the level of communication among the coastal communities. As the following examples highlight,

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[7]Malyn, Newitt ed., *The First Portuguese Colonial Empire* (United States: Humanities Press, 1986), 3.

[8]Azurara remarked in his chronicle of the first captured Africans when discussing a potential ransom of a noble for ten slaves, "It was better to save ten souls than three—for though they were black, yet had they souls like the others, and all the more as these blacks were not of the lineage of the Moors [Muslims] but were Gentiles, and so the better to bring into the path of salvation," trans in Beazley and Prestage, 55.

while a large number of coastal Africans were captured as informants, some of the captives did escape and their communities made recorded efforts to bargain or enquire about their fates.

Between the 1430s and the 1460s, one offshoot of the more belligerent Portuguese exploration tactics was their frequent capture of coastal Africans as navigators and informants. Although slavery had been present in Portugal and southern Europe in earlier centuries, initially these coastal raids were motivated more by a desire to bring back captives proving their discovery of new lands than by a need for slave labor in Portugal. Yet, the side profit that many of the captains of the Portuguese expeditions made from their captives probably did help to make African slaves more prevalent in Portugal.

Evidence of the numbers of these captured informants can be seen in the first narratives of coastal exploration. Royal chronicler Azurara recounted in 1441 with "some sort of pleasure" the news that captain Antam Gonçalvez had returned from the coast of Africa (along the coast of today's Mauritania) with the first captured prisoners from which "the Infant [Dom Henrique] will feel no small content, getting knowledge by that means of what kind are the other dwellers of the land."[9] After capturing a lone man and a woman, Gonçalvez's party was able to ambush a group and "took ten prisoners, what of men, women and boys." While their translator, an Arab accompanying Gonçalvez's assistant Nuño Tristam, was unable to talk with the captives, they discovered that one of the captives was a noble named Adahu who knew Arabic. Not only were the Portuguese happy to be able to communicate, their perception of Adahu's noble status later persuaded them to agree to his ransom (in exchange for other captives) and return to the

[9]Azurara in Beazley and Prestage, eds., 39-41.

coast of Mauritania.[10] The rest of Azurara's account contained frequent references to more captives on subsequent expeditions, totaling well into the hundreds.[11] Until the 1480s when more African visitors willingly traveled to Portugal showing the possibility of a different form of relations, the Portuguese continued to practice similar raiding patterns. Although the exchange with the captive Adahu, is but one example, it is notable that even in the first encounter the Portuguese made a clear distinction based on perceived African social status, according the noble the option of ransom but keeping the others as prisoners.

The Role of the Captives: Pilots and Translators

Although not discussed in much detail in the chronicles of exploration, captives served a vital role for the Portuguese as informants about West Africa, aids in navigation along unfamiliar coast and as much needed translators. Later, as some of the captives escaped or were allowed to return, they likely served similar functions for their African rulers. This dimension of African-Portuguese relationships is seldom remarked on in conventional histories of Portuguese exploration which highlight the new technological developments and shipbuilding utilized by the Portuguese without mention of any African navigational assistance. Yet the fact that much of their initial navigational success was based on directions from the captured Africans, who informed them both about sailing routes and also good harbors and local markets, should not be surprising. Some sources suggest that another initial desired role of the interpreters was to help

[10]Despite their unfamiliarity with coastal Africans, from Azurara's perspective, they could tell Adahu was a noble for "he shewed in his countenance right well that he held the pre-eminence of nobility over the others," 48. Adahu was later ransomed in exchange for supposedly 100 other slaves, although that number might have been wishful thinking on Azurara's part, 54-55.

[11]See for instance, Azurara trans in Beazley and Prestage, 77-78, 104, 107-116, 117-127, all passages recounting separate captures.

capture other Africans. Cadamosto, a Venetian employed by the Portuguese Crown, who explored the West African coast to the Cape Verde islands between 1455-1456, mentioned in his account that

> Each of our ships had negro interpreters on board from Portugal who had been sold by the lords of Senegal to the first Portuguese to discover this land of the blacks. These slaves had been made Christians in Portugal and knew the Hispanic language well. We had them from their owners on the understanding that for the hire and pay of each we would give one slave to be chosen from among all our captives. Each interpreter, moreover, who secured four slaves for his master was to be given his freedom.[12]

Moreover, the captains of each Portuguese expedition had orders to capture Africans if their interpreters could not communicate. Towards the end of his voyage, Cadamosto recounted their encounter with a group of Africans speaking no known language:

> Several negroes who were on the ship spoke to them, but without understanding a single word, nor making themselves understood. Three of the Blacks boarded one of the caravals: of these three, the Portuguese detained one, allowing the others to go. This they did in obedience to His Majesty the King, who had enjoined them that, from the farthest land they reached, if it chanced that the people were unable to understand their interpreters, they were to contrive to bring away a negro, by force or persuasion, so that he might be interrogated through the many negro interpreters to be found in Portugal, or in the course of time might learn to speak, so that he might give an account of his country.[13]

The use of these interpreters answers one of the practical questions of exploration, namely how the initial Portuguese explorers and coastal Africans communicated. As suggested above, their initial encounters, when both assumed the other was an enemy did not go well. At times communication using sign language was attempted, however, this often sent the wrong message:

> Gomez Pirez sought to show that he desired to go among them on peaceful terms, and so placed upon the shore a cake and a mirror and a sheet of paper on which he

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[12]Cadamosto quoted in Hair, "Use of African Languages," 12. Whether Cadamosto was the first or not to discover the Cape Verde islands is a matter of debate among historians.

[13]G. R. Crone, trans and ed., *The Voyages of Cadamosto and other documents on West Africa* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1937), 84.

> drew a cross. And the natives when they came there and found these things, broke up the cake and threw it far away, and with their spears they cast at the mirror until they had smashed it, and the paper they tore. 'Since it is so,' said Gomez Pirez to his bowmen, "shoot at them that they may at least learn that we can hurt those who will not be our friends."[14]

Determining the actual language used in the early encounters by the Portuguese and their interpreters requires a careful reading of the evidence and, to an extent, a reconstruction of the probable languages spoken. One of the few studies on this topic is P. E. F. Hair's article, "The Use of African languages in Afro-European Contacts in Guinea."[15] He mentions that much of the early communication was conducted in either Arabic or Berber, details frequently omitted from the chronicles because of the discomfort of many Portuguese in admitting they were using the language of their enemy.[16] As seen from the examples of Azurara's narrative, the need for other translators further south on the African coast became quite apparent when Arabic or Berber no longer served as useful intermediate languages. Later Portuguese expeditions, such as Cadamosto's brought their own interpreters. Hair's research also suggests that many Portuguese involved in coastal trade and exploration in West Africa gained a working knowledge of at least a few useful words in many African languages that helped reduce the need for as many interpreters. However, it appeared that fewer Portuguese traders gained fluency in African languages, for most accounts recorded the use of Portuguese and not African languages, except in the cases of long-term Portuguese settlers. Travelers' accounts from the later fifteen hundreds indicated that a number of Portuguese words became part of coastal vocabularies. As the historian Hair and several others have

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[14]Quoted in P. E .H. Hair, "The Use of African Languages in Afro-European Contacts in Guinea: 1440-1560," in *Africa Encountered* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1997).

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid., 6.

noted, the vocabulary lists compiled by English traveler Towerson, contained many words of Portuguese derivation.[17]

Over time the training and recruitment of translators and coastal assistance became more standardized, probably through the development of Portuguese settlements and various training centers run by religious authorities. In the fifteen hundreds and after, further means of communication were facilitated by many coastal Africans learning Portuguese or Latin through contacts with Europeans. In West Africa, extended contacts led to the development of Crioulo used by the trade middlemen. This language combined various West African languages and Portuguese.[18] The Portuguese were also able to find more willing volunteers as translators and navigators. For instance, they hired interpreters and some ship assistants from the Niominka, Papel and Biafada communities.[19] Partnerships of this sort paralleled the later more extensive development in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of merchant-princes.[20] These were essentially wealthy intermediaries who worked for themselves (and not for an African ruler) and acted as intermediaries to facilitate business and political relations between the Fante States and European traders. Similar relations developed along other areas of the African coast as well.

