

African Art at the Portuguese Court, c. 1450-1521

By Mario Pereira

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## VITA

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## Introduction

This study concentrates on the court practices of circulation and exchange of objects between Portugal and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as between Portugal and other European courts from the 1450s through the 1510s. This approach, favoring the reception and ceremonial use of objects across cultures, permits the incorporation of African luxury objects, especially ivory, into the history of art of Renaissance Europe in a coherent and meaningful manner. The Portuguese court used luxury objects, both natural materials and skillfully crafted artifacts, from sub-Saharan Africa to represent their claims to imperial power in that region to other European courts and to convey notions of possession by collecting and bestowing these items on others. The shifting perceptions and interpretations of these African objects depended on the ceremonies and diplomatic and propagandistic endeavors that accompanied their presentation in Africa and in Europe. Through the associations of the precious material and carved imagery with hunting, military prowess, and exalted notions of rule and courtly love, these ivory objects from Senegambia, Sierra Leone and the Kongo were consistently seen by the Portuguese as participating in the chivalric culture of the courts of Renaissance Europe.

The first chapter focuses on the ritual exchange of elephant tusks and assorted elephant body parts as trophies of the hunt between the rulers of Senegambia and Portuguese representatives in sub-Saharan Africa during the 1450s. Sailing slowly down the coast of Atlantic Africa, the Portuguese eventually encountered formidable Senegambian kingdoms whose military prowess forced the Portuguese to abandon their former practice of launching *razzias*, small piratical raids, on the coast for slaves and

plunder. Henceforth, the Portuguese court pursued a diplomatic policy of peaceful commerce in sub-Saharan Africa that lasted for over half a century. However, they were obliged to follow sub-Saharan African customs and were compelled to deal with Senegambians on their own terms, for these Senegambian kingdoms operated from a position of strength. The exchange of appropriate gifts on behalf of the Portuguese was first required to initiate relations. In order to forge enduring bonds of friendship and trust, Senegambian rulers included Portuguese representatives on hunting expeditions for the ultimate big-game animal, the elephant. In this way, the ritual practices in Europe and in Senegambia of diplomatic gift-giving and of big-game hunting as necessary means of establishing binding relationships seem to have corresponded in a mutually comprehensible and satisfactory manner. The Portuguese, fueled by the ideals of chivalry, and the remarkably powerful Senegambians they encountered seem to have shared values common to horse-owning warrior aristocracies, a similarity that facilitated such ritual communication.

The hunt became a literal and ritual substitute for war.<sup>1</sup> By participating on these elephant hunts, Portuguese representatives left the security of their ships and accepted the authority of the local rulers who controlled the hunt and the resources it involved. By engaging in the ritual aspects of the hunt, such as the kill and consumption of the quarry, and by receiving as ceremonial gifts the most highly prized trophies of the hunt, such as elephant tusks and other body parts like the trunk and foot, these Europeans were publicly honored by local Senegambian rulers, who thereby integrated them into their

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<sup>1</sup> Cummins, John, *The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting*, London: Phoenix Press, 1988, pp. 1-11; Crane, Susan, "Ritual Aspects of the Hunt à Force," in *Engaging with nature: essays on the natural world in medieval and early modern Europe*, edited by Barbara Hanawalt and Lisa J. Kiser, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008, pp. 63-84.

societies, permitting diplomatic and commercial relations to unfold. By hosting extraordinary elephant hunts, Senegambian rulers showcased their military prowess and political power as well as the wealth and abundance of their lands. From the perspective of the Portuguese court, their impressive organization of human and material resources, their intimate knowledge of prey and of terrain, and their inimitable expertise and skill in handling the weaponry required for undertaking such controlled, systematic big-game hunts confirmed the Senegambian's noble warrior qualities. Along with these attributes, the sophistication of their ceremonial courtly and military culture further made them worthy of respect in the eyes of the Portuguese. Since antiquity, hunting in Europe was seen as a royal sport that was inherently ennobling. It provided training for war, and through fellowship and conviviality it formed social bonds at court. These noble, martial and social values were ascribed by the Portuguese to elephant hunts in Senegambia. The trophies of the hunt, which were given to Europeans by Senegambians, were brought back to the Portuguese court where they were presented to the Infante D. Henrique. The Portuguese prince collected these trophies as exemplifying the relationships he had forged in Senegambia and the success of his enterprise there. They likewise embodied the profits to be made from his policy of peaceful commerce, for elephant tusks were an important source of wealth for the Portuguese. In this way, the Infante D. Henrique further promoted his international celebrity as the mastermind behind overseas expansion in Africa.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Russell, Peter E., *Prince Henry "the Navigator": A Life*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000; Elbl, Ivana, "The state of research: Henry 'the Navigator'," *Journal of Medieval History*, v. 27, 2001, pp. 79–99; Elbl, Ivana, "Man of His Time (and Peers): A New Look at Henry the Navigator," *Luso-Brazilian Review*, n. 28, n. 2, 1991, pp. 73-89.



There is at least one recorded instance of the Infante D. Henrique exchanging an unusually large elephant tusk he had received as a gift from a Senegambian ruler to another European court. In the late 1450s, the Infante D. Henrique sent an enormous elephant tusk to his sister, Isabella of Portugal, the Duchess of Burgundy and wife of Philip the Good. As a trophy of the hunt in Africa, the tusk was a fascinating object worthy of a princely collection. Yet its circulation and exchange from Senegambia to the court of Portugal and then from there to the court of Burgundy shows that the Portuguese court actively and purposefully used elephant tusks to fashion a distinctive court identity that was associated with sub-Saharan Africa and, specifically, with war, hunting, nobility and ivory.

The second chapter moves ahead chronologically a few decades to the 1480s, and we progress down Atlantic Africa several thousand miles from Senegambia to the Central African Kingdom of the Kongo. This chapter focuses on the presentation of Kongolese royal art to the Portuguese King João II by Kasuta, a member of the Kongolese royal family and *Mani Vunda* or chief spiritual authority in the Kongo, in 1489. The Portuguese king represented these royal gifts of elephant tusks, exquisitely carved ivory horns, known as *mpungi*, and luxury raffia pile cloth, known as *lubongo*, to other European rulers as the embodiment of his imperial claims to suzerainty in sub-Saharan Africa. In the early 1480s, the Portuguese had made contact with the Kingdom of the Kongo and abducted Kasuta, along with several other Kongolese nobles (*Miwissikongo*), as a hostage. Consequently, he spent a couple of years at the Portuguese court, where he was educated in the Portuguese language and initiated into the Christian religion, adeptly learned the manners, etiquette and protocol of the court, and became a favorite of the

Portuguese king. Kasuta eventually returned to the Kongo with another Portuguese embassy and was instrumental in facilitating the close diplomatic relationship between João II and Nzinga a Nkuwu, the *Mani Kongo* (King of Kongo).

A variety of factors, such as the great distance between Portugal and the Kongo, the white color of the Portuguese, the fact that they traveled on the water, spoke strange languages, possessed lethal military technologies, brought great riches and promised additional material wealth, and, through Christianity, pledged spiritual well-being and harmony, induced the Kongolese to perceive the Portuguese as belonging to the land of the dead. As a result, the Portuguese King João II, according to traditional Kongolese cosmology, was believed to be *Nzambi Mpungu*, the highest otherworldly authority or power, the otherworldly complement to the *Mani Kongo*. The experiences and perceptions of Kasuta were crucial to the shaping of this conviction. He held the important position of *Mani Vunda*, making him chief priest in the Kongo, the foremost authority on religious matters, somewhat analogous to supreme pontiff. Since it was his responsibility to mediate between the worlds of the living and of the dead, Kasuta was sent back to the Portuguese court by the *Mani Kongo* as official ambassador to present the Portuguese king with gifts of royal art and to effect conversion to Christianity. The elephant tusks, carved ivory horns and luxury raffia cloth he gave to João II on behalf of the *Mani Kongo* were exclusive royal objects and prominent elements of the royal regalia. As *Mani Vunda*, Kasuta ritually invested the *Mani Kongo* with the royal regalia and, as a consequence, legitimized his rule within the spiritual realm (*mbumba*). Therefore, with these objects of Kongolese royal art, I argue that Kasuta was investing the Portuguese king as *Nzambi Mpungu*, Lord of the Otherworld, in a parallel ceremony.

However, the Portuguese court, ignoring the overtly spiritual connotations of this title, mistranslated it as *Senhor do Mundo*, Lord of the World. They believed that the title of supremacy by which the Kongolese addressed the Portuguese king and the objects of royal art that Kasuta presented to him demonstrated that the Kongolese had accepted and acclaimed João II as their suzerain and overlord. Indeed, the title of *Nzambi Mpungu* seemed to fulfill and even increase the imperial title of *Senhor de Guiné*, Lord of Guinea, which João II had grandiosely adopted in 1485 as a result of the contact that had been made with the Kongo. Indeed, the first contact the Portuguese had made with the Kongo and the initial relationship they had forged with Kasuta, and then the title by which the Kongolese return embassy addressed the Portuguese king and the objects of Kongolese royal art they presented to him were central to the development of João II's imperial ideology and decisive to the ways it was articulated to other European courts. The Portuguese king commissioned special chronicles to detail and celebrate his relationship with the Kongo. However, the objects of Kongolese royal art, especially the carved ivory horns, embodied for João II his imperial claims of suzerainty in sub-Saharan Africa and represented his desired image of kingship in Europe.

The personal presence of Kasuta and his knowledge of Portuguese court culture ensured that these courtly gifts of Kongolese royal art were discussed in courtly conversations with the king. It is likely that aspects of the style and design of the carved ivory horns were explained by Kasuta to the Portuguese court during his subsequent two-year residence there. Moreover, Kasuta was sure to have elaborated on the functions, connotations and meanings of the carved ivory horns and on their suitability as gifts to the Portuguese king. In fact, the carved ivory horns, in addition to their royal

associations, were linked with notions of violence and military valor in the Kongo. These ivory objects of royal art from the Kongo, resonant with political power, military valor, and imperial authority, were integral to the image of the Portuguese court of João II and embodied his imperial ideology in sub-Saharan Africa.

The third chapter investigates the series of court ceremonies surrounding the reception of Bemoim, a deposed prince of the Senegambian empire of Great Jolof, at the Portuguese court in the fall of 1488. In fact, Bemoim's reception and residence at court overlapped with that of Kasuta and they were both present at court when Bartolomeu Dias announced his heroic rounding of the Cape of Good Hope. The simultaneous presence at court of Bemoim, Kasuta and a triumphant Dias spectacularly confirmed João II's success in Africa and seemed to embody the realization of his plans in Africa. The Portuguese had been familiar with Senegambian rulers since the 1450s, as we saw in Chapter 1, and had moved comfortably in that world for nearly three decades when Bemoim emerged as an important figure there. He purchased horses from Portuguese traders for a number of years in an attempt to bolster both the prestige of his court and the strength of his military power. Horse ownership and the skills of horsemanship were highly prized by the warrior aristocracy of Senegambia, much as they were in Europe. In exchange for these coveted horses, Bemoim seems to have supplied Portuguese merchants primarily with slaves. In addition, Bemoim and João II seem to have exchanged embassies as well as gifts over the years and a member of the Portuguese king's household followed Bemoim's court for a couple of years. The two princes—on in Europe and the other in Africa—seem to have been on good and friendly terms before

Bemoim was defeated in a dynastic war of succession and sought refuge at the Portuguese court.

Once in Portugal, Bemoim was lavishly hosted and lionized by the king. It was reported that he appealed to João II for military support in his capacity as *Senhor de Guiné* and role of suzerain in sub-Saharan Africa that the title proclaimed. Over the course of several weeks, the Portuguese king staged a series of elaborate court ceremonies for Bemoim, which recognized his princely status in Senegambia and tried to translate it into the forms and language of European chivalry. Bemoim was granted an official reception and audience with the king; he was later dubbed to knighthood by the king himself; and subsequently received a coat of arms, declaring his princely status and claim to the crown of Great Jolof. Like all Portuguese nobles, Bemoim had to swear an oath of homage and loyalty to the king. Numerous feasts, banquets, jousts and tournaments were held in his honor and he dined in state with the king on several occasions. The climax of these courtly rituals was his conversion to Christianity with the king serving as his godfather. Bemoim's royal status in Senegambia was acknowledged by the Portuguese court at the same time as he was created a nobleman according to European conventions. The point of these ceremonies and rituals was to secure permanent and reciprocal bonds of friendship and obligation between Bemoim and João II and to articulate their relationship as one of lord and vassal. Through these sacred and secular rituals João II ensured that he was suzerain to Bemoim as prince in Senegambia and that he was sovereign to him as a nobleman and Christian knight in Portugal. Only after the completion of these court ceremonies did João II send Bemoim back to Senegambia with overwhelming military support.

Unfortunately, Bemoim was murdered by Pero Vaz da Cunha, the Portuguese captain of the armada sent to restore him to his former territories and princely title. Even worse, João II failed to punish the murder even though Bemoim had committed no crime and the perpetrator had unlawfully usurped the king's authority and dashed his diplomatic and strategic plans and commercial investments in Senegambia. For example, the king had intended to construct a fortress at the mouth of the Senegal River. Although the Portuguese king was infuriated, he was forced to sacrifice Bemoim to his larger political objectives involving the Tudor court of Henry VII and the court faction that resisted his designs in sub-Saharan Africa. Despite the ignominious murder, João II continued to celebrate his relationship with Bemoim and the ceremonies and rituals which represented and embodied his imperial claims in Africa.

Chapter 4 examines the role of Luso-African ivories from Sierra Leone at the Portuguese court of Manuel I (r. 1495-1521). During the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, over the course of about three decades, prominent members of the Portuguese court, including the King Manuel I, directly commissioned refined objects of art from Temne and Bullom artists living in the area of Sierra Leone. The conspicuous patronage, collecting, circulation and exchange of West African art by the Portuguese court formed a crucial part of the king's larger artistic program intended to enhance his prestige, reputation, and honor in Europe and to promote his messianic imperial ideology to other European courts. Known as Luso-African ivories, these magnificent objects of luxury art, made by African artists in Africa, participated in decisive ways to the construction of the personal mythology of Manuel I and to the fashioning of an iconology of royal power.

The prominent role of Luso-African ivories in the formation of the court's identity necessarily championed the beauty and artistic skill of West African art and artists.

Because of the most unlikely circumstances surrounding Manuel I's accession to the throne, he held a profound Messianic belief in his being chosen by God to inaugurate the "Fifth Empire."<sup>3</sup> According to this crusading ideal, Manuel I was to continue the process of overseas expansion begun by the Infante D. Henrique and secure a universal empire. In this way, the king would spread the Christian faith throughout the world and initiate an unprecedented era of peace and prosperity. Sub-Saharan Africa played an important role in this imperial vision.

The Portuguese court had been familiar for some time with the artistic traditions of Sierra Leone. For instance, wood figure sculptures from Sierra Leone, described as idols, had been presented by a Portuguese nobleman to Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, in 1470. The appreciation of these wood and ivory carving traditions inspired the Portuguese court to patronize the Temne and Bullom artists practicing in Sierra Leone. A significant part of this chapter is dedicated to revealing the extent of knowledge at the Portuguese court about the kinds of sculptures made in Sierra Leone and the types of ideas and ritual practices surrounding them. This familiarity and appreciation accounts

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<sup>3</sup> Thomaz, Luís Filipe F. R., "L'idée impériale manuélina," in *La Découverte, le Portugal et l'Europe: Actes du Colloque*, edited by Jean Aubin, Paris: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, Centre Culturel Portugais, 1990, pp. 35–103; Thomaz, Luís Felipe F.R. and Jorge Santos Alves, "Da cruzada ao Quinto Império," in *A Memória da nação: Colóquio do Gabinete de Estudos de Simbologia*, edited by Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto, Lisbon: Livraria Sá da Costa Editora, 1991, pp. 81–165; Thomaz, Luís Filipe F. R., "A 'Política Oriental' de D. Manuel I e suas contracorrentes," in *De Ceuta a Timor*, Lisbon: Difel, 1994, pp. 189-206; Thomaz, Luís Filipe F.R., "Factions, interests and messianism: The politics of Portuguese expansion in the east, 1500-1521," *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, v. 28, 1991, pp. 97-109; Subrahmanyam, Sanjay and Luís Felipe F. R. Thomaz, "Evolution of Empire: the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean during the sixteenth century," in *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires*, edited by James D. Tracy, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 298-331; Humble, Susannah, "Prestige, ideology and social politics: The place of the Portuguese overseas expansion in the policies of D. Manuel (1495 – 1521)," *Itinerario*, v. 24, 2000, pp. 21–43.

for the sophisticated role the Luso-African ivories played in forming the image of kingship in Portugal.

Not only did the Luso-African ivories proclaim Manuel I's inheritance of the legacy of the Infante D. Henrique in sub-Saharan Africa, but they also reinforced the importance of Africa in fashioning the distinctive identity of the Portuguese court, begun by the Infante in the 1450s, as we saw in Chapter 1. Temne and Bullom artists used the luxury material of ivory, obtained locally in Sierra Leone, and worked in a local style, developed outside of European influence, to create objects that featured European royal devices and personal emblems and that thereby contributed to the imperial ideology of a European monarch in a manner which paralleled the so-called Manueline style.

Luso-African ivories were carved in the form of oliphants, which harkened back to a medieval Mediterranean tradition related to Christian knighthood and the crusades, epitomized by the legend of Roland. These oliphants participated in complex ways to the network of ideas about the Iberian Reconquest promoted by Manuel I. As military and hunting horns, they embodied many of the qualities, virtues and values of European chivalry and of the warrior aristocracies of sub-Saharan Africa that were encountered in Chapter 1. Yet some hunting horns likewise feature hunting imagery which closely associates them with broader courtly images and interpretations of the hunt as an allegory of courtly love. In addition, the royal patronage of ivory carvers from Sierra Leone and the circulation of precious ivory objects as courtly gifts were intended to evoke the example of the caliphs of Umayyad Spain as well as the crusader king and first emperor of Spain, Fernando el Magno. In this way, the ivories as portable luxury objects were



meant to signify the emergence of a unique imperial culture at the Portuguese court that continued, expanded and transformed earlier medieval traditions.

### Sources

I base my analysis and interpretation on archival documents and on close readings of primary sources, such as court chronicles, which depict in minute detail the use of objects of art in court ceremony and as diplomatic gifts, and I focus on the material, style and iconography of the surviving objects of African art. My aim is to uncover how sub-Saharan African objects in Europe articulated and contributed to the creation of a distinctive Portuguese court culture and the representation of empire based on the exchange of objects and the ideas they were thought to carry.

Because the principal primary sources for this project focus on the manners and protocol defining court culture, they contain valuable information on the contexts and ceremonies in which high-ranking Africans personally presented these objects to the Portuguese in sub-Saharan Africa. They are even more effusive about the reception at the Portuguese court of illustrious ambassadors from sub-Saharan Africa, who formally delivered objects of African royal art as courtly gifts directly to the Portuguese king. In addition, some chronicles and reports from sub-Saharan Africa describe possible functions, ritual and symbolic uses, and meanings of these objects of African art in their original context.

An important component of this project involves analyzing, in these documents, European perceptions and knowledge of sub-Saharan African art during the Renaissance. Although the Portuguese authors who wrote on African art inevitably misinterpreted

certain aspects of the original meanings of these objects, they do provide reliable and unique information on other significant elements, including their ritual use and especially the role these prestigious objects played in defining notions of African kingship and authority and in conveying ideas of military prowess.

As the eminent historian Adam Jones has emphasized, these early European sources on Africa have been undervalued by scholars.<sup>4</sup> My study of sources shows that the Portuguese court possessed knowledge about particular aspects of sub-Saharan African art. This information was acquired directly in conversation with the distinguished Africans who presented these objects of art to them initially in Africa and eventually at the Portuguese court. The Portuguese court recognized and exploited specific aspects of the original associations and meanings of these objects in their African context. They then reframed and circulated these sub-Saharan African objects in a European context with similar associations and meanings, but with the critical difference that these royal and martial connotations were now seen as pertaining to the Portuguese.

Through the exchange of courtly gifts in the fifteenth century, sub-Saharan Africans and the Portuguese sought to establish special and enduring connections with each other. These preliminary bonds were often fashioned through mutual respect for the shared values of chivalric warrior nobilities, which, as Ivana Elbl has show, could trump issues of race and religion in certain situations.<sup>5</sup> The courtly gifts of elephant tusks, ivory horns used in hunting and war, and African royal art were intended to recognize and

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<sup>4</sup> Jones, Adam, "Drink Deep, or Taste Not: Thoughts on the Use of Early European Records in the Study of African Material Culture," *History in Africa*, v. 21, 1994, pp. 349-370.

<sup>5</sup> Elbl, Ivana, "Group Identities in the Early Portuguese Overseas Expansion in Africa: Concepts and Expressions," *Portuguese Studies Review*, v. 15, nos. 1-2, 2007, pp. 37-61; Elbl, Ivana, "Cross-Cultural Trade and Diplomacy: Portuguese Relations with West Africa, 1441-1521," *Journal of World History*, v. 3, n. 2, 1992, pp. 165-204.

celebrate these shared royal and martial qualities and principles. The Portuguese court collected and circulated these objects of African art to communicate and reinforce similar notions of their own rule, kingship, military prowess and dominance to other European courts. They also employed these courtly gifts in Europe as evidence of their diplomatic and privileged relationships with sub-Saharan African states and as confirmation of their imperial stature, including their exclusive control over maritime access to sub-Saharan Africa, known as *mare clausum*.<sup>6</sup>

This project is based on the idea that a certain degree of cultural translation or compatibility existed between the Portuguese and the various African groups they encountered in Senegambia, Sierra Leone and the Kongo during the second half of the fifteenth century. As Sanjay Subrahmanyam has suggested, cultural interactions in the early modern period usually meant that the groups involved inevitably affected each other in some way, though these encounters were never symmetrical and were often muddled.<sup>7</sup> A recent body of scholarship, pioneered by Subrahmanyam and pursued by others like Serge Gruzinski and Stuart B. Schwartz, has defined and defended the concept of “connected histories.”<sup>8</sup> Opposing the notion of cultural incommensurability in which

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<sup>6</sup> Through a series of papal bulls and an intense diplomatic campaign, Portugal had been granted sovereignty over Atlantic Africa to the exclusion of other European powers. The Portuguese crown’s right of dominion included control over navigation to Atlantic Africa as well as a monopoly on commerce there. See, Ferreira, Ana Maria Pereira, *O Essencial sobre Portugal e a Origem da Liberdade dos Mares*, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1988; Fonseca, Luís Adão da, *Portugal Entre Dos Mares*, Madrid: Editorial MAPFRE, 1993; Garcia, José Manuel, *Portugal and the Division of the World: From Prince Henry to King John II*, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Subrahmanyam, Sanjay, “Beyond Incommensurability: Understanding Inter-Imperial Dynamics,” *Theory and Research in Comparative Social Analysis* (Department of Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles), Paper 32, 2005, pp. 1-30.

<sup>8</sup> Subrahmanyam, Sanjay, “Holding the World in Balance: The Connected Histories of the Iberian Overseas Empires, 1500–1640,” *American Historical Review*, v. 112, n. 5, 2007, pp. 1359-1385; Subrahmanyam, Sanjay, “Hearing Voices: Vignettes of Early Modernity in South Asia, 1400- 1750,” *Daedalus*, v. 127, no. 3, 1998, pp. 75-104; Subrahmanyam, Sanjay, “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 1997, pp. 735-762; Subrahmanyam, Sanjay, “A Tale of Three Empires: Mughals, Ottomans, and Habsburgs in a Comparative Context,” *Common*

cultures are seen as discrete entities, impermeable and inaccessible to others and closed and coherent in themselves, these scholars have investigated intercultural encounters in terms of messier notions like approximation and improvisation and have looked at the ways in which cultural adaption and response occurred. For example, the anthropologist Wyatt MacGaffey has described the interactions between Portugal and the Kongo in the fifteenth century as a “dialogue of the deaf.”<sup>9</sup> MacGaffey shows that a double misunderstanding between the Portuguese and Kongoleses nevertheless enabled successful interactions, which were satisfactory on both sides. Without diminishing differences or domination, I explore how participation in ceremonies, the ritual exchange of diplomats and gifts, and the circulation of precious objects facilitated inter-cultural communication and miscommunication between the Portuguese and sub-Saharan Africans.

### Court Art and Court Ceremony

The overriding importance of ceremony and ritual at court and the imperative to study the luxury arts as an active and integral participant in these court ceremonies and rituals and as a primary means of displaying and representing princely power and ideology have been recognized by historians of European culture. In fact, the notion that the patronage, collecting, circulation and exchange of the luxury arts was a conspicuous, ideal mode of shaping and promoting the identity of courts and of establishing their reputations and of enhancing the prestige of the prince had been theorized by renowned

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*Knowledge*, v. 12, n. 1, 2006, pp. 66-92; Gruzinski, Serge, *Les quatre parties du monde: histoire d'une mondialisation*, Paris: Martinière, 2004; Gruzinski, Serge, “Les Mondes Mêlés de la Monarchie Catholique et Autres ‘Connected Histories’,” *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, v. 56, n. 1, 2001, pp. 85-117; Schwartz, Stuart B., ed., *Implicit Understandings. Observing, Reporting and Reflecting on the Encounter Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

<sup>9</sup> Wyatt MacGaffey, “Dialogues of the deaf: Europeans on the Atlantic coast of Africa,” in *Implicit Understandings*, edited by Stuart B. Schwartz, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 249-267.

fifteenth-century courtiers, such as Giovanni Pontano at the Aragonese court of Alfonso the Magnanimous at Naples.<sup>10</sup> The role of ceremony and ritual in the lavish reception of diplomats and the ensuing exchange of courtly gifts has been seen as central to creating relationships and to affirming oaths and cementing bonds of alliance and friendship. By situating and interpreting objects of luxury art within this larger configuration of court culture, which encompasses the communication of dynastic ideologies and the representation of princely power, the potential, multiple meanings of these objects deepens and expands. Analysis of style, material, technique and imagery complements investigation into the use and function of these objects as gifts with precise meanings and messages at specific court ceremonies.

This study investigates the various ways these objects and their exchange between Portugal and sub-Saharan Africa were represented in contemporary sources and, when this was not possible, according to the relevant political and strategic endeavors and other ideological principles then being aggressively and conspicuously advanced by the court. As such, this project deals with representation and imagination, which often possessed greater force and potency for contemporaries than an elusive and indefinable reality. Although this is a study of the culture of the Portuguese court, this distinctive cosmopolitan court culture and its unique imperial ideology and eclectic artistic tastes are seen to be indivisible from the collecting and circulating of objects of African art. In comparison to the study of the collecting of objects from the New World in sixteenth-century Europe and of the cultural interactions and artistic exchanges between Europe

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<sup>10</sup> Pontano, Giovanni, *I Trattati delle Virtù Sociali*, edited by Francesco Tateo, Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1965, pp. 267-278. See also, Cole, Alison, *Virtue and Magnificence: art of the Italian Renaissance courts*, New York, H.N. Abrams, 1995, pp. 17-65; Welch, Evelyn, "Public Magnificence and Private Display: Giovanni Pontano's *De splendore* (1498) and the Domestic Arts," *Journal of Design History*, v. 15, n. 4, 2002, pp. 211-221.

and the Islamic worlds in the Medieval and Renaissance periods, the study of sub-Saharan African art in Renaissance Europe is relatively unexplored, with the notable exceptions of the work of Ezio Bassani, Kathy Curnow and Suzanne Preston Blier. Consequently, this study adopts the theoretical conception of court culture and the approach to court art of historians like Malcolm Vale, Sydney Anglo and Steven Gunn, while pursuing issues of interaction and exchange at international courts along the lines developed by historians of Islamic art like Oleg Grabar and Eva R. Hoffman and historians of Byzantine art like Anthony Cutler and Robin Cormack.

Sub-Saharan African art seems to have been associated later in the sixteenth century with the categories of marvel, wonder, paganism, *naturalia* and *exotica*. In aristocratic cabinets of curiosity the African origins of these objects was even eventually forgotten. However, as this project demonstrates, precious objects of African art from the Kongo and from Sierra Leone were important, defining features of Portuguese court culture, and their collecting was motivated by a complex network of ideas that expressed the court's imperial aspirations and ideology. For the Portuguese court, these luxury ivory objects of African art were perceived as signifying the noble values of chivalry, embodying the valor and prowess of Africans in hunting and in war, and celebrating the artistic skill, intellectual ability and imaginative faculty of African artists.

The presence of sub-Saharan Africans in Europe has typically been studied in terms of issues of race and slavery, and objects of sub-Saharan African art in Europe, such as Luso-African ivories, have been routinely interpreted as examples of “intercultural artistic métissage” and championed for their hybrid qualities. These are important and rewarding avenues of research and interpretation. However, I have chosen

to consider my subject from the perspective of the Portuguese court. In many ways, this is by definition a highly restricted and exceedingly privileged position, accessible only to a limited, elite group of Europeans and even fewer Africans. Nevertheless, this approach provides insight into an entirely different world in which sub-Saharan Africans and objects of sub-Saharan African art participated fully and to which they made significant contributions.<sup>11</sup>

In order to carry out this research and pursue this line of interpretation, it was necessary to situate my subject within the larger configuration of the ceremonial and artistic culture of the Portuguese court and to explore the ways in which these related to broader issues of ideology and the fashioning of an image of kingship. There have been a number of studies on ceremony and ritual at court and on the role of the luxury arts in the representation of princely power. The exchange of diplomats and the role of princely gift-giving have also been widely studied as essential to the formation of courtly identities and reputations. Issues of cultural interaction and intercultural exchange, especially regarding the circulation of objects of luxury art between cultures, have likewise been at the forefront of research on European, Islamic and Byzantine courts. Consequently, I examine the ceremonies involving Africans and Europeans and the ritual exchange of African objects in Africa and in Europe according to these established scholarly models.

The approach to the Portuguese court adopted in this study is indebted to the recent writings on courts by Malcolm Vale, Sydney Anglo, Steven Gunn, and Rita Costa

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<sup>11</sup> For recent work on Africans in Renaissance Europe, see Northrup, David, *Africa's Discovery of Europe 1450-1850*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002; Lowe, Kate, "'Representing' Africa: Ambassadors and Princes from Christian Africa to Renaissance Italy and Portugal, 1402-1608," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, v. 17, 2007, pp. 101-28; Earle, T. F. and K.J.P. Lowe, eds., *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Gomes.<sup>12</sup> These historians have emphasized the performative quality of court life and the role of ceremony and ritual in displaying and constituting power.<sup>13</sup> In the latest studies of the court, these ritualized and ceremonial forms are seen as creating, representing and sustaining princely ideology.<sup>14</sup> The significance of ceremony has been stressed in reaction to its former denigration as frivolous theater, pageantry, pomp and show.<sup>15</sup> An important aspect of these broad discussions of court culture involves the prominent position of the arts and the significance of luxury and display, including conspicuous consumption, lavish gift giving, and generous patronage of the arts.<sup>16</sup> Vale especially has

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<sup>12</sup> For Malcolm Vale, see Vale, Malcolm, *The princely court: medieval courts and culture in North-West Europe, 1270-1380*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001; Vale, Malcolm, "Ritual, Ceremony and the 'Civilizing Process': The Role of the Court, c. 1270-1400," in Gunn, Steven and Antheun Janse, eds., *The court as a stage: England and the low countries in the later Middle Ages*, The Boydell Press, Rochester, NY, 2006, pp. 13-27; Vale, Malcolm, "Courts, Art and Power," in *The Renaissance World*, edited by John Jeffries Martin, New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 287-306; Vale, Malcolm, "The Princely Court in Northern Europe, 1270-1380," *History Today*, v. 52, 2002, pp. 11-17; Vale, Malcolm, "The Civilization of Courts and Cities in the North, 1200-1500," in *The Oxford history of medieval Europe*, edited by George Holmes, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 276-323.

For Sydney Anglo, see Anglo, Sydney, *Images of Tudor Kingship*, London: Seaby, 1992; Anglo, Sydney, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997; Anglo, Sydney, "Humanism and the Court Arts," in Anthony Goodman and Angus MacKay, eds., *The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe*, New York: Longman, 1990, pp. 66-98.

For the work of Steven Gunn, see Gunn, Steven and Antheun Janse, "Introduction: New Histories of the Court," in *The court as a stage*, Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 2006, pp. 1-12; Gunn, Steven, "The Court of Henry VII," in *The Court as a Stage*, 2006, pp. 132-44; Gunn, Steven, "Henry VII in Context: Problems and Possibilities," *History*, v. 92, n. 307, 2007, pp. 301-317; Gunn, Steven, "The Courtiers of Henry VII," *English Historical Review*, v. 108, n. 426, 1993, pp. 23-49; Gunn, Steven, "The Structures of Politics in Early Tudor England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, v. 5, 1995, pp. 59-90; Gunn, Steven, "Chivalry and the politics of the early Tudor court," in *Chivalry in the Renaissance*, edited by Sydney Anglo, Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1990, pp. 107-128.

For Rita Costa Gomes, see Costa Gomes, Rita, *The Making of a Court Society: Kings and Nobles in Late Medieval Portugal*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003; Costa Gomes, Rita, "Usages de cour et cérémonial dans la péninsule ibérique au Moyen Âge" in *Les traités de savoir-vivre en Espagne et au Portugal du Moyen Âge à nos jours*, Clermont-Ferrand, France: Association des Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences humaines de Clermont-Ferrand, 1995, pp. 3-17; Costa Gomes, Rita, "Cerimónias da realeza nos fins da Idade Média: a propósito de um livro recente," *Penélope*, v. 14, 1994, pp. 129-136.

<sup>13</sup> Gunn and Janse, 2006, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Gunn and Janse, 2006, pp. 2, 6; Vale, 2001, pp. 165-169, 200-246.

<sup>15</sup> Vale, 2001, pp. 165-168.

<sup>16</sup> Keen, Maurice, "Review: Malcolm Vale, *The princely court: medieval courts and culture in North-West Europe, 1270-1380*," *The English Historical Review*, v. 117, n. 473, 2002, pp. 903-905.



advocated integrating the study of art into the general context of the court.<sup>17</sup> This entails giving equal weight to the use and function of art at court as to issues of style, materials, technique and iconography. For Vale, examining art in a court setting requires that it be understood primarily within the complex array of ceremony, ritual and display which it enabled, supported and embodied.<sup>18</sup> In this court context, art has been seen as a focal point for the nature and representation of power, and as shaping styles of life and forms of social behavior and values, particularly those related to the ideals of chivalry, such as *noblesse* and *courtoisie*. Court art not only communicated messages and ideas, but also embodied principles and beliefs and formed political and dynastic ideologies.<sup>19</sup>

Princely theories of magnificence, ultimately based on Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, have usually been invoked to explain the extravagance, luxury, lavish display and conspicuous consumption that characterized the court, especially regarding patronage of the arts.<sup>20</sup> According to Anglo, the main purpose of magnificence was that it widely and convincingly served as an external sign of intrinsic power and majesty.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, scholars agree that magnificence and its ritual display were obligatory for effective kingship. Notions of majesty and of an exalted monarchy were brilliantly and

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<sup>17</sup> Vale, 2001, pp. 165-170, 258-259.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 165-170, 250-259.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Cole, Alison, *Virtue and Magnificence: art of the Italian Renaissance courts*, New York, H.N. Abrams, 1995; Fraser Jenkins, A.D., "Cosimo de' Medici's Patronage of Architecture and the Theory of Magnificence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, v. 33, 1970, pp. 162-70; Green, Louis, "Galvano Fiamma, Azzone Visconti and the Revival of the Classical Theory of Magnificence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, v. 53, 1990, pp. 98-113; Clough Cecil H., "Chivalry and Magnificence in the Golden Age of the Italian Renaissance," in Sydney Anglo, ed., *Chivalry in the Renaissance*, Rochester, NY, Boydell Press, 1990, pp. 25-47; Belozerskaya, Marina, *Rethinking the Renaissance: Burgundian arts across Europe*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002; Belozerskaya, Marina, *Luxury arts of the Renaissance*, Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005; Campbell, Thomas P., *Tapestry in the Renaissance: art and Magnificence*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Anglo, Sydney, *Images of Tudor Kingship*, London: Seaby, 1992, pp. 6-10; Anglo, Sydney, "Humanism and the Court Arts," in Anthony Goodman and Angus MacKay, eds., *The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe*, New York: Longman, 1990, pp. 73-76.

compellingly manifested through magnificence and ceremony.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Vale has argued that theories of magnificence, though certainly valid, are neither exhaustive nor exclusive.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, he has investigated the broader social, political and ideological meanings carried by luxury objects in a court context. By making court art integral to its context, Vale opens up questions of the use and function of objects and highlights the importance of ceremony and ritual in understanding the meanings and values attached to luxury objects.

As Vale insists, court culture, and court art in particular, was diverse, multi-faceted and eclectic, drawing on a multiplicity of forms, styles and sources and catering to a diversity of tastes. The court by definition was cosmopolitan and eclectic in nature, and court culture was open, permeable and porous.<sup>24</sup> Individual courts with their own distinctive local differences nevertheless participated in a larger international court society with shared values and a common culture. However, these cosmopolitan courts, closely connected in an international network, were perpetually engaged in cultural competition and political rivalry. Competitive courts continually vied for prestige and endeavored to foster and uphold reputations principally through diplomacy, cultural exchange and gift giving.<sup>25</sup> Typically these cultural exchanges and diplomatic gifts involved objects of luxury art and excessive lavish display. Indeed, the exchange of diplomats and the presentation of gifts of luxury art were among the primary and most effective means of cementing social and political relationships.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Vale, 2001, pp. 169-258-259.

<sup>24</sup> Vale, 2001, pp. 250-255, 295-298.

<sup>25</sup> Gunn and Janse, 2006, pp. 2, 11. For an important case study of the Burgundian court, see Huesmann, Jutta M., *Hospitality at the court of Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy, c.1435-1467*, Oxford, D.Phil., 2001; Huesmann, Jutta M., "La procédure et le cérémonial de l'hospitalité à la cour de Philippe le Bon, Duc de Bourgogne," *Revue du Nord*, v. 84, n. 345-346, 2002, pp. 295-317.

The conceptual understanding of and theoretical approach to court culture, and court art specifically, most trenchantly advanced by Vale, possesses significant parallels with the work of art historians who have studied Islamic and Byzantine luxury arts within court contexts. Characterizing his methodology as an “anthropology of courtly objects,” Oleg Grabar proposed examining Islamic objects of luxury art in a court setting “as active ingredients in the fabric of daily or ceremonial life or as carriers of real or contrived memories...or ceremonial behavior.”<sup>26</sup> Grabar recognized that situating objects of art within the larger configuration of the court was possible only through recourse to written documents or texts that described the use of these objects in court ceremony, particularly in diplomacy and the ritual of gift giving. Indeed, the role of art in court ceremony, diplomacy and gift exchange has been extensively studied by historians of Byzantine art, such as Anthony Cutler and Robin Cormack.<sup>27</sup>

Scholars of the Medieval Mediterranean, such as Eva R. Hoffman, have likewise pursued questions of portability and circulation in relation to cross-cultural encounters and interactions.<sup>28</sup> Hoffman has identified a broad network of court culture with common

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<sup>26</sup> Grabar, Oleg, “The Shared Culture of Objects,” in *Islamic Visual Culture, 1100-1800: Constructing the Study of Islamic Art*, v. 2, Burlington, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2006, pp. 51-67.

<sup>27</sup> Cormack, Robin, “But is it Art?” in *Late Antique and Medieval Art of the Mediterranean*, edited by Eva R. Hoffman, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007, pp. 301-314; Cutler, Anthony, “Significant Gifts: Patterns of Exchange in Late Antique, Byzantine, and Early Islamic Diplomacy,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, v. 38, n. 1, 2008, pp. 79-102; Cutler, Anthony, “Gifts and Gift Exchange as Aspects of the Byzantine, Arab, and Related Economies,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, v. 55, 2001, pp. 247-278; Cutler, Anthony, “The Empire of Things: Gift Exchange between Byzantium and the Islamic World,” *Center 20: Record of Activities and Research Reports, June 1999-May 2000*, Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, 2000, pp. 67-70; Cutler, Anthony, “Uses of Luxury: On the Function of Consumption and Symbolic Capital in Byzantine Culture,” in *Byzance et les images: Cycle de conférences organisées au musée du Louvre du 5 octobre au 7 décembre 1992*, edited by Andre Guillou and Jannic Durand, Paris: Musée du Louvre, 1995, pp. 287-327.

<sup>28</sup> Hoffman, Eva R., “Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian Interchange from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century,” *Art History*, v. 24, n. 1, 2003, pp. 17-50; Hoffman, Eva R., “Christian-Islamic Encounters on Thirteenth-Century Ayyubid Metalwork: Local Culture, Authenticity, and Memory,” *Gesta*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (2004), pp. 129-142; Hoffman, Eva R., “A Fatimid Book Cover: Framing and Reframing Cultural Identity in the Medieval Mediterranean World,” in *L’Égypte fatimide: Son art et son histoire*, edited by Marianne Barrucand, Paris: Presses de l’université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999, pp. 403-419.

characteristics and shared traditions across the Medieval Mediterranean.<sup>29</sup> This was fostered through constant interaction and interchange, especially through diplomacy and the exchange of gifts.<sup>30</sup> This cosmopolitan court culture characterizing the Medieval Mediterranean exhibited a shared taste and classification of luxury and display, adhering to similar definitions and criteria of luxury and grandeur.<sup>31</sup> This shared vocabulary of luxury and notions of prestige and power as articulated through art facilitated comprehension and communication between courts. The performance of court ceremonies and the ritual exchange of luxury art as gifts forged allegiances and alliances and fashioned reciprocal bonds of friendship between courts. In Hoffman's model, the circulation and exchange of portable objects of luxury art as diplomatic gifts created and extended cultural relationships and connections.<sup>32</sup> In addition, these objects carried multiple identities and meanings, which derived in part from the circumstances of their exchange, reception and use at court.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, these objects shaped identity, ideology and memory and enabled the intersection and accommodation of cultures.

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<sup>29</sup> Hoffman, 2003, pp. 21-22.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-26.

<sup>32</sup> Hoffman, 2003, pp. 25-26; Hoffman, 2004, pp. 130, 138-140.

<sup>33</sup> Hoffman, 2003, p. 17; Hoffman, 2004, p. 133.

## Chapter 1

### Trophies of the Hunt: African Elephants and the Portuguese Court

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter examines the early interest and activities of the Portuguese in Atlantic Africa from 1415 through the early 1460s in terms of the ceremonial court practices of hunting and the circulation and exchange of trophies of the hunt such as elephant trunks and tusks as diplomatic gifts. The Portuguese claimed that they continued traditional *Reconquista* and engaged in crusade by fighting the Muslims of North Africa and by launching small *razzias* or piratical raids along the Moroccan and Mauritanian coasts.<sup>34</sup> In this way, Portuguese nobles simply continued and extended to the Atlantic the corsairing habits and practices they had earlier developed with much success in the western Mediterranean and along the coast of Granada.<sup>35</sup> Heavily influenced by chivalric romances and medieval *Res Gestae*, they perceived their own actions in terms of the noble culture of chivalry and honor. Official chronicles and diplomatic correspondence highlight the achievement of glorious and honorable deeds in combat, defined by personal courage and prowess. Commerce and *razzias* in Atlantic Africa were seen as the

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<sup>34</sup> Thomaz, Luís Filipe F. R., *De Ceuta a Timor*, Lisbon: Difel, 1994, p. 10-11, 22, 28, 44-47, 50. For surveys of this period, see Thomaz, 1994, pp. 1-147; Newitt, Malyn A., *History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 1400-1668*, New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 1-35; Disney, A.R., *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, New York: Cambridge University Press, v. 2, 2009, pp. 27-49; Diffie, Bailey W. and George D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese empire, 1415-1580*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, pp. 46-110; Russell, Peter E., *Prince Henry "the Navigator": A Life*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

<sup>35</sup> Fonseca, Luís Adão da, *The Discoveries and the Formation of the Atlantic Ocean: 14<sup>th</sup> century – 16<sup>th</sup> century*, Lisbon: Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimientos Portugueses, 1999, pp. 44-50, 70-71; Fonseca, Luís Adão da, *Portugal Entre Dos Mares*, Madrid: Editorial MAPFRE, 1993, pp. 190-198; Fonseca, Luís Adão da, *Navegación y Corso en el Mediterraneo Occidental: Los Portugueses a Medios del Siglo XV*, Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 1978, pp. 15-18.

necessary means of financing such worthy crusading endeavors and of rewarding those aristocratic heroes who participated in them.

However, war was supposed to lead to conquest and conversion and despite the fact that these results seem to have been embarrassingly lacking, the Portuguese, spearheaded by the Infante D. Henrique, launched an effective diplomatic campaign that convinced Europe of their success.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, the Papacy used its authority to assign absolute sovereignty over Atlantic Africa to Portugal to the exclusion and consternation of other European powers. This exclusive right of dominium over Atlantic Africa as well as concomitant control over maritime access to it, known as *mare clausum*, is fundamental to Portugal's interaction with and relationship to Atlantic Africa.<sup>37</sup> It eventually enabled Portugal to fashion an empire based on diplomatic and commercial relationships with Africans and not on territorial conquest or the subjugation of peoples.<sup>38</sup>

Some historians claim that the Infante D. Henrique (1394-1460) concentrated on exploration of the Atlantic and promoted his chivalric image as crusader and conqueror in Atlantic Africa because of his previous disastrous military failures in North Africa where

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<sup>36</sup> Elbl, Ivana, "Prestige Considerations and the Changing Interest of the Portuguese Crown in Sub-Saharan Atlantic Africa, 1444-1580," *Portuguese Studies Review*, n. 2, v. 10, 2003, pp. 22-24; Saunders, A. C. de C. M., "The Depiction of Trade as War as a Reflection of Portuguese Ideology and Diplomatic Strategy in West Africa, 1441-1556," *Canadian Journal of History*, v. 17, n. 2, 1982, pp. 219-234.