The sustained contact between Portuguese representatives and several African

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[17]Hair, "The Use of African Languages;" David Northrup, *Africa's Discovery of Europe, 1450-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Also see lists in "William Towerson's First Voyage to Guinea," in John Williams Blake, *Europeans in West Africa* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1942), 370 and 383. *Bassina*, for example, was the Fante word for "basins," in Portuguese *bacia*; *cowrte* from the Portuguese *corte*, "a cut," and *molta* for "much" from Portuguese *muito*. I would add that similar vocabulary adoptions can be found in Swahili from the Portuguese East African contact. *Pesa* is one of the Swahili terms for "money" and *mesa* for "table," from the identical Portuguese words.

[18]Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers*, 4.

[19]Ibid., 136. Francisco Mendes is one name that is known. He was a hired pilot for the Dutch on the coast of Sierra Leone, see Hair, "Hamlet," 36.

[20]See, for example, C. Darkwah's discussion of the role of "John Kabes, The Dutch and the English, 1680-1716," (Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 1967).

kingdoms led to the patterns of elite exchange and the addition of African court officials trained in Portuguese to serve as translators and liaisons to the European visitors. The Manikongo, for instance, deliberately sent various elites to be trained in the Convent of Santo Elòi with the intention of having them aid his rule upon their return. Many of the Kongolese embassies traveling to Portugal and Rome, went not alone, but with a retinue of various servants and assistants. Those who survived their journeys to and from Europe were well equipped to advise the Manikongo on language and other details about the Portuguese. By the fifteen hundreds, the respective leaders of Benin and Kongo were also typically conversant in Portuguese and frequently corresponded in that language. An English traveler who met the Oba of Benin in 1553 confirmed that "he himselfe could speake the Portugall tongue, which he had learned of [sic, likely as] a child."[21]

By the end of the sixteenth century, having court officials who were proficient in Portuguese appeared to be becoming the norm in other parts of West Africa as well. According to the historian Hair, an English account of an encounter with Portuguese traders on the coast of Sierra Leone revealed both the first documented performance of Hamlet (performed by the English traders for the Portuguese), and demonstrated an example of a favored court official functioning as a translator. Lucas Fernandes impressed the English, for he was described in one journal as "a man of marvaillous redie witt and speaks eloquent Portuguese." Previously he had lived on Cape Verde and likely received his linguistic and religious education there.[22] In the fifteen hundreds, a number

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[21]My clarification. "Richard Eden's Account of Windham's Voyage to Guinea, *Decades of the New World* (1555)," excerpts in Blake, *Europeans in West Africa*, 318.

[22]Quoted in P. E. H. Hair, "Hamlet in an Afro-Portuguese Setting: New Perspectives on Sierra Leone in 1607," *History in Africa* 5 (1978): 32. The spokesperson was part of William Keeling's expedition to the Indies, which stopped on the shore of Sierra Leone in 1607. Lucas Fernandes was the royal interpreter for King Bure (also called Philip) of Sierra Leone.

of Africans from near the Sierra Leonean coast were trained and educated in the Cape Verde islands.[23] These islands served a function similar to the Convent of Santo Elòi in Lisbon by providing a source of trained translators and assistants for various Portuguese and African leaders and traders.

At the turn of the century, the Portuguese strategy of bringing (willing or unwilling) Africans to Portugal or one of their settlements for training as interpreters and assistants was emulated by the Dutch and English traders who were becoming a growing presence on Africa's coasts. A London merchant, William Towerson, was confronted on the coast of Ghana in 1555 by a

> Fellow who came aboord our shippe without feare, and as soon as he came, de demaunded why we had not brought againe their men, which the last yeere we tooke away, and could tell us that there were five taken away by Englishmen; we made him answere that they were in England well used, and were kept till they could speake the language, and then they should be brought againe to be a helpe to Englishmen in this countrey.[24]

Towerson did not specifically mention these Fante captives again. However, his account of his second voyage, two years later, made frequent mention of "our negroes" who aided in communication and fostering good relations with some of the Fante states. For example, he wrote when near the kingdom of Shamma (also on Ghana's coast):

> We thought here to have found some Portugals, but there were none; so wee sent our negros on shore, and after them went divers of us, and were very well received, and the people were very glad of our negros, specially one of their brothers' wives, and one of their aunts, which received them with much joy, and so did all the rest of the people, as if they had bene their naturall brethren; we confronted the captaine and told him that hee should not feare the Portugals, for wee would defend him from them.[25]

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[23]Hair, "Hamlet," 30-31.

[24]"William Towerson's First Voyage to Guinea, 1555-6," first published by Hakluyt, here extracts from Blake's *Europeans in West Africa, 1450-1560*, 382.

[25]"William Towerson's Second Voyage to Guinea, 1556-7," in Blake, *Europeans in West Africa*, 399.

The Fate of the Captives

Some details regarding the actions and fates of many of the willing translators and assistants can be glimpsed from letters and asides by Portuguese chroniclers. Determining what happened to the first set of African captives along the coast remains more challenging. Azurara remarked with some emotion that many of the West African captives were separated and sent to different parts of Portugal.[26] A number of others were clearly trained as interpreters, at the direct request of the Portuguese Crown and probably captured with that original intention. In the late fourteen hundreds and early fifteen hundreds when diplomatic envoys arrived at the Portuguese courts, the accounts make it clear that the King already had interpreters. Details on a few specific individuals can be determined from narratives of exploration and some legal records. A later expedition led by Gonçallo de Sintra recounted the unfortunate escape of his interpreter, "An Azanegue boy . . . who already knew a great deal of our language, and whom the Infant had given into his charge commanding him to keep a good watch over him." According to Azurara, the boy escaped to give the dwellers of Araguim "information of all that he knew about

[26]Ibid., 83-86. Azurara also claimed that once settled with families, many of the captives readily learned Portuguese and were treated well on equal status with freed servants, some marrying Portuguese wives and gaining their own land. Several records of sale available record the sale of slaves taken from the coast of Guinea. See, for example, "Registo notorial de venda de uma escrava negra, de nome Catalina, de 34 anos de idade, natural da Guine"(Record of the sale of a black slave, named Catalina, 34 years in age, native of Guinea), my translation, doc. 86, 24 de Novembro de 1473, in *Portugaliae Monumenta Africana*, vol. I, original from Archivo de Protocolos de Sevilla, Escrituras del Siglo XV, Oficio XII. Another Sevilla record included "Registo notorial de venda de um escravo negro, de nome Martin, de 25 anos de idade, pouco mais ou menos, natural de Mandinga" (Official record of sale for a black slave, named Martin, 25 years old, more or less, a native of the Mandinga), doc. 118, 31 de Julho de 1480 in *Portugaliae Monumenta Africana*, vol. I, original from Archivo de Porotocolos de Sevilla, Libro de 1480, fl. 30. The Mandinga were people of the historic Mali trading empire in the interior of upper West Africa who were present as visiting traders on the coast. In the following century, the empire expanded to a physical presence on the Sierra Leonean coast, see Walter Rodney's article, "A Reconsideration of the Mane Invasions of Sierra Leone," *The Journal of African History* 8, no. 2 (1967): 219-246.

their enemies."[27] There is no way to ascertain whether the escaped interpreter in fact had such a motivation or merely sought to get as far from the Portuguese as possible. However, Azurara's immediately assumption about his motives reveals more about how the Portuguese valued their captives.