<sup>37</sup> Newitt, 2005, p. 30; Elbl, 2007, pp. 92-95; Elbl, 2003, pp. 23-24; Elbl, 1986, pp. 243-255; Newitt, 2001; Russell, Peter E., *Prince Henry "the Navigator": A Life*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 318, 352; Garcia, José Manuel, *Portugal and the Division of the World: From Prince Henry to King John II*, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1994, pp. 30, 104, 107, 112.

<sup>38</sup> Seed, Patricia, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 13-14, 100-148; Seed, Patricia, "Taking Possession and Reading Texts: Establishing the Authority of Overseas Empires," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, v. 49, n. 2, 1992, pp. 195-197; Thomaz, 1994, p. 51; Hair, P. E. H., "Discovery and Discoveries: The Portuguese in Guinea 1441-1650," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, v. 69, n. 1, 1992, p. 21; Elbl, Ivana, "Prestige Considerations and the Changing Interest of the Portuguese Crown in Sub-Saharan Atlantic Africa, 1444-1580," *Portuguese Studies Review*, n. 2, v. 10, 2003, p. 24; Newitt, Malyn, "Prince Henry and the Origins of Portuguese Expansion," in *The First Portuguese Colonial Empire*, edited by Malyn Newitt, Exeter: University of Exeter, 1986, p. 32; Newitt, Malyn A., "Formal and Informal Empire in the History of Portuguese Expansion," *Portuguese Studies*, v. 17, 2001, pp. 2-21

his limitations as a military genius were exposed.<sup>39</sup> As the activities of the Portuguese in Atlantic Africa took them further down the coast into Sub-Saharan Africa they were forced to transition from the ideology of crusade to one of diplomacy and peaceful commerce. During the early 1440s, the Portuguese reached sub-Saharan Africa where they encountered mighty Senegambian kingdoms whose military and naval strength capably resisted and decisively defeated the Portuguese in battle. Both sides, however, desired peaceful commercial enterprise and deplored the counterproductive effects of the use of force.<sup>40</sup> As a result, the 1450s were characterized by relatively peaceful trade and by surprisingly open-minded inquiry and the establishment of meaningful relationships between the Portuguese and sub-Saharan African rulers. In order to interact amicably with these Africans the Portuguese relied on the familiar court practices of Europe as well as the rituals and values of its warrior aristocracy.<sup>41</sup>

The importance and role of hunting in West Africa conveniently mapped onto Portuguese court conventions for the ritual development of diplomatic and social relations. The aristocratic elements and ceremonial qualities of hunting were understood and respected by both Portuguese and militarily powerful Africans. In the 1450s the Portuguese and African rulers created meaningful social bonds and relationships through hunting rituals, specifically elephant hunting, and through the obligatory diplomatic

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<sup>39</sup> Hair, P. E. H., "How the South was Won – and How the Portuguese Discovery Began," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, v. 71, 1994b, p. 43; Elbl, Ivana, "Man of His Time (and Peers): A New Look at Henry the Navigator," *Luso-Brazilian Review*, n. 28, n. 2, 1991, pp. 77-78; Elbl, Ivana, "The state of research: Henry 'the Navigator'," *Journal of Medieval History*, v. 27, 2001, pp. 79–99. Thomaz believes that the Portuguese crown actively prohibited the Infante D. Henrique from intervening in Morocco and instead aggressively encouraged him to focus on exploration of the Atlantic islands and Atlantic Africa by awarding him numerous concessions and grants over territory and trade. See, Thomaz, 1994, pp. 33, 80, 90, 150.

<sup>40</sup> Hair, 1994b, pp. 48, 51; Elbl, Ivana, *The Portuguese trade with West Africa, 1440-1521*, Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Toronto, 1986.

<sup>41</sup> Elbl, Ivana, "Cross-Cultural Trade and Diplomacy: Portuguese Relations with West Africa, 1441-1521," *Journal of World History*, v. 3, n. 2, 1992, p. 196

exchange of gifts, especially highly prestigious and symbolic trophies of the hunt. Hunting and its ritualized social benefits and rewards provided a common diplomatic and social language for European and African warrior aristocracies. Hunting and the exchange of gifts likewise afforded important opportunities to forge mutual esteem, respect and trust between Europeans and Africans. To some degree, big game hunting was perceived by Europeans and Africans as courtly, ritualized and noble. Not only were these Senegambian kingdoms a military match for the Portuguese, but their control of elephant hunts and the decision of when to include Europeans on them and when to award the trophies of the hunt to them, put the Portuguese at their mercy and in their debt. Hunting in sub-Saharan Africa therefore was a preferable alternative to war, one providing an honorable and glorious means of fashioning social relationships between equals.

Close readings of primary sources demonstrate quite clearly that an elite group at the Portuguese court acquired detailed first-hand knowledge about the ritual and technical aspects of African hunting and trophies of the hunt, such as elephant trunks and tusks, which were exchanged between Africa and Portugal. These trophies circulated at the Portuguese court and were appreciated largely for the means by which they were acquired: through exploits of a dangerous hunt in Africa or by diplomatic gift exchange with African rulers. This intimate knowledge about the origins of these objects and the social ties forged between the Portuguese and Africans through hunting and the exchange of gifts ensured that interpretation of these objects went beyond stereotypical notions of the exotic and negative perceptions of the other. Instead, these African objects embodied ritual and symbolic value as trophies of the hunt and as diplomatic gifts, which palpably



testified to the sophistication and power of African rulers, proclaimed Portugal's honored relationship with them, and publicized the commerce and riches of Africa that the Portuguese had successfully accessed. Yet the trophies of the hunt also dovetailed with the culture of chivalry, honor and glory that had initially spurred Portugal's advance into Atlantic Africa.

Scholars of the cultures of collecting in Europe have difficulty naming the sundry collecting practices of the first half of the fifteenth century.<sup>42</sup> Frequently characterized as treasuries, these seemingly miscellaneous collections of precious, exotic and rare objects belonged to a mental world dominated by notions of magic and mystery.<sup>43</sup> However, during the 1450s the Infante D. Henrique orchestrated the collecting of African elephant trunks, tusks and feet at the Portuguese court and actively used these prestigious trophies of the hunt in the formation of a unique Portuguese court identity. These African objects were initially circulated between Africa and Portugal to create and cement social ties, build relationships and facilitate trade. They were political, symbolic, ritual and ostentatious objects. Yet their acquisition at the hunt guaranteed that they were also worthy of presentation to noble warriors on both continents. In addition they testified to the mutual respect and to a certain degree of equality, especially in terms of military prowess, between Portugal and sub-Saharan Africa. Once in Europe, the meaning and courtly uses of African elephant trunks and tusks were indivisible from knowledge of the ritual of the noble hunt in Africa.

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<sup>42</sup> Morán, J. Miguel and Fernando Checa, *El coleccionismo en España: de la cámara de maravillas a la galería de pinturas*, Madrid: Cátedra, 1985, pp. 29-40; Mariaux, Pierre Alain, "Collecting (and Display)," in *A Companion to Medieval Art*, edited by Conrad Rudolph, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006, pp. 213-232.

<sup>43</sup> Morán and Checa, 1985, pp. 32, 34; Daston, Lorraine and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*, New York: Zone Books; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998; Schlosser, Julius von, *Die Kunst- und Wunderkammern der Spärenaissance*, Braunschweig: Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1978.

In a pioneering study, J. Miguel Morán and Fernando Checa underscored the fact that African objects obtained by the Portuguese fascinated European collectors as the principal visual and material manifestations of *exotica* available before the discovery of the New World over forty years later.<sup>44</sup> Yet few scholars have rigorously analyzed this African visual and material culture, its documentation or the context of its circulation and exchange between Africa and Portugal.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, there are various competing interpretations of the reception of objects from the New World in Europe starting in the 1490s.<sup>46</sup> Recently, scholars such as Anthony Pagden, Christopher Feest, Anthony Alan Shelton and Adriana Turpin have insisted that the preciousness or rarity of materials and the skill or ingenuity of manufacture and technique took absolute precedence over the geographical origins of cultural artifacts from the New World.<sup>47</sup> Sixteenth-century

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<sup>44</sup> Morán, J. Miguel and Fernando Checa, *El coleccionismo en España: de la cámara de maravillas a la galería de pinturas*, Madrid: Cátedra, 1985, p. 34.

<sup>45</sup> Ezio Bassani is a major exception. The kind of research and interpretation that I have undertaken would not have been possible without his valuable contributions. See especially, Bassani, Ezio, *African Art and Artefacts in European Collections 1400-1800*, edited by Malcolm McLeod, London: The British Museum, 2000; Bassani, Ezio and William Fagg, *Africa and the Renaissance: Art in Ivory*, edited by Susan Vogel, New York: Center for African Art: Distributed by Neues Pub. Co., 1988; Bassani, Ezio and Malcolm McLeod, "African Material in Early Collections," in *The Origins of Museums*, edited by Oliver Impey and Arthur Macgregor, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 245-50.

<sup>46</sup> Morán and Checa, 1985, p. 48; Elliott, John H., "Impact blunted for Europe - Renaissance Europe and America: A Blunted Impact?," in *The globe encircled and the world revealed*, edited by Ursula Lamb, Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1995, pp. 291-304; Heikamp, Detleff, "Il Nuovo Mondo," in *Magnificenza alla Corte dei Medici*, edited by Mina Gregori and Heikamp, Florence, 2000, p. 399; Heikamp, Detleff, *Mexico and the Medici*, Florence: Edam, 1972; Heikamp, Detleff, "Mexicanische Altertümer aus süddeutschen Kunstkammern," *Pantheon*, v. 28, n. 3, 1970, pp. 205-220; Heikamp, Detleff, "Les Medicis et le Nouveau Monde," *L'oeil*, v. 144, 1966, pp. 16-22, 50; Dacos, Nicole, "Présents américains à la Renaissance: L'assimilation de l'exotisme," *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 1969, pp. 57-64.

<sup>47</sup> Pagden, Anthony, *European Encounters with the New World*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, p. 33; Feest, Christian, "European Collecting of American Indian Artefacts and Art," *Journal of the History of Collections*, v. 5, n. 1, 1993, pp. 1-11; Feest, Christian, "Mexico and South America in the European Wunderkammer," in *The Origins of Museums*, edited by Oliver Impey and Arthur Macgregor, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp 237-244; Feest, Christian, "The collecting of American Indian artefacts in Europe, 1493-1750," in *America in European Consciousness, 1493-1750*, edited by K. O. Kupperman, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995 pp. 324-350; Shelton, Anthony Alan, "Cabinets of Transgression: The Renaissance Collections and the Incorporation of the New World," in *The Cultures of Collecting*, edited by J. Elsner and R. Cardinal, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994, pp. 177-203; Turpin, Adriana, "The New World collections of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici and their role in the creation of a Kunst- and Wunderkammer in the Palazzo Vecchio," in *Curiosity and Wonder from*

collectors, according to these studies, assimilated New World objects into familiar European categories of wonder and the marvelous as well as aesthetic appreciation of material and manufacture which necessarily disregarded their geographical origins and effaced their potential value as representative examples of unknown cultures.<sup>48</sup> This précis is important because the collecting of African objects in the mid-fifteenth century has often been conflated with the approach to collecting New World objects much later in the sixteenth century. However, close analysis of primary sources reveals that African objects circulated at the Portuguese court during the 1450s and that their connotations, meanings and origins were clear, comprehensible and specific.

## 2. Hunting at the Portuguese Court

During the first half of the fifteenth century, hunting enjoyed a particularly prestigious and prominent role in Portugal as the court, after a change in dynasty, struggled to redefine itself. The Portuguese royal family looked to hunting and the theoretical literature on hunting as the practical and metaphorical means by which to shape their new court. This fascinating material provides a specific interpretive framework both for the perception at the Portuguese court of Senegambians who engaged in big game hunting and for the reception of trophies of these big game hunts as diplomatic gifts from Senegambians with whom the court was in the process of establishing diplomatic and commercial contacts.

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*the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, edited by R.J.W. Evans and Alexander Marr, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006, pp. 63-85; Markey, Lia, *The New World in Renaissance Italy: A Vicarious Conquest of Art and Nature at the Medici Court*, PhD, University of Chicago, 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Turpin, 2006, pp. 65, 70, 73, 77, 82, 84; Shelton, 1994, pp. 177-203.

King D. João I, the father of the Infante D. Henrique, established the Avis dynasty in Portugal in 1385 and gradually restored the court, after decades of neglect, as the nucleus of a brilliant cultural florescence.<sup>49</sup> A conspicuous part of João I's strategy for the formation of a dynamic court culture was the categorical emphasis he placed on hunting.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the king personally directed the composition of a lengthy treatise on boar hunting written in Portuguese sometime between 1415 and 1433.<sup>51</sup> The purpose of the *Livro da Montaria* was to champion hunting as an essential pedagogical tool for the education of princes and the nobility and to supply a new social model for etiquette and comportment at court.<sup>52</sup> By promoting the sport of boar hunting, João I was attempting to foster bellicose and virile qualities at his court and in his courtiers.<sup>53</sup> He employed hunting as the preferred means of shaping the values, behavior and character of his court where the Infante D. Henrique and his princely brothers were raised and educated.

With his *Livro da Montaria*, João I joined a venerable European tradition of emperors and kings, such as Frederick II Hohenstaufen and Alfonso XI of Castile, who authored treatises on hunting.<sup>54</sup> However, João I harbored rather grand ambitions: he endeavored with the composition of his treatise to modernize the enterprise of big game sport hunting, to transform court society and to earn the Portuguese court international

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<sup>49</sup> For brief surveys of the intellectual and literary aspects of Portuguese court culture during the first half of the fifteenth century, see Buescu, Ana Isabel, "Livros e livrarias de reis e de príncipes entre os séculos XV e XVI: Algumas notas," *eHumanista*, v. 8, 2007, pp. 143-170; Monteiro, João Gouveia, "Orientações da cultura da corte na primeira metade do século XV (A literatura dos Príncipes de Avis)," *Vertice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, v. 5, 1988, pp. 89-103.

<sup>50</sup> Souza, Risonete Batista de, "Montaria: a saborosa arte de formar o cavaleiro," in *A Literatura Doutrinária na Corte de Avis*, edited by Lênia Márcia Mongelli, São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2001, pp. 155-200.

<sup>51</sup> D. João I, "Livro da Montaria," in *Obras dos Príncipes de Avis*, edited by M. Lopes de Almeida, Porto, Portugal: Lello & Irmão Editores, 1981, pp. 1-232. (This reference will hereafter be referred to as *LM*.)

<sup>52</sup> Souza, 2001, pp. 172, 175, 178-193.

<sup>53</sup> Souza, 2001, p. 165.

<sup>54</sup> Cummins, John, *The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting*, London: Phoenix Press, 1988, p. 1

renown by updating chivalric ideals and manners and by advancing humanist goals through the return to classical sources and values. To achieve these far-reaching, innovative objectives, João I relied on Xenophon, the ancient Greek nobleman whose writings on the education of princes and on war and hunting the Portuguese king seems clearly to have emulated.<sup>55</sup>

Following the royal model of hunting expounded by Xenophon, João I endorsed hunting as the noble sport of kings, for it instructed royal devotees and practitioners on how to become effective and feared leaders, courageous and skilled warriors, and astute and inspired strategists.<sup>56</sup> Yet hunting was not simply the preferred sport of nobles, but it was also, perhaps more importantly, ennobling in itself.<sup>57</sup> In the medieval literary tradition of chivalry, hunting was the characteristic virtue of heroes.<sup>58</sup> The expert and successful practice of big game hunting allowed for the expansion of quintessential chivalric values such as courage, honor and valor.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, a passion for hunting was linked to superiority, and skillfulness in hunting was seen as one of the defining signs of nobility.<sup>60</sup>

In the *Livro da Montaria* João I maintained these conventional chivalric views of hunting, claiming that it was basic to the idea of civilization itself. The central role of hunting in the civilizing process was due in large measure to its function as a social

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<sup>55</sup> Monteiro, 1988, p. 96; Souza, 2001, pp. 171, 188, 195-198.

<sup>56</sup> LM, pp. 9-11, 18-23. For the royal model of hunting in Xenophon, see Anderson, John Kinloch, *Hunting in the Ancient World*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, pp. 57-82; Schnapp, Alain, *Le chasseur et la cité: chasse et érotique en Grèce ancienne*, Paris: A. Michel, 1997.

<sup>57</sup> Thiebaut, Marcelle, "The Medieval Chase," *Speculum*, v. 42, n. 2, 1967, pp. 260-274; Thiebaut, Marcelle, *The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974.

<sup>58</sup> Thiebaut, 1967, p. 260.

<sup>59</sup> Crane, Susan, "Ritual Aspects of the Hunt à Force," in *Engaging with nature: essays on the natural world in medieval and early modern Europe*, edited by Barbara Hanawalt and Lisa J. Kiser, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008, pp. 63-84

<sup>60</sup> Thiebaut, 1967, p. 260.

model.<sup>61</sup> Hunting, as conceived and practiced by Europeans in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, provided vital instruction in good manners and behavior and afforded a principal opportunity for conviviality and the establishing of fellowship, familiarity and trust.<sup>62</sup> The paramount ceremonial and ritual qualities of big game sport hunting furnished the new ideals of comportment and rules of decorum and etiquette for court society.<sup>63</sup> As a major social event at court, hunting likewise facilitated the fashioning of social bonds through ritual and ceremony as well as prolonged companionship and generous hospitality.<sup>64</sup> The bellicose and virile qualities fostered by boar hunting in particular were intended by João I to shape his courtiers and his court in a rather distinctive manner.<sup>65</sup> The fervent promotion of boar hunting as an eminently courtly activity was strategically designed by João I to engender rugged and robust courtiers, imparting a noticeably fierce flavor to the civilizing process in Portugal.

The hunting of elephants in Senegambia was compared by Cadamosto, who witnessed the sport, to boar hunting because, like elephants, wild boars traveled in herds and favored muddy terrain, but there were also parallels with the danger of the tusks and strength of the beast.<sup>66</sup> The Infante D. Henrique and his noble knights perceived the hunt in Senegambia according to the values they ascribed to big game hunting at the Portuguese court. It testified, in their minds, to the dignity and royal status of Senegambian rulers and confirmed their military prowess and expertise. The hunting of elephants in Senegambia, an even more perilous activity than the hunting of boars in

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<sup>61</sup> Souza, 2001, p. 175.

<sup>62</sup> Souza, 2001, pp. 172, 178, 193, 200; Thiebaut, 1967, pp. 263, 265, 267.

<sup>63</sup> Crane, 2008, pp. 63-84; Cummins, 1988, pp. 32-46, 78

<sup>64</sup> Cummins, 1988, pp. 6-7, 105.

<sup>65</sup> Souza, 2001, p. 165

<sup>66</sup> Cadamosto in *The voyages of Cadamosto and other documents on Western Africa in the second half of the fifteenth century*, translated and edited by G. R. Crone, London: The Hakluyt Society, 1937, pp. 46-47, 70-72.

Europe, displayed the courage, honor and valor of the Senegambian hunters. The participation of Europeans on these hunts, however, secured reciprocal bonds of friendship through the performance of the ceremonies and rituals of the hunt. It also educated Europeans on the manners and customs of these Senegambian societies and initiated them into the proper behavior and rules of protocol they were expected to follow.

### 3. The Portuguese in Guinea during the 1440s

During the 1450s the Portuguese court was inundated with African animals. Many of them, such as parrots, apes, baboons, civet cats and lions, were still alive when they arrived in Europe. Others, such as elephants and leopards, had been skillfully hunted down, viciously killed and adeptly butchered in Africa. Indeed, the first elephants reached Portugal dismembered into pieces. African rulers from the Senegambia ritually hunted elephants, as the supreme big game animal, in order to send their tusks, trunks, ears, hairs, skin, tails, feet, and hunks of salted meat as gifts to the Portuguese court. The enormous tusks especially astounded the courts of Europe. They were certainly prized as *exotica* and as magical objects of marvel and wonder. Yet these spectacular African elephant tusks were principally understood and valued in terms of a specific diplomatic and ritual context forged between the Portuguese crown and African rulers from Guinea. Not only does the specific diplomatic and ritual context of the hunting and exchange of elephant tusks and ivory enrich our knowledge of their meaning and collecting in Europe, but it also enhances our understanding of subsequent Portuguese patronage and collecting

of highly polished and sophisticated ivory objects by African artists at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries.<sup>67</sup>

However, during the 1430s the Portuguese encountered no elephants in Morocco or along the Saharan coast as they engaged in anti-Islamic crusade, piratical attacks at sea and small *razzias* on land. The North African or Atlas elephant had become extinct by the fifth or sixth centuries, vanishing partly as a result of the military and sporting bloodlust of ancient Rome and Carthage, which had drastically reduced its numbers.<sup>68</sup>

Consequently, the imposing war elephants Hannibal had used to cross the Alps and then to overwhelm and terrorize the Romans in 218 B.C.E. could no longer be found by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century.<sup>69</sup> Instead as they traveled down the Saharan coast during the 1430s, the Portuguese received highly prized ostrich eggs and civet cats either through legitimate trade or as ransom for influential and wealthy Muslim captives.<sup>70</sup> In fifteenth-century Europe, ostrich eggs were especially valued as a rare delicacy for the princely table and as a precious object rich with Christian symbolism.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>68</sup> Climatic and environmental change also contributed to their dwindling numbers. Marais, Johan and David Hadaway, *Great Tuskers of Africa*, Johannesburg, South Africa: Penguin Books, 2007, p. 4; Meredith, Martin, *Elephant Destiny*, New York: Public Affairs, 2004, pp. 17-22; Meredith, Martin, *Africa's Elephant: A Biography*, London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., 2001.

<sup>69</sup> Lancel, Serge, *Hannibal*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1999, pp. 62-64, 88; Gowers, William, "The African Elephant in Warfare," *African Affairs*, v. 46, n. 182, 1947, pp. 42-49; Kistler, John M., *War Elephants*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006, pp. 98.

<sup>70</sup> Zurara, Gomes and Cadamosto all mention ostrich eggs and civet cats reaching the Portuguese court from the Saharan coast. On one *razzia*, the Portuguese captured the son of a local chief. He was released in exchange for one-hundred slaves and ostrich eggs. See, Zurara, Gomes Eanes de, *Crónica dos feitos da Guiné*, edited by Luís de Albuquerque and Torquato de Sousa Soares, Lisbon: Publicações Alfa, 1989, pp. 41-43. (This reference will hereafter be referred to as Zurara.)

<sup>71</sup> For the symbolic significance of ostrich eggs, see Levenson, Jay A., ed., *Circa 1492: art in the age of exploration*, Washington: National Gallery of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991, p. 128; Lloyd, Joan Barclay, *African animals in Renaissance literature and art*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 65; Meiss, Millard, "Ovum Struthionis: Symbol and Allusion in Piero della Francesca's Montefeltro Altarpiece," in *The painter's choice: problems in the interpretation of Renaissance art*, New York: Harper & Row, 1976; Meiss, Millard, "Not an Ostrich Egg?," *The Art Bulletin*, v. 57, n. 1, 1975, p. 116; Meiss, Millard, "Addendum Ovologicum," *The Art Bulletin*, v. 36, n. 3, 1954, pp. 221-222.



The presence of elephants and other big game could not be detected until the early 1440s when the Portuguese reached the fertile forests on the coasts of sub-Saharan Africa, which fifteenth-century sources referred to as “the land of the Blacks or the land of Guinea.”<sup>72</sup> Observers were quick to notice several major differences between Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa. Guinea was fertile, lush and green in contrast to the desolate, harsh and barren desert. It was also densely populated in settled communities by black Africans, whereas the Sahara was only sparsely populated by various nomadic Sanhadja (or Azenegue) Berber tribes. Furthermore, Guinea offered many commercial advantages to the Portuguese that were conspicuously absent in the Sahara.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, the lack of other economic opportunities along the Saharan coast contributed to the concentration on slaving raids there.<sup>74</sup> However, once the Portuguese entered sub-Saharan Africa, slave trading was reduced to a minor role and slave raiding for the most part ceased.<sup>75</sup>

There are two critical reasons for this change. The possibility of eventually inserting themselves into existing and available trade markets and networks in West Africa certainly meant that the Portuguese could pursue other potentially profitable commercial enterprises, especially in the niche role of middlemen.<sup>76</sup> But most importantly, the sub-Saharan Africans themselves put an abrupt, violent and definitive end to Portuguese *razzias* and slaving raids. Unlike their earlier experience along the Sahara, the Portuguese in Guinea in the 1440s found highly organized and militarily

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<sup>72</sup> Zurara, p. 114: “...e por isso é chamada terra dos Negros ou terra de Guiné...”

<sup>73</sup> Thomaz, 1994, p. 33, 123

<sup>74</sup> Hair, P. E. H., “The Early Sources on Guinea,” *History in Africa*, v. 21, 1994a, pp. 91, 93; Hair, 1994b, p. 47; Newitt, 2005, pp. 15, 25; Newitt, 1986, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> Hair, 1994a, p. 91; Hair, P. E. H., “Columbus from Guinea to America,” *History in Africa*, v. 17, 1990, p. 119.

<sup>76</sup> Hair, 1992, p. 21; Hair, 1990, p. 123; Thornton, John, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, second edition, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 48-49; Adenaike, Carolyn Keyes, “West African Textiles, 1500-1800,” in *Textiles: Production, Trade and Demand*, edited by Maureen Fennell Mazzaoui, Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1998, pp. 252, 256-257

formidable kingdoms.<sup>77</sup> These powerful African groups successfully resisted and decisively defeated the Portuguese in battle on land and in the water. Henceforth, Senegambians would control their interactions and relations with the Portuguese who sailed there.<sup>78</sup>

This point must be emphasized. The stereotype of Portuguese economic, technical, naval and military superiority in West Africa dies hard.<sup>79</sup> It is often assumed that the Portuguese acted in West Africa from a position of strength and promoted their interests by force.<sup>80</sup> For the area and period which concern us here, namely, the stretch of Guinea from the Senegambia down to Sierra Leone and covering the decades of the early 1440s to the early 1460s, it has been convincingly argued in recent years that Africans in fact played an active role and controlled the overriding nature of relations between Africans and Europeans.<sup>81</sup> Despite their propagandistic endeavors in Europe, the Portuguese made no territorial conquests and dominated no village or kingdom in West Africa. On the contrary, the Portuguese who sailed to Guinea in the 1440s were rather in a decidedly vulnerable position.<sup>82</sup> However, by following African customs, rituals and demands they were able to establish diplomatic relations with West African kingdoms and to seek peaceful, regulated commerce.<sup>83</sup> The ceremonial presentation by Africans to

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<sup>77</sup> Thornton, John K., "The Portuguese in Africa," in Bethencourt, Francisco and Diogo Ramada Curto, eds., *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 140-141, 143-45; Thornton, 1998, pp. 29-31, 36-39, 43; Elbl, Ivana, 1992, pp. 168-69, 177; Newitt, 2005, pp. 26; Newitt, 1986, pp. 29, 32. For information on the military organization, strength and tactics of the states of Senegambia and Sierra Leone, see Thornton, John K., *Warfare in Atlantic Africa, 1500-1800*, London, University College London Press, 1999, pp. 41-53.

<sup>78</sup> Thornton, 1998, pp. 6-8, 42-44, 54-57, 67-68; Newitt, 2005, p. 31; Newitt, 1986, p. 32.

<sup>79</sup> Elbl, 1992, p. 167

<sup>80</sup> Elbl, 1992, p. 166

<sup>81</sup> Thornton, 1998, pp. 6-8, 42-44, 54-57, 67-68; Newitt, 2005, p. 31; Newitt, 1986, p. 32.

<sup>82</sup> Elbl, 1992, pp. 168-169, 177

<sup>83</sup> Thornton, 2007, pp. 140-141, 143-144; Thornton, 1998, pp. 38-39, 43, 54-57, 67; Hair, 1994a, pp. 92-93; Hair, 1994b, p. 21; Hair, 1990, p. 122-123; Elbl, 1992, pp. 170, 177-179.

Europeans of big game animals captured on the hunt, especially elephants, was absolutely pivotal to this process.

The significance of big game hunting and the ritual presentation of trophies of the hunt carried similar connotations and implications to both Africans and Europeans. Hunting and the exchange of gifts related to the hunt facilitated mutually comprehensible communication and fostered the cultivation of trust and the formation of meaningful social bonds. By undertaking elephant hunts, African kingdoms demonstrated their military force to the Portuguese in a spectacular display of deadly weapons, such as poisoned spears and arrows, and impressive resources of manpower that could be marshaled at their command. In addition, Africans flaunted their coordinated strategic and tactical skill by tracking, pursuing and slaying the targeted elephant. This exercise likewise revealed their detailed and intimate knowledge of animal behavior and local terrain. Moreover, the trophies of the hunt actually embodied some of the most desirable products of trade, such as copious amounts of high quality, precious ivory, in the form of enormous elephant tusks. Yet the ritual exercise of the big game hunt, as a worthy substitute for war, made it emphatically clear to the Portuguese that the recently discovered African kingdoms of Senegambia would develop friendly diplomatic relations and engage in peaceable commerce at their own pleasure and on their own terms.

For their part, the Portuguese were obviously compelled to respect these militarily formidable kingdoms for the death and destruction they consistently meted out to them.<sup>84</sup> Although European merchants preferred ideally to deal with communities sustained by trade not war, Portuguese nobles in the wake of their defeat discovered common ground

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<sup>84</sup> Elbl, 1992, p. 169.

with these African warrior aristocracies.<sup>85</sup> After quickly realizing that their anti-Islamic crusading techniques of small affrays and violent *razzias* were no longer tenable in Guinea, they were greatly assisted in accepting the transition from the chivalric crusading culture of honor and glory won through deeds of arms to one dominated by diplomatic relations and peaceful commerce by securing social bonds with these same African warriors on big game hunts. If war had to be rejected as a viable option, then hunting was an appropriate and worthy aristocratic substitute. Yet participation on these hunting expeditions and the acceptance of trophies of the hunt required the Portuguese to put an enormous amount of faith and trust in their African hosts. Once they left the security of their heavily armed and fortified ships and entered the African forests in the company of African hunters fully outfitted with an intimidating panoply of deadly weapons, the vulnerable Europeans were completely at the mercy of their hosts. At the successful completion of the hunt and ritual presentation of the trophies of the hunt, the Europeans were also wholly in their debt.

The varying circumstances and experiences of Europeans on these elephant hunting expeditions exemplify the changing relationship between Africans and Europeans in West Africa from the early 1440s to the early 1460s. From the first evidence of elephants in sub-Saharan Africa, the Portuguese associated them with war and crusade. The earliest source is Gomes Eanes de Zurara (c. 1405-c.1474), the royal chronicler, keeper of the national archives and knight of the Order of Christ. During the 1450s, he was commissioned by Afonso V (1432-81) to celebrate the accomplishments of the Infante D. Henrique in sub-Saharan Africa according to the values of chivalry,

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<sup>85</sup> Elbl, 1992, pp. 172-173.

crusade and conquest.<sup>86</sup> Zurara's chronicle, *Chronicle of the Discovery of Guinea*, begins around 1444 when the Portuguese first reached the Senegal River.<sup>87</sup> At the mouth of the river, the Portuguese on ship sighted a small hut near the riverbank. Continuing the anti-Islamic crusading techniques of petty warfare they practiced along the Saharan coast, the Portuguese went ashore with the express purpose of taking prisoners. As it turned out, they captured only two siblings, a boy and a girl, less than ten years of age. Nevertheless, inside the hut they seized an impressive shield fashioned out of an elephant ear. Zurara, who relates this episode, claims that military shields in Guinea were commonly made of elephant ears and he proceeds to comment on the size and effectiveness of the shield. Indeed, he marvels at the magnitude of elephant ears, claiming that tools and techniques had to be invented by sub-Saharan Africans to reduce the unwieldy dimensions and prohibitive thickness of the hide to make it manageable in combat.<sup>88</sup> Notably, Zurara admits that the Portuguese were themselves unable to identify the material of the object as elephant hide. It was eventually explained to them on board the ship by the Sanhadja prisoners who served the Portuguese as interpreters. With some exaggeration, these Muslim captives from the Sahara also informed the Portuguese, who were apparently ignorant of the fact, that African elephants were of gigantic proportions and that sub-Saharan Africans killed them in order to eat their bountiful meat. They offered the

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<sup>86</sup> For the figure of Zurara and his writings, see Barreto, Luís Felipe, "Gomes Eanes de Zurara e o problema da *Crónica da Guiné*," *Studia*, v. 47, 1989, 311–369; Barreto, Luís Filipe, *Descobrimientos e renascimento: formas de ser e pensar nos séculos XV e XVI*, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1983, pp. 63-126; Albuquerque, Luís de, "Un prince et son chroniqueur," *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Português*, v. 23, 1987, pp. 319-331; Hair, P. E. H., "The Early Sources on Guinea," *History in Africa*, v. 21, 1994, pp. 89-92; Bennett, Herman L., "'Sons of Adam': Text, Context, and the Early Modern African Subject," *Representations*, n. 92, 2005, pp. 16-41.

<sup>87</sup> For the following episode, see Zurara, Chapter LX, pp. 114-118

<sup>88</sup> Zurara, p. 116: "...e, que o acham tão gordo além do necessário, que lhe tiram mais da metade, adelgçando-o com artifícios que têm feitos para isso."

allegedly reasonable estimate that the flesh of a single elephant could feed a minimum of 2,500 people and, speaking from experience, added that the meat was delicious.

However, what most surprised the Portuguese, who evidently had never seen an elephant, was not its legendary size or the consumption of its supposedly delectable flesh but the apparent lack of interest taken by those living around the Senegal in the tusks and bones of the beast. For the ivory of the tusks was the only part of the elephant familiar to Europeans, who valued it very highly as a precious material and as a prized medium for small-scale sculpture. Since at this time all ivory entered Europe through trade in the Levant, conducted mainly by Venetian merchants, Zurara quickly provided the reader of his Portuguese text with the current monetary worth of such tusks on the open market there. Although he might not have known it yet, this situation was about to change rapidly as the Portuguese in their emerging role as middlemen were soon to tap into the lucrative ivory trade in West Africa.

Zurara ends his brief excursus on elephants with this economic consideration and its enticing suggestion of possible future commercial development of the fabulously profitable ivory trade. However, when he returns to his narrative, the Portuguese soldiers resume their pursuit of the local inhabitants, searching in particular for the parents of the two children they had already abducted. The party tried to ambush a man alone who seemed to be chopping wood, but, coming onshore, it was the Portuguese who received the surprise attack. This single man rebuffed the group of Portuguese and then fled through thick forest to his abode to retrieve his weapons. Realizing that his children had been taken prisoner, the African took his spear and charged a startled Portuguese on the beach, slicing open one side of his face. The Portuguese managed to disentangle

themselves from the scuffle and quickly escaped to their ship. Clearly, first evidence of the presence of elephants was strongly connected to the aggressive raiding practices developed by the Portuguese along the Saharan coast and was also associated with fierce African resistance to them.

The next mention of elephants comes a few years later when the ships of Álvaro Fernandes traveled south of Cape Verde.<sup>89</sup> At the time, this was the farthest any Portuguese ship had sailed down the coast of West Africa. Indeed, Fernandes received separate financial rewards from both the regent, the Infante D. Pedro, and the Infante D. Henrique for his troubles and success.<sup>90</sup> The tumultuous events of the journey, therefore, were well publicized and applauded at court. Zurara relates that Fernandes was sent to Guinea by his uncle, the captain of the Atlantic island of Madeira, “with his caravel well armed, instructing him to travel as far as he was able, and to strive to obtain some booty whose novelty and greatness might provide testimony of the good will that he had to serve his lord [the Infante D. Henrique] who raised him [in his household].”<sup>91</sup>

When the expedition first went ashore, they discovered goats and footprints along a path. For fear of attack by the Africans who were evidently aware of their presence and their intentions, they dared not to follow them, but returned to their caravels.<sup>92</sup> At the next stop, they discovered enormous mounds of dung which, the amazed crew claimed,

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<sup>89</sup> For the following episode, see Zurara, Chapter LXXXVII, pp. 162-164.

<sup>90</sup> It should be noted that the Infante D. Pedro, who had forged important diplomatic and personal connections across Europe, had as regent also promoted peaceful commerce and opposed engaging in war in Africa. See, Marques, Alfredo Pinheiro, *A maldição da memória do Infante Dom Pedro: e as origens dos descobrimentos portugueses*, Figueira da Foz, Portugal: Centro de Estudos do Mar, 1994.

<sup>91</sup> Zurara, pp. 162-163: “com sua caravela bem armada; encomendando-lhe que sempre seguisse mais avante quanto pudesse, e que se trabalhasse de fazer alguma presa cuja novidade e grandeza pudesse dar testemunho da boa vontade que ele havia, de servir aquele senhor que o criara.”

<sup>92</sup> Zurara, p. 163: “Até ali chegaram os cristãos, porque não tiveram ousio de seguir mais anvante.”

were as large as grown men.<sup>93</sup> The Portuguese decided there were no opportunities to take booty or raid for captives at this spot littered with droppings and once again took to the water. Nevertheless, this observation is noteworthy for several reasons. First, the Portuguese believed the dung heaps were to be identified as elephant excrement and this was seen as sensational information to relate to court and to record in official chronicles. Second, the location of the presence of elephants was noted, perhaps for future reference and a return voyage. Likewise, the absence of humans in the area needed to be documented. The Portuguese recognized the presence of elephants and were manifestly impressed by the magnitude of their droppings. Nevertheless, after inspecting the dung, they promptly abandoned the area as devoid of opportunities for booty.<sup>94</sup> This seems strange since capturing an elephant, dead or alive, would surely qualify as a worthy deed and a great novelty, whose acquisition was a stated purpose of the voyage. At the least, elephant tusks and their ivory were highly desirable and esteemed throughout Europe. In addition, we know that the crew and the caravel were well-armed. The fact that the Portuguese did not try to obtain an elephant at this location, where there were no Africans to threaten them, indicates that the Portuguese did not know how to hunt elephants, despite their craving for novelties and despite the fact that they were armed with the latest European weapons technology. It also suggests that the Portuguese were not willing to venture off into the forests of Guinea to track down the beasts, despite the evident lack at this location of any possible threat from Africans.

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<sup>93</sup> Zurara, p. 163: “acharam em terra esterco de elefante de tamanha grossura (segundo juízo daqueles que o viram) como podia ser um homem.”

<sup>94</sup> Zurara, p. 163: “E por lhes não parecer lugar azado para fazer presa, tornaram-se outra vez a sua caravela.”



Nevertheless, news of these plentiful piles of elephant excrement was once again intimately tied to sub-Saharan African military prowess. For a few days later, the Portuguese spotted a village along the coast. They disembarked, but were immediately greeted by the African inhabitants who menaced them with spears and shields. Álvaro Fernandes distinguished the man he believed to be the leader of the group and fatally ran him through with his lance.<sup>95</sup> Fernandes snatched the warrior's weapons and took flight with his men back to their caravel. He later presented the African spear and shield, along with tall tales of elephant dung, to the Infante D. Henrique at court in Portugal.<sup>96</sup>

But Fernandes almost failed to return to Portugal to convey his story of gargantuan mounds of elephant droppings and to present African weapons won in battle to the Infante D. Henrique. In fact, he nearly died from the wound he received from a poisoned arrow. After beating their hasty retreat from the fiercely defended village, the Portuguese captured a defenseless woman and her young son walking along the side of a riverbank. However, the Portuguese soon alarmingly perceived, heading straight toward them, "four or five boats of Guineans, prepared like men who intend to defend their land, and our men in the boat were not at all desirous to try to engage in combat with them, seeing the great advantage their enemies had over them, and especially because they feared the great danger of the poison with which they shot."<sup>97</sup> The Portuguese, exposed in the treacherous river in their dinghy, fearfully hurried to the protection of the caravel, but in the chase Fernandes was shot in the leg with a poisoned arrow. With its gravely

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<sup>95</sup> Zurara, p. 163: "Entre os quais [moradores] vinha um bem adargado, com uma azagaia em sua mão, o qual vendo Álvaro Fernandes – parecendo-lhe principal daqueles – foi rijamente a ele; e deu-lhe com sua lança tão grande ferido que deu com ele morto em terra."

<sup>96</sup> Zurara, p. 163: "E tomou-lhe a darga e a azagai, a qual trouxe ao Infante com outras coisas, como ao diante será contado."

<sup>97</sup> Zurara, p. 164: "vieram sobre eles quatro ou cinco barcos de guinéus, corregidos como homens que queriam defender sua terra; cuja peleja os do batel não quiseram experimentar, vendo a grande vantagem que os contrários tinham, temendo sobretudo o grande perigo que havia na peçonha com que [a]tiravam."

wounded captain, the caravel nonetheless attempted to land one more time to acquire additional booty and captives, but was passionately welcomed on the beach by over one hundred and twenty warriors armed with spears and shields and others with bows and arrows. To the Portuguese observers, the Africans appeared to be dancing and celebrating with music.<sup>98</sup> However, the crew had learned dearly from experience, and Zurara informs us that the Portuguese, “wishing to decline the invitation to that festival,” abruptly turned back and headed home.<sup>99</sup>

The first mention of elephant hunting in Guinea and of the accompanying ritual exchange of its trophies as a potential means of fashioning friendly relations between Africans and Europeans comes from an abortive mission the Infante D. Henrique sent out from Lisbon to Senegambia in 1447.<sup>100</sup> This was perhaps the first official attempt by the Portuguese, albeit an unsuccessful one, to establish formal cordial relations with West Africans.<sup>101</sup> Vallarte (or Abelhart), a nobleman from the court of the King of Denmark had traveled to Portugal to enter the service of the Infante in order, it was reported, to see the world, i.e. sub-Saharan Africa. The Infante D. Henrique eventually sent Vallarte in a caravel to the “terra dos Negros” with the explicit purpose of contacting the *teen* of Bawol and a potent king who, Henrique had heard, was reputed to be a Christian.<sup>102</sup> Recognizing the African king’s authority and power, Vallarte was to obtain permission and protection from the him in order to operate on territory under his control.

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<sup>98</sup> Zurara, p. 164: “E estando à vista da praia, viram vir contra eles bem 120 guinéus, uns com adargas e azagaias, outros com arcos. E logo que chegaram, a junto da água, começaram de tanger e bailar, como homens afastados de toda tristeza.”

<sup>99</sup> Zurara, p. 164: “E os do batel, querendo escusar o convite daquela festa, tornaram-se para seu navio.”

<sup>100</sup> For this episode, see Zurara, Chapter XCIV, pp. 176-180.

<sup>101</sup> See, Hair, P. E. H., “The Use of African Languages in Afro-European Contacts in Guinea, 1440-1560,” in Hair, P. E. H., *Africa Encountered: European Contacts and Evidence, 1450-1700*, Brookfield, VT: Variorum Ashgate, 1997, VI, p. 13.

<sup>102</sup> Elbl, 1992, pp. 1169-170, 184.

Furthermore, the Infante provided Vallarte with official diplomatic letters addressed to the king inquiring whether he was Christian and if he would become the ally of Portugal and wage crusade against the Muslims of North Africa. A knight of the military Order of Christ was dispatched with Vallarte to act as an envoy (“quase por embaixador”). Vallarte’s overt mission was to establish peaceful diplomatic relations with this “very great lord” (“mui grande senhor”) and by inference to initiate commerce in his territory.<sup>103</sup> If the king professed the Christian faith, he was to be invited to join the Portuguese in their chivalric anti-Islamic crusade, an endeavor which Christian Europeans had declined.

When Vallarte’s caravel arrived at the designated location beyond Cape Verde, he found a large crowd waiting for the approach of his boat. He was informed that a knight, “cavaleiro,” called Guitanie had been appointed governor (“governador”) of the area by the principal king, Boor, whom the Portuguese so avidly sought to contact.<sup>104</sup> Unfortunately, Boor was currently engaged in war, suppressing a rebellion by another powerful ruler (“um outro grande senhor”), who had refused to obey him. The Portuguese were informed it would take a fleet-footed messenger a minimum of six to seven days to make a roundtrip journey into the interior to contact him. Guitanie and his associates gathered on the beach tried to persuade Vallarte that he should initiate peaceful diplomatic and commercial relations directly with him as appointed governor and need not obstinately insist on dealing exclusively with Boor.<sup>105</sup> Guitanie frequently sailed out

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<sup>103</sup> Zurara, p. 177: “E se o teu senhor assim fazer fará grande serviço ao seu rei, e proveito a sua terra.”

<sup>104</sup> In all likelihood, the Portuguese mistakenly took the Jolof word for the title of king, Bor, as the king’s given name. This probably indicates that Vallarte and his men were dealing with Jolof and not Mandinga warriors. See, Hair, 1997, VI, pp. 13, 24.

<sup>105</sup> Zurara, p. 178: “E falou com os nosso sobre a mercadoria, dizendo que ele bastava para tudo tratar, porquanto aquele rei Boor quando dava terra a algum cavaleiro, [este] podia fazer em ela como ele mesmo; e, assim, qualquer coisa que fizesse ele a havia por bem feita.”

to the Portuguese caravel to converse with the Portuguese and to enjoy their company.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, as part of his strategy he twice sent assorted fine foods and palm wine along with several large elephant tusks to the ship and encouraged the Portuguese to partake of the feast and gifts.<sup>107</sup>

Vallarte seems to have been swayed by Guitanie's comportment, conversation and impressive delectable offerings. Eventually Vallarte asked Guitanie whether he could kill an elephant for him and provide him with the slaughtered elephant's skin, tusks, bones and some of the meat.<sup>108</sup> In exchange, Vallarte proposed giving him a large tent of linen cloth capable of sheltering twenty-five to thirty people yet light enough to carry around on one's shoulders. Guitanie replied in the affirmative, boastfully promising that he could accomplish such a thing without much trouble.<sup>109</sup> He departed the coast and went into the forests to hunt his elephant for the Portuguese. However, after some days Vallarte grew impatient and against the advice of his crew rashly and repeatedly returned to the shore to inquire of the progress of Guitanie's hunt. On one fateful occasion, Vallarte's boat touched land and was swiftly overturned by a forceful wave. According to Zurara's narrative, a multitude of men with spears, who had been concealed under the shade of a large tree, speedily descended upon the confused Europeans, slaying some and taking others prisoner. The caravel promptly raised anchor and sailed for Portugal.

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<sup>106</sup> Zurara, p. 178: "mostrando estar muito contente com sua convivência."

<sup>107</sup> Zurara, p. 178.

<sup>108</sup> Zurara, pp. 178-179: "E um dia lhe vieram rogar que lhe houvesse um elefante morto para lhe tomarem a pele e os dentes e os ossos, com alguma parte da carne." Fernandes likewise describes this particularly interesting episode with Guitanie. He claims that Guitanie not only presented entire elephant tusks to the Portuguese, but also endeavored to obtain an elephant and to have it skinned for them. See Fernandes, Valentim, *Código Valentim Fernandes*, edited by José Pereira da Costa, Lisbon: Academia Portuguesa da História, 1997, p. 274.

<sup>109</sup> Zurara, p. 179: "Ao que respondeu o guinéu que sem grande trabalho [isso] se poderia haver."

By 1447 elephant hunting and the ritual exchange of hunting trophies such as the elephant's skin and tusks were seen by both sub-Saharan Africans and Europeans, intent on crusade and piracy, as an appropriate means for creating and cementing diplomatic and social bonds of friendship and trust. Vallarte had been sent to Guinea with the explicit purpose of establishing diplomatic and commercial relations with King Boor. Moreover, if Vallarte determined that Boor was indeed a Christian or at least sympathetic to the Christian cause, he was authorized and instructed with the help of the knight of the Order of Christ to forge a religious and military alliance between the Senegambia king and the king of Portugal in a coordinated strategic effort to attack and squeeze Morocco on several fronts simultaneously from the north, the south and the Atlantic coast. The important lesson of the disastrous Vallarte episode was that the Portuguese could not engage in trade before such exchanges and bonds had been firmly established for fear and distrust of the Portuguese quite legitimately persisted among sub-Saharan Africans. Moreover, the elephant hunt and its accompanying trophies could not themselves be traded or purchased. Like the two gifts of whole elephant tusks that Guitanie had earlier bestowed on Vallarte and his men in the caravel on separate occasions, the Portuguese had to be invited to participate or had to be offered the fruits of the kill by Senegambian warriors. It was a gift that had to be given by the Africans because it was intended to put the Portuguese in their debt and to forge and cement social bonds between them. By trying to make a commercial bargain of the enterprise, Vallarte negated the crucial concept of social debt, which defeated the ritual purpose of the hunt.

In several places, Zurara vehemently criticizes Vallarte for his imprudent handling of the situation, whereas he repeatedly praises Guitanie as a "cavaleiro" who

always “proved himself to be a true man,” i.e., a chivalrous knight or man of honor.<sup>110</sup> Surprisingly, the Africans who allegedly attacked Vallarte and his men when through their own impatience, incompetence and weakness they were rendered defenseless are not at all reproached by Zurara. This can be explained in part by the fact that Zurara interpreted the events in terms of his own cultural values of glory, honor and chivalry irrespective of which side the parties belonged to. By 1447 the Portuguese were clearly aware of the importance of big game hunting as a formative ritual experience in Senegambia and were equally cognizant of their own ignorance of the skills, techniques and knowledge necessary to undertake such an endeavor and of their dependence on Senegambians to provide these essential elements. In addition, they viewed elephant hunting in terms of their own chivalric cultural values associated with prowess in war. Yet the Portuguese did not fully appreciate or comprehend the dynamics of such an interaction from the African perspective.

However, the conceptual approach of the Portuguese was radically altered in 1448 when the Infante D. Henrique unequivocally prohibited piracy and *razzias* south of Cape Bojador.<sup>111</sup> All interactions and relations with sub-Saharan Africans were in future to be peaceful and preferably also of a commercial nature. Zurara brusquely ends his celebratory chronicle of the “conquest” of Guinea at this point because, as he writes, “the affairs of arms were henceforth treated more by the trafficking and bargaining of merchants than by acts of valor and feats of arms.”<sup>112</sup> Although Zurara undoubtedly

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<sup>110</sup> Zurara, p. 179: “E, assim, em tudo aquele cavaleiro guinéu se mostrava homem verdadeiro.”

<sup>111</sup> Zurara, p. 181.

<sup>112</sup> Zurara, *Crónica dos feitos da Guiné*, Lisbon: Publicações Alfa, 1989, pp. 181: “...ainda que as coisas seguintes não foram tratadas com tanto trabalho e fortaleza [de ânimo] como as passadas; porque, de este ano por diante, sempre se trataram os feitos daquela parte mais por tratos e avenças de mercadoria, que por fortaleza nem trabalho das armas.”

favoured the execution of chivalric deeds and bloody crusade over the pursuit of peaceful commercial transactions as a literary subject, it should not be inferred that in an officially commissioned panegyric he intended to denigrate the decision of the Infante, his lord.<sup>113</sup> Rather he believed this momentous resolution served as a convenient literary device or point of transition from one phase of exploration and contact to the next: “Since the volume we have written seems to us of a reasonable length, we halt here, with the intention, as already stated, of producing a further work which will extend to the termination of the Infante’s activities...”<sup>114</sup> Indeed, the development of trade in sub-Saharan Africa was one of the original principal motives Zurara had attributed to the Infante D. Henrique in sponsoring voyages down the Atlantic coast of Africa.<sup>115</sup>

To be sure, trading had occurred between the Portuguese and Africans in Guinea before 1448 and military skirmishes broke out with some regularity after 1448.<sup>116</sup> But it would seem that the scale, intensity and official encouragement of peaceful commerce increased in inverse proportion to the decrease of piracy and crusade.<sup>117</sup> The late 1440s and early 1450s remained unquestionably volatile, unpredictable years when the pursuit of mutual interests struggled to overcome years of mutual distrust and widespread hostility.<sup>118</sup> Nevertheless, for the Infante D. Henrique a radical theoretical shift had taken place which effectively divorced Portuguese activities in Guinea from the policy of anti-Islamic crusade and traditional *Reconquista* in Morocco.<sup>119</sup> The commercial exploration of sub-Saharan Africa henceforth constituted an independent, important arena of activity

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<sup>113</sup> Hair, 1994a, pp. 89-91; Hair, 1994b, pp. 43, 45-46.

<sup>114</sup> Zurara, p. 181: “e daí por nos parecer razoável volume este que já temos escrito, fizemos aqui fim como dito é, com inteção de fazermos outro livro que chegue até [o] fim dos feitos do Infante...”

<sup>115</sup> Zurara, p. 24.

<sup>116</sup> Hair, 1994a, p. 93; Hair, 1990, p. 122; Thomaz, 1994, pp. 32-34, 123-124, 140.

<sup>117</sup> Thomaz, 1994, p. 124

<sup>118</sup> Elbl, 1992, pp. 168-170.

<sup>119</sup> Thomaz, 1994, pp. 34, 124-125

governed by its own internal dynamic and logic of development separate from the course of action pursued in Morocco.<sup>120</sup> By opting for a policy focused on peace and commerce, the Infante D. Henrique was establishing an empire in West Africa based on diplomatic relationships and trade agreements and not on the subjugation of peoples or the conquest and possession of territory.<sup>121</sup> It would be up to men like Diogo Gomes and Cadamosto in the 1450s to meet with local rulers in West Africa and to establish these critical social and political ties with them through the successful ritual exchange of gifts and the ritual participation on elephant hunts. Elephant tusks and severed elephant trunks played a vital role in this delicate, unpredictable and potentially explosive process.

#### 4. African Ivory Obtained: Hunts and Diplomatic Gifts in Africa in the 1450s

Diogo Gomes de Sintra (c. 1402 - c. 1500) spent his exciting and distinguished life, which included exploration of the Gambia river and possibly also of the island of Santiago, Cape Verde, in the service of the Infante D. Henrique and then, after his death in 1460, in the service of King Afonso V.<sup>122</sup> Somewhat unusually, Gomes enthusiastically supported the Infante D. Henrique's controversial decision to abandon corsairing and raiding activities in order to trade peacefully in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>123</sup> In

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<sup>120</sup> Thomaz, 1994, pp. 34, 124.

<sup>121</sup> Seed, 1995, pp. 13-14, 100-148; Seed, 1992, pp. 195-187; Thomaz, 1994, p. 51; Hair, 1992, p. 21; Elbl, 2003, p. 24; Newitt, 2001, pp. 2-21; Newitt, 1986, p. 32.

<sup>122</sup> For the life and career of Diogo Gomes, see Henrique Pinto Rema, "Introdução histórica," in Gomes de Sintra, Diogo, *Descobrimento primeiro da Guiné*, edited and translated by Aires A. Nascimento, Lisbon: Colibri, 2002, pp. 33-48; Russell, Peter E., *Prince Henry "the Navigator": A Life*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 327-344; Russell, Peter, "Veni, vidi, vici: Some Fifteenth-century Eyewitness Accounts of Travel in the African Atlantic before 1492," *Historical Research*, v. 66, n. 160, 1993, pp. 115-128; Hair, 1994a, pp. 92-93.

<sup>123</sup> Gomes de Sintra, Diogo, *Descobrimento primeiro da Guiné*, edited and translated by Aires A. Nascimento, Lisbon: Colibri, 2002, p. 62: "Deinde dominus Infans suo consilio dicebat quod ultra non facerent litem cum gente illa in partibus illis sed ut inirent fedus et tractassent mercimonia et facerent cum ipsis pacem quia intentio sua erat ipsos facere christianos. Et precepit carauelas quod irent de pace et non de guerra." (This reference will hereafter be referred to as Gomes.)



fact, the Infante D. Henrique sent Gomes to Guinea to implement this unprecedented and dangerous plan. According to his own testimony, he seems to have performed brilliantly.<sup>124</sup> He boastfully claims personally to have been the first European to have established peaceful diplomatic relations with the ruler of Cantor up the Gambia River as well as with Batimansa and Niumi-Mansa, both Mandinka rulers on the lower Gambia who had been unyieldingly hostile to the Portuguese presence there.<sup>125</sup> As Hair has observed, Gomes believed his principal task was to overcome the misunderstandings and serious missteps with sub-Saharan Africans that had been the principal cause of enmity and violence.<sup>126</sup> If this could be accomplished, he was to strive to fashion friendly, mutually beneficial and reciprocally profitable relations with sub-Saharan rulers.<sup>127</sup>

As soon as Gomes had learned of Batimansa's intimidating reputation in the area as a "great lord" and was informed of his location on the lower Gambia, he contacted him in an attempt to reverse the brutal cycle of violence and somehow to establish peaceful relations.<sup>128</sup> The Mandinka ruler, accompanied by "an infinite number of armed men," awaited Gomes on the riverbank at the edge of a thick forest. After risking his own life by approaching Batimansa and his entire, fully and frightfully armed contingent, Gomes presented the mighty Mandinka king with suitable gifts, eventually winning his favor and protection.<sup>129</sup> Nevertheless, Gomes probably continued to mistrust Batimansa and to fear for his own safety until his hosts, local rulers under Batimansa's authority, reciprocated by sending Gomes a series of diplomatic gifts.

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<sup>124</sup> Gomes, pp. 56, 62, 66, 74.

<sup>125</sup> Gomes, pp. 76, 78: "Et tunc notificauerunt mihi quod ex parte altera, scilicet sinistra, fluminis erat quidam magnus dominus ad austrum qui uocabatur Batimansa. Et cupiebam facere pacem cum illo..."

<sup>126</sup> Hair 1994a, p. 93

<sup>127</sup> Hair, 1994a, p. 93

<sup>128</sup> Gomes, pp. 76, 78. "Mansa" is the Mandinga word for the title of chief. See, Hair, VI, 1997, pp. 13-14.

<sup>129</sup> Gomes, p. 78: "portauit secum gentem infinitam armatam sagittis ueneosis et azagayas et gladiis et dargas. Et ego accessi ad eum portans ei de muneribus..."

Earlier on the voyage, before reaching the Gambia, Gomes had traded for elephant tusks and had enthusiastically reported seeing five elephants emerging from a thick cover of forest to head toward a river. Gomes described three of the elephants he saw as large and the other two as being somewhat smaller, but unfortunately provided few other details. This is perhaps the first eyewitness account of live elephants in Guinea from a European source. Most astonishing, however, was the unbelievably massive elephant tusk Gomes received from one of the unnamed local rulers mentioned above after he had obtained the protection of Batimansa. Gomes tells us that this ruler of Alcuzet, probably at the limits of the Gambia, sent him a whole horde of tusks, but that the largest of the group alone required four men to carry it to his ship.<sup>130</sup> From this description, it would seem that the tusk probably measured between two and a half to three meters in length, roughly the same size as another tusk that was later presented to Cadamosto, who measured it. Cadamosto's tusk was then given to the Infante D. Henrique, who, in turn, sent it as a gift to his sister, Isabella of Portugal, the Duchess of Burgundy. Evidently, African rulers considered tusks measuring between two and a half and three meters sufficiently impressive and exceptional to be exchanged as prestigious diplomatic gifts. The exchange of this elephant tusk whose length and weight necessitated the strength of four men to carry it ultimately convinced Gomes to trust the intentions of this African ruler. A faint idea of the imposing scale and weight of such an object can be gleaned from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographs when tusks of similarly immense proportions, requiring the labor of four men to transport them, were still to be found on mature bull elephants. (Fig. 1.1) After Gomes had

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<sup>130</sup> Gomes, p. 78: "Et dominus terre illius mihi misit dentes elephantum, unum ualde magnum, et quatuor nigros qui dentem portabant ad nauem."

accepted the gift of elephant tusks, he tells us that the local ruler's men came in peace to his caravel.<sup>131</sup> Consequently, in a risky move, Gomes left the protection of his war ship with them to stay for three days with his African hosts away from the security of the coast in the uncharted, treacherous interior. In fact, he claims to have been an honored guest, staying in the very residence of the ruler in his densely populated village of Alcuzet.<sup>132</sup>

During his three-day sojourn Gomes evidently enjoyed observing the many parrots and leopards in the area. It is not clear whether he studied these animals in their natural habitat in the wild or whether, more probably, they were accessible through some form of confinement. However, over the course of those three days, Gomes evidently charmed the generous ruler of Alcuzet, who seems from Gomes's account to have amassed an impressive collection of African wildlife. Indeed, Gomes proudly declares that the ruler graciously bestowed on him the magnificent and prestigious gift of six leopard pelts. This was a highly symbolic gift perhaps suggested to the ruler by the interest Gomes had taken in the leopards in the area. However, in many West African societies the leopard and possession of leopard pelts were common symbols of rule, even royalty, and were thought to embody notions of strength, boldness and military prowess.<sup>133</sup> It is possible that the gift could even have symbolized the African ruler's authority over Gomes in his role as envoy and leader of the Portuguese contingent. The gift to Gomes would thus have established and embodied a political and social hierarchy

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<sup>131</sup> Gomes, p. 78: "Et sic uenerunt cum pace usque ad naues nostras et sic fui securus ab eis."

<sup>132</sup> Gomes, p. 78: "Et postmodum fui ad domum suam ubi erant habitationes multorum nigrorum....Et mansi cum eo per tres dies."

<sup>133</sup> Blier, Suzanne Preston, *The Royal Arts of Africa: The Majesty of Form*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1998, pp. 54, 170, 204. According to Blier, elephants and leopards are the two most prevalent symbols of royal authority and power in sub-Saharan Africa.

of power with the African ruler placing Gomes under his authority. At the least, by offering six leopard pelts as a gift to Gomes and thus to his superior, the Infante D. Henrique, the local ruler forcefully asserted to the Portuguese his skill and success as a hunter as well as the unlimited, bountiful resources at his command and under his control.

Then in order to make those qualities even more immediate and palpable to Gomes, this ruler of Alcuzet personally gave the grandiose command that an elephant be killed specifically so that the meat could be presented to Gomes.<sup>134</sup> Not only did this African ruler intend to enact the ritual of big game hunting for Gomes to witness, but he also included him in it by having the trophies of the hunt, the tusks and his choice of meat, presented to him as the culminating gesture. As Gomes states, the motivating factor of the entire hunt was simply but forcefully to honor their Portuguese guest. Indeed, the elephant was to be mercilessly hunted and savagely killed for the sole purpose of performing this invaluable ritual presentation of the trophies of the hunt to Gomes. Ever the diplomat, Gomes informs us that all of these gifts—the six leopard pelts, the elephant meat and assorted tusks including the enormous elephant tusk he singled out—were brought back to his caravels and, we might presume, made the return voyage to Portugal for the customary presentation on his own part to an eagerly awaiting Infante D.

Henrique.<sup>135</sup>

Before leaving the Senegambia region, however, Gomes proudly relates that he greatly desired to contact the king, Niumi-Mansa, who, he had learned from his munificent host at Alcuzet, was responsible for the devastating attacks on the

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<sup>134</sup> Gomes, p. 78: “Et ipse dedit mihi sex pelles de onzis et precepit interficere unum elephantem et iussit carnes suas portare ad carauelas.”

<sup>135</sup> Gomes, p. 78.

Portuguese.<sup>136</sup> Gomes initially tried to ingratiate himself with Niumi-Mansa, who quite understandably feared reprisals from the Portuguese, by sending the king and his followers numerous gifts, as was the custom.<sup>137</sup> Although the ferocious, debilitating assaults launched by African rulers like Niumi-Mansa in response to Portuguese raiding and slaving endeavors compelled the Infante D. Henrique to change his strategy, the military victories by these sub-Saharan Africans quickly earned them the esteem and respect of Portuguese like Gomes who now struggled to establish formal commercial relations with the understandably skeptical Senegambian rulers.<sup>138</sup> Niumi-Mansa repeatedly tested Gomes and probed his intentions by dispatching male and female representatives to Gomes's caravel on several different occasions.<sup>139</sup> At last, despite some misgivings and suspicions, Niumi-Mansa received Gomes "with the greatest solemnity."<sup>140</sup>

Once again Gomes willingly abandoned the security of his caravel and ventured out into the interior as a guest of the local ruler.<sup>141</sup> Quickly ensconced at Niumi-Mansa's court, Gomes fervently endeavored to curry favor with the militarily potent ruler who had roundly terrorized the Portuguese. His exaggerated claims to have triumphed in debate over a Muslim cleric resident at Niumi-Mansa's court, and as a result to have instantly converted the Senegambian king, should be treated with caution.<sup>142</sup> Nevertheless, Gomes narrates additional, more plausible, episodes from his time at court, giving particular

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<sup>136</sup> Gomes, p. 80: "Et ibi intellexi ueritatem: quod totum damnum factum christianis fecerat quidam rex qui uocatur Nomimans...Cum quo multum laboraui facere pacem et misi ei multa munera per suos homines..."

<sup>137</sup> Gomes, p. 80: "Et multum timebat christianos propter damnum quod illis fecerat et caraelis predictis."

<sup>138</sup> Elbl, 1992, p. 169. The diminishing financial returns caused by warfare also contributed to the drastic change in policy.

<sup>139</sup> Gomes, p. 80: "Et ipse misit ad me multociens uiros et feminas ad probandum me ne forte illis facerem tedium aliquod. Quod ego in contrarium feci, recipiendo ipsos cum affabili uultu."

<sup>140</sup> Gomes, p. 80: "...cum magna potestate."

<sup>141</sup> Gomes, p. 80: "Et mansi nocte illa in terra cum rege et baronibus suis..."

<sup>142</sup> Gomes, pp. 80.

attention to his conversations with Niumi-Mansa about the differences in hunting practices and techniques between Europe and sub-Saharan Africa. He mentions their discussion of falconry, alleging that the king, “rex” as he called him, was astonished to learn that European nobles hunted with birds perched on their hands and that these raptors would then pursue other birds. Gomes reports that Niumi-Mansa promptly wrote to the Infante D. Henrique requesting that he send a goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) to him so that he could learn and practice falconry, the European aristocratic sport par excellence.<sup>143</sup>

Niumi-Mansa’s request to the Infante D. Henrique via Gomes for a goshawk is particularly interesting because Gomes seems to have communicated and the African king seems clearly to have understood the general perception in Europe of falconry as the quintessential noble pastime, “an intrinsically superior activity.”<sup>144</sup> In addition, the diplomatic exchange of trained hunting birds ranked among the favorite and most highly desired royal and aristocratic gifts, not just in Europe but also throughout areas of the Middle East and Asia.<sup>145</sup> For instance, Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, ransomed his captive son, the Count of Nevers, from the Ottoman Sultan Bayazid (1448–1512) by sending him, at the sultan’s own explicit request, a gift of twelve gyrfalcons.<sup>146</sup> The symbolism of falconry in literary and visual representations enjoyed a remarkably rich

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<sup>143</sup> Gomes, p. 82: “Qui et immediate scripsit domino Infanti ut sibi...et quod ei mitteret unum aꝑor, auem ad uenandum (quia miratus erat ualde quando ei dixi quod christiani portabant auem in manu que capiebat ceteras aues)...”

<sup>144</sup> Cummins, John, *The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting*, London: Phoenix Press, 1988, p. 189. For the prestige of falconry, see also Forsyth, William H., “The Noblest of Sports: Falconry in the Middle Ages,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, v. 2, n. 9, 1944, pp. 253-259; Oggins, Robin S., *The Kings and Their Hawks: Falconry in Medieval England*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, pp. 10-35, 109-138.

<sup>145</sup> Cummins, 1988, p. 196.

<sup>146</sup> Forsyth, 1944, p. 253. The gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*) is the largest falcon as well as the most northerly breeding falcon, preferring arctic and subarctic regions like Greenland and Iceland. It preys on large birds.

and varied tradition in European and Islamic societies. The association of ancient warriors and medieval knightly heroes with trained raptors was commonplace, enduring and powerful.<sup>147</sup> However, for Europeans, but especially in Iberia, the goshawk, more than any other raptor, seemed best to embody the very essence of falconry, for it was generally considered to be unusually noble and beautiful as well as exceedingly ferocious.<sup>148</sup> As a short-winged, long-tailed raptor, the irascible goshawk is a true hawk.<sup>149</sup> Yet the goshawk, according to fourteenth-century commentators, distinguished itself from other raptors by its distinctively ill-humored temperament and tremendous difficulty in handling.<sup>150</sup> Not only did the goshawk adeptly attack low-flying birds, but it also brutally savaged ground game such as hares.

As a diplomatic gift for a formidable Senegambian king who had inflicted significant military damage on the Portuguese in Africa, the goshawk would therefore symbolize notions of proud nobility, fierce independence and frightening martial abilities. The gift of the goshawk would serve as a form of recognition of those qualities in Niumi-Mansa. Yet the possession of a goshawk as an exotic animal in sub-Saharan Africa would be doubly ostentatious since they had to be acquired from Scandinavia, especially Norway. Conveniently for the Portuguese court, the major center of trade in goshawks, at least throughout the fourteenth century, was Bruges, a city where the Portuguese business

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<sup>147</sup> Cummins, 1988, pp. 223-233; Oggins, 2004, pp. 109-117.

<sup>148</sup> Cummins, 1988, pp. 193, 232. However, the peregrine falcon was probably the preferred and more representative raptor of medieval European falconry. For an important fourteenth-century account of Goshawks from an Iberian perspective, see Pero Lopez de Ayala, *Libro de la Caça de las Aves*, edited by John G. Cummins, London: Tamesis Books Limited, 1986, pp. 183-186. Ayala makes the observation that goshawks are much more highly prized in Iberian than elsewhere in Europe. Cummins confirms this statement by noting that goshawks appear with more frequency and importance in medieval Spanish literature than in other European traditions. See, Ayala, 1986, pp. 183, 212.

<sup>149</sup> Cummins, 1988, p. 193.

<sup>150</sup> Ayala, 1986, pp. 183-186; Cummins, 1988, p. 193.

community had a large presence and enjoyed special trading privileges.<sup>151</sup> Thus, the bonds between Gomes and Niumi-Mansa were secured through the sport of hunting, for Gomes imparted not only his knowledge of falconry to the Senegambian king, but also gave him an exotic Scandinavian goshawk. In this way, the exchange of prestigious diplomatic gifts related to hunting was effected by both parties.

Gomes assured Niumi-Mansa that the Infante D. Henrique would fully satisfy his requests which had been explicitly communicated to the Portuguese prince in writing.<sup>152</sup> Although no record of such a gift seems to survive in Portuguese archives, Gomes twice promised Niumi-Mansa that he would indeed receive the goshawk he desired. As a man of honor, he likewise avowed to the reader that in the exalted presence of King Afonso V he had in fact dutifully secured delivery of the raptor along with other items pledged to Niumi-Mansa.<sup>153</sup> Thus, Gomes uses the greatest authority in Portugal, the person of the king himself, to validate his claim. In 1458, about two years after his initial meeting with Niumi-Mansa on the lower Gambia, Gomes proclaims that the Infante D. Henrique finally fulfilled the promises he had made to the Mandinka ruler by sending him the trained hunting goshawk.<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, at the time of their initial encounter on the

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<sup>151</sup> Cummins, 1988, p. 197. On Portuguese commercial privileges in Bruges granted in 1411 and 1438, see Elbl, 1992, p. 175; Paviot, Jacques, "Les Portugais à Bruges au XVe siècle," *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Calouste Gulbenkian*, v. 38, 1999, pp. 1-122; Paviot, Jacques, "Les Portugais à Bruges," in *International trade in the Low Countries (14th-16th centuries): merchants, organization, infrastructure*, edited by Peter Stabel and Bruno Blondé, Leuven: Garant, 2000 p. 55-74.

<sup>152</sup> Gomes, p. 82: "Quod ego omnia promisi quod dominus Infans omnia adimpleret."

<sup>153</sup> Gomes, p. 84: "Post aduentum uero domini Infantis de armata cum rege Alfonso...dixi ad memoriam domino Infanti ea que mihi dixerat rex Nomimans quod ei mitteret omnia que ei comiserat."

<sup>154</sup> Gomes, p. 82: "Quo ego postea commemorans dominum Infantem de illis quibus scripserat rex ille, qui et omnia misit ut ego promiseram."



Gambia, their conversation about hunting and falconry and the mere pledge of gifts to come seems to have been sufficient to cement their friendship.<sup>155</sup>

The Venetian nobleman and merchant Alvise da Cà da Mosto (c. 1433-1483), known as Cadamosto, sailed the Guinea coast three times for the Infante D. Henrique in 1455, 1456, and an unspecified later date, becoming, among other things, one of the first Europeans to explore the Cape Verde islands.<sup>156</sup> His voyages in Guinea took him through the Senegambia and eventually down to Sierra Leone. The Infante D. Henrique was eager to employ foreigners, especially Italians, in exploration and commerce in Guinea because they invested money in the venture and helped to increase the volume of trade.<sup>157</sup> But someone with the experience and background of Cadamosto was considered particularly valuable. As a Venetian merchant who had been previously involved in working the maritime trade routes between Venice, England and Flanders, Cadamosto could provide two important qualities necessary for the promotion of peaceful relations and regulated trade in Guinea in the 1450s. He could facilitate the vital connection between the new maritime trade routes the Portuguese were discovering and carefully developing with Guinea and the traditional commercial networks in Europe dominated by merchant

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<sup>155</sup> Gomes, p. 82: "Et in recessu meo plorabat ipse cum omnibus suis propter amicitiam maximam factam inter me et illum."

<sup>156</sup> For a fascinating and reliable account of Cadamosto, see Russell, Peter E., *Prince Henry "the Navigator": A Life*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 291-315; Russell, Peter, "Veni, vidi, vici: Some Fifteenth-century Eyewitness Accounts of Travel in the African Atlantic before 1492," *Historical Research*, v. 66, n. 160, 1993, pp. 115-128. See also, Hair, 1994a, pp. 98-100; Hair, P. E. H., "Early Sources on Religion and Social Values in the Sierra Leone Region: 1 Cadamosto 1463" *Sierra Leone Bulletin of Religion*, v. 11, 1970, p. 51-64; Hair, P. E. H., "The Use of African Languages in Afro-European Contacts in Guinea, 1440-1560," *Sierra Leone Language Review*, v. 5, 1966, pp. 5-26; Mauro, Alessandro, "Il Viaggio Raccontato: Le Quattro versioni delle *Navigazioni* di Alvise da Ca' Da Mosto," *Mare Liberum*, v. 2, 1991, pp. 161-176.

<sup>157</sup> Thomaz, 1994, pp. 124. It was common practice for the Infante D. Henrique to attract and secure talent from across Europe. See, Albuquerque, Luís de, *Historia de la navegación portuguesa*, Madrid: Editorial Mapfre, 1991, pp. 16-25.

powerhouses like Venice and Flanders.<sup>158</sup> Perhaps more importantly, Cadamosto could infuse the Portuguese project in Guinea with the discretion, diplomatic skill and tact which the Venetians had mastered over centuries of experience of trading with Muslims in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>159</sup> From Cadamosto's point of view, diplomacy was the prerequisite of commerce, and in the 1450s this was precisely the policy the Infante D. Henrique had sent Gomes off to implement.<sup>160</sup> Persuaded by the Infante D. Henrique to participate in his enticing enterprise in Guinea, Cadamosto was almost simultaneously dispatched to exploit Gomes's successes in the unprecedented endeavor.

Fortunately, Cadamosto possessed other typically Venetian characteristics as well. Like the countless sensitive, detailed and exhaustive reports penned by Venetian ambassadors stationed throughout Europe, Cadamosto's writings show him to be a relatively neutral and remarkably curious observer.<sup>161</sup> Writing about his own experiences in the Senegambia, Cadamosto concentrates on what seemed to him to be the exotic and unfamiliar, especially in terms of the material culture and public behavior of the Senegambians he encountered.<sup>162</sup> Yet he seems to have been expressly fascinated by the appearance and behavior of African animals, such as elephants, crocodiles, hippopotami and snakes.<sup>163</sup> Although his interest in animals like civet cats was motivated by economic concerns and his interest in others like parrots stemmed more from curiosity and aesthetic interests related to the exotic, his prolonged attention and deep interest in elephants was

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<sup>158</sup> Thomaz, 1994, p. 124

<sup>159</sup> Hair, 1994a, p. 100.

<sup>160</sup> Hair, 1994a, p. 100.

<sup>161</sup> Hair, 1994a, pp. 98-100; Hair, 1970

<sup>162</sup> Hair, 1992, pp. 18-20.

<sup>163</sup> Alvise da Ca da' Mosto, "Le navigazioni di Alvise da Ca' da Mosto e Pietro di Sintra" in Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Navigazioni e Viaggi*, edited by Marica Milanese, Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1978, v. 1, pp. 508-510; 530-532. (This reference will hereafter be referred to as Cadamosto.)

of a different order altogether.<sup>164</sup> Taking advantage of the invaluable experience and knowledge of the Senegambians he met, Cadamosto evidently inquired about the behavior of elephants and their reactions to and relations with humans. He discussed at length the methods and techniques of hunting and killing elephants while alertly and perceptively noting the role and significance of these hunts as bonding rituals which affirmed and articulated social structure, including the formation of diplomatic and commercial relations with foreigners.

In his account of his adventures among the Mandinka peoples along the Gambia, whom Gomes had just contacted, Cadamosto claims to have witnessed a native elephant hunt and to have eaten elephant meat, as was the custom among his hosts.<sup>165</sup> He describes the procedures and techniques of the big game hunt in vivid detail which must have excited the fantasies of aristocratic hunting enthusiasts in Europe who read his account. Cadamosto excuses himself from the task of describing the large size of elephants, for he claims his European readers can get a good enough sense of it from the enormity of the tusks which reach Europe.<sup>166</sup> Cadamosto himself would carry to Portugal one of the most remarkable of all elephant tusks to reach Europe in the fifteenth century. He then indicates that elephant tusks point downward and must only be removed from elephants after their death, hence the necessity of the hunt to procure them.<sup>167</sup> He even apparently measured how deeply embedded the tusks are in the jaws of elephants and how much

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<sup>164</sup> Hair, 1992, pp. 19-20. Cadamosto claims to have brought over one hundred and fifty African parrots back with him to Portugal. See, Cadamosto, p. 510: "Ed ebbine di queste due sorti molti, e specialmente piccoli di nido, di quali molti me ne moritteno e gli altri portai in Spagna; e la caravella venuta in Spagna com me ne portò da centocinquanta in suso, vendendoli per mezzo ducato l'uno."

<sup>165</sup> Cadamosto, p. 530-31.

<sup>166</sup> Cadamosto, p. 509: "...e la sua grandezza si comprende per li denti di avolio che vengono in queste nostre parti..."

<sup>167</sup> From his description of downward not forward curving tusks, it seems that Cadamosto saw Forest elephants (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) not Savannah elephants (*Loxodonta africana*). See, Cadamosto, p. 509: "...e questi delli elefanti guardono in zoso verso terra."

therefore must be sacrificed when hacking out the tusk from the skull.<sup>168</sup> Unlike elephants in other parts of the world, Cadamosto informs us, elephants in Guinea are wild and impossible to domesticate. Although he admits to having personally observed only three elephants in the wild during his time in Senegambia, he states that there were in fact many elephants living in social groups or herds in the forests of the region.

Cadamosto testifies to the apprehensive, docile nature of elephants and describes from his own experience the timid response of the three elephants he encountered. As Cadamosto's boat gently approached the riverbank, the three elephants gathered there quietly retired into the protection of the forest, calmly slipping out of sight. Confirming his experience, Cadamosto was likewise informed by local inhabitants that elephants posed no danger to humans unless provoked or traveling with young calves. He twice sharply makes this point, perhaps to highlight the extreme irritation and insufferable fury hunting expeditions unleashed on the relatively agreeable and unsuspecting beasts.

Elephant hunts, according to Cadamosto, lasted several days. A large hunting party would set off for the forests on foot. No auxiliary animals, such as the horses or dogs commonly employed in Europe for the hunting of big game like the hart or stag, were involved. The hunters carried nothing but spears and bows and arrows. However, Cadamosto informs us that all the weapons were poisoned and this was absolutely crucial to the success of the hunt. Once ensconced in the forest, numerous hunters would hide in and behind groups of trees and would then await the elephant's approach. This method was employed for three reasons which Cadamosto enumerates. Within the forest, as opposed to the open savannah or swamp lands, trees could be used for the cover and

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<sup>168</sup> Cadamosto, p. 530: "E questo piccolo elefante viddi io morto in terra, il dente lungo del quale non era oltre tre palmi, e di questi tre un palmo si raccoglieva nella mascella, sí che non poteva avere salvo duoi palmi di dente..."

protection of the hunters. They likewise provided favorable vantage points for hurling down spears or firing off arrows from above into the thick skin on the neck and back of the elephant. In addition, the dense forests could confuse panicked and wounded elephants and prevent them from running away or from charging and overtaking the hunters. In the thick forest, then, the hunted elephant is “unable to defend itself.”<sup>169</sup> Thus trapped amongst the trees, the elephant would be wounded many times with each blow simultaneously piercing flesh and injecting venom into the bloodstream. The hunters would toil feverishly to exhaust and slaughter the beast before it could escape the forest.

These hunting methods and strategies incorporated detailed knowledge of animal behavior and local topography. Senegambian hunters were well aware from experience that elephants despite their massive size could easily and rapidly outrun any human. As Cadamosto explains: “there is no man no matter how swift he is whom the elephant cannot overtake in the open field...and no man would dare to approach one where there are no trees.”<sup>170</sup> Although Cadamosto never himself witnessed an elephant attack on a human, he reports what many Senegambians had explained to him. According to this testimony, elephants struck humans with nothing but their trunks. Such a vicious blow, Cadamosto comments, would fell a man instantly, “as though hit by a bolt from a cross-bow.”<sup>171</sup> Elsewhere he remarks that an upward blow from a trunk could launch a man so

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<sup>169</sup> Cadamosto, p. 530: “senza potersi difendere.”

<sup>170</sup> Cadamosto, p. 509: “E non è uomo sí veloce che lo elefante non lo aggiunga all campagna...”  
Cadamosto, p. 530: “Ben vi dico che alla larga, dove non fosse arbori, niuno uomo non oseria accostarsi a lui...”

<sup>171</sup> Cadamosto, p. 509: “...che butta l’uomo alle fiata quasi un trar di balestra.”

high up in the air or toss him such a great distance that he would die before hitting ground again.<sup>172</sup>

The elephants on shore that Cadamosto observed from his small boat in the river were some distance away and disappeared quickly and discreetly before he could get a closer look. However, he was soon able to satisfy his curiosity and to inspect a dead elephant intimately and at length. Indeed, Cadamosto had the rare privilege of carrying it off with him back to Portugal in pieces as a trophy and almost as a kind of relic. The elephant had been hunted down and killed for him (“a mia complacenzia”) by Niumi-Mansa, the Mandinka ruler on the lower Gambia who had only recently hosted Diogo Gomes at his court and made peace with the Portuguese. Cadamosto unequivocally states that Niumi-Mansa himself lead the hunt accompanied by many hunters and that they isolated and tracked the targeted elephant for two full days.<sup>173</sup> This spectacular enterprise and subsequent exchange was undertaken with the explicit purpose of impressing and entertaining the curious Venetian traveling under the aegis of the Infante D. Henrique as the best means available to strengthen the relationship Niumi-Mansa and the Portuguese prince had already founded on knowledge of the aristocratic hunting sport of falconry and the promised gift of a cherished goshawk.

The elephant killed during this hunt, Cadamosto says, was young and small, its tusks measuring only about two palmi in length (44cm), whereas the tusks of mature elephant bulls, he seems to have been informed by knowledgeable local elephant hunters,

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<sup>172</sup> Cadamosto, *Le Navigazioni Atlantiche del Veneziano Alvise da Mosto*, edited by Tullia Gasparini Leporace, Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1966, p. 105: “per modo che arcoliendo l’ homo con questa tromba, lo buta tanto alto in aere, che avanti che ’l zona a terra l’ homo è morto.”

<sup>173</sup> Cadamosto, p. 530: “Guumimensa...andò a cacciarlo con molti Negri, e duoi giorni lo perseguitorono, in tanto che lo amazzorono.”

should reach anywhere between ten to twelve palmi in length (220cm to 264cm).<sup>174</sup> In an impressive display of honor to the European guest, Niumi-Mansa, the African leader, presented the kill to Cadamosto and asked that he freely take any part of the beast back with him to Portugal; the remainder would be given to the hunters to eat.<sup>175</sup> Cadamosto confesses that he, being courteous and curious, decided to taste elephant meat not only because his hosts had offered it to him as a reward of the hunt, but also because he wanted to boast that he had been the first to have eaten meat that no one from his own country had ever consumed before.<sup>176</sup> Unfortunately for Cadamosto, he did not find it much to his liking.<sup>177</sup> As a prize, his Mandinka host personally offered Cadamosto one of the elephant's feet, part of the trunk, and the skin and hairs of the beast. He brought these exotic fruits of the hunt, along with some salted elephant meat, back to Portugal to present to the Infante D. Henrique: "Which things...I then presented in Spain [i.e. Iberia] to my lord the Infante D. Henrique of Portugal who received them as a great present for they were the first things he had seen from that region and also because he was deeply desirous of possessing unusual objects that came from far-off lands and which were presented to him and which came from the lands discovered as a result of his labors."<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Cadamosto, p. 530: "E questo piccolo elefante viddi io morto in terra, il dente lungo del quale non era oltre tre palmi, e di questi tre un palmo si raccoglieva nella mascella, sí che non poteva avere salvo duoi palmi di dente: e questo era segno che l'era giovanetto, dico rispetto quelli che hanno i denti da dieci in dodici palmi lunghi." Peter Mark estimates that one palmi measures approximately twenty-two centimeters. See, Mark, Peter, "Towards a Reassessment of the Dating and the Geographical Origins of the Luso-African Ivories, Fifteenth to Seventeenth Centuries," *History in Africa*, v. 34, 2007, p. 207.

<sup>175</sup> Cadamosto, p. 530: "Questo elefante mi fu donato per questo signore, cioè che tolesse di esso quella parte ch'io volessi, e il resto fosse dato a quelli cacciatori per mangiare."

<sup>176</sup> Cadamosto, p. 530: "Onde, intendendo io che la carne di quello se mangiava per i Negri, ne feci tagliare un pezzo, del qual ne mangiai...per provar piú cose e per poter dire che avea mangiato della carne d'uno animale che non avea mangiato alcuno della mia terra..."

<sup>177</sup> Cadamosto, p. 530-31: "in effetto non è troppo buona, e mi parse dura e dissavida, cioè di poco gusto."

<sup>178</sup> Cadamosto in Brásio, António, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria Africana: África Ocidental (1342-1499)*, Lisbon: Agência Geral do Ultramar, second series, vol. 1, 1958, p. 361: "le qual cosse...apresentai poi in Spagna al mio signor Infante don Henrich de Portagallo el qual la receuj per grande presente per esser la prima cossa hauer visto de quel paexe e ancho perche el deisderaua molto de hauer de queste cosse stranje

Because the hunt yielded, even after much effort, only a young elephant with undersized tusks and feet, Niumi-Mansa, who was openly dissatisfied with the outcome, also gave Cadamosto the foot of a larger elephant.<sup>179</sup> Cadamosto goes into unusually precise detail in the text about how both of these elephant feet were measured and their dimensions recorded. He carefully observes the shape and characteristics of the amputated feet and even discusses the location of this exceptional event as well as the witnesses to it.<sup>180</sup> Evidently, obtaining accurate measurements and properly documenting those dimensions and then certifying their veracity were of the utmost significance to Cadamosto. Moreover, this statistical data then needed to be publicized and celebrated in prose. Cadamosto next relates how he eventually returned to Portugal and presented this large foot along with an elephant tusk of twelve palmi in length (about 264 centimeters or nearly nine feet in length) to the Infante D. Henrique. He does not explicitly say how he obtained the enormous tusk, which naturally he measured himself and which he describes as being “well formed” (“ben fato”) though it might be inferred from his text that it could have been another gift from Niumi-Mansa. However, Cadamosto does unequivocally affirm that the Infante D. Henrique subsequently sent the additional gifts of the elephant foot and huge elephant tusk of twelve palmi he received from Niumi-Mansa to the trend-setting court of Burgundy as a “great present” (“uno grande presente”) for his sister,

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che a luj ge venia de lonzi parte apresentade e de paese discoperti per soa industria...” The two manuscripts of Cadamosto’s text in the Marciana Library, Venice (Cod. it. VI, 454; Cod. it. VI, 208) differ on this point from the edited version published by Ramusio. Cf., Cadamosto, p. 531.

<sup>179</sup> Cadamosto, p. 531: “Ancora per lo detto signor negro mi fu donato un altro piede di elefante, il quale misurai più volte sotto la suola, e lo trovai palmi tre e uno dedo grosso...”

<sup>180</sup> Cadamosto in Leporace, p. 107: “Notando è che per lo dito signor Negro mi fo donato etiam un altro piè de elefante, il qual amesurai più volte sotto la solla de esso piè, presente molte persone, el qual atrovai palmi 3 e un dido grosso, cossì de largo como de longo, in ogni parte che ’l mesurava.”



Isabel of Portugal, Duchess of Burgundy, and wife of Philip the Good.<sup>181</sup> This circulation and exchange of an elephant tusk between Niumi-Mansa and Cadamosto in Gambia, then between Cadamosto and the Infante D. Henrique in Portugal, and then between the Infante D. Henrique and the Burgundian court exemplifies the deliberate manner in which the Portuguese court strategically fashioned a distinctive identity in Europe which was associated with hunting and war in sub-Saharan Africa.

During the closing years of the fifteenth century and the first decade of the sixteenth century, Valentim Fernandes, the royal printer, influential courtier, and crown's superintendent of the German business community in Portugal, compiled a manuscript in Latin and Portuguese that consisted of unpublished written reports and first-hand oral testimony of the experiences and observations of those who had traveled to Guinea under Portuguese auspices.<sup>182</sup> Probably deriving some of his information from manuscript texts

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<sup>181</sup> Cadamosto, p. 531: "...qual etiam appresentai al prefato signor infante con un dente dodici palmi lungo, qual con detto piede grande mandó a donare all signore duchessa di Bergogna per un gran presente." Again, the Marciana manuscript includes slight but important differences. Brásio, pp. 361-362: "...el pie grande etiam apresentai al prefato signor Infante con vno dente de alifante che iera 12 palmj longo e ben fato el qual dente con el dito pie manda il dito signor apresentar ala Duchesa de Brogogna per vno grande presente..." Fernandes confirms this exchange, see Fernandes, Valentim, *Códice Valentim Fernandes*, edited by José Pereira da Costa, Lisbon: Academia Portuguesa da História, 1997, p. 184: "Trouuerom hũu dente de 12 palmos o qual mandou o Jffante aa duqueza de Bergonha su jrmãa."

<sup>182</sup> Fernandes, Valentim, *Códice Valentim Fernandes*, edited by José Pereira da Costa, Lisboa: Academia Portuguesa da História, 1997. The bibliography on Fernandes has now become sizeable. See Hendrich, Yvonne, *Valentim Fernandes: ein deutscher Buchdrucker in Portugal um die Wende vom 15. zum 16. Jahrhundert und sein Umkreis*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007; Justen, Helga Maria, *Valentim Fernandes e a literatura de viagens*, Lagos, Portugal: Câmara Municipal de Lagos, 2007; Alves Dias, João José, ed., *No quinto centenário da Vita Christi: os primeiros impressores alemães em Portugal*, Lisbon: Instituto da Biblioteca Nacional e do Livro, 1995; Anselmo, Artur, *Origens da imprensa em Portugal*, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional—Casa da Moeda, 1981; Anselmo, Artur, "L'Activité Typographique de Valentim Fernandes au Portugal (1495-1518)," in *L'humanisme portugais et l'Europe: actes du XXIe Colloque international d'études humanistes, Tours, 3-13 juillet 1978*, edited by Jean-Claude Margolin and José V. de Pina Martins, Paris: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, Centre culturel portugais, 1984, pp. 781-818; Andrade, António Alberto de, "O Auto notarial de Valentim Fernandes (1503) e o seu significado como fonte histórica," *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Português*, Paris: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Centro Cultural Português, pp. 521-545; Lopes, Marília dos Santos, "'Vimos oje maravilhosas' Valentim Fernandes e os Descobrimientos Portugueses," in *Portugal--Alemanha--Africa: do imperialismo colonial ao*

of Gomes and Cadamosto, among numerous other sources, Fernandes records a vaguely similar elephant hunt, led by the familiar Mandinka leader, Niumi-Mansa, “the black king,” at the mouth of the Gambia.<sup>183</sup> He relates how Niumi-Mansa in order to delight and entertain Christian traders organized elephant hunts that lasted, impressively, up to three full days.<sup>184</sup> Like Cadamosto, but with more relish and seemingly greater accuracy of observation, Fernandes describes with specificity the methods and techniques of the hunt and the kill as practiced by the Mandinka. He likewise deliberately mentions that Niumi-Mansa personally divided up the dead elephant between the hunters and the Christians to be eaten at a feast. He also comments that parts of these hunted elephants, such as the meat and hair, were given to Christian traders to be brought back to Portugal.<sup>185</sup> Fernandes uses the third person plural for the action of the traders (“leuaram”), implying that this practice was carried out on more than one occasion.