A few references to others originally captured from the African coast can be found in Portuguese legal documentation. A manumission in 1471 was given to a "slave of Guine named Homar," who belonged to the widow Britiz Annes, and after spending many years with her family reportedly wished to return to his home in Guine.[28] The widow Annes appeared, according to the document, to be the husband of one of the explorers and Homar may have been acquired during one of her husband's journeys. Other documents were more explicit in mentioning the enslaved Africans roles as translators, although none of these roles were described in great detail. In 1454, for instance, Dom Afonso's treasurer signed a document of manumission (*carta de alforria*) for a female captive named Fatima granting her freedom on the condition that she serve the King in the territories of Guinea.[29] A later contract from 1475 recorded the agreement between Sevilla resident Sancho de Munon and Rodrigo Alvarez for the latter's hire of a slave named Pedro Muça to travel as a translator along the African coast.[30] Another

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[27] Ibid., 88. However, it seems that some Africans had similar motivations, for Azurara continued his narrative to record his annoyance that another Moor persuaded them by signs to take him aboard then stayed one night on the ship and escaped without anyone noticing, Ibid., 89. Azanegue referred to the Sahaja, one of the main groups of Tuareg people who inhabit inner West Africa.

[28]"Carta de alforria a Homar, escravo da Guine," doc. 70, 18 de Dezembro de 1471, *Portugaliae Monumenta Africana*, vol. 1, original in Portuguese National Archive of Torre do Tombo (ANTT), Chancelaria de D. Afonso V, L. 17, fl. 39. Guine was Portugal's name for most of known West Africa and does not refer to the three modern countries by the same name.

[29]"Carta de alforria de Fatima, moura, natural da terra de Arzique, com a condicao de prestar servicos ao Rei nas terras da Guine," Doc. 11, 17 de Maio de 1454 in *Portugaliae Monumenta Africana*, vol. I, project directors Luis de Alburquerque and Maria Emilia Madeira, ed. Maria Luisa Oliveira Esteves (Lisboa : Nacional Casa da Moeda, 1993), originally ANTT Chancellaria de D. Afonso V, L.10, fl. 44v.

[30]"Carta de contrato, feito entre Sancho de Muno, de Sevilha, e Rodrigo Alvarez, sobre o emprestimo de um escravo, de nome Pedro Muca, par air por lingua aos mares e portos da Guine, na

manumission two years later granted João Garrido his freedom after he had served as a translator and slave to Gonçalo Toscano who was working on the coast of Africa.[31]

Overall it appears that the Portuguese practice of taking captives and sailing with trained interpreters did more to facilitate relationships than harm their potential, although this view was probably not shared by the actual captives. Once interpreters were invited in a more voluntary fashion (such as given by their rulers or at least not kidnapped in the midst of a battle), the Portuguese appeared to be more welcome on their return because of this outward respect of African custom. The growing presence of officials at many African courts trained in the Portuguese language by the later fifteen hundreds also shows the perceived value of these interpreters to the African rulers. The existing accounts of various individuals reveal, through a record of their actions, some of the experiences and perhaps motives of these participants. How the African elites felt about these initial captives, taken without their permission, and how they valued the later development of the Portuguese employ of translators is less clear. For each of the coastal African kingdoms, one can argue that these exchanges were in accordance with various African diplomatic customs (some of which also had parallels in Europe), such as the exchange of hostages with political allies to ensure no foul play, or the custom of many rulers to have visitors and traders well versed in the languages and cultures of other kingdoms at court. Nevertheless, to what degree West African rulers deliberately sought to have those from their kingdoms hired by the Portuguese and later serve as their court officials in the various African courts is unknown based on the available accounts for West Africa. In

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caravela em que o ditto Rodrigo Alvarez ia por capitao," doc. 95, 10 de Outubro de 1475, *Portugaliae Monumenta Africana*, vol. I, original from Archivo de Protocolos de Sevilla, Oficio IV – Pedro Alvarez.

[31]"Carta de alforria de João Garrido, língua e escravo de Gonçalo Toscano, por servicos prestados e a prestar na Guiné, de onde era natural," doc. 101, 18 de Agosto de 1477, *Portugaliae Monumenta Africana*, vol. I, original from ANTT Ordem de Santiago, Convento de Palmela, L. 1, fl. 64.

East Africa, the records of the initial Portuguese experiences show more evidence of African rulers deliberately assigning pilots to the Portuguese as part of their general diplomatic approach towards these strangers.

The East African Coast

In the previous chapters little mention was made of Portuguese experiences on the East African coast. This, however, should not be understood to suggest that the Portuguese had little contact with coastal East African states. Much like the situation on the coast of West Africa, the initial period of East African contact, beginning with the first voyage of Vasco da Gama in 1497, paralleled both some of the successful encounters in West Africa and some of the confrontations caused by Portuguese antagonistic policies. Theoretically, the leaders of early expeditions could draw from fifty years of West African contact and the diplomatic visits to Portugal begun by Benin and Kongo to predict advantageous methods to initiate contact with the African coast. In practice, many Portuguese encounters were confrontational, raiding ships presumed to be Muslim and clashing with coastal villagers. The Portuguese awareness of their close proximity to the Muslim empires, still seen as rivals and enemies of Portugal, was a probable factor in explaining some of these actions. Travelers, even close to the mid-fifteen hundreds, recounted frequent antagonism towards Muslim cities near the Somali coast. Father Alvares, recounting his voyage to Ethiopia reported that in a village near Meti:

> The people of this place had all fled . . . There were also three old women in the place, two cripples and one blind. They did not understand their language. At night they also captured a young woman with a baby, near a mountain; the governor ordered that cotton cloths should be given them (as compensation) to cloth them in their fashion, and that they should go away to the people of the

> place. And he told them to come to them for he would ensure their safety; and he wanted peace with them; and those who should come and return boldly he would treat very kindly. They were not willing to believe or trust him. And so when the Governor saw that they did not come, he ordered fifty musketeers and crossbowman to try and capture some of the people of the country so that he might have some knowledge of what people they were and of what nation . . . they had not been able to find anyone"[32]

Three days later, Father Alvares added, "On our departure they took what they needed for firewood from the houses and mosques, and what was not needed they burnt together with the houses, ships and frigates."[33] Further south among the Swahili city-states, the Portuguese relationship with the various rulers appeared to fluctuate between relatively peaceful meetings to direct attacks, such as the sack of Kilwa in 1505. Nearer to Ethiopia, the memory of those living on the South Arabian coast had few positive memories of the Portuguese. *The Hadrami Chronicles*, a compilation of local history, reported a situation more reminiscent of the Portuguese attempted conquest of Morocco, than the peaceful trading seen elsewhere. In 1502 "vessels of the Frank appeared at sea en route for India, Hurmuz, and other parts. They took about 7 vessels, killing those on board and making some prisoner. This was their first action may God curse them."[34] Most of the records for the following years are in a similar tone.

Not all of these brief encounters ended badly in the minds of those on the coast. Some of the Portuguese explorers were able to convince coastal people of their good intentions, despite such methods. Vasco da Gama's first voyage around southern Africa encountered one person gathering honey near the coast who was "made captive. He was taken on board the captain-major's ship, and being placed at table he ate of all we ate. On

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[32]C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford, eds, *The Prester John of the Indies by Father Alvares*, Trans Lord Stanley of Alderley 1881, vol. I (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1961), 46.

[33]Ibid., 47.

[34]Translation in R. B. Serjeant, *The Portuguese off the South Arabian Coast: The Hadrami Chronicles* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1974), 43.

the following day the captain-major had him well dressed and sent ashore."[35] Apparently the experience of this captive was not so traumatizing, for the ship's log reported that: "On the following day fourteen or fifteen natives came to where our ships lay. The captain-major landed and showed them a variety of merchandise, with the view of finding out whether such things were to be found in their country."[36] One of the members of Da Gama's expedition, Fernão Velloso, was able to visit the nearby village, although on his way back some of his escorts attempted to detain him, perhaps in retribution for the other detained villager or perhaps seeking an available source of information about the Portuguese from their own captured informant.[37]

As in West Africa, the Portuguese recruited pilots and informants. Along much of East Africa's coast enough traders spoke some Arabic to aid communication. Here the capture of informants was more for apparent navigation purposes.[38] In some instances along the coast, whether these pilots volunteered willingly was certainly debatable, with a number of passing references to "taking on pilots" without details as to how they ended up joining the expedition.[39] Once in Ethiopia's territory, as the accounts of Father Alvares and others related, the regional governors whom the Portuguese encountered provided the Portuguese with porters and escorts to reach the Emperor. [40] These guides were both part of the Ethiopian hosts' sense of hospitality and a sensible precaution for

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[35]E. G. Ravenstein, trans and ed., *Journal of the first voyage of Vasco da Gama, 1497-1499* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1898), 6-7.