In another place Fernandes describes the hunting of elephants in Sierra Leone, carefully noting that those who manage successfully to bring down the beast are celebrated as worthy men and expert hunters, and the event elicits great festivities in their honor.<sup>186</sup> However, the hunters in Sierra Leone employed a different technique than the ones developed by Niumi-Mansa and his men along the Gambia. In Sierra Leone the hunters first construct harpoons with heavy handles and smear the points with poison. After patiently tracking a herd of elephants and confidently predicting the direction in

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*imperialismo político: actas do IV Encontro Luso-Alemão*, edited by A.H. de Oliveira Marques, Alfred Opitz, and Fernando Clara, Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 1996, pp. 13-23.

<sup>183</sup> Fernandes, p. 183: “Gnumimansa rey ngero acerca da boca do ryo...”

<sup>184</sup> Fernandes, pp. 183: “Gnumimansa...por comprazer aos christãos com sua gente a caça a pee com suas azagayas e frechas enheruadas todas e seguirom hũ aliffante pequeno tres dias antes que o matarom...”

<sup>185</sup> Fernandes, pp. 183: “Ho senhor negro despois de morto o aliffante ho repartio pera os caçadores e christãos e comerom no...E leuaram seus cabellos a Portugal.”

<sup>186</sup> Fernandes, pp. 111: “E qualquer que mata hũ aliffante tem no por muyto valente e lhe fazem grande festa.”

which the herd will next travel, the hopeful hunter takes his weapon and climbs up a tree under which he suspects the elephants will pass. As the elephants move below the tree the hunter drops the harpoon on one and then follows it until it eventually dies. Hunting by this method could take a good deal of time and could cover rather large tracts of land. Large elephants especially could resist the poison and continue to walk great distances until it took effect. Before finally falling down to die, the elephant might move into the territory of other tribes and villages and this could cause problems. It was the general practice to allow the successful hunter to return through friendly territory with his kill although if the elephant died in rival territory some form of exchange or payment had to transpire before the elephant could be claimed. Sometimes competing groups even went to war to fight for the rights to the kill. Fernandes noted that the parts of the elephant that the people of Sierra Leone especially prized as a delicacy were the toenails, trunks and penis.

In several places, Fernandes remarks that most of the West African societies the Portuguese encountered that hunted elephants seemed do so in order to obtain the bountiful amounts of meat for local consumption and, probably even more importantly, to acquire the pair of large ivory tusks found on both male and female African elephants to fashion into precious objects of art and adornment and to trade at a significant profit.<sup>187</sup> Speaking about the Temne peoples living in the interior of Sierra Leone, Fernandes writes, “In this land there are many elephants and they have an infinite number of elephant teeth from them and they make all of their praiseworthy objects from this

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<sup>187</sup> Fernandes, pp. 102-103, 111, 183, 189.

ivory.”<sup>188</sup> The Portuguese sailing along the coast of Atlantic Africa looked for areas with significant numbers of elephants. Moreover, they perceptively noticed and dutifully recorded regions with unusually large populations of elephants due to the fact that the local societies inhabiting those areas did not possess sufficient manpower, skill or knowledge to hunt them consistently or successfully.<sup>189</sup> The implication was that the Portuguese took a condescending view of those African societies which were incapable for whatever reason of hunting elephants in contradistinction to the powerful warrior groups who enjoyed the ability to kill elephants and consequently to bestow gifts and trade in elephant products such as ivory.

Although Cadamosto and Fernandes frequently portray and explain the methods and techniques of the elephant hunt, the social, ritual and religious aspects of elephant, buffalo and leopard hunting among the “Casse” receive particularly insightful comment.<sup>190</sup> In an enlightening passage, Fernandes states that those who kill a leopard must give the pelt and teeth to the local king as a sign both of their own submission and of the king’s authority and power.<sup>191</sup> The king then has spectacular necklaces made out of these leopards’ teeth, given as tribute, which are “held in great esteem” and which, according to Fernandes, are worth the equivalent of at least four slaves, sometimes more.<sup>192</sup> The leopard’s pelt is worn by the king as a form of ceremonial armor which was likely intended to symbolize notions of strength and prowess as a warrior and to embody

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<sup>188</sup> Fernandes, p. 111: “Em esta terra ha alliffantes muytos de que tem jnfijndos dentes que he marffim de que fazem todas suas obras louçãas.”

<sup>189</sup> Fernandes, p. 183: “Aqui ha muytos aliffantes saluagens porque os nom sabem amansar.”

<sup>190</sup> Since Fernandes specifies that the “Casse” live in an area under Temne control in Sierra Leone, they might possibly be identified with the Kissi.

<sup>191</sup> Fernandes, p. 102: “E se hũu negro mata hũa onça ha de dar a elrey a pelle e os dentes como por sojeiçam.”

<sup>192</sup> Fernandes, p. 102: “Ca does dentes fazem collares pera o pescoço que trazem em grande stima. E se acham que hũu colar daquelles val quatro escrauos e outros mais.”

ideas of royalty and majesty as king.<sup>193</sup> Moreover, the meat of all hunted elephants, buffalos and leopards was required to be sent to the king who, along with the elders, would consume it in front of their most important idol.<sup>194</sup> The presentation of elephant and other big game meat to the king as tribute confirmed the ruler's control and dominance over the human and animal societies in the area. The consumption of this meat with the group of elders in front of the principal idol provided social approval and religious legitimation to the king's reign and reinforced the social hierarchy. It also fortified and substantiated the association of the strength and power of elephants and the other hunted animals with the king in particular and notions of rule in general.

In addition to the elephant tusks Cadamosto and Gomes received as diplomatic gifts from sub-Saharan African rulers, Cadamosto implies that African rhinoceros horns were likewise acquired, although these were identified in Europe at the time with the miraculous horn of unicorns.<sup>195</sup> Marco Polo was partly responsible for this confusion since, following Chinese tradition, he had mistakenly identified unicorns with the Asian, one-horned rhinoceros.<sup>196</sup> Cadamosto recounts an incident during which the Portuguese king was informed by a recently arrived captive of the existence of unicorns in Africa. The captured fisherman's narrative was mediated through a female slave interpreter and also, it seems, through Marco Polo's account: "And what that Negro said to the king by

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<sup>193</sup> Fernandes, p. 102. The leopard is a common symbol of royalty in West African societies, especially in Benin. See, Blier, 1998, pp. 54, 170, 204.

<sup>194</sup> Fernandes, p. 102: "E algũa carne de aliffante ou buffaro se a tyram mandam a elrey que ha come com os velhos do lugar diante do ydolo."

<sup>195</sup> Schoenberger, Guido, "A Goblet of Unicorn Horn," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, v. 9, n. 10, 1951, pp. 284-288. For the general meaning of unicorns and their horns, see Cummins, John, *The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting*, London: Phoenix Press, 1988, pp. 153-59.

<sup>196</sup> Cummins, 1989, p. 153. Marco Polo describes a unicorn, evidently a one-horn rhinoceros, he had seen in Sumatra. For the Chinese tradition of identifying the rhinoceros with the unicorn, see Chun-chiang Yen, "The Chüeh-tuana as Word, Art Motif and Legend," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, v. 89, n. 3, 1969, pp. 578-599.

means of this woman was not understood, except that he had said among other things that one found live unicorns in his country.”<sup>197</sup> Although the prisoner’s account was originally communicated in an unfamiliar African language, it is possible that it was also filtered and translated through Arabic since many of African slaves at the Portuguese court spoke the language.<sup>198</sup> Arabic had only one word to signify both the rhinoceros and the unicorn.<sup>199</sup> In any case, European and Muslim as well as Chinese traditions conveniently coincided in considering the rhinoceros to be the fabled unicorn. Naturally, King Afonso V seems to have taken the slave’s testimony quite seriously, and Portuguese traveling to sub-Saharan Africa must eventually have found evidence of what they took to be miraculous unicorn horns because the king included them for many decades in his royal monopoly on trade in Africa.<sup>200</sup> Like the ostrich eggs which had arrived at the

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<sup>197</sup> Cadamosto, p. 542: “E quello che referisce il detto Negro al re per il mezzo di questa femmina non s’intende, salvo che l’avea detto fra l’altre cose trovarsi nel suo paese alicorni vivi.”

<sup>198</sup> It was customary in Portugal to use Arabic to speak with recently captured slaves during the early decades of expansion in Africa. Hair believes the fisherman and female slave might have both spoken a coastal Kru language or Gola. See, Hair, P. E. H., “The Use of African Languages in Afro-European Contacts in Guinea, 1440-1560,” in Hair, P. E. H., *Africa Encountered: European Contacts and Evidence, 1450-1700*, Brookfield, VT: Variorum Ashgate, 1997, VI, 5-26.

<sup>199</sup> For the identification of the unicorn and rhinoceros in Muslim cultures, see Ettinghausen, Richard, *Studies in Muslim Iconography. I: The Unicorn*, Washington: Freer Gallery of Art, 1950; D. S. Rice, “Review: *Studies in Muslim Iconography. I: The Unicorn* by Richard Ettinghausen,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, v. 17, n. 1, 1955, pp. 172-174; Ley, Willy, “Review: The Fabulous Monoceros,” *The Scientific Monthly*, v. 72, n. 3, 1951, pp. 198-198.

<sup>200</sup> The document is published in Brásio, pp. 444-445: “nē daqui ē diamte demos a quaes quer lugares ou pessoas particulares, de qual quer estado e cōdiçam que sejam pera aos dictos nossos trautos e terras de Gujnea poderem resgatar, se nō ētemdam as dictas cousas nē cada huã dellas, s. gatos dalgalia, malagueta e toda outra espeçiaría e alicornes, que pera nós soamente reseruamos.” See also the document published in Albuquerque, Luís de and Maria Emília Madeira Santos, *Portugaliae monumenta Africana*, Lisbon: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical; Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses; Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, v. 1, 1993, pp. 161-162. The idea that the rhinoceros was to be identified with the unicorn was repeated into the sixteenth-century, see Damiano de Góis, *Crónica do Príncipe D. João*, edited by Graça Almeida Rodrigues, Lisbon: Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 1977, p. 78: “per que defendeo que sem sua licença nenhũa pessoa de qualquer calidade que fosse, trattasse no resgate da Malagueta, nem gatos d’Algalea, nem em Unicornios.”

Portuguese court from an early date, unicorn horns ranked among the most highly prized and mysterious possessions of European collections.<sup>201</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

As the trophy or prize of the hunt, African elephant tusks, like the antlers of the stag in Europe, were proudly collected, circulated and displayed. It was self-evident that the acquisition and display of African elephant tusks, trunks and feet in Europe were inherently related to hunting and to aristocratic values. As trophies of the hunt, elephant tusks belonged to the same category as military trophies.<sup>202</sup> Both kinds of objects symbolized conquest and victory, victory over nature and victory over enemies. Not only was hunting widely seen as a worthy training ground for war, but the distinction between hunting and war was frequently blurred, even on occasion becoming erased altogether. Hunting was commonly recommended as an important element in the education of princes, for it kept them physically fit, taught them the principles and techniques of warfare and provided them with practical experience as leaders. Sometimes the lessons and metaphors of the hunt agreeably learned by youthful princes would continue to color and influence his thoughts and language later in life as the ruling duke or king. For instance, describing the successful suppression of Ghent in 1453, Olivier de la Marche, the chronicler of the Burgundian court, wrote that “the new, young knights certainly

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<sup>201</sup> Cummins, 1988, pp. 153-59; Miera, Jesús Sáenz de, “Instrumentos suntuarios para una nueva dignidad real: útiles y objetos preciosos pertenecientes a Isabel la Católica,” in *Isabel la Católica: la magnificencia de un reinado*, edited by Manuel Fernández Álvarez, Madrid: Sociedad Estatal de Conmemoraciones Culturales; Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 2004, pp. 155-168.

<sup>202</sup> It was reported that Don Álvaro de la Luna had been sent hunting trophies in the form of numerous animal heads and the pelt of a lion from an unknown North African king. The purpose of the diplomatic gifts was to impress D. Álvaro with the king’s power and expertise and, probably, to secure an alliance with Spain. See, *Crónica de don Álvaro de Luna*, edited by Juan de Mata Carriazo, Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S. A., 1940, p. 219; Morán, J. Miguel and Fernando Checa, 1985, p. 24.

enjoyed happy hunting.”<sup>203</sup> Philippe de Commines, a diplomat, reported that in the midst of a *mêlée* the Duke of Burgundy Charles the Bold announced that he would go on with “the hunt,” meaning that he took pleasure in the pursuit of the fleeing soldiers.<sup>204</sup>

However, the European perception and appreciation of large African elephant tusks, trunks and feet in princely collections encompassed a broader range of meanings and associations. They simultaneously epitomized ideas of *naturalia* and *exotica*, two of the principal governing categories of collections along with *arteficialia* (the products of man).<sup>205</sup> The two enormous tusks presented to Gomes and Cadamosto would have been placed, along with the elephant trunks and feet, in the category of *naturalia*, encompassing fossils, odd shells, agates, ostrich eggs and other wonders produced by nature. Yet the African origins of these hunting trophies conferred an exotic quality on them which in the fifteenth-century was associated with magic and mystery. Of course, those Europeans like Gomes and Cadamosto who witnessed or participated in elephant hunts in Africa, knew the source of ivory as well as the behavior and habitat of the elephants.<sup>206</sup> As *exotica*, the tusks and other body parts were also by definition rare and precious. Since antiquity precious materials like ivory contributed to the impression of luxury and splendor at court. Yet the exceptionally large size of the two tusks given to Gomes and Cadamosto meant that they certainly also served as objects of curiosity,

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<sup>203</sup> Quoted in Calmette, Joseph, *The Golden Age of Burgundy: The Magnificent Dukes and Their Courts*, London: Phoenix, 2001, p. 158.

<sup>204</sup> Quoted in Calmette, 2001, p. 174.

<sup>205</sup> Morán, J. Miguel and Fernando Checa, *El coleccionismo en España: de la cámara de maravillas a la galería de pinturas*, Madrid: Cátedra, 1985; Kaufmann, Thomas DaCosta, “From Treasury to Museum: The Collections of the Austrian Habsburgs,” in *The Cultures of Collecting*, edited by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994, pp. 135-154, 282-285; Kaufmann, Thomas DaCosta, “From Mastery of the World to Mastery of Nature: The Kunstkammer, Politics, and Science” in *The mastery of nature: aspects of art, science, and humanism in the Renaissance*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993, pp. 174-194.

<sup>206</sup> See, Fernandes, 1997, p. 189.



wonder and *mirabilia*. These extraordinarily large tusks superbly embodied potent ideas about marvels and the marvelous as they were developing across Europe.

In addition to these intellectual categories, the elephant tusks and elephant body parts were viewed in the 1450s within a highly specific political and cultural context. For the Portuguese court, African ivory and other elephant parts obtained in Africa were inseparable from the hunt and, through diplomatic gifts, from notions of nobility and rule. They symbolized diplomatic and commercial success, and were considered, in Africa and Europe, the ultimate trophies of the hunt, embodying concepts of power and control. When the Portuguese subsequently circulated and exchanged ivory tusks with other European courts, like the court of Burgundy, they were consciously adopting and continuing African practices and values.

The connection that the Portuguese made between these early ivories, as trophies, and the hunting of elephants in Africa by Africans is fundamental to understanding why the African and Luso-African ivories of the later part of the fifteenth and early part of the sixteenth centuries were carved in the form of oliphants or hunting horns and why these hunting horns themselves feature carved depictions of the hunt on them.<sup>207</sup> Indeed, the customs and ritual aspects of the hunt in Europe and Africa (as described by Cadamosto and Fernandes) shared important similarities and functions and this influenced the reception of these ivory trophies from Africa in Europe. On both continents the hunting of big game was controlled by local nobles or rulers as a sacred right and symbol of dominance and superiority.<sup>208</sup> Hunting required large and complex parties and were

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<sup>207</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>208</sup> Fernandes, 1997, p. 102: “E se hũu negro mata hũa onça ha de dar a elrey a pelle e os dentes como por sojeiçam. Ca dos dentes fazem collares pera o pesçoço que trazem em grande stima...E a pelle da onça tem o rey pendurado tras sy como nos hũu panno de armar/ E algũa carne de aliffante ou buffaro se a tyram

typically of long duration. After a successful kill, the spoils were divided among and consumed by the hunting party according to strict hierarchical order, and the triumphant hunting party was greeted with much merriment on its return as a kind of triumph. One of the primary social purposes of the hunt was to create bonds and cement friendships and alliances as well as reinforce social order and hierarchy. The participation of Europeans on elephant hunts in Africa and the awarding of the tusks, the prized trophies of the kill, by African leaders to Europeans was part of this strategy or bonding ritual.<sup>209</sup>

However, the elephant itself as well as its coveted tusks far surpassed any big game, such as the hart or the stag, hunted in Europe. Not only was the beast a more formidable and lethal opponent than the stag, but the value of its ivory far exceeded that accorded to the stag's antlers. The presentation of elephant ivory as hunting trophies to the Portuguese court might have served, on one level, to signify the organizational and military capability and skill of African rulers, who could successfully undertake a more daunting enterprise than any undertaken in Europe. But their association with the hunt would have equally affected their reception and value as gifts from the Portuguese to other courts, for the sport of hunting and hunting metaphors, were among the European elite's most passionate and enduring interests. The inflated stories of hunting exploits which would surely have accompanied such gifts added immeasurably to their worth, and fit easily into a European discussion of aristocratic merit. Objects such as raw ivory tusks

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mandam a elrey que ha come com os velhos do lugar diante do ydolo/ E a carne da onça/ cobra e lagarto/ porco spyn todo trazem a elrey que come com velhos." For an introduction to African perceptions and practices of the hunt, see Ross, Doran H., "Imagining Elephants: An Overview," in *Elephant: the animal and its ivory in African culture*, Los Angeles: Fowler Museum of Cultural History, University of California, Los Angeles, 1992, pp. 1-39.

<sup>209</sup> Crane, Susan, "Ritual Aspects of the Hunt à Force," in *Engaging with nature: essays on the natural world in medieval and early modern Europe*, edited by Barbara Hanawalt and Lisa J. Kiser, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008, pp. 63-84; Cummins, John, *The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting*, London: Phoenix Press, 1988, pp. 1-11.

and a mixture of elephant body parts, then, were not just exotic and precious but also testified to the skill of African hunters as well as to the bonds of friendship shared between the Portuguese and Africans. By their strategic presentation in Europe, an inherently powerful Portuguese aristocracy was then able to endow proof of its economic and global dominance in the form of a ritual gift to members of other European courts.

## Chapter 2

### Courtly Gifts, Conversion, and War:

#### Royal Art from the Kongo at the Portuguese Court

##### 1. Introduction

In early 1489 a dramatic event changed the history of European court culture and collecting: a royal embassy from the powerful western Central African Kingdom of the Kongo arrived at the Portuguese court then resident in Beja.<sup>210</sup> (Fig. 2.1) The striking delegation was headed by Kasuta, a distinguished member of the Kongolese royal family who held the important post of *Mani Vunda*, making him the chief spiritual authority in the Kongo. After being abducted from the Kongo by the Portuguese in 1483, Kasuta had spent more than a year and a half as an honored though captive guest of the Portuguese court, where he learned the Portuguese language, gained intimate and expert familiarity with Portuguese court culture, and through his intelligence, nobility and refined manners eventually became a favorite of the Portuguese King João II (1455-95; r. 1481-95). When Kasuta was officially received at the Portuguese court in 1489 as a royal ambassador with full diplomatic credentials from the Kongo, he was already an experienced courtier by European standards. Having personally attended the lavish receptions of European embassies at the Portuguese court during his earlier residence there, Kasuta was

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<sup>210</sup> The contemporary sources for the court ceremonies related to the embassy from the Kongo are Pina, Rui de, *Crónica de D. João II*, edited by Luís de Albuquerque, Lisbon: Publicações Alfa, 1989, pp. 112-135; Pina, Rui de, *O Cronista Rui de Pina e a "Relação do Reino do Congo": Manuscrito inédito do "Códice Riccardiano 1910"*, edited by Carmen Radulet, Lisbon: Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimientos Portugueses; Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 1992, pp. 96-133; Resende, Garcia de, *Livro das Obras de Garcia de Resende*, edited by Evelina Verdelho, Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1994, pp. 384-402.

cognizant of European practices and expectations, and he therefore could skillfully design an effective strategy to impress his former captors. He could, as well, fashion a courtly identity in Europe for himself and more generally for the Kingdom of the Kongo through proper courtly performance and the presentation of suitably magnificent courtly gifts.

Kasuta was the first official ambassador from sub-Saharan Africa to give precious objects of African royal art as courtly gifts to a European sovereign. The exchange of prestigious sub-Saharan African art by an elite and powerful African in person at a European court was extraordinary. Likewise, the positive reception of African royal art at the Portuguese court, which is well documented, was exceptional in the history of collecting in Renaissance Europe. This chapter argues that the exchange of esteemed objects of African royal art must be understood in its specific court context. The meanings Kasuta intended to convey through these diplomatic gifts and the appreciation by the Portuguese of the aesthetic value and powerful political and religious symbolism of these objects must be approached in the context of the court ceremony in which they were presented. It is crucial that Kasuta himself presented these objects of African royal art directly to the Portuguese king. This unique situation afforded the opportunity, for the first time in the history of collecting in Europe, for the designs, uses and associated meanings of these African objects to be introduced into courtly conversation by a high-ranking sub-Saharan African.

Kasuta was ideally suited for this courtly role as one of the experts on these Kongolese objects, and as someone likewise familiar from long experience and exposure with the artistic tastes and interpretive visual strategies of the Portuguese court. The courtly exchange of objects of African royal art from the Kongo, which was the

conspicuous focal point of one of the most celebrated formal court ceremonies of the reign of the Portuguese King João II, became integral to the representation of the Portuguese monarch in Europe as wielding imperial authority in sub-Saharan Africa. As the primary artistic and visual embodiment of this imperial ideology of the Portuguese court, these courtly gifts of African royal art were dynamically transformed into potent objects essential to the definition and image of the Portuguese monarch to other European courts. In this way, African art royal art became vital to the history of court culture and collecting in Renaissance Europe.

Kasuta enjoyed the friendship, confidence and trust of both the king of the Kongo, or *Mani Kongo*, whom he represented as ambassador, and the Portuguese king, to whom he had been sent. Both sovereigns—one African and the other European—perceived Kasuta, whom they both invested with enormous responsibility, as central to the effective communication and implementation of their respective diplomatic, commercial and religious strategies and objectives. Kasuta's ceremonial presentation of royal art from the *Mani Kongo*, Nzinga a Nkuwu, to the Portuguese King João II played a decisive role in the complex articulation and dramatic achievement of these policies. However, the enthusiastic reception of these fabulous gifts of African art at the Portuguese court inevitably failed to correspond precisely with their original intentions and certain important features constituting their meanings from the Kongoles perspective were misinterpreted by the Portuguese. To some degree, these discrepancies further enhanced the success of the ceremony and appreciation of the dazzling objects. The discrepancies in meaning permitted each ruler—the *Mani Kongo* and the Portuguese king—to interpret the objects in divergent ways that flattered his sense of his own stature: Nzinga a Nkuwu

perceived the courtly gifts according to spiritual categories, whereas João II imposed a political explanation.

When his royal audience commenced in Beja in early 1489, Kasuta first addressed João II through the necessary courtly and diplomatic gesture of praising the honor and glory of the Portuguese king.<sup>211</sup> He then gave substance to his opening speech with the presentation of appropriately sumptuous royal gifts. These consisted of many elephant tusks, exquisitely carved and highly polished ivory horns and vividly colored luxury fabrics known as raffia cloth, a velvet-like pile cloth.<sup>212</sup> (Fig. 2.2-3) The elephant ivory tusks likely came from African forest elephants (*Loxodonta cyclotis*), who then inhabited the densely lush forests in the Kongo region in large numbers. Elephants, and especially their formidable tusks, were widely associated with royalty,<sup>213</sup> and the possession of numerous elephant ivory tusks implied control of the hunting skills and weaponry

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<sup>211</sup> For diplomatic practice in fifteenth-century Europe, see Mattingly, Garrett, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, Cosimo Classics, 2009, pp. 34-44; Huesmann, Jutta M., *Hospitality at the court of Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy, c.1435-1467*, D.Phil., University of Oxford, 2001; Huesmann, Jutta M., “La procédure et le cérémonial de l’hospitalité à la cour de Philippe le Bon, Duc de Bourgogne,” *Revue du Nord*, v. 84, n. 345-346, 2002, pp. 295-317; Mallett, Michael, “Ambassadors and their Audiences in Renaissance Italy,” *Renaissance Studies*, v. 8, 1994, pp. 229-243. For a case study of a contemporary Italian ruler, see Lubkin, Gregory, “Strategic Hospitality: Foreign Dignitaries at the Court of Milan, 1466-1476,” *The International History Review*, v. 8, n. 2, 1986, pp. 174-189. Issues of diplomatic practice and protocol are addressed in Elbl, Ivana, “Cross-Cultural Trade and Diplomacy: Portuguese Relations with West Africa, 1441-1521,” *Journal of World History*, v. 3, n. 2, 1992, pp. 165-204.

<sup>212</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 116: “O presente do dito rei do Congo para el-rei era de dentes de elefantes e coisas de marfim lavradas e muitos panos de palma bem tecidos e com finas cores.” Pina, 1992, pp. 100, 102: “Questi adunque oratori in nome de’ loro Re rendono dipoi molti onori e grazie alla Maestà de’ Re di Portochallo, el quale chiedono che sia el primo infra tutti li altri principi del mondo e feciono prima l’offerta delli doni e presenti portati li quali funno denti d’alifanti, panni di palme, li quali appresso loro sono in grandissimo prezzo, e certe altre cose d’avorio le quali, mirabilmente pulite colla mano del maestro, risprendevano.” Resende, 1994, p. 387: “e trouxe a el-rey hum presente de muitos dentes d’ alifantes e cousas de marfim lavradas e muitos panos de palma bem tecidos e com finas cores.”

<sup>213</sup> Ross, Doran H., ed., *Elephant: The Animal and Its Ivory in African Culture*, Los Angeles: Fowler Museum of Cultural History, University of California, Los Angeles, 1992; Blier, Suzanne Preston, *The Royal Arts of Africa: The Majesty of Form*, New York: Abrams, 1998, pp. 11, 205; Lamp, Frederick J., “Houses of Stones: Memorial Art of Fifteenth-Century Sierra Leone” *The Art Bulletin*, v. 65, n. 2, 1983, pp. 219-237.

necessary to kill elephants and obtain the precious tusks.<sup>214</sup> At the least, the number, quality and size of these tusks would have associated the *Mani Kongo* with the potency of these massive elephants and would have forcefully symbolized notions of political power, military strength and unlimited wealth and abundance.<sup>215</sup>

Known as *mpungi* in the language of the Kongo, the exquisitely carved ivory horns that Kasuta presented to the Portuguese king on behalf of the *Mani Kongo* have not been securely identified. However, these ivory horns probably very closely resembled a coherent group of seven surviving *mpungi* which have been scrupulously researched and analyzed by Ezio Bassani.<sup>216</sup> The execution of three of these horns unquestionably dates from before 1553 when they were inventoried in the collection of Cosimo de' Medici in Florence.<sup>217</sup> It is quite possible, though not verifiable, that some of these surviving *mpungi* were among those actually presented by Kasuta to the Portuguese court. It can be confidently stated that the intricate and sophisticated designs found on these seven surviving *mpungi* also appeared on the *mpungi* given to the Portuguese king on behalf of the *Mani Kongo* in 1489.

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<sup>214</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>215</sup> Ross, Doran H., ed., *Elephant: The Animal and Its Ivory in African Culture*, Los Angeles: Fowler Museum of Cultural History, University of California, Los Angeles, 1992; Blier, Suzanne Preston, *The Royal Arts of Africa: The Majesty of Form*, New York: Abrams, 1998, pp. 11, 205; Lamp, Frederick J., "Houses of Stones: Memorial Art of Fifteenth-Century Sierra Leone" *The Art Bulletin*, v. 65, n. 2, 1983, pp. 219-237.

<sup>216</sup> Bassani, Ezio, *Ivoires d'Afrique dans les anciennes collections françaises*, Paris: Musée du Quai Branly, 2008, pp. 16-24; Bassani, Ezio, "Ivoires et tissus kongo: L'Italie, le Portugal et le Congo," in *La Nouvelle Histoire du Congo: Mélanges Eurafricains Offerts à Frans Bontinck, CIC*, edited by Pamphile Mabiala Mantuba-Ngoma, Cahiers Africains, Brussels, n. 65-67, Paris: L'Harmattan; Tervuren: Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, 2004, pp. 61-72; Bassani, Ezio, *African Art and Artefacts in European Collections 1400-1800*, edited by Malcolm McLeod, London: The British Museum, 2000, pp. 277-284; Bassani, Ezio, "The Art of Western Africa in the Age of Exploration," in *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, edited by Jay A. Levenson, Washington: National Gallery of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991, pp. 63-68; Bassani, Ezio and William Fagg, *Africa and the Renaissance: Art in Ivory*, edited by Susan Vogel, New York City: Center for African Art: Distributed by Neues Pub. Co., 1988, pp. 198-208.

<sup>217</sup> Bassani, 2000, pp. 146-47, 277, 303.



A close visual analysis of one of the superbly carved *mpungi* horns, now in the collection of the Museo degli Argenti, Florence, is the foundation for further interpretation of the exchange of these kinds of ivory horns at the Portuguese court.<sup>218</sup> (Fig. 2.4) Measuring about 83 cm in length, this beautiful musical instrument and ritual object features complex geometric patterns that belong to the traditional abstract decorative vocabulary of the Kongo, which was already elaborated and perfected before contact with the Portuguese in the early 1480s.<sup>219</sup> Typically the entire surface of these elegant *mpungi* horns, as in this example, is intricately carved in low relief designs consisting variously of continuous meanders, frets, and simple or interwoven lozenges.<sup>220</sup> The carved composition emphasizes spatial framing devices, striking open spiral lines, and serpentine forms.<sup>221</sup> These qualities derive from abstract textile patterning which was applied to the carving of precious ivory horns.<sup>222</sup> The densely complex, precise design of these magnificent objects reveals a clear and controlled pattern with a transparent geometry and rhythmic order.<sup>223</sup>

These kinds of large-scale, delicately carved, high-quality *mpungi* horns were prominent elements of the royal regalia of the *Mani Kongo*.<sup>224</sup> *Mpungi* horns were conspicuously featured in court ceremony in the Kongo. They were used as musical instruments on special, formal ritual occasions at the Kongolese court, such as investiture

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<sup>218</sup> Inv. no. 2 of the Bargello, Florence. Bassani, 2000, p. 146-147. This horn was inventoried in the collection of Cosimo de' Medici in 1553.

<sup>219</sup> Bassani, 2000, p. 277, 281; Bassani, 1991, p. 191; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 198, 202; Bassani, Ezio, "A note on Kongo high-status caps in old European collections," *RES*, v. 5, 1983, p. 79; Blier, Suzanne Preston, "Imaging Otherness in Ivory: African Portrayals of the Portuguese ca. 1492," *The Art Bulletin*, v. 75, n. 3, 1993, p. 375.

<sup>220</sup> Bassani, BM, 2000, p. 281; Bassani, 1983, pp. 79-80; Blier, 1993, p. 382

<sup>221</sup> Blier, 1998, pp. 212, 214; Blier, 1993, pp. 382, 384, 395.

<sup>222</sup> Blier, 1993, pp. 382-84, 395-96; Bassani, 2000, p. 281; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 202; Bassani, 1983, p. 79

<sup>223</sup> Bassani, 1991, p. 191; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, pp. 198, 204; Bassani, 1983, p. 80

<sup>224</sup> Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 206; Bassani, 1991, p. 191

ceremonies and the reception of ambassadors.<sup>225</sup> In addition to such royal political uses, *mpungi* also possessed a religious dimension. They were played for spiritual purposes as important elements in royal funerals and the ritual worship of ancestors.<sup>226</sup> Moreover, *mpungi* were closely connected to military leadership and war. They were likely carried into battle where they were sounded by military commanders to give orders or to invoke supernatural aid in combat.<sup>227</sup>

The extent to which the Portuguese court recognized the spiritual associations of the *mpungi* horns remains ambiguous. However, it seems certain from this analysis that they comprehended the royal, courtly and martial connotations and uses of the *mpungi* horns in the Kongo as royal objects of wealth, skill and power. The *Mani Kongo* and *Mani Vunda* presented these *mpungi* horns as gifts to the Portuguese court to establish affinities and forge bonds with the king. And these objects, I argue, suggest that the Kongolese and Portuguese courts seem, most effectively, to have communicated, understood and respected each other in terms of military power and war. The courtly gifts of objects of Kongolese royal art conveyed these associations to the Portuguese court, while in response the Portuguese court sent equally lavish gifts and waged war in the Kongo in defense of the *Mani Kongo* in order to demonstrate the legitimacy and efficacy of Christianity from the Kongolese perspective.

In addition to an abundance of large African elephant tusks and ivory *mpungi* horns, Kasuta presented João II with exceptional luxury textiles from the Kongo, known as raffia cloth. (Fig. 2.3) Contemporary Portuguese sources emphasize the quantity and

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<sup>225</sup> Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 206

<sup>226</sup> Hilton, Anne, *The Kingdom of Kongo*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 11-12; Blier, 1998, p. 211; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 206

<sup>227</sup> Blier, 1998, p. 211; Bassani, 2000, p. 277; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 206.

quality of the raffia textiles, describing them as being “finely woven” and “of the most vibrant colors.”<sup>228</sup> Raffia cloth, a celebrated specialty of the Kongo region, was made through a sophisticated process from fibers within the leaflets of raffia palm trees.<sup>229</sup> Luxury raffia cloth, called *lubongo* in the language of the Kongo, was dyed in vivid colors, particularly red.<sup>230</sup> Raffia cloths could be dyed in one color or in nuanced combinations of multiple colors with the dyes being applied to separate raffia fibers before weaving, or to the whole finished cloth.<sup>231</sup> Scholars believe that the traditional repertoire of abstract patterns seen on the *mpungi* horns derived from the complex straight edge geometric designs, open spiral compositional lines and spatial frames that were initially developed for raffia textiles.<sup>232</sup> These abstract textile designs and patterns were then applied to other art forms and media. In the refined artistic culture of the Kongo during the fifteenth century, luxury textiles occupied a primary position in the hierarchy of media.<sup>233</sup> Raffia pile cloth was favorably compared by Europeans to velvet and velvety-satin, as well as to brocade, silk and damask.<sup>234</sup> Finely woven and highly embellished luxury wares with intricate designs and vivid dyes, like those Kasuta presented to João II, were reserved for the *Mani Kongo* and were closely associated with

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<sup>228</sup> Pina, 1989, p116; Resende, p.387.

<sup>229</sup> Vansina, Jan, “Raffia Cloth in West Central Africa, 1500-1800,” in *Textiles: Production, Trade and Demand*, edited by Maureen Fennell Mazzaoui, Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1998, pp. 265; Picton, John and John Mack, *African Textiles*, New York: Harper & Row, 1989, p. 33-35.

<sup>230</sup> Blier, 1998, p. 216; Vansina, 1998, p. 268.

<sup>231</sup> Vansina, 1998, pp. 267-68.

<sup>232</sup> Vansina, 1998, pp. 268, 276; Blier, 1993, pp. 382-84, 395-96; Bassani, 2000, p. 281; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 202; Bassani, 1983, p. 79

<sup>233</sup> Blier, 1993, pp. 382-83; Blier, 1998, pp. 208, 214, 216

<sup>234</sup> Cossa, Egidio in *Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16th & 17th Centuries*, edited by Jay A. Levenson, Washington, DC: Smithsonian, Freer and Sackler Galleries, v. 2, 2007, pp. 87-88; Bassani, 2000, pp. 278-79; Bassani, 1991, p. 67; Bassani, 1988, pp. 47, 202-03; Blier, 1993, p. 376; Blier, 1998, p. 216; Vansina, 1998, pp. 263, 268; Thornton, John, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 48-49

the Kongolese monarchy.<sup>235</sup> As conspicuous markers of status, the textile designs, red color dyes and high quality weaving of these raffia cloths were essential symbols for the creation and representation of royal power at the court of the *Mani Kongo*.<sup>236</sup>

The reception of Kasuta, the *Mani Vunda* and leader of the Kongolese embassy, and the ceremonial presentation of sub-Saharan African objects of royal art—elephant tusks, *mpungi* or exquisitely carved ivory horns, and luxury raffia textiles—to João II in 1489 is the focus of this chapter. In order to understand the unprecedented reception in Portugal of embassies from powerful sub-Saharan African states, and the ensuing circulation and exchange of African art as diplomatic gifts at the Portuguese court, they must be seen as the crowning triumph of the long-term imperial ideology, deliberate political policies and sophisticated diplomatic strategies pursued by João II.

## 2. “o primeiro senhor de Guiné” and An Oration of Obedience in Rome, 1485

Sub-Saharan Africa, known then as Guinea, formed the centerpiece of João II’s imperial ideology.<sup>237</sup> The Portuguese king appropriately and successfully portrayed his involvement with sub-Saharan Africa as his best claim to glory and honor, using it to create a unique courtly identity and to enhance his power and prestige in Europe during the decade of the 1480s.

João II’s early interest and involvement in sub-Saharan Africa during the 1470s when he was crown prince was crucial to later developments. This youthful activity entailed direct control and governance of the African enterprise as well as the diplomatic

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<sup>235</sup> Vansina, 1998, pp. 270-71; Blier, 1998, p. 216; Bassani, 2000, pp. 278-79

<sup>236</sup> Vansina, 1998, pp. 270-71; Blier, 1998, pp. 214, 216

<sup>237</sup> Elbl, Ivana, “Prestige Considerations and the Changing Interest of the Portuguese Crown in Sub-Saharan Atlantic Africa, 1444-1580,” *Portuguese Studies Review*, n. 2, v. 10, 2003, pp. 15-36; Thomaz, Luís Filipe F. R., *De Ceuta a Timor*, Lisbon: Difel, 1994, pp. 149-67.

promotion and confirmation in Europe of the Portuguese crown's suzerainty and *dominium* in that region. Through a series of bitter wars and intense diplomatic negotiations, culminating in the Treaty of Alcáçovas-Toledo signed with Spain in 1479-80 and the subsequent papal bull, *Aeterni Regis Clementia*, promptly issued in 1481 to confirm it, the young prince personally secured a policy known as *mare clausum*, which awarded the Portuguese crown exclusive control over maritime access to and a monopoly on trade in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>238</sup> These military and political victories produced a dramatic shift in the imperial ideology of the Portuguese court upon João II's accession to the throne. For the first time, the Portuguese crown officially recognized the legitimacy of non-Christian African states and aggressively sought diplomatic and commercial relationships with them. This was best achieved, João II fiercely believed, by sending numerous diplomatic missions to sub-Saharan Africa and by formally receiving sub-Saharan African embassies in Portugal. The success of these diplomatic delegations and the creation of meaningful and lasting relationships depended on the reciprocal exchange of magnificent objects of art as diplomatic gifts.

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<sup>238</sup> Fonseca, Luís Adão da, *D. João II*, Lisbon: Circulo de Leitores, 2005, pp. 92-134; Oliveira e Costa, João Paulo, "D. Afonso V e o Atlântico: A Base do Projecto Expansionista de D. João II," in *D. João II, o Mar e o Universalismo Lusíada: Actas, III Simposio de História Marítima*, edited by Rogério d'Oliveira, Lisbon: Academia de Marinha, 2000, pp. 39-61; Oliveira e Costa, João Paulo, "D. Afonso V e o Atlântico," *Mare Liberum*, v. 17, 1999, pp. 39-71; Mendonça, Manuela, *As relações externas de Portugal nos finais da Idade Média*, Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 1994. For the Spanish perspective, see Armas, Antonio Rumeu de, *España en el África Atlántica*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Ediciones del Cabildo Insular de Gran Canaria, second edition, v. 1, 1996, pp. 132-136; Ysern, Paulina Rufo, "La expansión peninsular por la costa Africana: El enfrentamiento entre Portugal y Castilla (1475-1480)," in *Congresso Internacional Bartolomeu Dias e a sua Epoca: Actas: Economia e Comércio Marítimo*, edited by Luís Adão da Fonseca, Porto: Universidade do Porto; Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimientos Portugueses, 1989, v. 3, pp. 59-79; Edwards, John, *Ferdinand and Isabella*, New York: Pearson/Longman, 2004, pp. 20-22; Edwards, John, *The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs, 1474-1520*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, pp. 37-38, 42, 56, 123, 189-90, 243-44. For the text of the treaty, see Albuquerque, Luís de and Maria Emília Madeira Santos, *Portugaliae monumenta Africana*, Lisbon: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical; Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Decobrimientos Portugueses; Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, v. 1, 1993, pp. 243-247.

As king, João II proclaimed this innovative imperial ideology and royal identity to the courts of Renaissance Europe through the adoption of a new, ostentatious royal title, Lord of Guinea, and a politically explosive Oration of Obedience, which he had delivered to the papacy in 1485. It is against this background that João II hosted at the Portuguese court an impressive and unprecedented series of embassies from sub-Saharan Africa during the 1480s.

In 1485 João II selected and prepared one of the most influential embassies of his reign. It was a central, perhaps defining, moment for the monarchy.<sup>239</sup> This pivotal Portuguese embassy left for the Vatican at the same time as Kasuta and the other *Miwissikongo* captives left Lisbon to return to the Kongo. The two events were inextricably connected. The embassy to Rome and its mission were the direct result of the successful navigation to the Kongo and the friendship that the king had cultivated with Kasuta. Vasco Fernandes de Lucena, the kingdom's celebrated orator and a member of the royal council, was confidently sent to Rome to deliver the oration to Pope Innocent VIII on behalf of the king. Lucena was charged with the task of articulating the official version of the Portuguese court's imperial ideology on Europe's most visible political stage. The embassy also included Rui de Pina, the ubiquitous royal secretary and trusted diplomat. In his later role as royal chronicler and keeper of the national archives, Pina shaped the image and ideology of the Portuguese court. Pina's writings and courtly career figure prominently in this story.

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<sup>239</sup> Mendonça, Manuela, *D. João II: Um Percurso Humano e Político nas Origens da Modernidade em Portugal*, Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1991, pp. 373-376; Fonseca, 2005, pp. 81-83; Braga, Paulo Drumond, "Mecanismos de propaganda do poder real no reinado de D. João II: Subsídios," in *Congresso Internacional Bartolomeu Dias e a sua Época: Actas: D. João II e a política quatrocentista*, Porto: Universidade do Porto; Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 1989, v. 1, pp. 263-297; Lucena, Vasco Fernandes de, *The Obedience of a King of Portugal*, edited and translated by Francis Millet Rogers, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958.

The primary objective of the embassy was to use the venue of the Vatican to proclaim to all of Europe João II's new royal title, as well as the imperial ideology it represented. Lucena opens and closes the carefully crafted Latin oration by declaring João II's full royal title, highlighting the addition of "dominus Guinee," or as Pina announced it in Portuguese, "o primeiro senhor de Guiné" ("the first Lord of Guinea").<sup>240</sup> The entire body of the oration is dedicated to defining the rights and privileges of this imperial title. Since the cessation of hostilities with Spain and the signing of the Treaty of Alcaçovas in 1479, Portugal possessed the exclusive right to navigation to and the monopoly on commerce in sub-Saharan Africa. According to this principle of *mare clausum*, Portugal controlled maritime access to sub-Saharan Africa as if the ocean were an extension of its national borders.<sup>241</sup> Of immeasurable benefit, this treaty allowed Portugal to establish commercial arrangements and to form peaceful diplomatic relations with sub-Saharan African rulers without, in theory, any competition or threat from other European nations.<sup>242</sup>

The oration elaborated this policy of "peaceful conquest," which consisted of diplomacy, commerce and evangelization, and revealed how it was epitomized by the royal title of "senhor de Guiné."<sup>243</sup> Lucena provides a detailed historical account of the early phases of Portugal's overseas expansion in order to demonstrate the legitimacy of its exclusive imperial rights as being founded on claims of prior discovery and just reward as well as the pursuit of crusade, conquest and conversion.<sup>244</sup> Yet these sections

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<sup>240</sup> Lucena, 1958, pp. 38, 51; Pina, 1989, p. 49.

<sup>241</sup> Fonseca, 2005, p. 136.

<sup>242</sup> Newitt, Malyn A., *History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 1400-1668*, Routledge, New York, 2005, pp. 41, 52-53, 55.

<sup>243</sup> Elbl, 2003, pp. 24, 26, 28.

<sup>244</sup> Seed, Patricia, *Ceremonies of possession in Europe's conquest of the New World, 1492-1640*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 13-14, 100-148; Seed, Patricia, "Taking Possession and

emphasizing the role of crusade and conquest only further highlight the radical changes in policy consciously wrought by João II.