[36]Ibid., 7.

[37]Ibid., 8.

[38]Brief mention is made of coastal residents knowing some Arabic in Duarte Barbosa's *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the Beginning of the 16th century, translated from an early Spanish manuscript by Henry E. J. Stanley* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1995), 4-5.

[39]Ley's excerpts of Vasco da Gama's first voyage mention "taking on two pilots" on the coast near today's Mozambique. However, the circumstances that they "took" these pilots are not explicit, 14-15.

[40]A precaution likely both for Ethiopia's rulers and the visiting Portuguese's sakes. Alvares in his two volume account mentions several instances where the company was unexpectedly stoned or met with local hostility, see Beckingham and. Huntingford, eds., *The Prester John of the Indies by Father Alvares*, 230-231 and 237-9.

escorting strangers through the kingdom. Violent instances such as the Portuguese sack of Kilwa notwithstanding, other meetings between the Portuguese and the Swahili reveal an apparent willingness of the Swahili to help the Portuguese.

The Swahili, who lived in a collection of city-states along the coast of East Africa from today's Mozambique to Somalia, were politically autonomous but linked by trade networks and a common culture. At this time, the Swahili had wide-ranging trade connections with the Middle East, India, and even China, and were thus well equipped to give navigational directions to the Portuguese. They also appeared relatively comfortable receiving visitors. However, the fact that many of them were Muslim often led to subsequent confrontations once the Portuguese realized the extent of the Middle East and Swahili trade network. Vasco da Gama first encountered a Swahili community when he reached the coast of today's Mozambique. His ship's log recorded the useful help they received:

> On Thursday, the 1st of March, we sighted islands and the mainland . . . These Moors, moreover, told us that along the route which we were to follow we should meet with numerous shoals; that there were many cities along the coast, and also an island, one half the population of which consisted of Moors and the other half of Christians (India) . . . We were told, moreover, that Prester John resided not far from this place . . . this information and, many other things which we heard, rendered us so happy that we cried with joy, and prayed God to grant us health, so that we might behold what we so much desired.[41]

The Portuguese encounter also resulted in the useful hire of two pilots from the city-state's leader. The captain-major invited the leader to a meal and "begged him for two pilots to come with us. He at once granted this request, subject to our coming to

[41]Ravenstein, *Journal of the first voyage of Vasco da Gama, 1497-1499*, 23. Communication was facilitated by "a sailor that the captain-major (i.e. da Gama) had with him, and who, having formerly been a prison among the Moors, understood their language (Arabic). Da Gama remained rather confused about the religion in India and after his visit still believed that the Hindus were long lost Christians. By this point, the Portuguese knew that the Prester John was located in fact in Ethiopia.

terms with them. The captain-major gave each of them thirty *mitkals* in gold and two *marlotas*, on condition that from this day on which they received this payment one of them should always remain on board if the other desired to go on land."[42] While it is unclear how often the Swahili rulers allowed guides to be hired by other foreign trading partners, given their frequent wide-ranging trading contacts, it is probable that such a request was more typical.

Farther north, at the Swahili city-state of Mombasa, the Portuguese were well received by the city's leader. Outside of his court, though, their stay was marked by two attempts to capture the Portuguese ships, supposedly in revenge for the Portuguese attacks further south on the coast.[43] Not inclined to quickly change their habits, once leaving Mombasa, the Portuguese eagerly attacked two dhows:

> At break of day we saw two boats (barcas) about three leagues to the leeward, in the open sea, and at once gave chase, with the intention of capturing them, for we wanted to secure a pilot who would guide us to where we wanted to go. At vesper-time we came up with one of them, and captured it . . . In the one we took we found seventeen men, besides gold, silver, and an abundance of maize and other provisions.[44]

These captives were given to the leader of Malindi as a token of good faith, a potential sign that the Portuguese were learning the perils of taking captives from the kingdoms with which they wished to develop relationships or thought this would be a good faith gesture. The Malindi leader offered the Portuguese hospitality and exchanged gifts with da Gama. Although the Portuguese refused to go ashore, likely fearing capture, da Gama's men enjoyed a night-fete in the harbor, a horsemanship demonstration, and other celebrations. Upon leaving, Malindi's ruler sent the Portuguese a native of Gujarat as a

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[42]Ibid., 25.
[43]Ibid., 36-38.
[44]Ibid., 39.

pilot.[45]

As these accounts no doubt suggest, a variety of interactions took place between the initial Portuguese arrivals and the coastal Swahili. While the traveling traders (some native Swahili and others from the Red Sea region) had for the most part unpleasant meetings with the Portuguese, who typically attacked their ships, the rulers of the Swahili city-states initially were met with Portuguese respect. The navigators and pilots aiding the Portuguese along this coast appeared to be either captives taken in coastal raids and ship captures and those volunteered by the rulers of the city-states, a number of whom were originally from coastal India.

The reactions of the coastal Africans to the Portuguese on da Gama's expedition indicate several sentiments. The rulers appeared willing to extend basic hospitality to the visitors, but often da Gama's log records that the rulers and key traders were not impressed with what they offered, which given the nature of da Gama's cargo should not be surprising.[46] Others in the coastal towns seemed less ambiguous about their dislike of the Portuguese visitors. While the accounts of Vasco da Gama's voyages may have exaggerated the numbers of some of the hostile encounters, it is clear that an awareness of some of the fleet's antagonism had reached the upper Swahili coast. Unlike the situation in West Africa, along the East African coast in the rest of the sixteenth century, this pattern of antagonism continued as the Portuguese sought to gain control over Muslim counterparts of the trading networks. Typically the Swahili (mostly Muslim) and

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[45]Ibid., 45. Gujarat is a region of India that, as this account indicated, had frequent trading contacts with the Swahili.

[46]When da Gama reached the coast of India, he discovered that his fine gifts that he brought were items that even the poorest trader could afford. This led to some diplomatic tension. See Robert Wolff, "Da Gama's Blundering: Trade Encounters in Africa and Asia during the European 'Age of Discovery,' 1450-1520," *The History Teacher* 31, no. 3 (May, 1998): 297-318.

natives of the Middle East were grouped together as Portuguese targets. The expedition of Francisco d'Almeida attacked the community on Zanzibar in 1503, followed by attacks on Kilwa and Mombasa in 1505.[47] The raids on the villages on the Somali coast recorded by Father Alvares in the 1520 Ethiopian expedition were a continuation of this trend. I would argue that in general these confrontations were motivated by a sense of economic competition, however, the Portuguese world-view which made sharp divisions in policy between Christian and potential Christian kingdoms and rival Muslim ones should not be discounted here as part of the Portuguese rationale for their actions.

The experience of captured and coastal Africans with the early Portuguese was one of the dominant forms of African-European exchanges aside from the development of the elite political and trading relationships. The growing presence of the Portuguese along many coasts of Africa also led to the development of two other areas of involvement: Portuguese settlers in Africa and cases of commissioned artwork, both of which illustrate evolving African reactions to the Portuguese presence in this era.

African Reactions to Portuguese Settlers

Portuguese Crown's interest in exploration was originally geared towards circumventing the Muslim monopoly on the Mediterranean and Red Sea trade.[48] However, they soon became quite involved in African trading networks, seeking profits in whatever way possible. Unlike the semi-autonomous British and Dutch trading

[47]These attacks and the establishment of some Portuguese control over the cities were justified by one contemporary, a Spanish traveler, as "This King [of Mombasa], for his pride and unwillingness to obey the King of Portugal, lost his city, and the Portuguese took it from him by force, and the King fled, and they killed and made many captives of his people, and the country was ravaged, and much plunder was carried off from it of gold and silver, copper, ivory, rich stuffs of gold and silk, and much other valuable merchandise," Duarte Barbosa, *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa*, 12.