Lucena introduces João II's imperial ideology by praising the incredible quickening pace of exploration which had brought Portuguese ships well past the equator to the Kongo.<sup>245</sup> In addition to his dedication to continued successful exploration, Lucena applauds the profitable commercial arrangements with sub-Saharan Africans and the spreading of Christianity through evangelization and regular contact with Christians. Yet the crowning element of João II's imperial ideology, as he represented it to other European powers, was the forging of diplomatic alliances and personal relationships with sub-Saharan Africa rulers through the exchange of gifts. As Lucena pompously declares to Innocent VIII and the finest diplomatic corps assembled in Europe: João II was "a most formidable king, one who is most compliant with the Roman Church and a propagator of the Christian cult, before whom the kings of the Ethiopians bow down and to whom they offer presents every year..."<sup>246</sup> Through Lucena, João II was representing to other Europeans the exchange of courtly gifts with sub-Saharan Africans as the most critical proof of the peaceful diplomatic relations he had established with them. However, in the process of retelling, the presentation of these gifts to the Portuguese court was blatantly transformed into tribute and acknowledgement of his superior, imperial status as overlord or a king of kings in sub-Saharan Africa, as "senhor de Guiné."

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Reading Texts: Establishing the Authority of Overseas Empires," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, v. 49, n. 2, 1992, pp. 183-209; Saunders, A. C. de C. M., "The Depiction of Trade as War as a Reflection of Portuguese Ideology and Diplomatic Strategy in West Africa, 1441-1556," *Canadian Journal of History*, v. 17, n. 2, 1982, pp. 221-223; Elbl, Ivana, "The King's Business in Africa: Decisions and Strategies of the Portuguese Crown," in *Money, markets and trade in late medieval Europe: essays in honour of John H.A. Munro*, edited by Lawrin Armstrong, Ivana Elbl and Martin M. Elbl, Boston: Brill, 2007, pp. 89-118.

<sup>245</sup> Lucena optimistically boasted that the Portuguese had very nearly reached the end of Africa.

<sup>246</sup> Lucena, 1958, p. 52.



In his chronicle, Pina justifies the legitimacy and appropriateness of João II's assumption of his new royal title. João II explicitly made sub-Saharan Africa the showpiece of the greater project of Portuguese overseas expansion, and the royal title was intended to correspond to his focus on sub-Saharan Africa and its central role in the identity of the Portuguese court. According to Pina, the king believed the title of "senhor de Guiné" reflected his own greatest personal contribution to the crown and claim to glory, that is, his triumphs, broadly understood, in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>247</sup> As Pina writes: "And in this year [1485] he recently and for the first time titled and called himself the first Lord of Guinea... And even though the earlier kings, his predecessors, had acquired the said authority [*senhorio*] because of the Papal donations and concessions [they had received], and could have rightly and legitimately taken the title; but because in their days and up until the reign of the King [João II] Guinea had been so slight a thing and of too little prestige for the kings to take the title of it, they failed by chance to do it..."<sup>248</sup>

Álvaro Lopes de Chaves, the premier royal secretary, general notary of the realm and knight of the Order of Santiago, kept a journal recording major ceremonies and events of the court.<sup>249</sup> Since Chaves personally participated in the debates in the royal council on the adoption of the new royal title, his text provides valuable insight into João

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<sup>247</sup> Elbl, 2003, p. 26-27; Elbl, 1992, pp. 196-197; Thomaz, 1994, pp. 149-67.

<sup>248</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 49: "E neste ano nova e primeiramente se intitulou e chamou o primeiro senhor de Guiné... E porém, pelas doações e concessões apostólicas que os reis seus antecessores tinham do dito senhorio, bem e legitimamente se puderam dele também intitular, mas porque em seus dias e até ao tempo de el-rei foi a Guiné coisa mui pequena e de pouca estima para reis dela se intitularem, o deixaram porventura de fazer." It appears that the Infante D. Henrique had been granted the right to take the title, though he never did. Afonso V seems to have used it on one occasion, but never adopted it as a royal title. See, Russell, Peter E., *Prince Henry "the Navigator": A Life*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 318. For a study of the Portuguese royal title, see Saldanha, António Vasconcelos de, "Conceitos de Espaço e Poder e Seus Reflexos na Titulação Regia Portuguesa da Época da Expansão," in *La Découverte, le Portugal et l'Europe: Actes du Colloque*, edited by Jean Aubin, Paris: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, Centre Culturel Portugais, 1990, pp. 105-29.

<sup>249</sup> Álvaro Lopes de Chaves, *Livro de apontamentos (1438-1489): códice 443 da Coleção Pombalina da B.N.L.*, edited by Anastásia Mestrinho and Abílio José Salgado, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1984.

II's theories of empire. João II distinguished himself from his father's crusading exploits in North Africa by emphasizing his relationship to sub-Saharan Africa as evidenced by the new royal title of "Senhor de Guiné." Significantly, João II chose to style himself "Senhor" (Lord) and not "Rei" (King) as his father Afonso V (1432-81) had done in reference to his territorial conquests in North Africa.<sup>250</sup> Indeed, Chaves states that it had been suggested in the royal council that João II should adopt the title of "Rej de Guine," but that it was eventually agreed that it was more appropriate to use "senhor." Chaves says that it was likewise proposed in the council that the king should devise an additional royal coat of arms to reflect his title of "Lord of Guinea." In this instance, Chaves indicates that the king himself provided a forceful and reasoned response, writing that João II agreed only to take the title of "senhor de Guiné" without any associated arms unless he were to travel to sub-Saharan Africa to conquer significant territory there. This position, Chaves has the king say in an extraordinary statement, "would appear more honest."<sup>251</sup>

Chaves specifically discusses the principal reason given by João II in the royal council for not adopting the title "Rej de Guine," which was the lack of territorial conquest and by implication the absence of full jurisdiction or sovereignty. Only with the possession of sovereignty directly over people and territory, Chaves has the king clarify, comes the right to devise separate royal armorial bearings signifying jurisdiction over Guinea. The distinction Chaves makes between "Rei" and "Senhor" indicates that imperial ideas on suzerainty, involving a relationship of feudal overlordship while

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<sup>250</sup> Chaves, 1984, pp. 257-58.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., p. 258. Thomaz likewise attests to the perceived need of the king to take part in the conquest in person during the reign of Manuel I (r. 1495-1521). See, Thomaz, Luís Filipe F. R., "L'idée impériale manuélina," in *La Découverte, le Portugal et l'Europe: Actes du Colloque*, edited by Jean Aubin, Paris: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, Centre Culturel Portugais, 1990, pp. 35-103.

allowing autonomy to African states, versus sovereignty, which entailed complete authority over dependent states, were being debated and theorized in 1485.<sup>252</sup>

The title of “senhor de Guiné” expressed João II’s conception of his imperial status in Africa as one of suzerainty. This enabled the Portuguese king to maintain his navigational and commercial rights to sub-Saharan Africa to the exclusion of all other European countries and to establish enduring diplomatic relationships with sub-Saharan Africans. The lavish ceremonial reception of ambassadors from sub-Saharan Africa and the formal presentation and exchange of prestigious gifts at the Portuguese court were seen as the embodiment of this imperial ideology. The Portuguese court manipulated the representation of these ceremonies and courtly gifts as confirmation of João II’s claim to be “senhor de Guiné” by sub-Saharan Africans. This deliberate misrepresentation was necessary to defend the imperial title and the rights it signified in Europe.

Inspired by the return of Portuguese ships from the Kongo and his burgeoning relationship with Kasuta, João II seized the year of 1485 as a foundational moment. In a remarkable, strategic move, João II had the authoritative oration of obedience printed in Rome immediately after its delivery to the pope and assembled ambassadors.<sup>253</sup> The statement was definitive and it was intended to be disseminated throughout the courts of Renaissance Europe. To emphasize further the sweeping nature of these changes, João II also altered the royal coat of arms and issued the first gold coins of his reign in 1485.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid. Fonseca, 2005, p. 154; Thomaz, 1994, pp. 149-67; Frances A. Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century*, London: Pimlico, 1999, pp. 1-27.

<sup>253</sup> Lucena, Vasco Fernandes de, *The Obedience of a King of Portugal*, edited and translated by Francis Millet Rogers, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958, pp. 6, 14-16, 106-107.

<sup>254</sup> It has been argued that the purpose of these measures was to assert the renewed strength of the crown soon after João II had brutally suppressed serious threats from powerful noble factions led by the Bragança family. Yet even the Bragança conspirators recognized the importance of sub-Saharan Africa to João II. In 1483 the Bragança had repeatedly encouraged Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon to revive their claims and press their rights to sub-Saharan Africa in order to force João II into an untenable

After considered consultation with a series of experts on heraldry, the king removed the green cross of the Order of Avis from the royal coat of arms and ordered that the five blue shields arranged in the form of the cross should all be shown with their points facing downwards.<sup>255</sup> Acting on the advice of respectable heraldic authorities, João II claimed that he was simply correctling mistakes which had crept into the conventional representation of the royal armorial bearings. Yet the context of these changes indicates that they were part of the king's larger effort to fashion a new, distinctive royal identity.

The successful delivery and printing of the oration in 1485 was followed by a special chronicle on the Kongo which João II commissioned directly from Rui de Pina in 1492.<sup>256</sup> In fact, on 16 February 1490 the Portuguese king specifically charged Pina with responsibility for celebrating “the famous deeds [done by] ourselves or our Kingdom.”<sup>257</sup> By this date, João II had probably already intended Pina to write on his diplomatic relationship with the Kongo. At the end of the chronicle—of which only a contemporary fifteenth-century translation into Italian survives—Pina attests, unusually, to the accuracy of the narrative work, declaring that he had personally interviewed six members of the Portuguese embassy later sent to the Kongo in 1490-91 and that he had also consulted the documentation related to the mission.<sup>258</sup> Like the printed oration, the chronicle on the

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position. Yet the Spanish monarchs realized that João II was intransigent on the issue of navigation and commerce in sub-Saharan Africa and they did not to challenge him. It seemed clear to them that João II defined his monarchy and derived his strength from his dealings with sub-Saharan Africa. See Fonseca, 2005, pp. 67-70.

<sup>255</sup> Chaves, pp. 257-58; Pina, 1989, pp. 48-49; Resende, 1994, p. 243.

<sup>256</sup> In addition to this first chronicle dedicated solely to the Kongo, Pina later wrote on the relationship between the Portuguese court and the Kongo in his official chronicle of the reign of João II. The third primary source is the court chronicle written by Garcia de Resende. Both Pina and Resende held positions of influence at the Portuguese court and personally witnessed the reception of the Kongolese embassy. They would probably have been familiar with Kasuta during his residence at the court.

<sup>257</sup> Radulet, Carmen M. in Pina, 1992, p. 9: “trabalho e a ocupaçam grande que Ruy de pina escriptuam de nossa camara tem com o careguo que lhe demos de screuer & asentar os factos famosos asy nossos como de nossos Regnos que em nossos dias sam pasados & ao dyante se fezerom.”

<sup>258</sup> Pina, 1992, p. 132.

Kongo enhanced the prestige of the Portuguese king in Europe through his personal relationship with Kasuta and diplomatic relationship with the *Mani Kongo*. Not only did the Portuguese court exchange ambassadors with the Kongo, but it also correctly perceived the exchange of the precious courtly gifts of elephant tusks, *mpungi* ivory horns, and raffia textiles as the embodiment of that relationship. Moreover, as we shall see, the Portuguese misconstrued other forms of tribute through translation to European language and mores. To understand how this took place it is useful to examine the history of the relationship between João II and the Kongo.

### 3. Portuguese Contact with the Kongo

When João II assumed the throne on 28 August 1481, he already possessed a clear vision and firm objectives for sub-Saharan Africa as well as the experience and knowledge necessary to implement this imaginative, pioneering design. Immediately upon assuming the throne, João II prepared a powerful armada to sail to Mina in modern Ghana in December 1481 in order to construct the fortress of São Jorge da Mina. The purpose of the fort was to exploit the trade in gold with local Africans and to protect his monopoly on this lucrative commerce against European interlopers.<sup>259</sup> At the same time João II organized his first exploratory voyage down the Atlantic coast of sub-Saharan Africa with the principal goals of opening up new areas to commerce and, his highest priority, of establishing formal diplomatic contact with powerful Africans.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Hair, P.E.H. *The Founding of the Castelo de São Jorge da Mina: An Analysis of the Sources*, Madison: University of Wisconsin, African Studies Program, 1994, p. 5; Elbl, 1992, p. 176.

<sup>260</sup> Newitt, Malyn A., *History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 1400-1668*, Routledge, New York, 2005, pp. 50-51; Fonseca, Luís Adão da, *D. João II*, Lisbon: Circulo de Leitores, 2005, pp. 114-16; Thomaz, Luís Filipe F. R., "O Projecto Imperial Joanino (Tentativa de interpretação global da política ultramarine de D. João II)," in *De Ceuta a Timor*, Lisbon: Difel, 1994, pp. 149-167.

As captain of this important expedition, João II appointed Diogo Cão, a knight of the king's household who had recently served with distinction in the war with Castile.<sup>261</sup> With deadly consequences, he had patrolled the waters of Guinea, sinking, capturing or expelling all unauthorized ships sighted in the area. Eustache de la Fosse, a Flemish man imprisoned by Cão in Guinea for engaging in illicit trade there, commented bitterly on his hardnosed, pitiless and unyielding personality.<sup>262</sup> According to Carmen Radulet, Cão likely first put out to sea along with the fleet headed to Mina and then continued sailing the great distance to the mouth of the Zaire River. After the successful completion of this initial exploratory voyage, João II, confidently armed with the vital, previously unknown, information that Cão had just obtained, generously outfitted an armada for a second voyage. With Cão as captain, the ships, fortified with artillery, departed Lisbon in the spring of 1483 for the Zaire River and points beyond. He had been provided by João II with specially trained African interpreters to communicate with any peoples encountered and with opulent gifts intended for African rulers as tokens of friendship.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> For the figure of Diogo Cão and his trips to the Kongo, see Radulet, Carmen, "Diogo Cão," in *Dicionário de História dos Descobrimentos Portugueses*, edited by Luís de Albuquerque and Francisco Contente Domingues, Lisbon: Caminho, v. 1, 1994, pp. 192-93; Radulet, Carmen, "As viagens de descobrimento de Diogo Cão: Nova proposta de interpretação," *Mare Liberum*, n. 1, 1990, pp. 175-204; Radulet, Carmen, "Diogo Cão no Reino do Congo," *Oceanos*, v. 8, 1991, pp. 38-39; Radulet, Carmen M., "As viagens de Diogo Cão: um problema ainda em aberto," *Revista da Universidade de Coimbra*, v. 34, 1988, pp. 105-19; Radulet, Carmen M., "Le Navigazioni di Diogo Cao," in *Documenti delle Scoperte Portoghesi: Africa*, Bari: Adriatica, 1983, pp. 115-133; Winius, George D., "The Enterprise Focused on India: The Work of D. João II," in *Portugal, the Pathfinder: Journeys from the Medieval toward the Modern World, 1300-ca. 1600*, edited by George D. Winius, Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1995, pp. 89-120; Disney, A.R., *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, New York: Cambridge University Press, v. 2, 2009, pp. 35-39.

<sup>262</sup> La Fosse, Eustache de, *Voyage d'Eustache Delafosse sur la côte de Guinée, au Portugal et en Espagne: 1479-1481*, edited by Denis Escudier, Paris: Editions Chandeigne, 1992

<sup>263</sup> For the use of black slaves as interpreters in sub-Saharan Africa, see Hair, P. E. H., "The Use of African Languages in Afro-European Contacts in Guinea, 1440-1560," in Hair, P. E. H., *Africa Encountered: European Contacts and Evidence, 1450-1700*, Brookfield, VT: Variorum Ashgate, 1997, VI, 5-26; Hair, P. E. H., "Early Sources on Religion and Social Values in the Sierra Leone Region: 1 Cadamosto 1463" *Sierra Leone Bulletin of Religion*, v. 11, 1970, p. 51-64; Hair, P. E. H., "The Early Sources on Guinea," *History in Africa*, v. 21, 1994, pp. 87-126; Hair, P. E. H., "Columbus from Guinea to America," *History in*

In 1483 Cão reached the mouth of the Zaire estuary and disembarked at the port of Mpinda in the province of Soyo. Here he learned about the extensive power of the kingdom of the *Mani Kongo* to whom he immediately sent Christian messengers and the obligatory sumptuous gifts, as the Portuguese knew was standard practice when establishing relations in Africa.<sup>264</sup> They were to request peace and friendship with suggestions of the profitable commerce to be had from such a potential relationship. However, the Portuguese were surprised to learn that the African interpreters they had brought with them were unable to understand the language spoken in the Kongo. At Mpinda Cão waited in vain for a response from the *Mani Kongo* to the delegation of Christians and lavish gifts he had dispatched as well as his offer of friendship. Quickly becoming impatient and increasingly anxious, Cão abducted a number of hostages, including Kasuta, who, trusting in the good faith of the Portuguese, had freely boarded his ships to investigate their “novelty.”<sup>265</sup> The purpose of Cão’s duplicitous behavior was, supposedly, to secure the safe return of his messengers (whose ultimate fate is unknown) and, perhaps more importantly, to bring the Kongolesse captives back to the Portuguese court to be instructed in the Portuguese language and the Christian religion. The hostages, it was hoped, would become familiar with Portuguese court culture and, in turn, would provide the court with valuable information on the commerce and culture of the Kongo.

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*Africa*, v. 17, 1990, pp. 113-29; Russell, Peter E., *Prince Henry "the Navigator": A Life*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 305-307, 310, 314, 335, 341.

<sup>264</sup> For the importance of gift-giving in Africa, see Elbl, Ivana, “Cross-Cultural Trade and Diplomacy: Portuguese Relations with West Africa, 1441-1521,” *Journal of World History*, v. 3, n. 2, 1992, pp. 165-204; Thornton, John, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 54-57; Curtin, Philip D., *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, v. 1, 1975, pp. 286-91; Sundström, Lars, *The Exchange Economy of Pre-Colonial Tropical Africa*, New York: St. Martins Press, 1974, pp. 13-14.

<sup>265</sup> Pina, 1992, p. 98

In this way, it was believed, these prisoners could later facilitate communication, commerce and conversion.<sup>266</sup>

Cão's armada returned to Lisbon from the Kongo on April 8, 1484. As it turned out, his captives belonged to the *Mwissikongo*, the local Kongolese ruling nobility. Pina claims that Cão treated his elite hostages "with much humanity and honor" and "not as prisoners, but as friends."<sup>267</sup> This is an unexpected statement for Cão had earlier distinguished himself for his ruthless persecution of interlopers in Atlantic Africa, such as Eustache de la Fosse. Pina also makes it clear that Cão had taken these hostages against the explicit orders of the king, who had, we presume, wished to discontinue the formerly standard practice for its obvious potential to thwart the establishment of diplomatic contacts. Nevertheless, João II was elated when Cão presented the *Mwissikongo* captives to him. Initially, the Portuguese king was primarily impressed with their noble blood and their prominent stature as "principal" members of the Kongolese royal family.

These involuntary *Mwissikongo* guests were among the first royal or noble figures from sub-Saharan Africa to visit the Portuguese court. In addition to admiring and respecting their status, João II was delighted by their attractive appearance, dignity and intelligence. The Portuguese king immediately arranged for the *Mwissikongo* to be provided with the finest courtly attire appropriate to their aristocratic rank. He then

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<sup>266</sup> Pina succinctly explained the strategy: "veio com eles para Portugal, não os trazendo como cativos, mas com fundamento e esperança de que, depois de aprenderem a língua, costumes e tenção de el-rei e do reino de Portugal, tornariam em suas terras e por seu meio as coisas de uma parte e da outra se podiam bem comunicar, porque de outra maneira, segundo a diversidade da língua, não era possível." (Pina, 1989, pp. 113-114). In his earlier history, penned in 1492, Pina more explicitly emphasizes the necessity of having the prisoners from the Kongo learn the language and customs of Portugal, "accoiché 'mparassino li costumi e la lingua de' reame," so that they could engage in conversation with the Portuguese and eventually be persuaded to convert to Christianity, "quelli negri ritornati co' noi più facilmente convertissino e conversassino." (Pina, 1992, p. 98.) For the earlier practice of abducting hostages to learn Portuguese, see Diogo Gomes, 2002, p. 57.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., "con grande umanità e onore" and "non come prigionieri ma come amici."



decreed that the court and the entire kingdom must receive, treat and favor these *Mwissikongo* in the most honorable fashion as peers and privileged, influential guests. The Portuguese king, Pina tells us, took a special interest in his *Mwissikongo* prisoners. Through conscientious and considerate interaction with the *Mwissikongo* over the course of their year and a half long residence at the Portuguese court, João II became increasingly comfortable with them and, according to Pina, they seem gradually to have gained intimate access to the king as favored companions.<sup>268</sup>

The Portuguese king realized that his ambitions in the Kongo depended, in large measure, on winning the cooperation and support of these *Mwissikongo* hostages and on persuading them to exert their influence in favor of the Portuguese on the *Mani Kongo* upon their return to the Kingdom of the Kongo. João II had been fortunate in Diogo Cão's choice of hostages, for these *Mwissikongo* were reportedly close to the *Mani Kongo*, and he was determined not to waste this rare opportunity to impress his elite guests and to press them into service as facilitators between Portugal and the Kongo. Accordingly, the *Mwissikongo* were taught the Portuguese language and received an education in Portuguese court culture. Emphasis was placed on conveying the principles of the Christian religion to them and on encouraging them to convert to Christianity. In addition, they were toured around court and country in an attempt to overwhelm them with the marvels, power and prosperity of Portugal.

In October 1485, on the orders of a satisfied João II, the noble *Mwissikongo* captives sailed with Cão back to the Kongo, a year and a half after their initial arrival in Portugal in April 1484. Although Cão was instructed to continue his exploration down

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<sup>268</sup> Pina, 1992, p. 98: "Ma dopo che quel tempo li quali li negri rimasono in Portochallo per l'assidue e continua consuetudine pigliarono la mente de' Re el quale solamente cercava l'onore e la salute di loro anime e loro comodità."

the coast of Africa in search of the elusive end of the continent, he was first to return the hostages to the Kongo and to present the *Mani Kongo* with even more lavish objects than those gifts he had previously delivered in 1483,<sup>269</sup> among them luxury fabrics and eighteen exceptional horses complete with caparisons and harnesses crafted out of the finest metalwork in silver.<sup>270</sup> The gifts were well-received, for the fine damask fabrics which João II sent to Nzinga a Nkuwu at this time were incorporated into the royal regalia of the *Mani Kongo*. In addition to the extravagant presents intended for the *Mani Kongo*, João II likewise ensured that the departing *Mwissikongo* were properly compensated for their enforced residence at court with the munificent awarding of honors and gifts which, it was hoped, would further convince them of the king's liberality, magnificence, power and good intentions. Debate continues as to whether Cão himself was sent as ambassador to the *Mani Kongo* and, if so, whether he actually made the inland journey to the capital of Mbanza Kongo and was received by the *Mani Kongo*.<sup>271</sup> Nevertheless, it is certain that João II did send an official embassy to the *Mani Kongo* and that its threefold purpose was to present the various gifts of luxury objects, to establish peaceful diplomatic relations with the Kongo, and to persuade the *Mani Kongo* to convert to Christianity.

The return of the hostages to the court of the *Mani Kongo* was, according to the anthropologist Wyatt MacGaffey, a critical event for the Kongoleses and helped to determine the future course of their relations with the Portuguese.<sup>272</sup> It decided the

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<sup>269</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 114; Pina, 1992, p. 98; Resende, p. 386.

<sup>270</sup> Radulet, 1983, pp. 376-79; Newitt, 2005, p. 50.

<sup>271</sup> Radulet, 1994; Radulet, 1991; Radulet, 1990; Radulet, 1988; Radulet, 1983; Winius, 1996; Disney, 2009.

<sup>272</sup> MacGaffey, Wyatt, "Dialogues of the Deaf: Europeans on the Atlantic Coast of Africa," in *Implicit Understandings. Observing, Reporting and Reflecting on the Encounter Between Europeans and Other*

direction of the relationship between Portugal and the Kongo as well as the way in which the Kongoleses were to perceive the Portuguese and incorporate them into their own view of the universe. This event is crucial for understanding the exchange of elephant ivory tusks, *mpungi* horns and raffia cloth at the Portuguese court several years later in 1489. In addition, Linda Heywood and John Thornton have emphasized the point that, from the first contact, the Kongo dealt “with the Portuguese from a position of strength” and that it was thus able to “control” with confidence and authority the nature of its interactions with Portugal.<sup>273</sup>

When the Portuguese delegation, along with the returning *Mwissikongo* captives, arrived at the capital of Mbanza Kongo, they were received with shock and jubilation. The Kongoleses court was astonished at their return, having believed that they would never be seen alive again. Moreover, their seemingly good spirits and excellent health as well as the sumptuous garments they wore amazed those who witnessed their reception. According to Pina’s description, the *Mani Kongo* and his court were overcome with emotion at the sight of these high-ranking noblemen, some of whom belonged to the royal family. In a revealing passage, which is important in understanding the relationship and exchanges between Portugal and the Kongo, Pina states that the *Miwissikongo* were welcomed at court with so much amazement and joy as if the dead had come back to life.<sup>274</sup> The explicit emphasis on pervasive happiness at the Kongoleses court and on the association by the Kongoleses of the *Miwissikongo* elites who were returning from

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*Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, edited by Stuart Schwartz, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 257.

<sup>273</sup> Heywood, Linda M., and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585-1660*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 57, 61.

<sup>274</sup> Pina, 1992, p. 100: “come se tutti fussero morti e resuscitati.” Pina, 1989, p. 115: “como se debaixo da terra os viram resuscitar.” Resende, “p. 386: “como se todos resuscitaram da morte à vida.”

Portugal with the notion of returning from the land of the dead was critical to the selection of courtly gifts later presented to the Portuguese king.

News of the reception of the Portuguese embassy and the return of the *Miwissikongo* captives quickly spread throughout the Kongo. Indeed, full attendance at court was required to honor the embassy and former captives and to bear witness to what promised to be a momentous event. The necessary feasts and celebrations were immediately organized. We are told that João II was repeatedly praised for the honorable way in which he had treated the hostages and the lavish presents he had presented to them. Their luxurious attire and other bodily accoutrements and ornaments were admired in great detail.

Pina reported that the Portuguese ambassadors expounded on the doctrine and virtues of the Christian religion to the Kongolese court. They seem to have concentrated on the efficacious water of baptism as the principal means of conversion and as the essential induction to Christianity.<sup>275</sup> The luxury gifts presented to the *Mani Kongo* clearly attested to the Portuguese king's concern for his physical wellbeing, while through the acceptance of Christianity, Pina has the Portuguese mission argue, João II would preserve and safeguard the fate of the *Mani Kongo*'s soul. As MacGaffey has suggested, the spiritual character of Christianity was made indivisible from the material benefits and practices of the Portuguese.<sup>276</sup> According to Pina's account, it was the *Mani Kongo* who commanded the Portuguese embassy to speak at length about Christianity at their public reception at court and enjoined them to expand further on it in later private conversations.

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<sup>275</sup> Pina, 1992, pp. 100, 102, 104.

<sup>276</sup> MacGaffey, 1994, p. 253.

#### 4. Kongolese Perceptions of the Portuguese

It is necessary at this point to explain briefly the cosmology of the Kongo and their perception of the Portuguese and Christianity through this prism. Several scholars have attempted to reconstruct the traditional cosmology of the Kongo during the fifteenth century when contact was first made with the Portuguese.<sup>277</sup> According to MacGaffey, for the Kongolese, “Christianity was a new means to approach the highest *nzambi*.”<sup>278</sup> Stressing continuity in Kongo cosmology, Anne Hilton suggests that the Kongolese in the fifteenth century perceived Christianity as a new cult inspired by *Nzambi Mpungu*.<sup>279</sup> *Nzambi* was a spirit, diety or power and *Nzambi Mpungu* was considered to be the most powerful or highest god, the original force or creator of the universe.<sup>280</sup> For Suzanne Preston Blier, Christianity seemed to offer the Kongo “another, potentially more direct

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<sup>277</sup> My characterization of the interactions and relationship between the courts of Portugal and Kongo are based on the existing primary sources and on the extensive secondary literature dedicated to the subject. For the perspective of the Kongo, I have relied on the research, theories and conclusions of anthropologists and historians, such as Anne Hilton, Wyatt MacGaffey and John Thornton. I have found MacGaffey’s conception of a “dialogue of the deaf,” in which shared, double misunderstandings between Portugal and the Kongo are seen as enabling peaceful interactions and as promoting successful diplomatic and commercial relations, to be particularly helpful. See, MacGaffey, Wyatt, *Religion and Society in Central Africa: The BaKongo of Lower Zaire*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986; MacGaffey, Wyatt, “Dialogues of the Deaf: Europeans on the Atlantic Coast of Africa,” in *Implicit Understandings. Observing, Reporting and Reflecting on the Encounter Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, edited by Stuart Schwartz, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 249-67; Hilton, Anne, *The Kingdom of Kongo*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985; Heywood, Linda M., and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585-1660*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Thornton, John, “Religious and Ceremonial Life in the Kongo and Mbundu Areas, 1500-1700,” in Linda M. Heywood, ed., *Central Africans and Cultural Transformation*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 71-90; Thornton, John, “The Origins and Early History of the Kingdom of Kongo, c. 1350-1550,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, v. 34, n. 1, 2001, pp. 89-120; Thornton, John, “The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1491-1750,” *The Journal of African History*, v. 25, n. 2, 1984, pp. 147-167; Randles, W. G. L., *L’Ancien royaume du Congo des origines à la fin du XIXe siècle*, Paris: La Haye, Mouton, 1968.

<sup>278</sup> MacGaffey, 1986, p. 199; MacGaffey, 1994, p. 257.

<sup>279</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 51; MacGaffey, 1994, p. 254

<sup>280</sup> MacGaffey, 1994, p. 258; MacGaffey, 1986, pp. 6, 75-76, 78-79, 195, 199; Hilton, 1985, p. 50-51, 91-92, 94, 102.

route of contacting the gods and ancestors.”<sup>281</sup> In the belief system of the Kongolese of the fifteenth century, the universe was divided into the world of the living and that of the dead. These two worlds were separated by a conceptual barrier of water, an ocean or other large body of water, known as *kalunga*.<sup>282</sup> However, this barrier of water also served as a passage through which sojourns could be made from the land of the living to the land of the dead and back again.<sup>283</sup> Death itself was an ambiguous concept, being viewed as “life continued in another place.”<sup>284</sup> After death, the soul, *moyo*, was believed to travel through the water to the land of the dead where it would take on a new body, colored white, and a new name.<sup>285</sup> In addition, the passage across the water to the land of the dead, or the otherworld, was not rapid, but was instead thought to take an indeterminate though long period of time.<sup>286</sup> The living and the dead were arranged in a hierarchy with the dead seen as being more knowledgeable and powerful than the living.<sup>287</sup> Indeed, the dead could influence the lives of the living and control their fortunes.<sup>288</sup> According to Hilton, the otherworld was responsible for good and evil in the world of the living, and all power and authority in this world likewise derived from the otherworld.<sup>289</sup> To obtain the favor of the dead and to persuade them to confer their powers on the living, it was believed that those in this world needed to present the dead with suitable gifts and render appropriate homage and obedience to them.<sup>290</sup> Another means of securing the special favor of the dead was to undergo ritual initiation into

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<sup>281</sup> Blier, 1998, p. 207.

<sup>282</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 9; MacGaffey, 1986, pp. 53-57.

<sup>283</sup> MacGaffey, 1994, p. 255; Hilton, p. 9

<sup>284</sup> MacGaffey, 1986, p. 199; MacGaffey, 1994, p. 255

<sup>285</sup> Hilton, 1985, pp. 9, 27

<sup>286</sup> MacGaffey, 1986, p. 53.

<sup>287</sup> MacGaffey, 1986, p. 6; MacGaffey, 1994, p. 255.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 9

<sup>290</sup> MacGaffey, 1994, pp. 255-56

relevant cult practices, which involved prolonged visits to the land of the dead and the acquired ability to speak strange languages.<sup>291</sup>

The world of the dead, then, was closely associated in the cosmology of the Kongo with water, long distances, protracted sojourns, the color white, incomprehensible languages, riches, power, and the exchange of gifts and a reverential attitude. One of the most significant categories of otherworldly power was known as *mbumba*. The *mbumba* dimension, in Hilton's analysis, encompassed water and earth spirits and conceptualized aspects of the natural world.<sup>292</sup> It was believed that *mbumba* spirits from the land of the dead were incarnated in strange human forms or were manifested in unusually shaped objects of the natural world, and these were often found near water.<sup>293</sup> Consequently, when Diogo Cão and his men disembarked with their ships at the port of Mpinda in the province of Soyo in 1483 and when they later returned to the Kongo and were received at court in Mbanza Kongo in 1485, they were regarded as *simbi* spirits (water spirits) from the land of the dead.<sup>294</sup>

In fifteenth-century Kongo, the Portuguese were, according to Hilton and MacGaffey, understood as *simbi* or water spirits of the *mbumba* dimension.<sup>295</sup> They had come to the Kongo, it was believed, from the land of the dead as emissaries of *Nzambi Mpungu*, the highest spiritual or otherworldly authority of the *mbumba* dimension, the ultimate power or paradigmatic spirit, to which in later periods the misleading Christian term, "God," was applied.<sup>296</sup> The Portuguese King João II was considered by the *Mani*

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Hilton, 1985, pp. 10, 13-17, 50.

<sup>293</sup> Hilton, 1985, pp. 15, 17

<sup>294</sup> MacGaffey, 1985, p. 199; MacGaffey, 1994, p. 267

<sup>295</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 50; MacGaffey, 1986, p. 199.

<sup>296</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 50; MacGaffey, 1986, p. 199.

*Kongo* Nzinga a Nkuwu and the *Miwissikongo* nobles to be *Nzambi Mpungu*: the otherworldly, *mbumba* counterpart of the king of the Kongo.<sup>297</sup> Thus, Christianity was received at the Kongolese court as a new cult inspired by *Nzambi Mpungu*.<sup>298</sup>

As Hilton and MacGaffey have observed, the Portuguese were white in color, they came from the sea, traveled long distances, spoke strange and unintelligible languages, brought generous gifts and riches, and possessed unknown, powerful technologies in the form of large ships or caravels, firearms and heavy artillery.<sup>299</sup> They claimed to have been sent by their king and spoke eloquently and repeatedly about the virtues and benefits of the Christian religion. The Portuguese promised material wealth and wellbeing in this world as well as eternal salvation, or the spiritual wellbeing of the soul, in the otherworld. Moreover, the principal element of Christianity which the Portuguese seem in the chronicles to have emphasized and which the Kongolese seem most greatly to have desired was the rite of baptism and the receiving of the sacred waters of baptism as essential to conversion. This concentration on water compellingly evoked the land of the dead for the Kongolese. The initial perception of the Portuguese as *simbi* spirits of the *mbumba* dimension was effectively reinforced by the obsessive concern of the Portuguese with issues of religion and conversion and with the focus on water as a defining feature of Christianity.

The color white, *mpemba* in the language of the Kongo, held deeply symbolic, complex meanings in the cosmology of the Kongo. *Mpemba* was predominantly

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<sup>297</sup> MacGaffey, 1986, p. 199; MacGaffey, 1994, p. 258; Hilton, 1985, pp. 50-51; Blier, 1993, p. 379; Blier, 1998, p. 211.

<sup>298</sup> Hilton, p. 51; MacGaffey, 1994, p. 254.

<sup>299</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 50; MacGaffey, 1986, p. 198.



recognized as the color of the otherworld or the land of the dead.<sup>300</sup> After traveling to the land of the dead, the soul, *moyo*, was believed to take on a white body.<sup>301</sup> Therefore, the dead were white in color, like the Portuguese.<sup>302</sup> In Kongolesse rituals and ceremonies related to the ancestors, participants, such as musicians, would paint their bodies white with chalk or clay acquired from streambeds to represent their participation in the land of the dead.<sup>303</sup> The word *mpemba*, then, referred to the color white and was related in particular to bones and white chalk and clay.<sup>304</sup> Consonant with its close association with the land of the dead, white further signified the abstract concepts of transition, redemption, and purity.<sup>305</sup> This intricate network of ideas connoted by *mpemba* was readily transferred by the Kongolesse to the Portuguese, who were, as a result, identified as *simbi* spirits of the *mbumba* dimension from the land of the dead. The beautiful white color of elephant tusks and of the *mpungi*, or exquisitely carved ivory horns, later ritually given to the Portuguese king participated fully in this tightly woven web of ideas related to purity and the dead. As gifts to João II, the white ivories were, it seems, pointedly intended to trigger these associations and to incorporate the Portuguese king in them.

When the hostages returned from Portugal to the court of the *Mani Kongo* they were received, Pina reported, as if they had returned from the dead. The expression was not an innocent figure of speech. In the eyes of the Kongolesse, these hostages had been abducted by strange white men, the Portuguese whom they regarded as *simbi* spirits, and had traveled long distances across the sea. They had remained in Portugal, understood as

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<sup>300</sup> Hilton, 1985, pp. 10, 16, 51; MacGaffey, 1986, pp. 45, 55; MacGaffey, 1994, pp. 255; Thornton, 1992, pp. 57-63.

<sup>301</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 9; MacGaffey, 1986, pp. 52, 73.

<sup>302</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 50; MacGaffey, 1986, p. 198.

<sup>303</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 51; MacGaffey, 1994, pp. 255-56, 258.

<sup>304</sup> MacGaffey, 1986, p. 52; MacGaffey, 1994, p. 255

<sup>305</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 28; Thornton, 1992, pp. 57-63; Blier, 1993, p. 386.

the land of the dead, for almost two years and had finally returned to the Kongo fortified with the ability to speak an unknown language, Portuguese, and laden with fabulous riches and clothing. In addition, they had received instruction in the doctrines and rituals of the Christian religion. It was consequently believed that the *Mwissikongo* captives had been taken to the land of the dead where they had received “a truly exceptional initiation into the powers of the dead.”<sup>306</sup>

As we have seen, Kasuta was among the *Miwissikongo* hostages who had been initiated into the new cult. He held the prominent and powerful position of *Mani Vunda*. The *Mani Vunda* was the foremost spiritual authority in the Kongo, a position somewhat analogous to that of supreme pontiff.<sup>307</sup> As the chief or highest ranking priest (*kitome*) of the *simbi* cult, the *Mani Vunda* Kasuta was the principal mediator between the world of the living and the world of the dead.<sup>308</sup> The *Mani Vunda* embodied and mediated the power of *mbumba* in the world of the living.<sup>309</sup> He maintained and regulated public cults of the *mbumba* dimension in order to promote fertility, health and harmony with the natural world in general.<sup>310</sup>

As the mediator between the worlds of the living and the dead and as the incarnation of the *mbumba* dimension in this world, the *Mani Vunda* was the ideal figure to accompany Diogo Cão to the Portuguese court. The subsequent development of relations between Portugal and the Kongo hinged on the capture of Kasuta by Cão. The delighted reaction of João II upon the reception at court of the captive Kasuta is quite understandable. Indeed, Kasuta was readily acknowledged by the Portuguese king as a

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<sup>306</sup> MacGaffey, 1994, p. 257

<sup>307</sup> MacGaffey, 1986, p. 195.

<sup>308</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 23; MacGaffey, 1986, p. 194.

<sup>309</sup> Hilton, 1985, pp. 24-25, 48.

<sup>310</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 24.

distinguished figure of great intelligence and noble stature. In addition to his religious authority and concomitant vast knowledge of spiritual matters in the Kongo, Kasuta played vital political roles and possessed critical political powers there as well.

One of the primary functions of the *Mani Vunda* was the election and ritual consecration of the king of the Kongo.<sup>311</sup> The *Mani Kongo* was selected by four electors and the *Mani Vunda*. After the election, the chosen *Mani Kongo* was then announced to the *Miwissikongo* by the *Mani Vunda*, who thereby endorsed the decision.<sup>312</sup> As the second part of the election process, the *Mani Kongo* was publicly invested in his office in a ceremony performed by the *Mani Vunda* alone.<sup>313</sup> This pivotal ceremony involved endowing the *Mani Kongo* with the full royal regalia, the insignia of office.<sup>314</sup> These ritually sanctified actions taken by the *Mani Vunda*, unassisted by others, were essential to the investiture of the *Mani Kongo*. His delivery of the royal regalia legitimized the rule of the *Mani Kongo* in terms of the *mbumba* dimension. The *Mani Vunda*'s approval furnished the requisite religious sanction of the *Mani Kongo*'s secular power. Without the backing of the *Mani Vunda* as the incarnation of the *mbumba* dimension of otherworldly power, the *Mani Kongo* could not legitimize his rule.

With this background in the cosmology of the Kongo in the fifteenth century, we can return to the reception of the Portuguese embassy and the restitution of the *Miwissikongo* nobles in 1485. After much celebration and great rejoicing at the *Mani Kongo*'s court and after extended discussions and prolonged instruction in the Christian

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<sup>311</sup> MacGaffey, 1986, p. 196.

<sup>312</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 36.

<sup>313</sup> Hilton, 1985, pp. 36-37.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

faith, the *Mani Kongo* Nzinga a Nkuwu at last proclaimed his readiness to accept Christianity as the new official *mbumba*-based cult and to suppress the old ones.<sup>315</sup> MacGaffey has affirmed that the proliferation of lesser *nzambi* cults at this time had threatened the *Mani Kongo*'s position as the representative in this world of the highest *nzambi*.<sup>316</sup> From the perspective of the *Mani Kongo*, Christianity provided a new approach to the highest *nzambi* which consolidated his control over spiritual matters and consequently bolstered his source of royal power.<sup>317</sup>

Pina testifies to the *Mani Kongo*'s orders forbidding the Portuguese embassy to leave his court at Mbanza Kongo until his desire for knowledge about Portuguese culture, technology and religion had been satisfied. Surely, he eventually exhausted the information he could obtain from the Portuguese envoys. However, the central role of Kasuta in introducing Christianity to the *Mani Kongo* and in translating it into the familiar and comprehensible terms of the indigenous cosmology of the fifteenth-century Kongo must be stressed. Kasuta and the other noble *Miwissikongo* hostages, who had learned to speak Portuguese during their residence at the Portuguese court in order to facilitate communication, acted, it would seem, as translators for the Portuguese embassy. This was, in fact, the whole point of their rigorous education in language and religion at the Portuguese court. Kasuta would have been instrumental in conveying the fundamentals of Christianity to Nzinga a Nkuwu and in convincing him to convert.<sup>318</sup> Without the collaboration and support of Kasuta in his role as *Mani Vunda*, the

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<sup>315</sup> Hilton, pp. 90

<sup>316</sup> MacGaffey, 1986, pp. 199-200.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid. and Hilton, 1985, pp. 49, 60, 62

<sup>318</sup> Johnson, LeRoy-Ronald, *Congolese-Portuguese Relations 1482-1543: The First Phase of Lusitanian Expansion in Tropical Africa*, Thesis (Ph.D.), The University of Michigan, 1981, p. 142.

establishment of diplomatic relations between Portugal and the Kongo and the receptive and sympathetic reaction to Christianity in the Kongo would have been impossible.<sup>319</sup>

Indeed, it would seem that the success of the entire mission depended on Kasuta's diplomatic ability and close relationship with both sovereigns, the Portuguese King João II and the *Mani Kongo* Nzinga a Nkuwu. During Kasuta's residence at the Portuguese court, João II had quickly recognized his importance as a noble of the royal household in the Kongo and as the *Mani Vunda*, and had carefully cultivated their relationship. In fact, Kasuta spent a combined total of over three and a half years in residence at the Portuguese court from 1483-1485 and then from December 1488 to late 1490. Likewise, Kasuta enjoyed the confidence of Nzinga a Nkuwu and as *Mani Vunda* possessed the spiritual and political authority to influence his decisions.<sup>320</sup>

After retaining the Portuguese embassy at court for a number of years in order to converse with them, Nzinga a Nkuwu finally confessed his desire to convert to Christianity. Pina's phrasing here is of interest for its emphasis on water as sacred and as essential to the process of initiation into the new cult. He states that the *Mani Kongo* "yearned for nothing except for the welfare of his soul and those of his subjects and to receive holy baptism and the faith of Christ."<sup>321</sup> Consequently, he outfitted a return embassy to the Portuguese court and appointed Kasuta as chief ambassador.

##### 5. The Kongolese Embassy to the Portuguese Court in 1489

The Portuguese embassy along with Kasuta and the other *Miwissikongo* hostages left Lisbon in October 1485 and likely arrived at the port of Mpinda in the province of

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<sup>319</sup> Johnson, 1981, pp. 144, 178.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Pina, 1992, p. 100

Soyo in late 1485. They remained at the court of the *Mani Kongo* in Mbanza Kongo for three years. When Nzinga a Nkuwu decided to send his return embassy to Portugal in 1488, he had to rely on Portuguese navigational knowledge, skills and technology for the Kongolese did not possess sea going vessels which could make the journey to Portugal. However, after Diogo Cão had delivered the Portuguese embassy and returned the hostages at Mpinda, it appears that he then continued on his exploratory voyage, perhaps sailing up the Zaire River before stopping at Yellala Rapids. Although his ultimate fate remains shrouded in mystery, it seems certain that Cão and his ships were unavailable to bring the Kongolese embassy to Portugal. Instead, this return Kongolese embassy, headed by Kasuta, was picked up by Bartolomeu Dias as he sailed back up the Atlantic coast of Africa after having rounded the Cape of Good Hope in early 1488.<sup>322</sup>

After Kasuta and the rest of the Kongolese embassy boarded the ships and their baggage—including the royal gifts of elephant ivory tusks, *mpungi* horns and raffia textiles—had been securely loaded, Dias set sail for the Portuguese fort of São Jorge da Mina (Ghana). However, they apparently first stopped at the small island of Príncipe in the Gulf of Guinea where they rescued Duarte Pacheco Pereira, who had been stranded on the island and was suffering from ill health.<sup>323</sup> It seems that Pereira, on the orders of João II, had spent several years exploring the lands and waterways of Guinea.