[48]See, for instance, Emily C. Bartels, "Othello and African Post-colonialism Revisited," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (1997). Her brief discussion of the Portuguese suggests that African was much neglected by the Portuguese since they were primarily focused on Asian trade.

companies of the eighteenth century, early Portuguese trade was characterized by a high degree of royal control and frequent adaptation to African trading customs. A large part of this trade was controlled by appointed traders representing respective African and Portuguese interests.

Insights from the Complaints of Illegal Trading

In addition to the "officially" mandated trade, the actual circumstances of trade led to a number of unofficial trade encounters, much to the irritation of Portuguese officials. Primarily economically motivated, evidence of many of these unofficial encounters can be inferred from Portuguese officials' complaints and the many stringent measures implemented to safeguard against illegal trading. At the São Jorge da Mina Castle on the Fante coast stringent measures were implemented to safeguard against illegal gold smuggling.[49] This is understandable, given the lucrative nature of the gold trade, yet other complaints reveal that more common items such as the fort's wine supply were also being 'illegally' traded.[50] The patterns of non-officially sanctioned Portuguese-African trading demonstrate several important trends in early coastal commerce. First, as seen in other types of African-European relations, not all the Portuguese followed Royal Crown directives. While African rulers typically received a profit from major trading endeavors and required either annual tribute or the equivalent to export and import fees on long distance commodities, they did not seek to restrain their traders to only the

[49]The problem of non-sanctioned gold trading on the coast was the subject of complaints from a number of Portuguese stationed on the coast of Ghana at Mina. One anonymous report, among many complaints, reported that many of the Portuguese workers at Mina were keeping their earnings, in A. Teixeira da Mota and P. E. H. Hair, *East of Mina* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 92, original document in Bibliotheca Nacional de Lisboa, Funda Geral, 8457, ff.100v-110.

[50]"Mamede de Goios to King Manuel. São Jorge da Mina 22 January 1510," in Blake's *European's in West Africa*, 104-106. The newly arrived Goios complains about the unauthorized sale of wine from the ships to the coastal residents, which the ship's staff had claimed had been allowed by his predecessor, 105.

"official" Portuguese representative. This is significant because it shows that, aside from an affirmation of African traders' resolve to conduct trade their way, there were also a wider degree of mutual exchanges and encounters than officially recorded. From the same region of Ghana's coast, Fante oral traditions for almost every town interviewed report that early trade exchanged commodities such as alcoholic drinks, clothes, and cooking utensils.[51] These oral traditions collected by Ghanaian historian J. K. Fynn do not indicate the nature of these trading encounters. I wish to suggest, though, that such oral records may indicate that trading encounters encompassed a wider scope than the São Jorge da Mina records suggest. This is important, for it may show a greater degree of Fante trade control than previously assumed, establishing not only trading terms but also locations, and a wider degree of meetings between Fante and Portuguese traders. Without a more detailed investigation into Portuguese records and Fante tradition this question cannot be fully resolved. Clear evidence of illegal trading can also be found elsewhere along the African coast, revealed by case studies of Cape Verde and Sierra Leone. The historian Rodney summarized the draconian laws aimed at curbing the illegal Sierra Leonean trade implemented by Manuel I in 1514:

> It was a capital offence to go to [western Africa] without a license; it was illegal to send or carry any trade goods to [western Africa], unless one was an accredited trader; no ship bound for a given port was allowed to touch on any other point on the coast, except in an emergency; and no person, irrespective of rank or station, should throw himself [that is, se-lancar] with the Negroes, nor, under any circumstances, remain with the said Negroes, on pain of death. [52]

The majority of trading encounters took place in African markets on the coast or on Portuguese ships. The Portuguese gradually established settlements on the Cape Verde

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[51]John Kofi Fynn, *Fante Oral Traditions*, vols. 1-6 (Legon: Institute of African Studies & Ghana University Press, 1976).

[52]Rodney quoted in George E. Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers: Ecology, Society, and Trade in Western Africa, 1000-1630* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 153.

islands, Araguim island (near Senegal) and on the islands of São Tomé and Principe. These areas, in addition to the fortress at São Jorge da Mina on Ghana's coast, became the major destinations for Portuguese stationed abroad. Many of the Portuguese trading agents would spend the duration of several trading and exploration trips along the coast, likely acquire a few mementos such as the ivory carvings, and return to Portugal. The more successful could hope for an appointment as one of the captains of the trading factories, such as at the Castle of São Jorge da Mina.

Portuguese Settlers and the Development of Luso-African Culture

The experiences of other Portuguese went beyond these trading encounters. The historian George E. Brooks is one of the few authors to publish two extensive studies on the phenomenon of Europeans who settled in Africa and joined African communities in various ways.[53] The earliest of these settlers were Portuguese criminals who were dropped off on sections of the African coast to test out the area. Some of these forced settlers joined African communities, others likely perished.[54] Later settlers were the illegal traders who became middlemen between official Portuguese and African traders. According to Brooks' studies, many of these traders were integrated into African communities in the Senegambia region, subject to African leaders. A number of them

[53]See George E. Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993) and *Eurafricans in Western Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003).

[54]Timothy J. Coates, *Convicts and Orphans: Forced and State-Sponsored Colonizers in the Portuguese Empire, 1550-1755* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). In a few cases, some documentation shows that these *degrades* served the intended Portuguese purpose of aiding exploration and were pardoned for their former crimes. For instance, "Carta de Perdão a João Rodrigues, escudeiro de Fernao Martins Mascarenhas, que for a degradado para a ilha de Cabo Verde e seguira, sem licenca, na armada organizada para a tomade de Arzila e Tanger, do degredo e da falta cometida," *Portugaliae Monumenta Africana*, doc. 76, 6 de Agosto de 1472, original from ANTT-Chanc. D. Afonso V, L. 29, fls. 87-87 v. Translation: "Pardon for João Rodrigues, a junior knight to Fernao Martins Mascarenhas, who was declared a degredo on Cape Verde and went on without a license to organize an army to capture Arzila and Tangier, was declared a degredo and had lacked a crime." Escudeiro – was a nobleman serving as a knight in the earlier stages of his career who served on foot, armed with a sword and shield, hence my rough translation as junior-knight.

married African spouses and some rose to significant landowning and leadership roles and appeared quite integrated into the systems of African culture, reportedly wearing African dress, protective amulets, undergoing circumcision and participating in African rituals, to the displeasure of Portuguese officials.[55]

Although here, as with the cases of captured African guides, little information is available on the specific cases, Brooks' study and the harsh Portuguese laws against such settlers both suggest that many West African communities appeared to welcome these settlers and derive some benefits from their presence. As the captured (and later hired) Africans helped to facilitate Portuguese trade, the presence of a number of Portuguese settlers, integrated into African communities, helped to widen the local communities' trading connections. Brooks' research further proposes that the descendants of the African-Portuguese marriages (who he terms Eurafricans) played a continued prominent role in the trade. The degree of assimilation to African culture varied depending on the number of Portuguese settlers and their degree of contact with Portugal. Overall, the case of the European settlers' integration into coastal African communities demonstrates the ability of many African kingdoms to respond to an unanticipated type of contact to their benefit.

Especially along the Senegambian coast, Sierra Leone, and on the islands of Cape Verde, there arose another definition of Eurafricans. The historian Horta argued that the frequent cultural contacts between the Portuguese who settled on the islands and the Africans they encountered (both forced immigrants and traders) led to the development of Luso-African culture. This was a culture that was shared even by many Portuguese who

[55]Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers*, 191.

could not claim any African parentage.[56] Many of these settlers used their cultural connections to interact with Africans through non-Portuguese trade networks. This trend was exemplified by Bartolomeu André, considered in the early sixteen hundreds to be the leading trader in Sierra Leone and Cape Verde. He is frequently cited as an intermediary between the Portuguese and African trade networks in contemporary accounts.[57] Here, the European and African-influenced culture seems to have had economic benefits for both the Portuguese settlers and the coastal African trading communities. Later, some of the settlers also developed their own ideas about settling a wider area of African territory. In practice many of the Eurafricans and their descendants had to adhere to African customs and laws regarding trade, tribute and land ownership. Some of the settlers on Cape Verde developed their own ambitions to found an early Jesuit colony on the coast of today's Sierra Leone.[58] Yet this plan was abandoned after a few years when the Portuguese Crown showed no interest.

The phenomenon of Eurafricans and Luso-African settlers represented some of the general characteristics of this early period of African-European relations, namely a greater degree of attempted cooperation with African rulers and an interest, one might even say respect, that emerged for African cultures by many of the Portuguese in contact with coastal Africans. For the Africans closer to European settlers, many of the communities were accustomed to travelers and strangers joining their communities. Few

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[56]Another major area of early Portuguese settlement and cultural adaptation was in southern east Africa. See Malyn Newitt's *Portuguese Settlement on the Zambezi: Exploration, Land Tenure and Colonial Rule in East Africa* (New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1973); Jose da Silva Horta, "Evidence for a Luso-African Identity in 'Portuguese' Accounts on "Guinea of Cape Verde'," *History in Africa* 27 (2000): 99-130.

[57]See the discussion in P. E. H. Hair, "Hamlet in an Afro-Portuguese Setting: New Perspectives on Sierra Leone in 1607," *History in Africa* 5 (1978): 21-42.

[58]P. E. H. Hair, "The abortive Portuguese settlement of Sierra Leone 1570-1625," in *Africa Encountered: European Contacts and Evidence 1450-1700* (Hampshire: Variorum, 1997).

African societies appeared to change their policies with regard to the European newcomers. Although the African kingdoms had not initiated the contact, the general fifteenth and sixteenth-century experience shows that most of these kingdoms responded successfully and were able to use the new type of relationships to their advantage. One of the clearest examples of this trend was the development of an African trade in carved ivory works that were sold to the Portuguese from kingdoms in Sierra Leone and Benin.

Art, Africans, and the Portuguese

In the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon, Portugal, one of the objects on display is a carved ivory saltcellar depicting a Portuguese coat of arms. The design itself is ubiquitous with many other decorations adorning monasteries and public works throughout Lisbon dating from that period. What is unique about this saltcellar is that its carver was not Portuguese but an artisan from Benin.[59] This saltcellar represents one of many surviving pieces from a widespread African-European relationship motivated by the visiting Portuguese. Not surprisingly, the majority of these ivory carvings are from the three West African areas where the Portuguese had the most extended contacts: Sierra Leone, Benin and the Kongo. Their "hybrid Euro-African" style of carving has received much attention from museum curators and art historians and prompted a number of vigorous debates on its exact artistic classification, as a "hybrid," an example of "proto-tourist art" or something else.[60] This study does not seek to resolve the classification debate, but rather to argue that this body of carvings functions as important historical

[59]This saltcellar is one of the highlights of the Museum, "Saleiro-Saltceller, Benim, XVI," Inv. no. 750. A set from the early sixteenth century, part of an incomplete group of 15 items. Nearby in the Museum are two Ivory trumpets (*Trompa de Caça*), Inv. no. 988 and 898, from Sherbro, Sierra Leone, also dating from the sixteenth century.

[60]For a detailed artistic perspective on this debate, see Kathy Curnow, "The Afro-Portuguese Ivories: Classification and Stylistic Analysis of a Hybrid Art Form," vols. 1 and 2, Ph.D Diss., Department of Fine Arts (Indiana University, 1983).

documentation of another facet of African-Portuguese relationships. Analysis of these carvings demonstrates the scope of African-European contacts outside the African courts and serves as a unique measure of the African artists' perspectives on the Portuguese.

The artwork discussed in this section, which I refer to as the African ivory carvings, comprises a large body of surviving works found in museums in Europe, the United States, and parts of Africa today. Although the text references several pieces as examples, it should be understood that the full body of artwork discussed by the art historians mentioned is in fact much larger than the few images discussed here. Much can be analyzed about the artwork, but unlike European paintings less is known about the actual African artists themselves. Art historians and African anthropologists have been able to determine the dates and regions for the majority of the pieces; however the actual identities of the artists remain unknown. In Benin, where the majority of artisans and professions were highly regulated in the royal guild system, it is probable that the artists had a degree of contact with the Oba's court and some of the surviving bronze castings of the Portuguese were probably done as royal commissions. The ivory carvings from Benin acquired by the Portuguese appear to have been private transactions, although to what degree the artists were suggested by members of the Benin court, or brought there to first observe the Portuguese is unclear. The ivory pieces coming from Sierra Leone were either from the Bullom or Temme kingdoms, the prominent two on the coast before the influx of Mane influence from interior West Africa.[61] Here, the kingdoms' craftsmen were less highly regulated and the establishment of over nine main centers for the production and sale of these ivory works suggests a clear economic interest in their

[61]For details, see Walter Rodney, "A Reconsideration of the Mane Invasions of Sierra Leone," *The Journal of African History* 8, no. 2 (1967): 219-246.

production but a lesser if any degree of royal direction from the respective rulers.[62]

A Marker of African-Portuguese Contact

Benin has long been known to the world of African art for its incredibly detailed bronze castings of former rulers and court life, some of which still decorate the historic palace. The ivory carvings and bronze castings of the Portuguese from fifteenth-century Benin are similarly detailed to portray Portuguese costume, religious ornaments and hair styles. Art historian Suzanne Preston Blier elaborated:

> The careful attention to physiognomy and costume and the accuracy of such detail, I would argue, reflect not only the importance placed on relative naturalism in the Benin court and the concomitant skill of royal artists, but also both the sustained period of residence of the Portuguese in the Benin capital during this period and the general availability of the foreigners as models for arts at court.[63]

Although contact with the Portuguese appeared to be more restricted to coastal trading stations after the reign of Oba Esigie and his son, the presence of Portuguese soldiers and missionaries was certainly sufficient for their accurate observation by court artists. A collection of African art assembled by Frank Willett included three castings of Portuguese soldiers in Benin that show a variety of perspectives on the Portuguese presence.[64] The first shows an active pose, the soldier stepping forward, holding his gun level preparing perhaps to fire, a contrast from the customary stationary portrayals of Benin officials facing the viewer. Details of the soldier's gun, helmet, trousers, decorated doublet and its straps are clearly visible. The soldier's face appears to have European features. In short, the artist must have had a sufficient exposure to actual Portuguese

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[62]The existence of the nine main centers of production is mentioned in Tom Phillips, ed, *Africa: The Art of a Continent: 100 Works of Power and Beauty* (Guggenheim Museum, 1996), see discussion of the Afro-Portuguese ivories.

[63]Suzanne Preston Blier, "Imaging Otherness in Ivory: African Portrayals of the Portuguese ca. 1492," *The Art Bulletin* 75, no. 3 (September 1993): 384.

[64]Frank Willett, *African Art: An Introduction* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 178, Figures no. 169 and no. 170.

soldiers to be able to replicate these details sufficiently. The other statue in Willett's collection shows less decisive Portuguese details. The face of this soldier appears at first glance to be Benin, with facial markings or a beard on both sides of its mouth and eyes and a nose similar to statues of the Oba's attendants. The figure wears a cross in addition to a necklace of linked beads, possibly representing the coral necklaces given to honored assistants by the Oba. For clothing, the figure wears a wrapped garment around its waist, tied with a looped belt, a style worn by many coastal Africans. This figure may have been created by an artist with less exposure to Portuguese physiology, suggesting a possible commission of this piece from a non-court artist or a figure made for sale based on second-hand details of the Portuguese.[65] The differences here are significant, for they show a varying degree of contact between the Portuguese and those of Benin, and may indicate contacts outside the Oba's court.