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<sup>322</sup> Newitt, Malyn A., *History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 1400-1668*, Routledge, New York, 2005, p. 51; Axelson, Eric, *Congo to Cape Hope: Early Portuguese Explorers*, New York: Harper & Row, 1973, p. 94.

<sup>323</sup> Fonseca, 2005, p. 110; Newitt, 2005, p. 51; Axelson, 1973, p. 174; Garcia, José Manuel, *Portugal and the Division of the World: From Prince Henry to King John II*, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1994, p. 79.

Bartolomeu Dias and his ships disembarked in Lisbon in December 1488.<sup>324</sup> On this pioneering voyage he had become the first European to reach the end of the African continent and to round the Cape of Good Hope. Dias returned safely home with Kasuta, as the official ambassador of the *Mani Kongo*, and with Pereira, an adventurer, explorer and expert cosmographer.<sup>325</sup> Christopher Columbus, then resident in Lisbon, witnessed and recorded the momentous arrival of Dias and, we presume, his distinguished passengers in Lisbon.<sup>326</sup> In addition, Bemoim, the dispossessed *bumi* (prince) of Jolof from Senegambia, was residing at the Portuguese court where he had been fabulously feted during the two previous months of October and November.<sup>327</sup> Bemoim had recently converted to Christianity and had enlisted an overwhelming show of military and naval support in his own political interest from João II. It is quite likely that Kasuta would have met Bemoim and would have seen the impressive armada and artillery assembled in Lisbon for him.<sup>328</sup> For Kasuta, Bemoim's story would have further confirmed the inseparable connection between Christianity and military and naval power and technology.<sup>329</sup> This association was to be important later when the Portuguese fought on behalf of the *Mani Kongo* to demonstrate, from the perspective of the Kongo, the efficacy of Christianity as a *mbumba* based cult.

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<sup>324</sup> Fonseca, Luís Adão da, *D. João II*, Lisbon: Circulo de Leitores, 2005, pp. 97-119; Fonseca, Luís Adão da, *O essencial sobre Bartolomeu Dias*, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1987; Newitt, 2005, p. 50; Disney, v. 2, 2009, pp. 37-39; Garcia, 1994, pp. 78-79; Radulet, 1983, pp. 135-55.

<sup>325</sup> For the figure and career of Duarte Pacheco Pereira, see Mota, Avelino Teixeira da, "Duarte Pacheco Pereira: Capitão e Governador de S. Jorge da Mina," *Mare Liberum*, n. 1, 1990, pp. 1-27; Aubin, Jean, "Les Frustrations de Duarte Pacheco Pereira," in *Le Latin et L'Astrolabe: recherches sur le Portugal de la Renaissance, son expansion en Asie et les relations internationales*, Paris: Centre Culturel Calouste Gulbenkian, 1996, pp. 111-133.

<sup>326</sup> Radulet, 1983, Doc. 23, p. 419-21; Fonseca, 2005, p. 98; Garcia, 1994, p. 79.

<sup>327</sup> For Bemoim, see Chapter 3. See also Teixeira da Mota, Avelino, *D. João Bemoim e a expedição portuguesa ao Senegal em 1489*, Lisboa: Centro de Estudos de Cartografia Antiga; Junta de Investigações do Ultramar, 1971.

<sup>328</sup> Johnson, 1981, p. 178.

<sup>329</sup> MacGaffey, 1994, p. 253

During the brief period of time from October 1488 to early January 1489, the Portuguese court witnessed an unprecedented series of events centered on sub-Saharan Africa: the extraordinary reception of Bemoim, a Jolof prince from Senegambia; the triumphal return of Dias from rounding the Cape of Good Hope; and the dramatic arrival of Kasuta, the ambassador and *Mani Vunda* from the Kingdom of the Kongo. The atmosphere at court was electric, bustling with activity and energized with expectation about Portugal's future relationship with sub-Saharan Africa. The convergence of the three celebrated figures of Dias, Pereira, and Kasuta in sub-Saharan Africa has not been appreciated. It shows that Kasuta was closely associated with the leading experts on sub-Saharan Africa at the Portuguese court. The loaded symbolism and dramatic impact of Kasuta's arrival in Portugal with Dias surely contributed to the festive atmosphere and confidently optimistic tone which accompanied Kasuta's reception at court, for he embodied the efficacy of the court's knowledge about sub-Saharan Africa.

Kasuta and his embassy had arrived in Lisbon in December, 1488 and were officially received by João II at court in Beja at the beginning of 1489.<sup>330</sup> It had been over three years since Kasuta had left the Portuguese court laden with honors and riches in October 1485, yet the absence had not in any way diminished the Portuguese king's respect for him. In fact, this second visit, which lasted from December 1488 to the end of 1490, further strengthened their relationship. Having managed to secure positions of intimacy and influence with both Nzinga a Nkuwu and João II, Kasuta occupied a doubly powerful position. His exceptional status as a member of the inner circle of both an African and a European king was recognized, celebrated and exploited by both courts. Furthermore, as *Mani Vunda*, Kasuta was primarily engaged on a religious mission to the

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<sup>330</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 117; Resende, 1994, p. 388



land of the dead, for the Portuguese king was considered to be a personification of *Nzambi Mpungu*, the lord of the otherworld. From the Portuguese perspective, as the representative of the *Mani Kongo*, Kasuta enjoyed full-fledged diplomatic status by European standards, and was able to use his familiarity with Portuguese court ritual, etiquette and symbolism to his advantage. He seems to have done so successfully, for João II and his high-ranking courtiers were impressed by Kasuta and his majestic presentation of objects of African royal art as well as his subsequent conversion to Christianity.

Pina and Resende, the authors of the principal primary sources for the reception of the embassy from the Kongo, were in attendance at court and personally witnessed the ceremony at Beja in 1489. In their contemporary accounts both men praise the gifts Kasuta presented to João II. In addition, Pereira later commented on luxury raffia textiles, like the ones Kasuta presented to the Portuguese king. Although it cannot be established that Pereira was present for the formal delivery of the elephant tusks, *mpungi*, or carved ivory horns, and raffia textiles by Kasuta, it is probable that he earlier had the opportunity to discuss and view them with Kasuta on board ship as they sailed together from Atlantic Africa to Portugal. They could also have engaged in courtly conversation about them after the reception ceremony during Kasuta's prolonged two year residence at the Portuguese court from December 1488 to December 1490. Pereira definitely had occasion to examine these objects subsequently during his years of service at court as one of the great cosmographers of Renaissance Europe.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Barreto, Luís Filipe, *Descobrimientos e Renascimento: Formas de Ser e Pensar nos Séculos XV e XVI*, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 1983; Albuquerque, Luís de, “Duarte Pacheco Pereira: O saber de experiência feito,” in *Navegadores, Viajantes e Aventureiros Portugueses nos Séculos XV e XVI*, Lisbon: Circulo de Leitores, 1987, pp. 157-173; Carvalho, Joaquim Barradas de, ed., *Esmeraldo de situ*

The purpose of the embassy from the Kongolese perspective was first to render honor and thanks to the Portuguese king for providing for the comfort, security and wellbeing of the *Mani Kongo* in this material world of the living and in the spiritual otherworld of the dead. Kasuta was then to request the sacred waters of baptism and, consequently, initiation and conversion to Christianity. After this opening ceremonial oration in praise of the Portuguese king and the benefits and virtues of Christianity, Kasuta formally presented the gifts of royal art from the *Mani Kongo* to João II. In his brief account of the Kongo translated into Italian, Pina portrays the courtly ceremony and objects themselves in the following manner: “These orators [Kasuta and his delegation], in the name of their King, then rendered many honors and delivered much gratitude to His Majesty the King of Portugal, inquiring whether he was foremost among all the other princes of the world. And first they made an offering of some gifts and presents they had brought with them, which were elephant tusks, raffia palm cloths, which are considered by them to be extremely valuable, and certain other pieces of ivory, which, marvelously [*mirabilmente*] polished by the hand of the master, shone forth with splendor.”<sup>332</sup> After introducing Kasuta as the principal ambassador, Pina provides a dry, straightforward account of the diplomatic exchange in the deceptively simple prose of his official royal chronicle in Portuguese: “The gift of the said King of Kongo to the king [João II] was elephant tusks and carved ivory pieces and many raffia cloths well-woven and of fine

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*orbis de Duarte Pacheco Pereira: édition critique et commentée*, Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Serviço de Educação, 1991; Carvalho, Joaquim Barradas de, *À la recherche de la spécificité de la renaissance portugaise: l’Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis” de Duarte Pacheco Pereira et la littérature portugaise de voyages à l’époque des grandes découvertes*, Paris: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Centre Culturel Portugais, 2 volumes, 1983.

<sup>332</sup> Pina, 1992, pp. 101-102: “Questi adunque oratori in nome de’ loro Re rendono dipoi molti onori e grazie alla Maestà de’ Re di Portochallo, el quale chiedono che sia el primo infra [102] tutti li altri principi del mondo e feciono prima l’offerta delli doni e presenti portati li quali funno denti d’alifanti, panni di palme, li quali appresso loro sono in grandissimo prezzo, e certe altre cose d’avorio le quali, mirabilmente pulite colla mano del maestro, rispredevano.”

colors.”<sup>333</sup> In his more literary and embellished chronicle, Resende basically repeats Pina’s text except for his more active and participatory sentence construction in which, by the use of the verb *trazer*, Kasuta is shown as having personally accompanied these objects from the Kongo or as actually having presented them himself to the king: “And he [Kasuta] brought to the king a present of many elephant tusks and carved ivory pieces and many raffia cloths well-woven and of fine colors.”<sup>334</sup>

Pina and Resende explicitly connect Kasuta with the presentation of the diplomatic gifts from the *Mani Kongo* at the Portuguese court. They likewise affirm his familiarity with the court, the result of his previous year and a half long residence there, and the high regard in which he was held by the king on account of his noble bearing and blood as well as his intelligence and acumen.<sup>335</sup> As the *Mani Kongo* certainly recognized, these exceptional qualities and experiences were crucial for effective diplomatic communication and performance. Because Kasuta knew the language, signs and customs of both the Kongolese and Portuguese courts he could make himself properly understood, as far as that was possible, while also appreciating the treatment his embassy received. He was certainly aware of the need for the prestigious and symbolic exchange of objects and would have been able to help select the gifts presented to João II and, equally importantly, to try to explain their meanings within their original Kongolese context to the Portuguese recipients. The exchange of gifts was possibly even more significant and complex in sub-Saharan Africa than it was at the courts of Renaissance Europe.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 116: “O presente do dito rei do Congo para el-rei era de dentes de elefantes e coisas de marfim lavradas e muitos panos de palma bem tecidos e com finas cores.”

<sup>334</sup> Resende, 1994, p. 387: “e trouxe a el-rey hum presente de muitos dentes d’ alifantes e cousas de marfim lavradas e muitos panos de palma bem tecidos e com finas cores.”

<sup>335</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 116; Pina, 1992, pp. 101-102; Resende, p. 387.

<sup>336</sup> Elbl, 1992, p. 179; Thornton, 1998, pp. 54-57; Curtin, 1975, pp. 286-91; Sundström, 1974, pp. 13-14.

Not only was Kasuta familiar with the ceremony, ritual and royal iconography of the courts of Kongo and of Portugal, but he was also the foremost expert on the sacred and secular symbolism of the objects of Kongolese royal art given as gifts to the Portuguese king. Indeed, these objects of art formed part of the royal regalia of the *Mani Kongo*, which Kasuta, as *Mani Vunda*, personally presented to the newly elected *Mani Kongo* at his investiture ceremony.<sup>337</sup> Kasuta himself must have participated in the selection of these royal gifts for João II for a number of reasons. First, Kasuta knew from experience the types of materials and ceremonial objects most highly valued at the Portuguese court. Second, the meanings and purposes behind the African ceremonial objects ultimately given to João II required, I argue, the participation of the *Mani Vunda* in their exchange in order to activate them. It is my contention that the objects of African royal art were intended to invest João II as *Nzambi Mpungu*, lord of the otherworld. In this process of consecrating the Portuguese king as the otherworldly complement of the *Mani Kongo*, Kasuta would have appropriately performed his role as mediator between the worlds of the living and of the dead. This function conveniently paralleled his charge as ambassador to mediate between the Kongo and Portugal and his ability to navigate between their two respective languages and religions. Moreover, the presentation of precious and prestigious objects of African royal art as courtly gifts likewise served as the preliminary offerings required in the Kongolese belief system to begin initiation into the new cult and eventual conversion.

Kasuta played the critical role of translating, clarifying and explicating the prestigious Kongolese objects presented to the Portuguese court. As Charles Hope has observed in a classic article, the meaning and value of most Renaissance paintings were

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<sup>337</sup> Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 206; Bassani, 1991, p. 191.

communicated in personal conversations with patrons or artists.<sup>338</sup> And in public art in particular, Hope comments, “obscurity or ambiguity of meaning was not desirable.”<sup>339</sup> Instead, Hope contends, meaning would have been conveyed clearly and forcefully most commonly in speech or less frequently in writing to the intended audience.<sup>340</sup> The question of whether Kasuta might have discussed the design, style, composition or technique of the objects he presented is impossible to answer, though judging by the standards of the literature of art from the European Renaissance, Hope argues that these formal qualities of works of art were not necessarily considered to be of very high importance.<sup>341</sup> Nevertheless, Kasuta would have volunteered or been invited by João II to provide information about the royal associations and political and spiritual connotations, as well as the ritual and social contexts of use of these objects at the Kongoese court for which they were originally produced. The conspicuous ceremonial presentation of these African objects to the Portuguese king guaranteed they were perceived as political and public art and, according to Hope’s model, the king would have expected a clear explanation of their meanings from Kasuta. They would certainly have been the subject of lively courtly conversation for the objects and their imagery carried complex ideas; they surely would not have been classified solely as mute exotica or curiosity. The role of personal conversation in tandem with the physical presence of Kasuta and of the actual elephant ivory tusks, *mpungi* horns and raffia textiles was fundamental for facilitating the appreciation of the diplomatic gifts as objects of royal art from sub-Saharan Africa. In this way, Kasuta was ambassador of the *Mani Kongo* and of the objects of sub-Saharan

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<sup>338</sup> Hope, Charles, “Aspects of criticism in art and literature in sixteenth-century Italy,” *Word & Image*, v. 4, 1988, pp. 1-10.

<sup>339</sup> Hope, 1988, pp. 4-5.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>341</sup> Hope, 1988, p. 1.

African art whose proper reception by the Portuguese was fundamental for the success of his mission.

MacGaffey and Hilton have correctly viewed Nzinga a Nkuwu's choice of Kasuta, the *Mani Vunda*, as ambassador to the Portuguese court as being primarily motivated by religious objectives.<sup>342</sup> Because of this spiritual perception of the Portuguese and the intriguing notion that the Portuguese king, as the otherworldly complement of the *Mani Kongo*, personified the highest *nzambi*, Hilton has argued that "it was appropriate that the mani Kongo should send the kitome of Mbanza Kongo, the mani Vunda, with return presents. It was also politic from the mani Vunda's point of view, since the new contact potentially threatened his position as the principal mediator of the mbumba dimension in Kongo."<sup>343</sup> Following the observations and conclusions of MacGaffey and Hilton on the cosmology of the Kongo during the fifteenth century, Suzanne Preston Blier has offered a theoretical interpretation of the design principles and compositions of the *mpungi* or carved ivory horns.<sup>344</sup> (Fig. 2.5-6)

For Blier, the designs on the horns reinforce local Kongolese perceptions of the Portuguese as signifiers of life, death and transition.<sup>345</sup> According to Blier, the *mpungi* horns were commissioned or presented to the Portuguese "to help to assure their return" to the Kongo from Portugal, the land of the dead.<sup>346</sup> In her analysis, the compositional frames within the designs on the horns evoke "ideas of spatial and conceptual divisions,

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<sup>342</sup> MacGaffey, 1994, p. 257; Hilton, 1985, p. 50

<sup>343</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 50; MacGaffey, 1986, p. 199.

<sup>344</sup> Blier, Suzanne Preston, "Imaging Otherness in Ivory: African Portrayals of the Portuguese ca. 1492," *The Art Bulletin*, v. 75, n. 3, 1993, pp. 375-96; Blier, Suzanne Preston, *The Royal Arts of Africa: The Majesty of Form*, New York: Abrams, 1998, pp. 201-16.

<sup>345</sup> Blier, 1993, pp. 381-82.

<sup>346</sup> Blier, 1993, p. 383.

such as those between living and dead.”<sup>347</sup> By the same token, the open spiral lines encircling the horns can be associated with notions of longevity, vitality and renewal.<sup>348</sup> Blier speculates that the prominent serpentine lines and patterns as well as the spiral-form lines enveloping the horns “may have alluded to the circuitous route taken by the dead to the world beyond.”<sup>349</sup> By uniting all of these traditional design elements of the Kongo—spatial frames, open spiral lines, serpentine forms and lines, and abstract geometric textile patterning—on *mpungi* horns, the *Mani Kongo* intended, in Blier’s provocative but limited interpretation, to create cosmological maps, which contained rich symbolism associated with liminal notions of transition and return as well as the spiritual values assigned to those concepts.<sup>350</sup>

For Blier, the purpose of the complex designs and geometric embellishment of the *mpungi* horns was to furnish conceptual diagrams of the meandering pathways connecting the two worlds of the living and the dead.<sup>351</sup> By providing the Portuguese with these elaborately carved ivory horns, the Kongolese believed they were supplying the Portuguese with a sophisticated spiritual guide to assist them in their return to the Kongo. Concentrating exclusively on analysis of the elegantly carved traditional abstract designs, Blier regards the *mpungi* horns as valuable primarily because they reveal “unique insights” into the Kongolese perception of the Portuguese.<sup>352</sup>

Since the abstract concepts associated with the design and decoration of the *mpungi* were spiritual, it would only be appropriate, I would argue, for the *Mani Vunda*

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid., p. 382. Blier, 1998, p. 212.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.; Blier, 1998, p. 212, 214.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., p. 395-96.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., pp. 382, 396; Blier, 1998, p. 216.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., p. 375.

Kasuta to present the *mpungi* horns to the Portuguese king in person and perhaps to convey to the Portuguese court the ideas signified by the design principles as well as their spiritual implications and connotations. Blier addresses neither the divergent perception of these objects by the Portuguese, nor the significant role they played in fashioning the identity of the Portuguese court, nor does she consider deliberate variations in meaning and interpretation from the Kongolese perspective when these objects were calculatingly presented in an elaborate ritual to the Portuguese king. By studying the context of the exchange of these objects of African royal art as gifts at the Portuguese court, I highlight the critical role played by Kasuta in facilitating and explicating the entire courtly exchange. By adopting this perspective, supported in the primary sources, I argue that these courtly gifts, as prominent elements of the royal regalia of the *Mani Kongo*, served to recognize the Portuguese King João II as *Nzambi Mpungu*, the otherworldly complement to the king of the Kongo, in the cosmology of the Kongo. Examination of the court context reveals that these gifts of African royal art were not received and collected only as precious, marvelous and exotic objects. Instead they were seamlessly integrated into the Portuguese court's imperial ideology in sub-Saharan Africa and were seen as embodying João II's royal title as "Senhor de Guine."

According to Bassani, the complex abstract designs and geometric decorations and patterns embellishing the *mpungi* horns were developed wholly within the sophisticated artistic tradition of the Kongo. This refined indigenous artistic tradition flourished before contact with the Portuguese and imagery on the *mpungi* horns, therefore, does not follow European models.<sup>353</sup> However, as Bassani has noted, the

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<sup>353</sup> Bassani, 2000, p. 277, 281; Bassani, 1991, p. 191; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 198, 202; Bassani, 1983, p. 79; Blier, 1993, p. 375.



surviving *mpungi* horns also possess lugs which have been carved specifically for the attachment of suspension straps.<sup>354</sup> These suspension lugs are European elements and confirm that the horns were designed and carved only after contact had been established with the Portuguese. It is possible that Diogo Cão and his men had brought ivory or metal horns with them on their voyages to the Kongo in 1483-84 and 1485-86. In Renaissance Europe, musical instruments, such as drums and horns, featured regularly in court ceremony as well as the rituals of war. Indeed, Pina records the presence and ritual use of these kinds of musical instruments, particularly horns, for courtly ceremony and military purposes on the return diplomatic mission of the Portuguese to the Kongo in 1491.

Nevertheless, Kasuta and the other *Miwissikongo* hostages would have seen European horns with suspension lugs and witnessed their prominent use in court ceremony during their year-and-a-half long residence at the Portuguese court. Kasuta was undoubtedly aware of their courtly and military uses and meanings in Europe, which were identical on a certain level to the uses of horns in the Kongo. Kasuta could have made the decision to give horns, equipped with lugs, to the Portuguese court knowing they would be understood in these terms. Indeed, the presence of lugs might indicate that the surviving *mpungi* horns were commissioned, designed and produced specifically as gifts for elite Europeans, such as, I would suggest, the Portuguese king.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Bassani, 2000, p. 277; Bassani, 1991, p. 191; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, 198-99, 201

<sup>355</sup> Bassani claims that the lugs probably indicate that the horns were carved as gifts for a high-ranking European. Because of the later Medici provenance (1553) of several of these *mpungi* horns, Bassani assumes they were originally intended as gifts for one of the Medici popes, Leo X or Clement VII. Unfortunately, there is no record of such an exchange. However, we do know that a number of *mpungi* horns were in fact given to the Portuguese king in 1489. It is possible that the Portuguese king Manuel I later presented *mpungi* horns to Leo X in his celebrated embassy of 1514 in which Hanno the Elephant traveled. On the other hand, Bassani also suggests that the *mpungi* horns could have been commissioned for use in the Kongo, but simply incorporated European lugs into the traditional design. See especially, Bassani, Ezio, "Ivoires et tissus kongo: L'Italie, le Portugal et le Congo," in *La Nouvelle Histoire du Congo: Mélanges Eurafricains Offerts à Frans Bontinck, CIC*, edited by Pamphile Mabilia Mantuba-

Indeed, as we have seen, the sources testify to the fact that several *mpungi* horns were presented by Kasuta to João II in Beja in early 1489. Kasuta was warmly received by the court as an official ambassador from the Kingdom of the Kongo, as the *Mani Vunda* or supreme spiritual authority in the Kongo, as a distinguished *Miwissikongo* nobleman who was related to the Kongolese royal family and who was on intimate terms with the *Mani Kongo* himself, and as an esteemed, personal favorite of the Portuguese king. In contrast to his first enforced sojourn at the Portuguese court as an honored royal hostage, Kasuta now triumphantly arrived as a fully credentialed diplomat. However, his statements, actions and courtly performance as ambassador, as perceived and represented by Portuguese witnesses, portray him discharging his duties and fulfilling his role as *Mani Vunda*. Indeed, Kasuta's responsibilities and objectives as ambassador and as *Mani Vunda* were identical. The courtly gifts of royal art that Kasuta presented to João II served to articulate, activate, and achieve these goals.

At the behest of the *Mani Kongo*, the *Mani Vunda* traveled from the Kongo to the Portuguese court in order, I suggest, to consecrate the Portuguese King João II as *Nzambi Mpungu*, lord of the otherworld. The investiture performed by Kasuta involved, as a key element, the presentation of royal art. By bestowing these courtly gifts of elephant tusks, *mpungi* horns, and raffia textiles, which were exclusive to Kongo royalty, I believe Kasuta was enacting a type of investiture ceremony that paralleled the one he alone performed to legitimize the authority of the *Mani Kongo*. As ambassador and *Mani Vunda*, Kasuta was mediating on diplomatic and spiritual planes between the kings of the Kongo and of Portugal. These luxury objects of royal art, whose ceremonial presentation

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Ngoma, Cahiers Africains, Brussels, n. 65-67, Paris: L'Harmattan; Tervuren: Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, 2004, pp, 61-72

defined and legitimized Kongo kingship itself, were perceived by Kasuta, who probably had chosen them, as the most appropriate gifts for the Portuguese king, whom Kasuta and the *Mani Kongo* identified as *Nzambi Mpungu*.<sup>356</sup>

The courtly exchange of these royal objects served several purposes. Their presentation was intended to acknowledge, empower and legitimize the Portuguese King João II as the lord of the otherworld in a manner paralleling the consecration of the *Mani Kongo*. The gift was likewise intended to recognize Christianity as the new, valid cult of the *mbumba* dimension, superseding the previous ones, and to function as a token of appreciation for the introduction of Christianity and the material benefits which accompanied it. It was widely believed that the dead conferred their favor and special powers on the living only after receiving the necessary homage and gifts, and these precious and prestigious courtly gifts would have been considered appropriate according to these terms. In addition, the ceremonial presentation of the objects of royal art launched the process of initiation into Christianity and secured the continuance of Kasuta's privileged position as *Mani Vunda* within the doctrine and practice of the new cult. Kasuta had offered the highly symbolic gifts of royal art to João II as, in part, a form of investiture as *Nzambi Mpungu*. By accepting these objects of royal art as courtly gifts from Kasuta, João II was conceding Kasuta's right to give them. From Kasuta's perspective, the implications of the successful exchange of these objects were great. The consecration ceremony in which the *Mani Vunda* ritually invested the *Mani Kongo* with the royal regalia, thereby legitimizing his rule, constrained the *Mani Kongo* to recognize and respect the power and authority of the *Mani Vunda*. When João II received these

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<sup>356</sup> MacGaffey, 1986, p. 199

objects of royal art from Kasuta, he was thus placing himself in a similar position to the *Mani Kongo* vis-à-vis the authority of the *Mani Vunda*.

The Portuguese king readily accepted his role of *Nzambi Mpungu*, which the Portuguese chroniclers translated as “lord of the world,” and in the process admitted Kasuta’s authority, as ambassador and *Mani Vunda*, to bestow and legitimize such a title. This title of *Nzambi Mpungu* and all of the associated powers it conferred were articulated and instigated by the exchange of the objects of royal art. From the evidence of the Portuguese chronicles, it seems that João II and his court interpreted the title of *Nzambi Mpungu* as “lord of the world” in order to make it correspond to and aggrandize João II’s royal title of “Senhor de Guiné.” From the perspective of the Portuguese court, Kasuta’s courtly gifts and oration of homage consecrated João II as “Senhor de Guiné,” thus fulfilling and increasing the imperial implications of the royal title adopted in 1485. The mistranslation of *Nzambi Mpungu* as “lord of the world” as opposed to highest spiritual or otherworldly authority of the *mbumba* dimension eliminated any spiritual connotations. Instead the Portuguese focused on the element of highest or ultimate power without regard for the sphere in which that power was believed to be held, which was the spiritual—not the political—realm.

From either perspective and according to either interpretation of the title Kasuta bestowed on João II, who duly accepted it, the objects of royal art were seen as essential to the activation and confirmation of the entire process. As *Mani Vunda*, Kasuta rightfully possessed the power to bestow the title of *Nzambi Mpungu* in its spiritual interpretation as “lord of the otherworld,” meaning the highest or supreme otherworldly

authority of the *mbumba* dimension, on the Portuguese king.<sup>357</sup> As official ambassador of the *Mani Kongo* to the Portuguese court, Kasuta was likewise lawfully empowered in Europe to confer the title of *Nzambi Mpungu* on João II in its secular and imperial misinterpretation as “lord of the world.” According to the misreading of the title by the Portuguese court, Kasuta was paying homage to João II in the name of the *Mani Kongo* and in the process giving formal acknowledgment of the Portuguese king’s superior political position. Kasuta, according to this line of reasoning, was simply establishing a dependent political relationship with the Portuguese king, thereby crowning João II an emperor in the medieval or feudal sense of a king of kings.<sup>358</sup> João II’s claims in Europe to enjoying imperial status in sub-Saharan Africa depended entirely on notions of suzerainty, which entailed a relationship of supremacy or feudal overlordship in relation to another independent sovereign.<sup>359</sup> The Portuguese chronicles represented João II’s relationship to the Kongo as embodied in the ceremonial homage, gifts and title offered to him by Kasuta as one of suzerainty, precisely the form of feudal overlordship implied in the royal title of “Senhor de Guiné.”

Kasuta presented the objects of royal art to João II and conferred a title which recognized him as the otherworldly complement to the *Mani Kongo*. João II accepted the title of *Nzambi Mpungu* and the courtly gifts of objects of royal art which legitimized it. Kasuta’s spiritual understanding of the exchange served his purposes and reinforced his powers as *Mani Vunda*; João II’s political conception of the exchange likewise realized his imperial ambitions and legitimized his claims to the title of “Senhor de Guiné.” These

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<sup>357</sup> Hilton, 1985, pp. 50-51.

<sup>358</sup> Thomaz, 1994, pp. 149-67; Frances A. Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century*, London: Pimlico, 1999, pp. 1-27.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*

two perceptions were theoretically incompatible. However, the misunderstanding was satisfactory to both the *Mani Vunda* and the Portuguese king.<sup>360</sup> The exchange of royal art initiated a new type of relationship between Kasuta and João II, one of hierarchy and clientage. For Kasuta, the lord of the otherworld first required homage and valuable gifts in order for the living then to receive his favor. For João II, the obedience and presentation of gifts offered by Kasuta represented the acquisition of a dependent or client state in sub-Saharan Africa and the validation of his claims to be “Senhor de Guine.”

### Elephant Tusks

The elephant ivory tusks presented to João II in the courtly ceremony of 1489 were intended to embody the potency of elephants as large and dangerous animals, as overpowering forces of nature. The monetary and symbolic value attributed to elephant ivory tusks readily associated them with power, prosperity and wealth.<sup>361</sup> This affluence and authority implied enjoyment of refined luxury, as well as control over natural resources. For these reasons, elephant tusks were associated with strength in general and with royalty in particular. They could even symbolize the legitimacy of royal prerogatives.<sup>362</sup> The white color of elephant ivory, *mpemba*, represented for the Kongolese the dead and the land of the dead. It could also signify notions of purity and

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<sup>360</sup> MacGaffey, 1994, pp. 260.

<sup>361</sup> For surveys of the values ascribed to elephant tusks and ivory, see Ross, Doran H., ed., *Elephant: The Animal and Its Ivory in African Culture*, Los Angeles: Fowler Museum of Cultural History, University of California, Los Angeles, 1992; Shalem, Avinoam, *The Oliphant: Islamic Objects in Historical Context*, Boston: Brill, 2004; Cutler, Anthony, *The craft of ivory: sources, techniques, and uses in the Mediterranean world, A.D. 200-1400*, Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, Research Library and Collection, 1985.

<sup>362</sup> Lamp, Frederick J., “Houses of Stones: Memorial Art of Fifteenth-Century Sierra Leone,” *The Art Bulletin*, v. 65, n. 2, 1983, p. 227

transition. On a variety of levels, therefore, the elephant ivory tusks invoked ideas of royalty and the powers of the *mbumba* dimension, making them suitable gifts to João II. They were precious and valuable objects and in this respect they would be appropriate as luxury gifts intended to appease the dead in order to win their favor. As *Nzambi Mpungu*, João II was likewise seen as the source of wealth and abundance, the very qualities embodied by the tusks themselves.

As the most menacing part of the elephant, the tusks best personified the strength and might of elephants. These violent and powerful qualities embodied by the tusks coincided with the characteristics also attributed to João II as *Nzambi Mpungu*. As the otherworldly complement to the *Mani Kongo*, João II was expected to make his exceptional powers manifest through the harnessing and unleashing of violence, especially in the arena of warfare. In the Kongo, the standard means of authenticating and testing the efficacy of new cults, such as Christianity, was by their success in war.<sup>363</sup> Indeed, the Portuguese fought in 1491 on behalf of the *Mani Kongo* as a test against rebels in Nsundi in order to demonstrate the merit and authenticity of Christianity to the Kongolese.

In addition, the primary means of communicating with the dead was by placing on the grave objects which indicated the status of the deceased.<sup>364</sup> A common means of establishing contact with revered, valiant warriors was by placing weapons, *mpungi* horns or elephant tusks on their graves. The appeal was considered to be most efficacious if a social, political, or professional relationship could be established with the deceased. Thus, warriors would appeal to deceased warriors for aid in battle. In this instance, I

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<sup>363</sup> MacGaffey, 1994, p. 258; MacGaffey, 1986, p. 200

<sup>364</sup> Hilton, 1985, pp. 11-12.

suggest, Kasuta seems to have been making a king to king appeal to João II as lord of the otherworld from the *Mani Kongo*, king of the living. The *Mani Kongo* was therefore making his connection to João II in this appeal from one king to another king with a precious object associated in this kind of ancestor ritual with the skills, valor and violence of warriors.

Since the *mpemba* color of the elephant ivory tusks was the color of the dead, they were appropriate as courtly gifts for the lord of the dead. As symbols of wealth and abundance as well as of the mighty, violent forces of nature, elephant tusks again referred to this *mbumba* dimension. Since the *Mani Vunda* Kasuta was considered to be the embodiment of *mbumba* power in the world of the living, his function was to mediate the power of the *mbumba* dimension and to regulate *mbumba*-based cults.<sup>365</sup> It was fitting, then, for Kasuta to present João II with elephant ivory tusks as the incarnation of the abundance or fertility and power of *mbumba*, the natural world.

### *Mpungi*: Carved Ivory Horns

The qualities, characteristics and associations of the elephant tusks likewise inhered in the *mpungi* or carved ivory horns. As already noted, the abstract geometric designs on *mpungi* horns resonate with profound spiritual meanings evoking the land of the dead.<sup>366</sup> In this regard, it is imperative to examine the chronicles on the return Portuguese embassy to the Kongo in 1491. These chronicles elucidate, clearly and reliably, the ceremonial use of *mpungi* horns at court in the Kongo. The testimony of the Portuguese witnesses indicates that the *mpungi* were conspicuous elements of court

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<sup>365</sup> Hilton, 1985, pp. 23-25

<sup>366</sup> Blier, 1993, pp. 375-96; Blier, 1998, pp. 201-16.



ceremony as well as religious and military rituals.<sup>367</sup> These royal, spiritual and martial connotations of the *mpungi* horns confirmed their relevance as gifts to the Portuguese king. Most importantly, the chronicles reveal that the Portuguese court was aware of these associations.

In order to investigate the meanings and uses of *mpungi* horns in the Kongo as observed and understood by the Portuguese, we will need to leave Kasuta at Beja in 1489 and move ahead momentarily to the Portuguese embassy sent to the Kongo in 1491 in response to Kasuta's embassy and gifts. When on 29 March 1491, the Portuguese embassy once again landed at the port of Mpinda in the province of Soyo, they were received by the local governor, known as *Mani Soyo*. The envoys first sent to the *Mani Soyo* to announce their arrival discovered the provincial court replete with warriors either armed with weapons or equipped with musical instruments, such as *mpungi* horns, which they played during the ceremonial reception of the Portuguese envoys. Pina succinctly describes the scene: "And for this purpose many people immediately gathered with bows and arrows and with drums and trumpets of ivory and with string instruments (*violas*), everything according to their custom, very harmoniously, it appeared well..."<sup>368</sup> The sound of the musical instruments is praised as being quite harmonious and pleasing. During this initial audience, the Portuguese sources report, the *Mani Soyo* referred to the Portuguese king specifically as *Nzambi Mpungu*. After the successful reception of the Portuguese representatives, whose arrival had been announced by the sounding of the

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<sup>367</sup> We presume that Kasuta would have described the symbolism and ritual function of *mpungi* horns to the Portuguese court during his second, two year long residence there. Nevertheless, these royal, spiritual and martial meanings and connotations of the *mpungi* were in fact communicated to the Portuguese court after the return of the Portuguese embassy from the Kongo in 1491.

<sup>368</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 119: "E para isso se juntou logo muita gente com arcos e frechas e com atabaques e trombetas de marfim e com violas, tudo segundo seu costume, mui acordado, parecia bem..."

*mpungi* horns much to the delight of the Portuguese themselves, the *Mani Soyo* assembled his men to travel to the port to see the ships and to greet the official ambassador, Rui de Sousa. According to Pina, the *Mani Soyo* departed “accompanied by three thousand soldiers with bows and arrows and with another noisy beating of drums.”<sup>369</sup> In his Italian chronicle, he writes that “they were beating the drums and various other instruments as is their custom.”<sup>370</sup> The music produced was again applauded by Pina as creating “the smoothest sounds and harmony” (“suoni e armonia soavissima”).<sup>371</sup> (We can assume musicians playing *mpungi* horns were also included in this procession, for the chronicles specify that the party sent out to accompany the Portuguese embassy to the *Mani Kongo*’s court at Mbanza Kongo featured these ivory trumpets. In Soyo Pina simply mentions “other instruments.”) In turn, Sousa came out of the ships to greet the loudly approaching *Mani Soyo*. The Portuguese contingent was almost identical to the Kongolese one, being composed of armed warriors and noisy musicians, who trumpeted European horns.<sup>372</sup> In these two reception ceremonies, the performance of *mpungi* horns was powerfully coupled with the presence of armed military figures. This practice resonated to some degree with standard European court practices.

To announce the arrival of the Portuguese ships and to assemble his court for the reception of the Portuguese ambassador, the *Mani Soyo* had the *mpungi* horns blown throughout his territory.<sup>373</sup> The importance to the *Mani Soyo* of his audience with the Portuguese—understood as *simbi* spirits of the *mbumba* dimension who had returned to

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., “acompanhado com três mil archeiros e com outro muito estrondo de tangeres.”

<sup>370</sup> Pina, 1992, p. 106: “trombedavano timpani e altri vari stromenti com’ è costume di quelli.”

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 119

<sup>373</sup> Pina, 1992, p. 108.

the Kongo as emissaries of *Nzambi Mpungu*—can be gauged by his decree that failure by his subjects to attend the ceremonies would result in death.<sup>374</sup> For the ceremonial reception of the Portuguese at the provincial court of Soyo, the Kongolese participating in the formal rituals wore skirts of finely woven raffia plam cloth and were naked from the waist up. Their naked upper bodies and faces had been completely painted white, *mpemba*, with chalk or clay. On their heads they sported feather headdresses. In the Italian translation Pina writes, “on their heads they wore crowns (*corone*) composed of the feathers of parrots and other diverse birds” and, in the Portuguese chronicle, “they came...with feather headdresses (*penachos*) on their heads, made from feathers of parrots and other diverse birds.”<sup>375</sup> It is unclear from the two descriptions of them as feather crowns and as feather headdresses whether the crests were attached to caps and whether they symbolized the holding of a type of office or authority.<sup>376</sup> Nevertheless, the purpose of this specific ritual form of dress, Pina informs us, was to signify “great pleasure and happiness” (“grande prazer e alegria”) and intended “only to demonstrate their joy” (“solo per dimostrare la suo leitizia”). The white color of the painted bodies, *mpemba*, was indeed intended to express boundless pleasure and happiness.<sup>377</sup> Yet it was also the color of the dead, the ancestors, and connoted the concepts of redemption and purity.<sup>378</sup> According to Hilton’s interpretation, the *Mani Soyo* was ritually enacting a form of *mbumba*-based festival.<sup>379</sup> It should be recalled that the reception of the *Mwissikongo*

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> Pina, 1992, p. 108: “in capo tenevano corone composte di penne di pappagallo e di altri diversi uccelli.” Pina, 1989, p. 119: “vinham...com penachos na cabeça feitos de penas de papagaios e de outras aves diversas.”

<sup>376</sup> Volavka, Zdenka, *Crown and ritual: the royal insignia of Ngoyo*, edited by Wendy Anne Thomas, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998, pp. 19-20.

<sup>377</sup> Thornton, 1992, p. 57.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 51.

hostages when they returned from their captivity in Portugal was rather similar, for they had been greeted with happiness and welcomed as if they had returned from the dead. As the Portuguese had mistranslated the title of *Nzambi Mpungu* as “lord of the world” and thereby eliminated any spiritual reference, so Pina here mentions the expression of happiness and joy, explicitly associated with the realm of the dead, but again omits the spiritual connotations of the bodies that had been painted white, *mpemba*. Significantly, the playing of the *mpungi* horns accompanied the performance of this *mbumba*-based courtly ceremony.

Striking feather headdresses formed an integral part of the formal military attire of elite Kongolese warriors and would have fortified the connection of the *mpungi* horns to war. This information comes from Duarte Lopes, a Portuguese merchant who had lived at the court of the *Mani Kongo* from 1578 to 1584 when he was sent as ambassador of the *Mani Kongo* to the courts of Philip II of Spain and Pope Sixtus V in Rome.<sup>380</sup> Lopes observes that the military headdresses were composed of feathers from several different birds, “desvairadas plumas.”<sup>381</sup> In particular, he mentions ostriches, peacocks, roosters (possibly referring to African Guinea Fowl) and a number of other birds, “outros pássaros.”<sup>382</sup> The martial purpose of the feather headdress, Lopes affirms, is to make the wearer seem larger, more intimidating, and to give him a terrible, frightful appearance

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<sup>380</sup> Pigafetta, Filippo and Duarte Lopes, *Relac, ão do Reino do Congo e das terras circunvizinhas*, edited by António Luis Alves Ferronha, Lisbon: Publicaç ões Alfa, 1989, pp. 33-34, 49-50. While serving as ambassador of the Kongo to the Vatican, Duarte Lopes conveyed his experiences in and observations on the Kongo in lengthy conversations with the Italian writer and cartographer Filippo Pigafetta, who recorded, revised, edited and published his testimony. It is probable, however, that Lopes had composed a text in Portuguese which he then gave to Pigafetta to translate. Other parts of the eventual publication derived from Pigafetta’s own research and did not come from Lopes. See, Thornton, John, “The Origins and Early History of the Kingdom of Kongo, c. 1350-1550,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, v. 34, n. 1, 2001, pp. 102.

<sup>381</sup> Pigafetta, 1989, pp. 33-34.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

(“tornam o homem maior e de semblante espantoso”).<sup>383</sup> In addition, ostrich and peacock feathers were likewise employed in the Kongo to fashion “emblems and banners of war.”<sup>384</sup> However, Lopes states that peacock feathers were the exclusive possession of the *Mani Kongo* because of their inherent royal associations.<sup>385</sup> This seems to confirm Pina’s subtle suggestion that these elaborate, colorful feather headdresses belonged to the formal military apparel of the elite or persons of distinction. Indeed, Pina makes the interesting remark that these feather headdresses were made only by noble Kongolese women (“gentis mulheres”) and that their manufacture and design were considered a feminine art, “composed by the art of maidens.”<sup>386</sup> Nowhere else does Pina comment on the gender of the makers of objects of royal art. The fact was significant to the Portuguese embassy and to Pina.

Lopes insists that the feather headdresses were worn in battle as essential components of the military attire of the Kongo. Pina claims that the headdresses were composed of parrot feathers in addition to the feathers of other indigenous birds, which he fails to identify. According to the testimony of Lopes, these might have been ostrich and peacock feathers. However, the grey parrots with red tails found in abundance in the Kongo area were large and well spoken (“grande e bem-falantes”).<sup>387</sup> Because of their ability to fly and to talk effusively, MacGaffey claims they were considered dangerous and equated with *simbi* spirits as well as witchcraft and divination.<sup>388</sup> In the context of the *mbumba*-based ceremony with which the *Mani Soyo* welcomed the Portuguese embassy,

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid, p. 50: “insignias e bandeiras de guerra”

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 119; Pina, 1992, p. 108: “composti per arte di donzelle.”

<sup>387</sup> Pigafetta, p. 50.

<sup>388</sup> <http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/loango/fl5.htm> Website for the exhibition *A Spiral of History* held at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1998

the elaborate headdresses composed of parrot feathers crowning the bodies of those who had been painted white, would have reinforced the spiritual dimension of the ritual as well as the identity of the Portuguese as *simbi* spirits, who instead of traveling through the air like birds, had traveled across the ocean from the land of the dead.

Like other ritual and symbolic objects, such as the *mpungi* horns, the elaborate feather headdresses confirm the link between the martial and the spiritual spheres. These military feather headdresses were made by noble Kongolesse women for noble Kongolesse men or warriors of distinction to wear in formal court ceremonies and in battle. They were certainly composed of feathers from grey parrots and probably also from ostrich and peacock feathers. Therefore, their ceremonial uses and military functions, and the symbolism of the feathers themselves, combined to associate the feather headdresses with royalty, war and the dead. Although these headdresses were not recorded as among the courtly gifts to the Portuguese king, their connotations and the fact that they were worn in ritual performance in conjunction with *mpungi* horns and white painted bodies powerfully reinforces the connection between the elephant ivory tusks and *mpungi* horns with violence and war and with the land of the dead. I have argued that the purpose of these courtly gifts was to acknowledge and consecrate the Portuguese king as *Nzambi Mpungu*, or the otherworldly complement to the *Mani Kongo*. These associations were further confirmed when the Portuguese embassy left the province of Soyo and was finally received at the court of the *Mani Kongo*. As the Portuguese contingent approached the capital of Mbanza Kongo, according to Pina, the *Mani Kongo* sent “many noble courtiers” to greet them.<sup>389</sup> Behind the delegation of *Miwissikongo* nobles, Pina writes, came “an infinite number of archers and after them warriors with lances and thus others

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<sup>389</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 125: “muitos gentis-homens cortesãos.” Pina, 1992, p. 116: “tutti li nobili.”

with other instruments (*bisarmas*) of war.”<sup>390</sup> Pina describes these warriors as being “all separated into battalions (*batalhas*) and with many trumpets of ivory and drums and many other instruments.”<sup>391</sup> Again, the *mpungi* horns were involved in the ceremonies of announcing and receiving the ambassadors, and the musicians who sounded them during these rituals formed a conspicuous part of the contingents of armed warriors. During these ceremonies at the court of the *Mani Kongo*, Pina says that the Portuguese king was again proclaimed, “Lord of the World” (“senhor do Mundo”).<sup>392</sup> In addition, he comments that those at court faced the direction of the sea and raised their hands towards the sea as if to indicate the land of the dead or more precisely the location of Portugal when they sang the praises of the Portuguese king as *Nzambi Mpungu*.<sup>393</sup> The *mpungi* horns were sounded throughout these rituals.

*Mpungi* horns formed an essential part of the royal regalia and featured conspicuously in investiture ceremonies.<sup>394</sup> They likewise figured prominently in funerals of the elite and in court ceremonies, such as the official reception of the Portuguese embassy. The precious elephant ivory material and its lustrous white color; the complex, finely carved abstract geometric designs rhythmically covering its surface; the smooth, harmonious sounds soothingly emitted when it was played; and its decisive ritual use established the indissoluble connection of the *mpungi* horn to royalty and the land of the dead. The pervasive connotations of ivory with the strength and power of elephants and the consistent ritual association of the exquisitely carved ivory horns with fully armed

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<sup>390</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 125: “infindos archeiros e depois lanceiros e assim outros com outras bisarmas de guerra.”

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*: “todas repartidas em batalhas e com muitas trombetas de marfim e atabaques e outros muitos instrumentos.”

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126-27

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.* p. 126.

<sup>394</sup> Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 206; Bassani, 1991, p. 191

and elaborately attired warriors evoked the martial overtones of the *mpungi* horns. Lopes substantiates these implicit connections between *mpungi* and actual war when he details the military use of them as one of the musical instruments of war and to give commands on the field of battle.<sup>395</sup>

According to Lopes, in some parts of the Kongo, pieces of elephant ivory were sharpened to fine, deadly points as substitutes for metal tips at the ends of weapons, such as lances (“setas”) and knives (“facas”).<sup>396</sup> In addition to the use of ivory as lethal components of weaponry, Lopes describes the military use of ivory horns as musical instruments. He states that the Kongolesse military employed three different types of musical instruments during military exercises and battles.<sup>397</sup> He first mentions drums made from a single piece of wood with leather coverings. These drums were played with “certain small mallets of ivory.”<sup>398</sup> The second instrument is said to be shaped like an inverted pyramid and was made with “sheets of thin iron.”<sup>399</sup> These two types of percussive instruments, which Lopes discusses together, were designed to produce, in Lopes’s account, “the most raucous, ghastly, and warlike sounds possible.”<sup>400</sup> The ivory horns, however, merit their own separate discussion.<sup>401</sup> Whereas the two drums were employed to generate the intimidating sounds of war, the ivory horns inspired warriors to despise death and scorn danger in battle. Lopes notes that the size of these ivory horns varied widely, but he nevertheless specifies that the mouthpiece was always located on the side of the inner curve of the tusk, as was typical for African horns, and not at the end

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<sup>395</sup> Pigafetta, pp. 33-34; Blier, 1998, p. 211; Bassani, 2000, p. 277; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 206.

<sup>396</sup> Pigafetta, p. 29.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.



of the horn, as was standard in Europe. He remarks that the horns were deliberately designed and carved in a certain way in order to produce the desired sounds. For Lopes, the music produced by the ivory horns was “cheerful and harmonious” (“alegre e concordável”). This would seem to coincide with Pina’s perception of the music of the *mpungi* horns played, “according to their own custom,” at *mbumba*-based court rituals as being very agreeable (“mui acordado”) and as creating the smoothest sounds and harmony (“suoni e armonia soavissima”).<sup>402</sup> The purpose of the specially engineered sounds produced by the ivory horns in this military context was to “move and incite the souls to scorn the dangers [of war].”<sup>403</sup>

Lopes next details the use of these three musical instruments to give commands on the field of battle. The size of the horns assigned to personnel is determined by rank with the most senior military leaders possessing the largest ivory horns. When a command was given with the large ivory horns, Lopes relates, the heads of the lesser units returned the call to acknowledge having received the order. Therefore, possession of ivory horns was a conspicuous indication of power and status. Those who controlled the sounding of the horns were those in positions of authority and command. The larger ivory horns carried a greater impact with their music. The large size of the ivory horns and the greater volume of the music they produced indicated the superior status of its owner, for the larger size of the ivory and the increased sound it consequently produced derived directly from the tusks of mature and powerful elephants. It would be appropriate, then, for the military leaders to possess the largest ivory horns fashioned from the tusks of the most potent of elephants, since they wielded the most authority and could muster the

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<sup>402</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 119; Pina, 1992, p. 106.

<sup>403</sup> Pigafetta, p. 34: “commove e incita os ânimos e desprezarem os perigos”

greatest amount of force on the field of battle. The ivory horns were employed in war to appeal for supernatural aid from deceased warriors, to inspire warriors to battle and incite them to deeds of valor, to communicate urgent military commands, and to indicate status, power and authority.

### Luxury Raffia Cloth

According to Pina and Resende, the final group of courtly gifts Kasuta, as ambassador and as *Mani Vunda*, formally presented to João II in 1489 was “many raffia cloths well-woven and of fine colors.”<sup>404</sup> (Fig. 3) Pina testified that these luxury raffia textiles were “considered by them to be extremely valuable.”<sup>405</sup> Pereira, who sailed to Portugal with Kasuta, was well-acquainted with sub-Saharan African textiles, especially raffia palm cloth. His informed, admiring comments on these textiles, a prized specialty of the Kongo, are revealing. He succinctly observed, “In this Kingdom of the Kongo they make some cloths from palm trees with a surface like velvet, and some worked like velvety satin, so beautiful that nothing finer than these palm cloths is made in Italy. And throughout the whole of the other Guinea there is no other land in which they know how to make these cloths except in this Kingdom of the Kongo.”<sup>406</sup>

In these two sentences, Pereira praises luxury raffia cloth on several levels. He describes the material and the high quality of manufacture, the fineness of the weave of the pile cloth, as being similar to velvet and velvety satin. Pereira also esteems the beauty

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<sup>404</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 116: “muitos panos de palma bem tecidos e com finas cores.” Resende, 1994, p. 287.

<sup>405</sup> Pina, 1992, p. 102: “appresso loro sono in grandissimo prezzo.”

<sup>406</sup> Pacheco Pereira, Duarte, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, edited by Augusto Epiphanyo da Silva Dias, Lisbon: Typographia Universal, 1905, p. 134: “Neste Reyno de Conguo se fazem huns panos de palma, de pello como veludo, e delles com lauores como çatim velutado, tam fermosos, que a obra d’elles se nam faz melhor feyta em Italia; e em toda ha outra Guinee nam há terra em que saybam fazer estes panos senam neste Reyno de Conguo.”

of their designs (“tam fermosos”), claiming they surpass in artistry the finest textiles produced in Europe (“nam faz melhor feyta em Italia”). He appreciated the refined aesthetic qualities of the complex geometric designs featured on raffia pile cloth as well as the sophisticated skill and technique required to weave the designs, to create the finely woven fabrics, and to achieve the vividly dyed colors. Indeed, for Pereira, the manufacture of raffia pile cloth constituted a unique form of knowledge (“saber fazer”), which remained inaccessible to other sub-Saharan Africans. He values raffia pile cloth as artistic creations, objects in their own right, independent of their cultural, functional and symbolic value in the Kongo.

From the testimony of Pereira, it could be deduced that the courtly gift of numerous pieces of luxury raffia pile cloth would have been greatly appreciated at the Portuguese court as sumptuous textiles equal or superior to comparable European fabrics. Pina proclaims that raffia pile cloth was very highly valued in the Kongo. This statement implies the Portuguese were aware of the values attached to raffia cloth by the Kongolese who made them. Once again, Kasuta would likely have explained the meanings and associations of raffia textiles to the Portuguese court. Moreover, the Portuguese embassy to the Kongo in 1491 witnessed the symbolic use of raffia cloth at the courts of the *Mani Soyo* and the *Mani Kongo*.

Decorated luxury raffia cloth was known in the language of the Kongo as *lubongo*.<sup>407</sup> The finest, most precious examples of *lubongo* were the exclusive possession of the *Mani Kongo*.<sup>408</sup> These exceptional royal pieces of raffia cloth were defined as

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<sup>407</sup> Blier, 1998, p. 216.

<sup>408</sup> Blier, 1998, p. 216; Blier, 1993, p. 383; Bassani, 2000, p. 278; Bassani, 1983, p. 74.

being the most elaborate, intricately worked textiles.<sup>409</sup> The high quality of royal raffia cloth depended on the excellence of several features. Royal raffia cloth required, above all, richness of design, which was identified by the degree and type of ornamentation. The same refined, complex straight-edge geometric designs that were carved in ivory on the *mpungi* horns were likewise used to embellish luxury raffia cloth. Indeed, these traditional abstract patterns first developed as decoration for the weaving of raffia textiles and were then eventually applied to other art forms, such as ivory carving.<sup>410</sup> As we have seen with the royal *mpungi* horns, the geometrical designs of the Kongo representational tradition consists of spatial frames, serpentine forms, continuous meanders, frets, and simple or interwoven lozenges.<sup>411</sup>

Here, the sophisticated, abstract designs were finely woven into luxury raffia textiles and not delicately carved in low relief on precious elephant ivory tusks. The tightness of the weave of the cloth, and its similar appearance to silk, was valued.<sup>412</sup> These complex textile patterns were achieved by the employment of a highly developed pile cloth technique, which gave the appearance of worked velvet.<sup>413</sup> The raised geometric decoration on a plain ground was realized by the weaving of additional wefts which were cut to create pile.<sup>414</sup> In order to attain the richest, most elaborate geometric designs for these royal raffia cloths, mastery of the technique of embellishing with pile cloth was required of the Kongolese artist and it was appreciated by the royal patrons. Another element for the designation of a *lubongo* raffia cloth that made it appropriate for

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<sup>409</sup> Vansina, 1998, p. 270.

<sup>410</sup> Blier, 1993, pp. 382-84, 395-96; Bassani, 2000, p. 281; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 202; Bassani, 1983, p. 79

<sup>411</sup> Bassani, 2000, p. 281; Bassani, 1983, pp. 79-80; Blier, 1993, p. 382.

<sup>412</sup> Vansina, 1998, p. 275.

<sup>413</sup> Bassani, 2000, p. 278; Picton and Mack, 1989, pp. 32-35.

<sup>414</sup> Cossa, Egidio in *Encompassing the Globe*, v. 2, 2007, pp. 87-88.

royalty was the quality and fastness of the vivid colors of the textile. For instance, the fiber threads forming the pile cloth decoration were often of a different color from the smooth plain weave section. The *lubongo* raffia cloths Kasuta presented to João II in 1489 were described as being dyed in “vivid colors” and a couple years later, in 1491, members of the Portuguese embassy, who were residing in the palaces of the *Mani Kongo* at Mbanza Kongo, described seeing many “painted” raffia textiles. Whole raffia cloths could be dyed in a single color, such as red, black or white, or could feature a combination of multiple colors.<sup>415</sup> These dyes could be applied to the raffia fibers before weaving or a whole cloth could be dyed a single color.<sup>416</sup> Pina and Resende’s language (“finas cores”) plainly suggests that the raffia cloths presented to João II displayed at least two different colors.

Precious raffia textiles were essential to the effective performance of political and spiritual rituals in the Kongo.<sup>417</sup> Every feature of the sumptuous *lubongo* raffia textiles defined and fortified royal power: the physical material of the fine raffia fibers; the tightness of its weave; the vibrant red color dyes; and the intricate pile cloth technique employed to create its elaborate geometric design. Indeed, luxury raffia fabric and its traditional geometric patterns were inseparable from the symbolic articulation of kingship and royal power. Caps of exquisite raffia construction, known as *mpu*, were an essential insignia of office and embodied the authority to rule.<sup>418</sup> (Fig. 7) A crucial element of the royal regalia, they functioned as the equivalent of a royal crown in Europe.<sup>419</sup> Both the *Mani Soyo*, when he welcomed the Portuguese ambassador at Mpinda, and the *Mani*

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<sup>415</sup> Vansina, 1998, pp. 267-68.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>417</sup> Blier, 1993, p. 383; Blier, 1998, p. 216.

<sup>418</sup> Hilton, 1985, pp. 37, 41, 48;

<sup>419</sup> Bassani, 2000, p. 279, Bassani, 1983, pp. 74-84; Thornton, 1992, pp. 57-63; Blier, 1998, p. 214.

*Kongo*, when he formally received the embassy at court, were described in the chronicles as wearing the *mpu* cap, which clearly impressed the Portuguese contingent.

Pina gives two accounts of the appearances of the *Mani Soyo* and the *Mani Kongo* when they received separately the Portuguese embassy in 1491. The first report on the *Mani Soyo* reads: “And *Mani Soyo* was dressed in ceremonial attire and cloth of serpent skin, but on his head he wore a cap made by hand, which had on top a rather naturalistic figure.”<sup>420</sup> In his later chronicle, Pina provides more specific details about the *mpu* cap worn by the *Mani Soyo*: “And [*Mani Soyo*] wore on his head a cap on which there was a serpent very finely worked with the needle and very naturalistic.”<sup>421</sup> The *Mani Soyo*, who was the brother of the queen, was authorized by the *Mani Kongo* to wear the *mpu* cap in his capacity as governor of the province of Soyo. As the insignia of office, the *mpu* crown accompanied the title of *Mani Soyo*. The *mpu* cap worn by the *Mani Kongo* for the formal audience with the Portuguese ambassador likewise receives comment from Pina. He describes the appearance of the *Mani Kongo* in the Italian version as follows: “And this King [was] nude from the waist up, but below he was covered with damask fabrics, which on other occasions the King of Portugal had sent him, and over the shoulders he had a horse tail ornamented with silver and on his head a cap, which was made from white cloth, similar to a diadem, which is an ornament to the honor of priests, and on the left arm, he wore a chain, that is, a necklace.”<sup>422</sup> In the Portuguese chronicle Pina describes the full majesty of the *Mani Kongo* in the following terms: “the king was nude

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<sup>420</sup> Pina, 1992, p. 108: “E Manisoncho era vestito di veste di festa e di panno di serpente, ma ’n capo portava uno acciaio fatto a mano el quale aveva nella sommità una figura quasi naturale.”

<sup>421</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 119: “E o senhor trazia na cabeça um carapuça em que andava uma serpe mui bem lavrada de agulha e mui natural.”

<sup>422</sup> Pina, 1992, p. 116: “Ed era esso Re nudo sopra al bellico ma di sotto era coperto di panni di domasco il quali altre volte lo Re di Portochallo aveva mandati, e sopra alle spalle teneva una coda di cavallo ornata d’argento e nel capo una fastuola, ovvero, vetta di panno bianco in modo di diadema ch’è ornamenti a onore de sacerdoti, e, nello braccio sinistro, teneva una catena ovvero collana.”

from the waist up, with a high cap of palm cloth with worked designs placed on his head, and on his shoulders, a horse tail ornamented with silver, and from the waist down, [he was] covered with some damask fabric which the king had sent to him, and on the left arm a bracelet of ivory.”<sup>423</sup> The ivory bracelet, known as *malunga*, was a bracelet of authority.<sup>424</sup> However, Pina’s description of it as a “chain” or a “necklace” implies that the ivory was delicately carved to form a series of separate links.

Pina shows admiration for the sophisticated technical and artistic skill evident in the design and creation of the *mpu* cap worn by the *Mani Soyo* and *Mani Kongo*. He specifies that the *Mani Soyo*’s cap of authority featured a naturalistic figural representation of a serpent. The virtuosic serpent portrayed on the *mpu* seems to have been complemented by the serpent skin garment sported by the *Mani Soyo* (“vestito...di panno di serpente”). The *mpu* belonging to the *Mani Kongo*, however, seems to have been made from raffia palm fibers that had been dyed white. Pina portrays both of the *mpu* as having been “very finely worked” (“mui bem lavrada”), which in this context seems to imply that the raised geometric designs had been executed in velvet-like pile.

The royal *mpu* was intended to be a virtuosic example of technical and artistic skill and its method of creation and its geometric designs were meant to embody cosmological notions of royal power and authority. The *mpu* cap was woven in a spiral form from a single raffia thread.<sup>425</sup> As Blier has remarked, the construction of the *mpu* cap, therefore, literally embodied a spiral composition.<sup>426</sup> The abstract designs

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<sup>423</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 125: “el-rei, que estava...nu da cinta para cima, com uma carapuça de pano de palma lavrada e nuito alta posta na cabeça, e ao ombro, um rabo de cavalo guarencido de prata, e da cinta para baixo, coberto com uns panos de damasco que lhe el-rei tinha mandado, e no braço esquerdo, um bracelete de marfim.”

<sup>424</sup> Thornton, 1992, pp. 57-63.

<sup>425</sup> Bassani, 1983, p. 74; Blier, 1998, p. 214.

<sup>426</sup> Blier, 1998, p. 214.

embellishing the *mpu* caps were identical to those on the *mpungi* horns, and on the *lubongo*, or richly decorated raffia cloths. According to Blier, they would have carried similar meanings and associations, relating to transition and the land of the dead, as did the designs on the other objects of royal art.<sup>427</sup>

However, the serpentine forms and patterns common to the decoration of these objects received special emphasis on the *mpu* cap. The actual snake skins worn on the body of the *Mani Soyo* in conjunction with the figural representation of a serpent on the *mpu* cap itself certainly dramatized the serpentine symbolism and increased its influence. These serpentine patterns, for instance, could represent notions of physical force and fecundity.<sup>428</sup> This again places the abstract patterns, figural imagery and snake skin in the *mbumba* dimension, the forces governing the natural world. Indeed, serpents were believed to be *simbi* spirits of the *mbumba* dimension related to the renewal of life.<sup>429</sup> Along these lines, the white color, *mpemba*, of the *mpu* cap worn by the *Mani Kongo* was probably likewise intended to refer to the land of the dead. However, raffia textiles were more commonly dyed red, which was closely associated both with kingship and with ideas of transition. The use of raffia textiles for royal funerals further connected them to the dead and royal status.

The clear royal associations of *lubongo* raffia cloth and its prominent use in court ceremony as well as its enduring connections to the land of the dead made it a suitable gift to the Portuguese king as *Nzambi Mpungu*. However, luxury raffia textiles were also hoarded by the *Mani Kongo* and displayed at court as the principal expression of wealth,

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<sup>427</sup> Blier, 1998, p. 214; Blier, 1993, pp. 383, 396

<sup>428</sup> Blier, 1998, p. 214; Blier, 1993, p. 382.

<sup>429</sup> Blier, 1998, p. 214.



power and status.<sup>430</sup> As the exclusive preserve of the king, luxury raffia cloth was given by the *Mani Kongo* to deserving *Miwissikongo* nobles to indicate favor and position.<sup>431</sup> Plain raffia cloth was also received as tribute from clients. Indeed, luxury textiles occupied a similarly prestigious role in the Kongo as they did in Portugal, and the exchange of luxury textiles would have comprised a common courtly language of honor and respect. Luxury fabrics and textiles played vital roles in the courtly ceremonies, rituals and images of kingship in both the Kongolese and Portuguese courts and these respective meanings were mutually recognized.

Marina Belozerskaya has emphasized the prominence of luxury fabrics and textiles as essential to the display of magnificence and splendor at the court of Burgundy during the fifteenth century.<sup>432</sup> Belozerskaya's assessment of the role of luxury fabrics at the Burgundian court is equally applicable to the Portuguese court of João II. Sumptuous fabrics were a defining element of court life throughout Renaissance Europe.<sup>433</sup> They covered human and animal bodies as clothing and livery, adorned walls and furnishings as interior decoration, and distinguished the presence of royal personages during processions, receptions, feasts and tournaments as canopies, baldachins, flags, banners and more. Luxurious fabrics and textiles, rigorously regulated by sumptuary law, proclaimed the wealth, social influence and political authority of members of court and

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<sup>430</sup> Vansina, 1998, p. 271; Thornton, John, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 48-51; Thornton, 1990-91, p. 17.

<sup>431</sup> Vansina, 1998, p. 271.

<sup>432</sup> Belozerskaya, Marina, *Rethinking the Renaissance: Burgundian Arts Across Europe*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 104-125; Belozerskaya, Marina, *Luxury Arts of the Renaissance*, Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005, pp. 89-133. The following paragraph is based on Belozerskaya's publications.

<sup>433</sup> For the importance of fabrics, textiles, clothing and dress at court, see Vale, Malcolm, *The Princely Court*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 93-135; Uytven, Raymond van, "Showing Off One's Rank in the Middle Ages," in *Showing Status: Representation of Social Positions in the Late Middle Ages*, edited by Wim Blockmans, Turnhout, 1999, pp. 19-34; Uytven, Raymond van, "Cloth in Medieval Literature of Western Europe," in *Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe*, edited by N.B. Harte and K.G. Ponting, London, 1983, pp. 151-183.

demarcated the very spaces of power. Court manuals, chronicles, diaries and ambassador's reports abound in detailed descriptions and adept, nuanced discussions of the beauty and significance of fabrics and textiles in the projection of princely magnificence and splendor and in the creation of an exalted image of rule at both exceptional and routine ceremonies and events.

The Portuguese king certainly perceived the gifts of luxury raffia cloth as contributing to his princely image and enhancing his claims to the imperial title of "Senhor de Guiné." The Portuguese embassy to the Kongo had witnessed the use of raffia cloth at court ceremonies there and readily identified similarities and parallels with the courtly use of luxury textiles in Europe. During their extended stay, the Portuguese embassy had resided in palaces belonging to the *Mani Kongo*. They reported that the walls of these palaces were hung with large, colorful raffia textiles: "and thus they put them in a house [connected to] the palace [and the house was] large, beautiful and the whole thing was decorated and woven from many different threads of raffia of many colors."<sup>434</sup> It would seem that these multicolored raffia wall-hangings were employed similarly to tapestries at European courts. The resplendent, ceremonial display of luxury fabrics and textiles at the courts of Portugal and the Kongo was witnessed and understood by Kasuta and then by the Portuguese ambassador Rui de Sousa in 1491.

During the fifteenth century sumptuous fabrics and textiles—such as cloth of gold and tapestry in Europe and *lubongo* raffia cloth in the Kongo—were the most highly prized art forms and, consequently, powerful representations of royal authority.<sup>435</sup>

Indeed, the exchange of luxury textiles between the courts of Portugal and the Kongo

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<sup>434</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 126: "e assim as puseram em uma casa dos paços grande, formosa e toda lavrada e tecida de laços desvairados de palmas de muitas cores."

<sup>435</sup> Belozerskaya, 2002; Belozerskaya, 2005; Picton and Mack, 1989

were essential to forging a diplomatic relationship which enhanced the magnificence of the senders and flattered the pretensions of the receivers. The presentation of appropriately valuable courtly gifts was compulsory for the initiation and maintenance of good diplomatic relations in both sub-Saharan Africa and Renaissance Europe.<sup>436</sup> These courtly gifts and the successful performance of the elaborate ceremony and protocol which necessarily accompanied their presentation were often the foundation upon which enduring bonds and special connections were built.<sup>437</sup>

In sub-Saharan Africa and Renaissance Europe, the quantity and quality of the opulent textiles, luxury fabrics, and sumptuous clothing which were ceremoniously worn, lavishly displayed and proudly hoarded by rulers and kings served as a primary means to express, embody and reinforce notions of power, authority, wealth and prestige.<sup>438</sup> The exchange of luxury textiles between João II and Nzinga a Nkuwu would have comprised a common courtly language and helped to cement their relationship as complementary kings, one in Europe and the other in Africa, one as lord of the otherworld and the other as lord of the living. The gift of royal raffia cloth was partly intended by the *Mani Kongo* as a suitably lavish response to João II's gift from 1485 of exquisite fabrics, such as the fine damask, which the *Mani Kongo* had incorporated into his own royal regalia. The Portuguese king countered the gift of luxury raffia cloth by sending Nzinga a Nkuwu additional sumptuous fabrics from Europe, such as brocade and cloth of gold.

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<sup>436</sup> Elbl, 1992, pp. 171, 200-01; Thornton, 1998, pp. 54-57; Curtin, Philip D., *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, v. 1, 1975, pp. 286-90.

<sup>437</sup> Thornton, 1998, pp. 54-57, 67-68.

<sup>438</sup> Belozerskaya, 2002; Belozerskaya, 2005; Thornton, 1998, p. 48-51; Thornton, John, "Precolonial African Industry and the Atlantic Trade, 1500-1800," *African Economic History*, n. 19, 1990-1991, pp. 1-19; Vansina; Adenaike, Carolyn Keyes, "West African Textiles, 1500-1800," in *Textiles: Production, Trade and Demand*, edited by Maureen Fennell Mazzaoui, Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1998, pp. 251-262; Picton and Mack, 1989.

The chronicles of Pina and Resende and the favorable testimony of Pereira confirm the favorable reception at the Portuguese court of *lubongo* raffia cloth. These sources indicate that the Portuguese court admired the African artistic skill, which was brilliantly displayed in the design and execution of the luxury textiles, and appreciated the refined beauty of the cloth.<sup>439</sup> Furthermore, it is almost certain that the Portuguese court recognized the complex associations and functions of *lubongo* raffia cloth and that the court was made aware of these from the information provided by Kasuta himself when he presented these courtly gifts in 1489 or a few years later by the returning members of the Portuguese embassy headed by Rui de Sousa in 1491.

## 6. Courtly Gifts, Conversion and War

Before Kasuta presented his gifts of African royal art to João II, Pina reports that “he asked the Portuguese King whether he was first among all the princes of the world.”<sup>440</sup> The rhetorical question was intended to identify João II as *Nzambi Mpungu* or as Pina translates it, “Senhor do Mundo,” Lord of the World. After the ceremonial exchange of courtly gifts, Kasuta expressed his fervent desire to receive “the sacred waters of baptism” in order to convert to Christianity. He likewise petitioned the Portuguese king to provide priests and other religious figures to return with him to the Kongo in order to spread the new faith, give instruction in doctrine, and effect additional conversions. As MacGaffey has observed, the material practices and technology of the Portuguese were, for the Kongolese, inseparably connected to Christianity.<sup>441</sup> Consequently, Kasuta requested an ambitious program of cultural and technological

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<sup>439</sup> Bassani, 2000, pp. XVII, XXV-XXVI, XXXI-XXXIII.

<sup>440</sup> Pina, 1992, pp. 100,102: “el quale chiedono che sia el primo infra tutti li altri principi del mondo.”

<sup>441</sup> MacGaffey, 1994, p. 253.

transfer from Portugal to the Kongo.<sup>442</sup> This program entailed the Portuguese king sending architects, carpenters and stonemasons to the Kongo to construct churches for worship and palaces for the nobility. Farmers were to demonstrate how to cultivate the earth according to European techniques and with European tools, while women were to provide training in the baking of bread.

Finally, Kasuta suggested that noble *Miwissikongo* youths should be sent to the Portuguese court to receive an education in the Portuguese language (including the ability to read and write) and in the complicated manners and protocol of the court, and indoctrination in Christianity. This kind of education of noble youths at court was common in Europe and conveniently paralleled the system in the Kongo where provincial governors and nobles sent their children to the court of the *Mani Kongo* at Mbanza Kongo in order for them to make connections and to receive an education in the skills and knowledge appropriate to their status.<sup>443</sup> According to Pina, the purpose of these proposals, initiated by Nzinga a Nkuwu and put forward by Kasuta, was to create a situation in which “the men of one and the other kingdom are equal and convinced in love, familiarity and conversation, with the same manner of living and the same customs.”<sup>444</sup> In addition to being baptized and initiated into the rudiments of the Christian religion, and to perfecting their ability to speak, read and write the Portuguese language, the young *Miwissikongo* nobles sent to the Portuguese court would, according to Kasuta’s plan, learn the “other customs of good living” (“altri costume del ben viver”).<sup>445</sup> Kasuta evidently perceived that an education in Portuguese court culture and language, like the

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<sup>442</sup> Heywood and Thornton, 2007, p. 61; Thornton, 1990-91, pp. 1-19.

<sup>443</sup> Hilton, 1985, pp. 38, 42

<sup>444</sup> Pina, 1992, p. 102: “l’uomini de l’uno e l’altro regno sieno pari e convinti da una parte in amore e in praticare e conversare, con uno medesimo modo di vivere e di costume.”

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

one he had already involuntarily received, was vital to establishing and maintaining enduring, advantageous relations with the Portuguese king as *Nzambi Mpungu*.<sup>446</sup>

Soon after setting forth this grand program of cultural and technological transfer, Kasuta and his embassy “were baptized with great solemnity and devotion in Beja” with the Portuguese king and queen as well as other high-ranking titled noblemen acting as godparents.<sup>447</sup> Pina is uncharacteristically demonstrative in his praise for Kasuta and it seems that this reflects the esteem in which he was held by the Portuguese king. Pina refers to Kasuta as “homem mui principal” and “pessoa de bom natural” and, tellingly, as “amigo de Deus.” After his baptism Kasuta adopted a new Christian name, Dom João da Silva. It is indicative of the respect for his status as well as his personal merits that both Pina and Resende fastidiously insist in their chronicles on always using the exclusive honorific title “Dom,” signifying royalty or high nobility, before his name, an honor conspicuously denied his Portuguese counterpart sent by João II as ambassador to the *Mani Kongo* in response to Kasuta’s mission, who was described only as “fidalgo” or “uomo nobile.”<sup>448</sup> The use of the title of “Dom” in Portugal was exceedingly restricted and tightly controlled, and was exclusive to royalty and privileged members of the high nobility. It was conferred solely by the king’s authority.

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<sup>446</sup> Thornton, John, “Early Kongo-Portuguese Relations: A New Interpretation,” *History in Africa*, v. 8, 1981, pp. 183-204

<sup>447</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 117.

<sup>448</sup> For the significance of the noble title of “Dom,” see Elbl, 1992, p. 201. Neither the original ambassador, Gonçalvo de Sousa, who died before reaching the Kongo, nor his cousin Rui de Sousa, who was chosen to replace him, were permitted to use the honorific title of “Dom.” Rui de Sousa was a respected member of the royal council and an experienced diplomat who had already served in a number of prestigious posts in Europe, such as ambassador to Edward IV of England and ambassador to Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, before being dispatched to the Kongo. For more on Rui de Sousa, see Garcia de Resende, *Vida e feitos d’ el-rey Dom João segundo*, edited by Evelina Verdelho, Corpus electrónico do celga – Português do período clássico, Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra, 2007, pp. 125, 244-45.

The rite of baptism with its emphasis on the importance of water was perceived by the Kongoleses, Hilton and MacGaffey contend, as a ritual initiation into the new *mbumba* cult inspired by *Nzambi Mpungu*.<sup>449</sup> In the Kongo, it was believed that the soul, *moyo*, took on a new name as well as a new body when it traveled across the water to the land of the dead.<sup>450</sup> Likewise, it was standard practice in the Kongo to take a new name after ritual initiations. The parallel emphasis in the Kongo and Christian religions on water as an essential rite of initiation into the new cult and the obligation to receive a new name after this initiation enabled the Kongoleses and Portuguese to engage in these rituals and ceremonies in mutually satisfactory ways but from divergent perspectives. Because the Kongoleses thought of the Portuguese as their otherworldly counterparts, Nzinga a Nkuwu eventually took the name of the Portuguese king, João, after his baptism, while the *Mani Soyo*, who was the brother of the *Mani Kongo*'s wife, adopted the name of Manuel since his namesake in Portugal was also the brother of the Portuguese queen.

By receiving baptism and taking the Portuguese king and queen as his godparents, Kasuta was establishing a ritually and spiritually sanctioned kinship relationship with the king. With João II as his godfather, Kasuta obtained a triumph as *Mani Vunda*, for the special relationship he had already developed with him on a personal level was now formalized and institutionally sanctioned through sacred ritual. His direct, kinship relationship with the Portuguese king secured him privileged access to the *Nzambi Mpungu* and ensured the continuation of his position as mediator of the *mbumba* dimension. On a diplomatic level, the baptism and ensuing formation of a kinship relationship, as godson and godparent, provided Kasuta as ambassador with an official

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<sup>449</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 51; MacGaffey, 1994, p. 257.

<sup>450</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 9.

position vis-à-vis the household of the Portuguese king. From the Portuguese perspective, João II had acquired a client state and established a dependent relationship with the Kongo, thereby giving substance to his claims to empire based on suzerainty in sub-Saharan Africa. The conversion was also a propaganda success in Europe and it led to the possibility that a client Christian state might be created in Africa.<sup>451</sup> Nevertheless, Kasuta now enjoyed an even more privileged relationship, endorsed by religious ceremony, with the *Mani Kongo* and with the Portuguese king. On a personal level, when Kasuta took his Christian name of Dom João da Silva, his royal status in the Kongo and high-ranking position as *Mani Vunda* were formally recognized according to the strict conventions of aristocratic European court culture.

The honorific noble title of “Dom” carried enormous weight at European courts. This formal acknowledgement of Kasuta’s royal status in the Kongo and personal relationship with the Portuguese king in Europe, as well as his preeminent diplomatic position, commanded respect and wielded considerable importance in terms of courtly protocol. This would have greatly enhanced Kasuta’s profile and facilitated his maneuverings within the intricate court culture during his second extended residence at the Portuguese court. After the ceremonial reception and subsequent baptism, Pina states that “it pleased the king” to have Kasuta and his embassy remain at the Portuguese court until the end of 1490. They reportedly spent their time there honing their language and conversational skills—and by implication their courtly manners and deportment—and studying religious doctrine.

During these additional two years at the Portuguese court, Kasuta was able, according to the chronicles, to become an expert on Christianity. Clearly, this was

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<sup>451</sup> Thomaz, 1994, p. 165.



intended to strengthen his position as *Mani Vunda*, to maintain his control over *mbumba*-based religious cults, and to reinforce his authority as the foremost authority on spiritual matters. This second tour at court also enabled Kasuta to reinvigorate his relationship with João II and, through constant exposure and participation, to improve his knowledge of European court culture. Over the course of these two years, it seems reasonable to assume that Kasuta would also have discussed in courtly conversations the exquisite objects of royal art which he had presented as courtly gifts to the Portuguese king in early 1489.

#### Courtly Conversations about sub-Saharan Africa

We know from the Latin writings of Hieronymus Münzer that João II enjoyed conversing at length about sub-Saharan Africa with visiting dignitaries from other European courts.<sup>452</sup> He seems to have taken pleasure in impressing his honored guests by flaunting his knowledge of Africa and in displaying objects and products obtained from Africa. Münzer, a German doctor, cosmographer and humanist with ties to the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian and the German merchant community, traveled from Nuremburg to Spain and Portugal in 1494, visiting first the court of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon before staying for an extended period at the Portuguese court.<sup>453</sup> The journey seems to have been motivated by intellectual curiosity about overseas expansion as well as political and economic objectives.

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<sup>452</sup> Münzer, Jerónimo, *Viaje por España y Portugal: 1494-1495*, edited by Ramón Alba, Madrid: Ediciones Polifemo, 1991, pp. 165-189; Münzer, Jerónimo, “Do Descobrimento da Guiné pelo Infante D. Henrique,” in *Monumenta Missionaria Africana: África Ocidental (1342-1499)*, edited by António Brásio, Lisbon: Agência Geral do Ultramar, second series, vol. 1, 1958, pp. 214-253.

<sup>453</sup> For Münzer’s trip through Iberia, see Fonseca, João Abel da, “D. João II e a viagem a Portugal do Dr. Jerónimo Münzer,” in *D. João II: O Mar e o Universalismo Lusitano. Actas do III Simpósio de História Marítima*, edited by Rogério d’Oliveira, Lisbon: Academia de Marinha, 2000, pp. 91-99; Branco, Maria dos

Münzer dined with João II on four separate occasions, a rare privilege which indicates the importance the king attached both to Münzer's impressions of the court and to his ability as a respected and well-connected humanist to publicize his perceptions to an international audience. During these highly symbolic ceremonial occasions, Münzer affirms, they engaged in intense conversations about sub-Saharan Africa. He marveled at João II's deep and broad range of learning as much as his ravenous interest in acquiring additional knowledge. According to Münzer's description, João II relished the opportunity to boast about his successful pursuit of peaceful diplomatic relations with sub-Saharan Africans and to disseminate knowledge of these achievements throughout Europe. Münzer confirms on several occasions that these relationships were forged by the regular exchange of gifts.<sup>454</sup> However, he emphasizes that it was the Portuguese king who was obliged to present suitable gifts to various sub-Saharan African rulers to win their favor and retain their protection in Africa. Münzer implies that João II obtained the friendship and support of African rulers only on their terms. It was first necessary, according to Münzer's account, for the Portuguese king to receive permission as well as protection from these African rulers in order to engage in commerce there. Consequently, Münzer commented that João II possessed "great talent for acquiring wealth from commerce," especially with Africa.<sup>455</sup>

In contrast to the Oration of Obedience from 1485 in which the Portuguese ambassador trumpeted the gifts African rulers presented to João II as a means of

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Remédios Castelo, "Portugal nos finais do século XV visto por Münzer," in *Congresso Internacional Bartolomeu Dias e a sua Época: Actas: Sociedade, Cultura e Mentalidades na Época do Cancioneiro Geral*, edited by Jorge Osório, Porto: Universidade do Porto; Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimientos Portugueses, 1989, v. 4, pp. 285-299; Hoenerbach, Wilhelm, "Der deutsche Humanist Hieronymus Munzer im eroberten Granada," *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, v.. 27, n. 1/3, 1987, pp. 45-69.

<sup>454</sup> Münzer, 1958, pp. 247, 250.

<sup>455</sup> Münzer, 1991, p. 167.

recognizing his imperial status as suzerain or feudal overlord, Münzer praised the Portuguese king in 1494 for establishing peaceful diplomatic relations with African rulers by sending them fittingly opulent gifts. Whereas the exchange of gifts had earlier been perceived as a form of tribute, João II now represented the gifts as evidence of the friendship and favor he enjoyed with African rulers. In both instances, the exchange of gifts was seen as embodying these relationships. Surely referring to the Kongo, Münzer reported that João II claimed to have successfully used the exchange of gifts to persuade African rulers to convert to Christianity. The Portuguese king was likewise eager to impress Münzer with the prominent presence of numerous noble African youths, probably the youthful *Miwissikongo* who had been sent from the Kongo to the Portuguese court to learn the Portuguese language, courtly etiquette and protocol, and the rudiments of Christianity.

In addition to the courtly conversations about sub-Saharan Africa Münzer enjoyed with João II, he was shown a variety of objects from Africa as tangible proof of the privileged diplomatic and commercial relationship the king had fostered with African rulers. He was especially fascinated by the African flora and fauna to be found at court in Évora and in Lisbon. Münzer excitedly examined the skin of an unusually large serpent and included animated descriptions of various birds, crocodiles, camels and lions, among others, which he had seen. He was toured around the royal arsenal and foundry in an attempt to highlight the military and naval resources the king dedicated to defending the royal policy of *mare clausum* and to deter interlopers and competition from other European courts. In addition, Münzer was particularly struck by the products João II obtained as gifts and from commerce with Africa, such as gold, pepper, slaves and ivory.

Indeed, he was flabbergasted by the “infinite” number of elephant tusks the king had stored in the royal warehouse in Lisbon. Unfortunately, Münzer offers no substantial descriptive details about specific objects of African manufacture, except for mention of an Africa weapon known as an *azagaya* and of raffia palm cloth, and he provides little information about the types of objects exchanged between João II and numerous African rulers. Nevertheless, Münzer’s writings provide a clear depiction of João II’s sophisticated strategy of displaying objects from sub-Saharan African to European dignitaries visiting the Portuguese court and of engaging in learned conversation about them. In light of Munzer’s comments on the stress João II emphatically placed on the exchange of gifts with African rulers as essential to the establishment and continuation of relations, it seems reasonable to suppose that the Portuguese king would have queried Kasuta during his two years of residence at the court about the gifts of royal art from the Kongo he presented to him in order to be able to discuss them with European courtiers and ambassadors in the deliberate and informed manner that Münzer’s describes.

The central role the Portuguese king had carefully groomed Kasuta to play in the development of peaceful diplomatic relations with the Kongo can be gauged by Pina’s reaction to Kasuta’s tragic death. After João II had determined that Kasuta had sufficiently mastered the Portuguese language, the manners and customs of the court, and the tenets of Christianity, he organized an extravagant return embassy to the Kongo. (This embassy has already been mentioned in relation to the use of *mpungi* horns and raffia cloth at the Kongolese court during the reception ceremonies of the Portuguese.) The extensive armada departed Lisbon on Monday, 19 December 1490. Unfortunately,

the Portuguese ambassador, Gonçalo de Sousa, a gifted *Miwissikongo* youth who had converted to Christianity and spoke Portuguese, and Kasuta himself had contracted the plague while waiting in Lisbon, and they all perished as the ships approached the Cape Verde Islands. According to Pina, Kasuta's death seriously jeopardized the entire relationship between the courts of Portugal and the Kongo: "The principal guidance and aid of the voyage was Dom João, the ambassador, who had become very learned about Portuguese culture and had become its friend and, above all, was a very good Christian, so that it was in him that they had laid the principal foundation of the whole enterprise."<sup>456</sup>

With much fear about how the death of Kasuta would be received, the delayed Portuguese ships eventually landed at Mpinda on 29 March 1491. The *Mani Soyo*, we are told, reacted to the tragic news, which was potentially disastrous to the developing relationship between Portugal and the Kongo, by ordering extravagant celebrations to commemorate such a singularly distinguished figure, who had died, Pina has him proclaim, "in the service of God and of two great kings."<sup>457</sup> Kasuta's brother, who was baptized as Dom Diogo, immediately succeeded the recently deceased Kasuta as the new *Mani Vunda*.<sup>458</sup> He was, however, predictably reluctant to relinquish his spiritual authority and control over cult practices. After the death of Kasuta, the Portuguese priests sent to the Kongo with him probably tried to insist on their independence and power and to circumvent the recently appointed *Mani Vunda* with whom they had no prior relationship in order to deal directly with the *Mani Kongo*. However, Kasuta's brother,

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<sup>456</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 118: "o principal guia e ajuda de sua viagem, que era o dito D. João, embaixador, que das coisas de Portugal ia mui ensinado e amigo e sobre isso era mui bom cristão e tal em que se fazia o principal fundamento da dita empresa."

<sup>457</sup> Ibid., p. 119: "em serviço de Deus e de tais dois reis."

<sup>458</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

Dom Diogo, was able to re-assert the *Mani Vunda*'s preeminent role as mediator of the *mbumba* dimension by discovering an unusual natural object.<sup>459</sup>

The morning after the Virgin Mary had appeared to D. Diogo at night in a vision, he encountered as he left his house, "a sacred thing of stone which I had never seen, and it was made like those [objects] that the monks had when we became Christians, and they called it by the name of the cross."<sup>460</sup> Pina describes the propitious natural object as follows: "The said object was a cross of black stone upon which were the arms of Christ Our Savior, but round, and it was very smooth and clean and well composed with its proper proportions as if it had been manufactured with every great industry and expense."<sup>461</sup> The length of this miraculous black stone cross was estimated to be two *palmas* (44 cm). Pina emphasizes that the type of black stone from which the cross had been formed was not found in the Kongo region. Hailed as a miracle and as indisputable evidence of divine approval and "revelation," the cross provided natural affirmation and therefore it legitimized the *Mani Kongo*'s conversion to Christianity, validated the *Mani Vunda*'s position in the new *mbumba* cult and authenticated the initiations or baptisms in terms of the *mbumba* dimension.<sup>462</sup> According to Hilton, *mbumba* spirits revealed their intentions of favoring or serving a person by manifesting themselves in such unusual objects of the natural world as the black stone cross. These extraordinary kinds of natural objects were believed to contain the power of the *mbumba* spirit.<sup>463</sup>

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<sup>459</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 51; MacGaffey, 1994, p. 258.

<sup>460</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 131.: "uma coisa santa de pedra que eu nunca vi, e feita como aquela que os frades tinham quando fomos cristãos, e diziam pela cruz"

<sup>461</sup> Pina, 1992, p. 124: "La qual cosa era una croce di pietra negra sopra alla quale erano li bracci di Cristo Nostro Redentore, ma ritonda, ed era così piana e pulita e ben composta delle sue debite proporzione come se con ogni grande industria e grande spesa fosse state fabbricata."

<sup>462</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 51.

<sup>463</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 15.

Without delay, the *Mani Kongo* sent for the natural stone cross Dom Diogo had discovered and just described to him in such passionate language and, reportedly, when it was presented at court both the Kongolese and the Portuguese were astonished, though they viewed the event—the object and its discovery—from different perspectives. Speeches were made in praise of the *Mani Kongo* for the spirital world—whether this was understood as the *mbumba* dimension or in Christian terms—had clearly manifested its satisfaction with his recent actions and decisions. We are told that prayers, adoration and tears of joy were fervently offered to it by all. Overcome with emotion, the Portuguese priests carried the cross around the capital in a solemn procession and brought it to the recently constructed church where it was enshrined as “a great relic and notable miracle” and preserved as “an exceptional memory.”<sup>464</sup>

It is important to contrast the dense abstract designs expertly carved on the white ivory *mpungi* horns with the smooth, highly polished black stone cross featuring the figural representation of the arms of Christ, a marvelous work of nature which imitated traditional European religious sculpture. The diplomatic and spiritual relationship between the courts of Portugal and the Kongo were here once again articulated and communicated through ceremonial objects presented and mediated by the *Mani Vunda*. Whereas the white ivory *mpungi* horns with elaborate geometric decoration were believed to embody traditional concepts of Kongolese cosmology, the black stone cross was fashioned by nature, the *mbumba* dimension itself, but was created to resemble the forms and iconography of European sacred art. According to Pina’s report, this miraculous natural object was appreciated for the deft ways in which it imitated art. The language Pina employs to describe the visual and physical attributes of the cross are

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<sup>464</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 132; Pina, 1992, p. 126.

identical to those applied to sculpture in Renaissance Europe. He focuses on the expense and rarity of the materials involved, the excellence of the carving technique of the artist, in this case, nature (“com grande indústria foram lavradas”), the surface qualities of the worked stone (“cosí piana e pulita”), the manner of its overall composition (“ben composta”), and the proportions of its individual members (“le sue debite proporzione”). The manufacture of the object by nature as well as the form it assumed and Christian iconography it displayed made it doubly miraculous. The fact that it was located outside of the house of the *Mani Vunda*, who discovered it and brought it to court, ensured the continued relevance of this position, despite the presence of Portuguese priests, and indicated that this role was defined through the possession and presentation of marvelous objects of art and nature.