The artwork from the Sierra Leone region shows more clearly the variations in direct contact. The development of an early trade in carved ivory intended for Portuguese purchase was especially apparent on the coast of Sierra Leone with the Temme and Bollom kingdoms, which had some of the longest contact with the Portuguese who colonized the islands of Cape Verde. The Portuguese purchased raw ivory tusks and then commissioned pieces that were brought back to Portugal. "Their forms – oliphants (hunting horns, cutlery, pyxes, and saltcellars – usually followed European models and were decorated with heraldic, Christian, mythological, and other alien motifs from books

[65]A similar less accurate piece is in the Faletti family collection: an ivory carved armlet from the 18th century shows a Portuguese soldier horseback below a leopard, a characteristic symbol of the Oba. Here, although less precise in outline, the soldier is recognizable for the helm, high necked shirt and sword belt of the Portuguese. Mary Nooter Roberts and Allan F. Roberts, *A Sense of Wonder: African Art from the Faletti Family Collection* (Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 1997), 72, object 19: "Armlet: Ikoro esanmwan Edo Peoples."

and sources that the Portuguese supplied."[66] Typical forms included an array of European mythical creatures and a family shield with additional patterns and creatures added by the Sierra Leonean artists. While some of the objects, given their accurate replication of Portuguese decorations, facial details, and family crests, must have been made with direct Portuguese consultation, other works contain errors that suggest some of the artists may not have had direct contact with the Portuguese. Instead these works were likely made to fill a known market, with features such as mouthpieces placed on the sides of hunting horns instead of the front as was the European custom, or family crests carved upside down, suggesting less direct contact with the Portuguese commissioners.[67]

The number of carved ivory pieces is another key indication. According to the Guggenheim's estimate, over one hundred pieces survive from Sierra Leone from the period of the late 1460s through 1530, coming from over nine workshops. This suggests both that contact between the actual artists and Portuguese varied and also that the trade in carved ivories was large enough to necessitate the mass production of non-commissioned pieces. The historian Ryder adds that by the early fifteen hundreds, based on customs records held by the Casa da Guinea, many Portuguese traders obtained ivory souvenirs.[68] "It was evidently a common practice for individuals returning from Guinea to bring with them ivory spoons and salt-cellars, though these articles did not figure in official trade. The customs valuations indicate they were inexpensive items."

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[66]Phillips, 126.

[67]Curator Phillips of the Guggenheim collection mentions errors such as shields being upside down, or lozenge shape of the mouthpieces on the instruments (an African style) versus the European convention of end blown mouthpieces.

[68]A. F. C. Ryder, "A Note on the Afro-Portuguese Ivories," *Journal of African History* v, no. 3 (1964): 364. This was one of the earliest mentions of the Afro-Portuguese ivories aside from William Fagg's undated study *Afro-Portuguese Ivories* (Batchworth Press, London). Since then they have received much attention in various African art collections, with Suzanne Blier's article, "Imaging Otherness in Ivory," one of the most extensive comparisons.

The accuracy of the Portuguese representations is one marker of the degree of actual African-Portuguese contact. Many of the Benin castings and carvings, aside from the exception noted above, accurately show Portuguese costume and physiological details that according to art historians match records of Portuguese clothing so well they can be precisely dated. The often less precise nature of the carvings from Sierra Leone show that contact with the actual Portuguese was more varied, likely due to the Portuguese Crown's prohibitions on non-authorized trips to the coast, and the greater frequency of contact which made ready-made pieces more desirable.

African Perspectives on the Portuguese

The last Benin object in Willett's collection is a bronze box casting of the palace showing a tower and two armed Portuguese on the rooftop.[69] On the top of the tower rests an ibis and below its feet hangs a python. The ibis and the bronze cast rooftop guards demonstrate the power of the Oba and the Portuguese military assistance, an overall picture of the power and connections held by the Benin court. The python, a symbol of the dead, in contrast, shows the potential unworldly connections of the Portuguese.

Together the bronze statues and ivory carvings also provide a key insight into one of the often non-documented questions of the early African-European relationships, namely: How did many of the coastal Africans actually feel about the Portuguese? As touched upon in chapter one's discussion of the Kongolese use of Christianity, in general, many West African kingdoms probably associated the strange appearance of the Portuguese and their arrival from the sea with traditional religious beliefs about the dead.

[69]Willett, 102, no. 85.

MacGaffey, one of the foremost historians on pre-colonial Kongolese thought, explained:

> The Kongo understanding of what sort of people the Europeans were and what their arrival meant was very different from what the Europeans themselves thought. In Kongo thought to this day, the universe is divided into the two worlds of the living and the dead, separated by water. Africans who die travel to the land of the dead, where they change their skins and become white . . . The land of the dead (*nsi a bafwa*) is variously underground, in the forest, in the cemetery, across the river, across the Atlantic, and under the water. It is called Mpemba, which is the same word as *mpemba*, chalk or white kaolin clay. White, besides being the color of the dead, is also the color of innocence, purity, and enlightenment.[70]

It seems clear from their actions that African rulers soon realized the human nature of their new contacts, yet understandably some ambiguities remained regarding the intentions of these new trade partners and political allies.[71] Some of the ambiguities that were probably felt by the average person in these kingdoms are reflected in the artwork from Benin and Sierra Leone through the use of animal and water imagery in the designs.

Benin cosmology, similar to that of the kingdoms of Sierra Leone and the Kongo in broad terms, associated water and movement in artistic objects with the realms of the dead. Thus, even among the accurate costume portrayals in the Benin carvings and bronze castings, art historian Blier frequently found that "other motifs that appear in the Afro-Portuguese ivories from Benin, namely angels and fish, also reinforced the association of the Portuguese with movement, water, and otherworldly realms."[72] The decorative details in the castings and carvings of various fish, crocodiles and snakes are reference to Olokun, the Benin god of the sea. Other carved saltcellars, researched by

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[70]Wyatt MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture: The Conceptual Challenge to the Particular* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 27.

[71]Northrup, in *Africa's Discovery of Europe, 1450-1850,* added that reactions of Africans typically took two forms: "One was that these creatures, so different in appearance from normal (i.e. African) humans, might be dangerous sorcerers or evil spirits whose marvelous possessions came through the use of evil magic . . . The second African conclusion went in the opposite direction: it would be good to befriend these visitors from across the ocean in order to acquire some of their marvelous goods and gain access to the spiritual power or practical knowledge that lay behind them," 12.

[72]Blier, 384.

Blier, were more explicit, showing Portuguese heads alternating with mudfish. Mudfish were considered the main avatar of the sea god Olokun, who had the ability to return to life after a drought and move to land, as the Portuguese did in their ships.[73]

The details of the ivory carvings from Kongo and region of Sierra Leone revealed similar concerns. The many pieces held in the Guggenheim Museum's collection contained frequent motifs of snakes, crocodiles and other water references.[74] While the Kongolese artists typically employed more abstract symbols associated with the dead and the crossroads marking the boundaries between the living and dead, epitomized in their symbol of a cross, the Sierra Leonean kingdoms' artists tended to use symbolic creatures instead.[75] Blier's study included a list of the most frequent Sierra Leonean animal motifs on the carvings. [76] These included the serpent, symbolizing the local water spirit known as Ninkinanka or Niniganne, a creature of beauty and danger believed to reside in springs, rivers and the ocean in abodes filled with riches. Dogs, as creatures of warning, were often placed in confrontation with the serpent. The crocodile was associated with bringers of wealth and people with supernatural powers could transform themselves into crocodiles. Lastly, birds as liminal beings which could cross the boundaries of time and space also appeared.

The ivory carving from the Kongo typically dated from the end of the sixteenth century and later. Given the problems previously discussed existing in Kongo-Portuguese relations at that time, indicated by the body of elite letters complaining about Portuguese

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[73]Ibid., 385.

[74]Phillips, 126.

[75]Other symbols used by Kongo artists included framing, spirals and abstract textile patterning. Elaborate textiles were typically used to bury the dead and also given to celebrate the birth of a new child, Blier, 383. This tradition casts perhaps a different light on the Kongolese presentation of textile gifts to the visiting Portuguese.

[76]Ibid., 393-394.

conduct from the Manikongo, it is noteworthy that the Kongolese artwork also revealed these tensions. From this perspective, the ambiguities in the carvings appear quite telling, underscoring the growing negative perceptions of the Portuguese in the kingdom.

For artists in Benin and the region of Sierra Leone, while they certainly evinced uncertainty regarding the nature and intentions of their clients, the volume of the artwork produced and the fact that trading relations continued in these areas, show that whatever reservations they had, the fears were not enough to prevent trade encounters.

Conclusions

More so than the other chapters that described cases of undeniably African agency and control over Europeans encounters, the examples in this chapter challenge us to determine how Africans (both local rulers and the average person) responded to meetings not of their making. It is especially important, in light of later centuries defined by less equal relationships, to evaluate the cases where the non-African initiated contact resulted in positive relationships, in contrast with the concurrent growing problems from seemingly parallel situations such as the settlers on São Tomé.

Looking at the variety of examples in this chapter, from captured to hired coastal guides, the African integration of Portuguese settlers, and the trade in African ivory artwork, the general success of these relationships depended on the degree of Portuguese cooperation and whether the Portuguese planned to attempt to form long-term ties with the same African kingdom. The Portuguese appeared to learn relatively quickly that violating African customs by coastal raids or settling on the coast without African rulers' permission were not effective strategies. The Portuguese ship captains and the Portuguese Crown also quickly grasped this lesson and sought to regulate trading, probably both out

of an interest in avoiding African retributions as well as a willingness to respect Africans laws and trade customs. Portuguese eventual cooperation was most prevalent when cooperation yielded the most benefits.

Contrasting the two cases of settler colonies, the Cape Verde islands and São Tomé, it is significant to realize that Cape Verde's profitable trade (both the legal and illegal varieties) hinged upon effective interchange with the West African coast. In contrast, the São Tomé traders gradually found themselves in direct confrontation with the trading ambitions of the Manikongo, with both sides seeking direct profits from shipping as well as trading. Additionally, I would argue, that the frequent 'illicit' contact between the settlers of Cape Verde and the coastal Africans led to a greater degree of mutual dependence and a presence of Africans and Europeans from a variety of backgrounds. The population on the islands gradually grew to include Portuguese officials, Portuguese criminals, Luso-Africans, African traders, African refugees, and captured African slaves. This plurality was probably instrumental in creating the initial perception that settlers' interests were best served by working with coastal Africans.

In the seventeenth century and later, the confrontational nature of the São Tomé relationship with the Kongo would become the norm instead of the main exception. However, before this transition the majority of contacts were peaceful and usually mutually beneficial. The most revealing lesson from the plurality of these non-elite exchanges is that the later more confrontational and exploitive relations between parts of Europe and Africa were not inevitable and were, in fact, a significant departure from the majority of the earlier relationships.

CONCLUSIONS

The political relationships and diplomatic exchanges that marked fifteenth and sixteenth-century African-European relations resulted from a mutual perception of advantages in developing and deliberately pursuing such relationships. The shift close to the seventeenth century towards economic over political links was likewise a reaction of both sides. External events in Europe and the Americas influenced Portugal's changing policies. The Portuguese experience under Spanish control from 1580 until 1640, especially Philip II's commitment to the establishment of actual territorial control, probably was a model for future Portuguese efforts. The growing lucrative plantation economy in Brazil, where those of African descent were in a subservient role, also countered the traditions of elite exchanges that had characterized earlier centuries. Changes in world economics made increased slave trading and greater Portuguese control over trading transactions appealing.

Most African rulers in this period also shifted their policies to continue long term trading relations with the Portuguese, but distanced themselves politically. These changes made it difficult for the Portuguese to gain exclusive monopolies and allowed certain African rulers greater control over trading terms and profits. Some kingdoms, exemplified by the Kongo and Ethiopia, chose to break with the Portuguese, with varying degrees of success. Ethiopia flourished in the following centuries due to increased ties with north east Africa and the Middle East. The Kongo kingdom sought new European

allies, building brief but close ties with both the Dutch and the Vatican, an impressive accomplishment given the religious differences between the two. The Kongo also established diplomatic alliances with neighboring kingdoms, some previous rivals. These tactics helped prevent Portuguese military control for close to another century.

In the centuries to come, the ability of many African kingdoms to retain control over their encounters with Europeans or to set trading terms did not immediately change. The pattern of diplomatic exchanges continued between some African kingdoms and parts of Europe, with a number of embassies from the Fante coast and other parts of West African visiting the courts of France, Spain, and later England. Although the tradition of embassies continued, probably the most defining difference was the absence of an attempt from European kingdoms to pursue close alliances with the African kingdoms. Mentions of these later diplomats indicate they were well received at European courts, but considered more of a novelty than genuine political ambassadors. Moreover, the role of trade itself changed from an affirmation of African rulers' status and worldly connections to a significant source of profit. This shift undeniably helped a number of coastal African kingdoms rise to greater prominence, but it did not lend itself well to future respectful diplomatic ties with Europe.

What was unique about the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries of African-European dynamics was that the societies then had the combination of circumstances that made such respectful relations possible. The structures of European and African societies, political ambitions, and relatively equal military powers helped each see key advantages in maintaining political partnerships with the other. This study's discussions of African reactions and ambitions concerning the new Portuguese allies, to the collective

phenomenon of elite diplomatic exchanges, and finally to several facets of other interactions taking place outside the elite courts, helps characterize this era. However, such a study also raises additional questions.

The previous chapters have primarily emphasized political and diplomatic aspects of these alliances. More briefly, the role of religious connections was glimpsed through the popularity of the Vatican as a key Ethiopian destination and the importance of several convents as lodgings and training centers for visiting Africans. The nature of the growing role of missionaries and Popes as potential political allies for the Kongo in the later fifteen hundreds is one area that merits further study. Was the Kongo the new battleground for an attempt by the Vatican to reassert its authority in Europe or were sympathies genuine for the struggles of the manikongo to spread Christianity throughout his realm? Documents from these years also suggest a key informal role played by a number of missionaries to aid Kongolese diplomats attempting to reach Rome through Spanish opposition. Study of this area could illuminate another interesting aspect of diplomatic experiences.

A related dimension to the religious connections was the existence of the African training centers. Aside from St. Stefano Maggiore delgi Abissini in Rome, Santo Elòi in Lisbon, and the briefly mentioned site in Cape Verde, looking for parallel developments of training centers in other European kingdoms would be quite revealing. Were the models of Santo Elòi and St. Stefano Maggiore delgi Abissini well known or did African interpreters for the English, Spanish, Dutch, and French, acquire their skills through other means? As an Africanist, I am also curious as to whether these prolonged African stays in Europe inspired parallel early European studies of Africa. The numerous publications at

the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries suggest an inspired interest in collecting information about the continent.

Finally, a more speculative but likely popular area of study, is this first era of contact's overall impact on Africans and Europeans in subsequent centuries. What happened to the memory of the elite, respectful exchanges in the ensuing centuries known for an escalation of the slave trade and the brutality of chattel slavery? Was the greater degree of cultural mixing and avenues for social mobility present in Portugal and Brazil a long-term effect of early relations? On the African side, one also wonders whether this lengthy period of exposure to European traders motivated future caution on the part of coastal Africans or was the source of the increasingly evident desire to acquire similar commodities or trading empires as the Portuguese.

As these questions have underscored, the era of initial African-European contact was host to a series of complicated and unique relationships that are both vital to understanding later relations and key to refuting oversimplifications of this first period. The final observation should be the varied and complex nature of this era. African ambassadors, traders, captives, and rulers all had different experiences with the Portuguese and the Vatican. The variety of their experiences underscored their societies' abilities to react to the new arrivals, obtain political or trade benefits, and pursue their agendas on their own terms. The general documented ability of these African kingdoms to maintain initial political and economic relations with Europe on an equal footing is an important example for Africa and the world today of diplomacy that worked.

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