After the black stone cross had been ritually processed around the capital and reverentially placed in the church, the *Mani Kongo* organized public celebrations and, as the centerpiece, staged mock battles.<sup>465</sup> Indeed, after Nzinga a Nkuwu had been baptized, he ordered impressive *nsanga* or military dances and displays, which resembled combat with warriors armed with bows and arrows, and the *Mani Kongo* had even personally engaged in the display of fighting for over an hour.<sup>466</sup> The connection between war and ceremonial objects of art and religion was recognized and encouraged by both the *Mani Kongo* and the Portuguese king. Throughout the royal courts of Europe, where the codes and values of chivalry continued to thrive, tournaments and jousts were routinely

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<sup>465</sup> Pina, 1992, p. 126.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid., p. 122; Heywood and Thornton, 2007, p. 61.



celebrated as the climax of important ceremonial occasions.<sup>467</sup> Chivalry was the ethos of the warrior nobility in Europe and its emphasis on honor, military prowess, valor and bravery meant that, despite various other differences and misunderstandings, the Portuguese and Kongolese courts were able to make enduring connections and foster mutual respect through war and objects related to war. The association of the courtly gifts discussed in this chapter, especially ivory, with war and martial prowess must be stressed, for these qualities formed important elements of their meanings.

When the ambassador Rui de Sousa had his formal audience with the *Mani Kongo* and presented the courtly gifts of luxury fabrics and textiles from Europe, such as silks and brocades and cloth of gold, European religious images and richly caparisoned horses, he also made, as the resounding conclusion to the entire prolonged ceremony, the surprising offer of himself, in his capacity as captain, and of the entire Portuguese armada. Pina writes: “And above all, the said captain offered himself to him [the *Mani Kongo*] along with the entire armada of the king as well as all the people manning it, so that he would be served fully by all in all things which concerned his honor and service, until everyone had died, because they had been brought there on these orders [by the Portuguese king].”<sup>468</sup> In response to such an unexpected offer, Pina says that Nzinga a Nkuwu hailed João II as “senhor do mundo.” At the time of the initial offer of military support, the *Mani Kongo* had not yet converted to Christianity.

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<sup>467</sup> Keen, Maurice, *Chivalry*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984; Keen, Maurice, “Chivalry and the Aristocracy,” in *The New Cambridge Medieval History: c. 1300-1415*, v. 6, edited by Michael Jones, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 209-221.

<sup>468</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 127: “E sobretudo o dito capitão lhe ofereceu a si mesmo, com toda a frota de el-rei e gente dela, para que de todos se servisse e em tudo o que fosse honra sua e serviço, até todos morrerem, porque assim o trazia por mandado.” Pina, 1992, p. 118.

The origin myths surrounding the institution of the *Mani Kongo* focused on his unnatural violence and cruelty.<sup>469</sup> In the Kongo and in sub-Saharan Africa more generally, real and sacred violence were crucial elements of royal authority.<sup>470</sup> Royal force and violence in Africa and in Europe were typically manifested in the hunting of powerful animals, the dispensing of justice and the waging of war. João II had won his power and reputation as king on the battlefields of North Africa and Castile and had consolidated his rule with the swift and grisly execution of nobles suspected of treason.<sup>471</sup> From an early age as prince and regent, he understood that Portugal's security and independence from Spain depended almost wholly on military and naval power. His remarkable expertise on military matters was legendary. The Portuguese king deliberately contributed to the intimate association between Christianity and military power for the *Mani Kongo* Nzinga a Nkuwu. It is impossible to know what information Kasuta might have passed on to João II about displays of military power, yet it seems that the Portuguese king was somehow aware that the *Mani Kongo* would eventually test the validity of the cult of Christianity by a display of strength in the arena of war.<sup>472</sup> Indeed, according to MacGaffey, "a demonstration of exceptional powers of violence" was a "standard means of authenticating a ruler's relation to the dead."<sup>473</sup>

It was surely no coincidence that Rui de Sousa waited to announce his desire to fight in battle on behalf of the *Mani Kongo* until he had already presented all of the other courtly gifts from João II. It was as if the offer of Portuguese military and naval might was the crowning gift of the Portuguese king. The Portuguese sources relate that Nzinga

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<sup>469</sup> Hilton, 1985, p. 45.

<sup>470</sup> Blier, 1998, pp. 11, 28, 204-05.

<sup>471</sup> Pina, 1989, pp. 31-39, 41-48; Fonseca, 2005, pp. 14-16, 64, 70-77, 210-212.

<sup>472</sup> MacGaffey, 1986, pp. 199-200.

<sup>473</sup> MacGaffey, 1994, p. 258.

a Nkuwu had decided to make war on rebels in the province of Nsundi who had refused to recognize his authority.<sup>474</sup> Consequently, after hearing of the *Mani Kongo*'s intention to go to war, the Portuguese ambassador presented the *Mani Kongo* with a war standard featuring a cross. This banner was a personal gift from the Portuguese king. It is possible that the cross on the flag resembled the simple crosses surmounting the stone *padrões* left on the African coast by Diogo Cão and Bartolomeu Dias as beacons for navigators and markers of discovery and possession. It is also possible that this flag carried the cross of the military Order of Christ since it is said by Pina to be "a bandeira de Cristo" while, in another passage, its image is described as "este sinal da cruz."<sup>475</sup> The Portuguese claimed that by carrying this standard into battle, the *Mani Kongo* would be "always the victor and never the vanquished."<sup>476</sup> As the emblem of Portugal's elite religious military order, whose governor since 1484 was the queens' brother D. Manuel, the Cross of the Order of Christ seamlessly combined Christianity and military prowess. The chronicles report on how the Kongolese regarded and handled the banner with reverence, like a most sacred object, and, from this evidence, MacGaffey suggests that they appropriately considered it to be a war talisman.<sup>477</sup>

The sources insist that Rui de Sousa had to persuade the *Mani Kongo* to accept his offer of Portuguese military support.<sup>478</sup> According to Pina, Sousa argued that the *Mani Kongo* should make use of his men and ships as soon as possible before the soldiers

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<sup>474</sup> Thornton, John, "The Origins and Early History of the Kingdom of Kongo, c. 1350-1550," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2001), pp. 115.

<sup>475</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 133.

<sup>476</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 133: "sempre vencedor e nunca vencido."

<sup>477</sup> MacGaffey, 1986, p. 199.

<sup>478</sup> Pina, 1992, p. 128: "E a' Re l'usò tale parole che'esso Re accettò volentieri in sussidio le navi e le genti de' Re di Portochallo."

became ill and eventually died from tropical diseases.<sup>479</sup> Reportedly, the *Mani Kongo* was delighted by Sousa's resolve to fight and granted him permission to return to the armada stationed at the port of Mpinda to gather and prepare his men for war. Sousa met up with the *Mani Kongo* in the nearby province of Nsundi, near the Zaire River, and they fought together against the provincial rebels. The Portuguese military standard featuring the cross had been carried into battle by the Kongolese forces. Pina remarks that the fighting was "great and cruel" and most of the Portuguese soldiers seem to have been killed in action.<sup>480</sup> Afterwards, Nzinga a Nkuwu attributed his victory over his enemies to the "assistance and favor of the king of Portugal" and to his "being always favored by the standard of the cross which was carried."<sup>481</sup>

In return for Kasuta's courtly gifts of elephant tusks, carved ivory horns, and raffia textiles as well as his pivotal acceptance, as *Mani Vunda*, of Christianity, the Portuguese king reciprocated appropriately with a show of military strength to legitimize Christianity and the perception of the Portuguese as belonging to the *mbumba* dimension of the otherworld. The element of military force, power and violence inherent in the courtly gifts of royal art had been discerned by the Portuguese who responded in suitably comprehensible martial terms.

## 7. Conclusion

The approach adopted in this study to the court ritual of gift-giving and the analysis offered here of the courtly gifts which were exchanged between Portugal and the Kongo develop from theories of the gift which have been elaborated with increasing

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<sup>479</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 134.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.; Pina, 1992, p. 128.

sophistication and specificity since the pioneering essay by Marcel Mauss first published in 1925.<sup>482</sup> The fundamental premise, according to Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, is that gift-giving fosters and maintains relationships by creating durable interactions, binding commitments and reciprocal obligations.<sup>483</sup> The diplomatic exchange of objects of art as courtly gifts, so common in Renaissance Europe, had in fact been essential to the promotion of enduring, mutual bonds between rulers and to the cultivation and confirmation of alliances and peaceful relations since antiquity.<sup>484</sup>

This study of the objects of African royal art presented by Kasuta on behalf of the *Mani Kongo* to the Portuguese court participates in what Oleg Grabar has defined as the “anthropology of courtly objects.”<sup>485</sup> According to Grabar, these objects, as courtly gifts,

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<sup>482</sup> For theoretical investigations of the gift, see Mauss, Marcel, *The Gift: Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, translated by W.D. Halls, introduction by Mary Douglas, New York: Routledge 1990; Bourdieu, Pierre, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, translated by Richard Nice, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979; Derrida, Jacques, *Given time. I, Counterfeit Money*, translated by Peggy Kamuf, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992; Starobinski, Jean, *Largesse*, translated by Jane Marie Todd, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997; Godelier, Maurice, *The Enigma of the Gift*, translated by Nora Scott, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999; Sykes, Karen Margaret, *Arguing with Anthropology: An Introduction to Critical Theories of the Gift*, New York: Routledge, 2005.

<sup>483</sup> Ben-Amos, Ilana Krausman, *The Culture of Giving: Informal Support and Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 1-9. For useful approaches to gift-giving in the Medieval and Renaissance periods in Europe, see *Negotiating the Gift: Pre-Modern Figurations of Exchange*, edited by Gadi Algazi, Valentin Groebner and Bernhard Jussen, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003; Groebner, Valentin, *Liquid Assets, Dangerous Gifts: Presents and Politics at the End of the Middle Ages*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002; Davis, Natalie Zemon, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000; Wilson, Jean C., *Painting in Bruges at the Close of the Middle Ages: Studies in Society and Visual Culture*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998, pp. 61-70; Warnke, Martin, *The Court Artist: On the Ancestry of the Modern Artist*, translated by David McLintock, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993; Davis, Natalie Zemon, “Beyond the Market: Books as Gifts in Sixteenth-Century France: The Prothero Lecture,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*,” fifth series, v. 33, 1983, pp. 69-88.

<sup>484</sup> Cutler, Anthony, “Significant Gifts: Patterns of Exchange in Late Antique, Byzantine, and Early Islamic Diplomacy,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, v. 38, n. 1, 2008, pp. 79-102; Cutler, Anthony, “Gifts and Gift Exchange as Aspects of the Byzantine, Arab, and Related Economies,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, v. 55, 2001, pp. 247-278; Cutler, Anthony, “The Empire of Things: Gift Exchange between Byzantium and the Islamic World,” *Center 20: Record of Activities and Research Reports, June 1999-May 2000*, Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, 2000, pp. 67-70; Cormack, Robin, “But is it Art?” in Eva R. Hoffman, ed., *Late Antique and Medieval Art of the Mediterranean*, Blackwell, 2007, pp. 301-314.

<sup>485</sup> Grabar, Oleg, “The Shared Culture of Objects,” in *Islamic Visual Culture, 1100-1800: Constructing the Study of Islamic Art*, v. 2, Burlington, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2006, pp. 51-67.

must be situated in the larger configuration of the court, for they formed a key part of its ceremonial culture. These kinds of courtly objects, for Grabar, were carriers of real and contrived meanings and memories, but these meanings and memories, whatever they might have been, must be found in texts and explored in relation to surviving objects.<sup>486</sup> The exchange of objects between Kasuta, the *Mani Kongo* and João II exists only in the chronicles by Pina and Resende. These chronicles, and countless others like them from other contemporary courts, reveal the overriding importance of what Brigitte Buettner has aptly termed the “performative efficacy” of objects of art as courtly gifts as well as the decorum of the gift.<sup>487</sup>

In her study of gifts at the courts of France and Burgundy, Buettner, following Grabar, rightly emphasizes the central role of the performance of ceremony in defining the meaning of objects and in determining their success as courtly gifts.<sup>488</sup> In her analysis, Buettner comments that: “Gift giving, like most court rituals, adhered to that mute but persuasive grammar made of objects, words, and gestures that ceaselessly spoke of rank and status.”<sup>489</sup> This is precisely what, in part, made Kasuta and his expertise on Portuguese court culture and protocol indispensable to the success of the reception ceremony, the favorable reception of his gifts of Kongoles royal art, and the realization of peaceful diplomatic and commercial relations. Moreover, Kasuta’s skilled performance bolstered his own status and reputation. The success of the gift depended on several variables that required careful consideration to make it appropriate to the giver and the receiver, fitting to the occasion of the giving, and proper to the intended

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<sup>486</sup> Grabar, 2006, pp. 52-53.

<sup>487</sup> Buettner, Brigitte, “Past Presents: New Year's Gifts at the Valois Courts, ca. 1400,” *The Art Bulletin*, v. 83, n. 4, 2001, pp. 598-625.

<sup>488</sup> Buettner, 2001, p. 598.

<sup>489</sup> Buettner, 2001, p. 616.

purpose.<sup>490</sup> Because of his residence at the Portuguese court and his familiarity with the king, Kasuta would have been in a position to evaluate these criteria and select suitable gifts best tailored to the ceremony of consecrating João II as *Nzambi Mpungu* and to commencing the process of ritual initiation (or conversion from the Portuguese perspective) into Christianity.

Courtly gifts were supposed to signify the giver and the multiple associations between a gift and its giver invested it with meaning and contributed to its subsequent power as the embodiment of memory.<sup>491</sup> The objects of Kongoles royal art Kasuta presented signified the *Mani Kongo* in terms of materials, design, style and technique. Yet the possible spiritual meanings of these specific objects and the ceremony during which they were given to the Portuguese king also signified Kasuta for as *Mani Vunda* he was the chief spiritual authority in the Kongo and it was his responsibility in this capacity to invest the *Mani Kongo* and, in this instance, the Portuguese king as *Nzambi Mpungu* with these very objects. However, the meanings and memories of these objects that Portuguese chroniclers recorded and represented differed considerably from the Kongoles perspective. The ideas these gifts carried for the Portuguese court were primarily political. Pina and Resende perceived Kasuta's courtly gifts as recognition of João II's imperial pretensions to suzerainty in sub-Saharan Africa and they characterized the gifts in conjunction with their ceremonial presentation at court as first embodying João II's title of "Senhor de Guiné" and then as aggrandizing it as "Senhor do Mundo." Kasuta's baptism and the conversion of the *Mani Kongo* were likewise represented in political terms for it created in theory a dependent Christian state. For this study, issues

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<sup>490</sup> Buettner, 2001; Klein, Lisa M., "Your Humble Handmaid: Elizabethan Gifts of Needlework," *Renaissance Quarterly*, v. 50, n. 2, 1997, pp. 459-493.

<sup>491</sup> Klein, 1997, pp. 472, 474; Grabar, 2006, p. 52.

related to the veracity or reliability of the Portuguese chronicles matter little because the focus is on how the Portuguese court favorably received, masterfully manipulated and strategically represented in official texts and courtly performances the exchange of objects of African royal art as constituting an integral part of the court's imperial ideology. For the Portuguese court, these were the meanings and memories carried by Kasuta's courtly gifts. Regardless of the discrepancies of interpretation of the gifts, it is clear that both the Portuguese and the Kongolese considered the reciprocal exchange of gifts as creating and promoting enduring social bonds and committed diplomatic alliances.



## Chapter 3

### Courtly Virtues and Fatal Deceit:

Bemoim, prince of the Jolof Empire, at the Portuguese Court, 1488-89

#### 1. Introduction

The magnificent reception at the Portuguese court of Bemoim, also known as Bumi Jelen, the prince of Jolof, in the autumn of 1488 was vigorously celebrated by contemporaries and has been subsequently investigated by eminent scholars from a variety of fields.<sup>492</sup> It is one of the best known episodes in the history of the Portuguese court during the fifteenth century, a court at the height of its prestige and renown in Europe. Bemoim controlled territory around the mouth of the Senegal River where he had engaged in trade with the Portuguese during the 1480s.<sup>493</sup> In an attempt to secure the

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<sup>492</sup> The publications dealing with Bemoim I found most helpful in formulating this essay include: Elbl, Ivana, "Group Identities in the Early Portuguese Overseas Expansion in Africa: Concepts and Expressions," *Portuguese Studies Review*, v. 15, n. 1-2, 2007, pp. 37-61; Elbl, Ivana, "Prestige Considerations and the Changing Interest of the Portuguese Crown in Sub-Saharan Atlantic Africa, 1444-1580," *Portuguese Studies Review*, n. 2, v. 10, 2003, pp. 15-36; Elbl, Ivana, "Cross-Cultural Trade and Diplomacy: Portuguese Relations with West Africa, 1441-1521," *Journal of World History*, v. 3, n. 2, 1992, pp. 165-204; Rema, Padre Henrique Pinto, "Baptismo de príncipe jalofo em 1488 na corte de D. João II e o método missionário na época dos Descobrimentos," *Congresso Internacional Bartolomeu Dias e a sua época*, Porto: Universidade do Porto; Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, v. 4, 1989, pp. 495-522; Teixeira da Mota, Avelino, *D. João Bemoim e a expedição portuguesa ao Senegal em 1489*, Lisboa: Centro de Estudos de Cartografia Antiga; Junta de Investigações do Ultramar, 1971.

<sup>493</sup> For discussion of Bemoim in relation to the history of Africa, see Boulègue, Jean, *Les Anciens Royaumes Wolof (Senegal): Le Grand folof (XIIIe-XVIe Siècle)*, Blois: Éditions Façades; Paris: Karthala, 1987; Brooks, George E., *Landlords and Strangers: Ecology, Society, and Trade in Western Africa, 1000-1630*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993; Elbl, Ivana, *The Portuguese trade with West Africa, 1440-1521*, Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Toronto, 1986; Curtin, Philip D., *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975; Oliver, Roland, ed., *The Cambridge History of Africa Volume 3: c. 1050-1600*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977; Gonçalves, José and Paul Teyssier, "Textes portugais sur les Wolofs au XVe siècle – Baptême du prince Bemoi (1488)," *Bulletin de l'Institut fondamental d'Afrique noire*, v. 30, ser. B, n. 3, 1968, pp. 822-46; Thornton, John K., "Portuguese - African Relations, 1500-1750," in *Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16th & 17th Centuries: Essays*, edited by Jay A. Levenson, Washington, DC: Smithsonian, Freer and

vacant throne of Great Jolof, a formidable Senegambian kingdom, the pretender Bemoim appealed to the Portuguese court in person for military support. He was grandly fêted at court, converted to Christianity, knighted and provided by the Portuguese king with an armada, artillery and soldiers. Unfortunately, upon his return to the Senegal River, Bemoim was stabbed to death by the Portuguese captain, who, surprisingly, was not punished for this sordid murder.

The abruptly tragic conclusion of such a promising enterprise not only confounded contemporaries, but has also thwarted balanced attempts by modern scholars to explain these events. Anthony Pagden has supplied the most authoritative interpretation of the Bemoim episode. In his influential book *European Encounters with the New World*, Pagden introduces the Bemoim incident to exemplify the theme of cultural incommensurability.<sup>494</sup> He argues that the ceremonies and rituals performed at the Portuguese court, which granted power and status to Bemoim in Europe, were empty and invalid back in Senegambia. In sub-Saharan Africa, Pagden claims, Portuguese noblemen were free to reveal their “contempt” for Bemiom, who according to Pagden, “had become nothing but a ‘black’, a thing, like any other slave, who could be tossed overboard to shorten a tedious voyage.”<sup>495</sup> Bemoim’s story epitomizes, for Pagden, the refusal of Europeans to respect African kingship and their failure to perceive black Africans outside of the institution of slavery. Similar conclusions had already been drawn

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Sackler Galleries, 2007, pp. 57-63, 265-66; Thornton, John K., “The Portuguese in Africa,” in *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800*, edited by Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 138-60; Thornton, John K., “Early Portuguese Expansion in West Africa: Its Nature and Consequences,” in *Portugal the Pathfinder: journeys from the medieval toward the modern world, 1300-ca. 1600*, Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1995, edited by George D. Winius, pp. 121-132.

<sup>494</sup> Pagden, Anthony, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, pp. 4-5; Damrosch, David, “The Semiotics of Conquest,” *American Literary History*, v. 8, n. 3, 1996, pp. 516-532.

<sup>495</sup> Pagden, 1993, p. 5.

by Sir Peter Russell, who completely dismissed the ceremonies at the Portuguese court in honor of Bemoim as “only play-acting,” a charade with no correspondence to the more sinister reality.<sup>496</sup> In Russell’s estimation, the mistreatment of Bemoim demonstrated that for the Portuguese court, it was “impossible to recognize the distinction between black slaves and black kings.”<sup>497</sup> In two recent important studies, Kate Lowe has pursued this line of interpretation, focusing on racial attitudes and issues of kingship in a cross-cultural context.<sup>498</sup> Yet the issues of race and slavery, which surround the scholarly treatment of Bemoim, tell only a small though significant part of a larger, complex story of courtly intrigue and deception.

By re-reading rarely consulted primary sources—including an important new contemporary source that I have discovered—on Bemoim’s lionization at the Portuguese court and his subsequent murder on the Senegal River and by placing these exceptional events within the internal machinations and power struggles of the court as well as the broader overt political strategies and clandestine diplomatic maneuvers of the Portuguese king, I offer an original interpretation of the Bemoim affair that is more sensitive to the character, richness and nuances of the courts of Renaissance Europe. I suggest that Bemoim, the deposed prince of Jolof, and João II, the Portuguese king, had indeed used ceremony and ritual to cement bonds of friendship and that this relationship was forged through shared courtly virtues and martial values, as well as the mutual pursuit of power and profit. However, Bemoim and João II fell victim to potent competing noble factions

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<sup>496</sup> Russell, Peter E., “White Kings on Black Kings: Rui de Pina and the Problem of Black African Sovereignty,” in *Portugal, Spain and the African Atlantic, 1343-1490: Chivalry and Crusade from John of Gaunt to Henry the Navigator*, Aldershot Variorum, Brookfield, VT, 1995, pp. 151-163, quote on p. 161.

<sup>497</sup> Russell, 1995, p. 162.

<sup>498</sup> Lowe, Kate, “‘Representing’ Africa: Ambassadors and Princes from Christian Africa to Renaissance Italy and Portugal, 1402-1608,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, v. 17, 2007, pp. 101–28; Lowe, Kate, “The Stereotyping of black Africans in Renaissance Europe,” in Earle, T. F. and K.J.P. Lowe, eds., *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 17-47.

at the Portuguese court that resisted and resented the king's policy in sub-Saharan Africa. Uncharacteristically, João II endured this affront to his majesty and refused to grant Bemoim the justice he deserved in order to preserve a furtive arrangement he had engineered with the Tudor monarchy. Bemoim was caught in the middle of this lethal game of courtly intrigue and deceit and was sacrificed to its pursuit.

Another consequence of scholarship narrowly focused on racial attitudes and slavery when discussing Bemoim is that issues surrounding the prominent and deliberate use the Portuguese court continued to make of Bemoim, despite the ignominy of his infamous murder, to fashion the image of the king and the identity of his court in Europe have been largely ignored. Indeed, I suggest that the elaborate court ceremonies in honor of Bemoim and their subsequent celebration in official orations and court chronicles composed under the direction of the monarchy constitute— along with the reception of an embassy from the Kongo only a month later in January 1489—the best evidence for the integral role of sub-Saharan Africa in forming and defining the distinctive identity of the Portuguese court of King João II (1455-1495) for an international European audience. These sources demonstrate that the Portuguese court championed the ceremonies and rituals performed by Bemoim and João II as valid and binding and as singular events of the court intrinsically worthy of commemoration and dissemination, certain to enhance the glory, honor and prestige of the king in Europe. They persisted in this belief even as they condemned Bemoim's murder by a Portuguese courtier and deplored João II's inexplicable, shameful failure to uphold justice. In the chronicles, Bemoim's reception was used to legitimate, to other Europeans, João II's claim to imperial suzerainty in sub-

Saharan Africa and to show the king successfully performing his role as suzerain, defending the rights of his African vassal, Bemoim, who recognized this authority there.

## 2. The Sources

A careful, rigorous analysis of the various primary sources provides a fresh interpretation of the Bemoim affair. This is achieved in part by considering the individual authors of these sources as fully realized three-dimensional figures. The different personalities, professional responsibilities and positions of influence of each figure at the Portuguese court determined the perspective and content of the texts in divergent and meaningful ways. The prominence of these authors at the Portuguese court and their personal and professional relationship to the events they describe assist in evaluating the unexpected magnitude they collectively ascribed to the reception of Bemoim in the history of the court. This approach likewise helps to place the Bemoim affair in its larger courtly context and international political situation in Europe, an approach which divulges rather surprising revelations.

The principal primary sources for the reception of Bemoim, a Jolof prince from Senegambia, are extraordinary. Of the five known contemporary sources, four were written by highly influential courtiers who had been intimately involved in the events themselves. The authors of these four sources, written in Portuguese, are Rui de Pina, Garcia de Resende, Álvaro Lopes de Chaves, and D. João Teixeira. These courtiers, who all knew each other, possessed different temperaments and interests and held different positions at court. These distinctive characteristics and qualities shaped their perspectives and writings.

Rui de Pina's chapter on Bemoim in his official chronicle of João II's reign constitutes an invaluable source on the topic. In 1488, the year of Bemoim's reception, Rui de Pina was the ubiquitous royal secretary as well as an esteemed and seasoned diplomat. A terse and cutting figure, he had already served on several momentous embassies.<sup>499</sup> In 1490, João II awarded him the unique commission to record and to celebrate notable events of his reign.<sup>500</sup> This would be followed up later in the decade with two prestigious, coveted appointments as the royal chronicler and keeper of the national archives. Pina, a clever and incisive writer, belonged to the charmed inner circle of the king's intimates.

The eminently skilled courtier and accomplished poet Garcia de Resende penned his own chronicle of the king's reign and contributed vital information not found in Pina.<sup>501</sup> Pina wrote a hard-edged prose deceptively infused with profound knowledge of the king's diplomatic and political objectives, which he had helped to shape. In contrast, Resende elegantly embroidered scenes with his deep familiarity with the king's character and personal reactions and with his acute sensitivity to the rapidly shifting fashions of the court. While Pina's success rested on his expertise in the diplomatic and political spheres, Resende flourished as the quintessentially charismatic courtier, whose bond with his monarch was personal. At the time of Bemoim's reception at court, the talented Resende served as *moço da camara* to the king and was a welcome, entertaining ornament of the court. He soon ingratiated himself as the king's favorite *moço de escrivanhinha* (page of

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<sup>499</sup> For Pina's text on Bemoim, see Pina, Rui de, *Crónica de D. João II*, edited by Luís de Albuquerque, Lisbon: Publicações Alfa, 1989, pp. 68-74.

<sup>500</sup> Pina, Rui de, *O Cronista Rui de Pina e a "Relação do Reino do Congo": Manuscrito inédito do "Códice Riccardiano 1910"*, edited by Carmen Radulet, Lisbon: Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses; Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 1992, p. 9.

<sup>501</sup> For Resende's text on Bemoim, see Resende, Garcia de, *Livro das Obras de Garcia de Resende*, edited by Evelina Verdelho, Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1994, pp. 268-274.

the king's writing desk). Although too young at the time to possess responsibilities on his own, he was a keenly discerning witness to the major events of the court and enjoyed the king's confidence and conversation in private.

The formation and perspective of another prominent courtier, Álvaro Lopes de Chaves, was entirely different. Chaves, the premier royal secretary, general notary of the realm and knight of the Order of Santiago, was in charge of court ceremony and possessed access to the royal seal.<sup>502</sup> He had been a fearless companion-in-arms of King Afonso V (1432-81) before securing his prominent position as the king's secretary. He continued in the post and increased his authority and status in the reign of Afonso V's son, João II. Chaves, a lettered knight, kept a valuable journal recording major ceremonies and events of the court, frequently noting his own typically administrative, though no less essential, participation in them. He took the official notes on the king's private conversation with Bemoim and documented the commitments and promises he made to the deposed Senegambian prince. Yet he was most fascinated by court ceremony and etiquette and consequently provides with the expertise and precision of a professional the most detailed interpretative account of the reception. As an experienced knight, adept courtier and fastidious secretary, Chaves offers a properly chivalric view of events. Unlike the other known contemporary descriptions, Chave's observations were not originally intended for public consumption. However, Chaves has been routinely overlooked and undervalued by scholars writing on Bemoim. This relative neglect can be explained by the challenges posed by his difficult prose style and by the summary, almost

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<sup>502</sup> Álvaro Lopes de Chaves, *Livro de apontamentos (1438-1489): código 443 da Coleção Pombalina da B.N.L.*, edited by Anastásia Mestrinho and Abílio José Salgado, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1984, pp. 119, 127-28, 179, 309-12. For his discussion of Bemoim, see Chaves, 1984, pp. 321-324.

dismissive, treatment his text received from Avelino Teixeira da Mota in the now classic article on Bemoim.<sup>503</sup>

Despite persistent scholarly attention devoted to Bemoim, the fourth contemporary Portuguese source on the perception of the Bemoim affair has not before received comment. On 1 March 1489, only a few months after the departure of Bemoim from the Portuguese court and his return to Senegambia, the royal chancellor D. João Teixeira delivered an oration on the occasion of the elevation of D. Pedro de Meneses to the title of Marquis of Vila Real. In this speech, Teixeira fulsomely praised João II for the spectacular success of his reception of Bemoim. These two grand ceremonies, one in honor of Bemoim and the other in honor of Meneses, were closely associated by contemporaries for a variety of reasons to be dealt with below.<sup>504</sup> In fact, Pina includes the ceremony in honor of D. Pedro de Meneses at the end of the very chapter dedicated to Bemoim, while Resende, though separating the material, has the chapter on Meneses immediately following the one on Bemoim. It is not surprising that Teixeira, the royal chancellor, should refer to the king's triumphant reception of Bemoim the previous autumn in his oration in March, for as Teixeira emphasizes it was one of João II's proudest moments.<sup>505</sup> Teixeira's oration furnishes an important public representation of Bemoim's reception from within the official court hierarchy before news of Bemoim's murder reached Portugal. His profoundly religious view, proclaimed at a major court

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<sup>503</sup> Teixeira da Mota, Avelino, *D. João Bemoim e a expedição portuguesa ao Senegal em 1489*, Lisboa: Centro de Estudos de Cartografia Antiga; Junta de Investigações do Ultramar, 1971.

<sup>504</sup> Mendonça, Manuela, *D. João II: Um Percorso Humano e Político nas Origens da Modernidade em Portugal*, Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1995, pp. 377.

<sup>505</sup> Teixiera, João, *Oraçam que teue Ioam Teyxeira chanceler mór destes Reynos em tempo del Rey dom Ioam o segundo de Portugal & do Algarue & senhor da Guiné quando deu a dignidade de Marques de vila Real ao... muyto manifico [sic] dom Pedro de Meneses cõde da mesma vila & de Ourem*, Coimbra: Ioam Aluarez, 1562. I have located only two examples of this book. The copy I consulted is in the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Lisbon, RES. 80//2 V and is available online: <http://purl.pt/14434>. The other copy belongs to the Newberry Library, Chicago.



ceremony celebrating the achievements of the king, seems to have been the preferred, current interpretation at the court, for it is confirmed by the fifth known primary source, a letter written by a Florentine merchant resident in Lisbon, who perceived the reception of Bemoim in a similarly confident and unskeptical manner.<sup>506</sup>

Pina, Resende, Chaves and Teixeira—the principal contemporary sources—were all men of distinction and influence at court. They all knew each other and personally attended or actively participated in the events related to Bemoim which they describe. Yet surprisingly their opinions and perceptions have been routinely jettisoned in favor of the more properly historically oriented material later compiled by João de Barros, a creature of the court of King João III (1502-1557), whose outlook and policies diverged markedly from those of his predecessor João II in 1488. Most modern scholars have relied heavily on the account provided by Barros in his monumental history from the 1550s, partly because it is easily accessible, having been translated into English and widely published.<sup>507</sup> Because Barros includes reliable historical background information not found in the other sources, he should certainly be used to supplement the principal sources whenever necessary, and he is so used here. But he should not be employed as a substitute for them.<sup>508</sup> Not only did Barros in the 1550s write over sixty years removed from the reception of Bemoim at court in the late 1480s, but he also did so in a wildly dissimilar political, religious and economic world. Moreover, the hindsight and revisions imposed by Barros in his account of Bemoim crucially included foreknowledge of its

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<sup>506</sup> Russell, 1995, p. 158; Hair, P.E.H., *The Founding of the Castelo de São Jorge da Mina: An Analysis of the Sources*, Madison: University of Wisconsin, African Studies Program, 1994, p. 7. For the letter, see Zafarana, Zelina, “Per la storia religiosa di Firenze nel Quattrocento,” *Studi Medievali*, v. 9, 1968, pp. 1109-1110.

<sup>507</sup> Blake, John, *Europeans in West Africa, 1450-1560*, London: The Hakluyt society, 1942, pp. 80-86.

<sup>508</sup> Hair, 1994, p. 6

tragic conclusion, which none of the contemporary sources ever imagined as they experienced the ceremonial events themselves.

### 3. Bemoim: Jelen, the *bumi* of Jolof

Bumi Jelen or Bemoim, as he is known in Portuguese sources, was the highest ranking sub-Saharan African political figure to visit the courts of Europe during the fifteenth century. Chaves twice specifies that he was the brother of the king or *buurba Jolof*, the titular overlord of Great Jolof, an impressive Muslim empire in the region of Senegambia.<sup>509</sup> His name in Portuguese, therefore, probably derives in corrupted form from the Jolof term *bumi*, a standard title meaning prince or heir, or more literally, “the chosen one.”<sup>510</sup> Bemoim’s royal descent and his resulting place in the royal hierarchy and political position in the Senegambian state of Jolof seem to have been clearly recognized at the Portuguese court. Only Teixeira refers to him as the King of Jolof, but he does so intentionally and rather optimistically, after the Portuguese had already sent an imposing armada to Senegambia to restore Bemoim, the pretender to the throne of Jolof, to his realm.<sup>511</sup>

The Portuguese seem, at least initially, to have known exactly what they were doing with Bemoim. Indeed, the Portuguese had been on good and familiar terms with the Jolof states of the Senegambia region since the late 1440s and early 1450s when they

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<sup>509</sup> Chaves, 1984, pp. 321-24.

<sup>510</sup> Russell, 1995, p. 153; Elbl, 2003, pp. 27-28; Elbl, 1986, p. 62; Davidson, Basil with F. K. Buah, *A History of West Africa, 1000-1800*, London: Longman, 1977, p. 58; Gamble, David P., *The Wolof of Senegambia*, London: International African Institute, 1967, p. 17.

<sup>511</sup> Teixeira, João, *Oraçam que teue Ioam Teyxeira chancarel mór destes Reynos...*, Coimbra: Ioam Alvarez, 1562 (Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Lisbon, RES. 80//2 V). Contrary to Lowe, there is no evidence in the sources or in his reception to support the idea that the Portuguese denigrated Bemoim and were disinclined to champion his cause because he was considered to be an “illegitimate” member of the Jolof royal family. See Lowe, 2007, p. 113.

had been forced by African military prowess to establish peaceful relations and to foster regular, mutually beneficial contact.<sup>512</sup> These early interactions with Jolof rulers were pioneered by Cadamosto, the Venetian merchant, and Diogo Gomes, the Portuguese nobleman and explorer, who both recorded their mostly profitable and satisfying experiences with the Jolof and furnished extremely informative observations on a variety of aspects of Jolof society, including court ceremony.<sup>513</sup> In fact, Cadamosto was impressed by the dignity and majesty of Jolof kingship he witnessed in the coastal states.<sup>514</sup> The Jolof prince Bemoim, therefore, belonged to a world familiar to the personnel of the Portuguese court for over three decades and, what is more, it was one in which they seem to have moved quite agreeably and comfortably.<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>512</sup> See Chapter 1. See also, Thornton, John K., "Portuguese - African Relations, 1500-1750," in *Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16th & 17th Centuries: Essays*, edited by Jay A. Levenson, Washington, DC: Smithsonian, Freer and Sackler Galleries, 2007, pp. 57-63, 265-66; Thornton, John K., "The Portuguese in Africa," Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto, eds., *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 138-60; Thornton, John K., *Warfare in Atlantic Africa, 1500-1800*, New York: University College London Press/Routledge, 1999, pp. 41-54; Thornton, John K., "Early Portuguese Expansion in West Africa: Its Nature and Consequences," in *Portugal the Pathfinder: journeys from the medieval toward the modern world, 1300-ca. 1600*, Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1995, edited by George D. Winius, pp. 121-132; Thornton, John, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 36-43; Brooks, 1993, pp. 121-135.

<sup>513</sup> Russell, Peter E., *Prince Henry "the Navigator": A Life*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 298-99, 301-303; Boulègue, Jean, *Les Anciens Royaumes Wolof (Senegal): Le Grand folof (XIIIe-XVIe Siècle)*, Blois: Éditions Façades; Paris: Karthala, 1987. For the texts of Gomes and Cadamosto, see Gomes de Sintra, Diogo, *Descobrimento primeiro da Guiné*, edited and translated by Aires A. Nascimento, Lisbon: Colibri, 2002; Leporace, Tullia Gasparini, ed., *Le navigazioni atlantiche del Veneziano Alvise da Mosto*, Rome: Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, 1966.

<sup>514</sup> Russell, 2000, pp. 301-303. Leporace, Tullia Gasparini, ed., *Le navigazioni atlantiche del Veneziano Alvise da Mosto*, Rome: Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, 1966.

<sup>515</sup> For Portuguese perceptions of black Africans during the fifteenth century, see especially the publications of José da Silva Horta and Ivana Elbl: Horta, José da Silva, "A representacao do Africano na litterature de viagens, do Senegal a Serra Leoa (1453-1508)," *Mare Liberum*, v. 2, June, 1991, pp. 209-339; Horta, José da Silva, "A imagem do Africano pelos portugueses antes dos contactos," in *O Confronto do Olhar: O encontro dos povos na época das Navegações portuguesas, Séculos XV e XVI: Portugal, África, Ásia, América*, edited by António Luís Ferronha, Lisbon: Caminho, 1991, pp. 41-70; Horta, José da Silva, "Primeiros olhares sobre o Africano do Sara Ocidental à Serra Leoa (meados do século XV-inícios do século XVI)," in *O Confronto do Olhar*, 1991, pp. 73-126; Elbl, 2007, pp. 37-61. See also, Bennett, Herman L., "Sons of Adam": Text, Context, and the Early Modern African Subject," *Representations*, v. 92, 2005, pp. 16-41; Blackmore, Josiah, *Moorings: Portuguese expansion and the writing of Africa*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009; Devise, Jean and Michel Mollat, *The Image of the*

The Portuguese and the Jolof shared symbols of power and systems of value. Like the Portuguese, the Jolof were ruled by noble equestrian warriors, who prized military exploits and engaged in conquest.<sup>516</sup> When, beginning in the 1450s, the Portuguese viewed and judged the Jolof according to their own European aristocratic codes of behavior and values of chivalry, they found much to admire in their elite Senegambian counterparts. The peaceful and profitable relationship between the Portuguese and the Jolof that developed for over three decades before the reception of Bemoim was founded in part on the mutual recognition of the common values of noble horse-owning warriors and similar ideals of kingship and majesty.

The Great Jolof Empire was founded on the strength of its inland states and based on trade in the interior with the Sahel and trans-Saharan caravan routes.<sup>517</sup> The king of Jolof, the *buurba Jolof*, controlled the entire, loose confederation of Jolof kingdoms, claiming suzerainty over the rulers of states on the coast. These coastal territories with their own relatively independent rulers remained somewhat peripheral to the larger Jolof federation based in the interior. However, the commercial activity of the Portuguese along the coast over several decades and the products to be had and profits to be made from it attracted the attention of some like Bemoim, who transferred his interests, energies and considerable resources from the interior to the coast. As the half-brother of

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*Black in Western Art: From The Early Christian Era to the "Age of Discovery"*, Lausanne: Office du Livre, 1979.

<sup>516</sup> Brooks, 1993, pp. 34, 107-108, 127-128, 130, 172; Oliver, Roland and Anthony Atmore, *Medieval Africa, 1250-1800*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 65.

<sup>517</sup> For the history of the Jolof and Senegambia in the fifteenth century, see Boulègue, 1987, pp. 150-154; Brooks, 1993, 121-135; Elbl, 1986, pp. 9-21; Curtin, 1975, pp. 3-58; Barry, Boubacar, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 1-45; Monteil, Vincent, *Esquisses sénégalaises: Wâlo, Kayor, Dyolof, Mourides, un visionnaire*, Dakar: IFAN, 1966; Suret-Canale, Jean and Boubacar Barry, "The Western Atlantic Coast to 1800," in *History of West Africa*, edited by J. F. A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder, New York : Columbia University Press, 1976, pp. 461-79; Fage, John D., "Upper and Lower Guinea" in Roland Oliver, ed., *The Cambridge History of Africa Volume 3: c. 1050-1600*, 1977, pp. 463-518.

the *buurba Jolof*, Bemoim's actions did not go unnoticed and they caused some internal friction for Bemoim had appropriated state resources from his royal brother. According to Boulègue, Bemoim gained autonomy fairly illicitly by securing control over coastal territory by creating tributary states and agents and by exploiting commercial exchange with the Portuguese.<sup>518</sup> When the Jolof empire descended into a dynastic war of succession, Bemoim quickly found himself under attack and struggling for survival. This quite naturally lead to his appeal to the Portuguese for military assistance. But Bemoim had already initiated and tried to sustain a relationship with the Portuguese for a number of years during the 1480s.

Since the late 1440s and early 1450s the Portuguese primarily imported horses to the Jolof states on the coast in exchange for slaves.<sup>519</sup> Although other valuable products such as gold, textiles and ivory were traded, the exchange of horses for slaves formed the backbone of commerce between the Portuguese and Jolof kingdoms.<sup>520</sup> Bemoim first appears on the scene in the 1480s as a renowned purchaser of Iberian horses from Portuguese merchants in Senegambia. Before the arrival of the Portuguese, Barbary horses had been traditionally acquired from Arab and Sanhadja merchants, and the Portuguese never supplanted this trade. As precious, prestige possessions, horses in

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<sup>518</sup> Boulègue, 1987, pp. 150-154.

<sup>519</sup> Elbl, Ivana, "The Horse in Fifteenth-Century Senegambia," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, v. 24, n. 1, 1991, pp. 85- 110; Russell, 2000, pp. 262, 299-300; Curtin, 1975, pp. 9-11, 199; Jean Suret-Canale and Boubacar Barry, "The Western Atlantic Coast to 1800," in *History of West Africa*, edited by J. F. A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder, New York : Columbia University Press, 1976, v. 1, pp. 458, 462-63. For Portuguese involvement in the slave trade, see Elbl, Ivana, "The Volume of the Early Atlantic Slave Trade, 1450-1521," *The Journal of African History*, v. 38, n. 1, 1997, pp. 31-75; Thomas, Hugh, *The slave trade: the story of the Atlantic slave trade, 1440-1870*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999. For studies of slavery in Portugal, see Saunders, A.C. de C.M., *A social history of black slaves and freedmen in Portugal, 1441-1555*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982; Fonseca, Jorge, *Escravos no sul de Portugal: séculos XVI-XVII*, Lisbon: Editora Vulgata, 2002; Tinhoão, José Ramos, *Os Negros em Portugal: Uma presença silenciosa*, Lisbon: Caminho, 1988; Stella, Alessandro, *Histoires d'esclaves dans la péninsule ibérique*, Paris: Edition de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2000.

<sup>520</sup> Brooks, 1993, pp. 127-130, 172; Oliver and Atmore, 2001, pp. 65-66.

Senegambia were widely considered potent symbols of power and status.<sup>521</sup> They appeared prominently as central elements in court ceremony, when horsemanship was greatly valued, and were routinely demanded as tribute from subject states or given as gifts to rulers from vassals. In Senegambia during the fifteenth century horses were closely associated with kingship, court ceremony and power. Yet as the Portuguese increased the supply of horses and made them more accessible to coastal Jolof states, horses gradually became the premier instruments of war. They were increasingly used for mounted cavalry and were thus transformed into the attribute of noble warriors, the ruling elite of the Jolof. In this way, the role and symbolism of horses in Senegambia paralleled those in Europe, which were closely associated with the aristocratic culture of chivalry.<sup>522</sup>

Bemoim seems to have obtained large numbers of horses from the Portuguese for both purposes, as courtly, prestige possessions and as noble instruments of war.

Acquiring horses from the Portuguese suited Bemoim's economic, political and military objectives in his bid for authority and independence. He gained economically because he controlled the trade with the Portuguese. In addition, these horses increased his majesty as ruler and the prestige of his sizeable court. This is confirmed by his willingness to accept and pay full price for the tails of horses, which had died en route from Portugal to Senegambia, since horse tails were collected and displayed there as status symbols.

Finally, by significantly enlarging his mounted cavalry forces, Bemoim would, so he believed, vastly improve his chances in the ensuing dynastic wars of succession. Duarte

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<sup>521</sup> Elbl, 1991; Law, Robin, "Horses, Firearms, and Political Power in Pre-Colonial West Africa," *Past & Present*, n. 72, 1976, pp. 112-132; Law, Robin, *The Horse in West African History: The Role of the Horse in the Societies of Pre-colonial West Africa*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.

<sup>522</sup> For the European perspective, see Keen, Maurice, *Chivalry*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, pp. 9, 16, 23-24, 26, 224-25, 240, 245, 249; Vale, Malcolm, *War and chivalry: warfare and aristocratic culture in England, France, and Burgundy at the end of the Middle Ages*, 1981, pp. 100-128.

Pacheco Pereira, an important figure at the Portuguese court who spent several years in the 1480s exploring the Guinea coast, was overawed by the mounted cavalry forces the Jolof commanded during these years.<sup>523</sup>

According to Portuguese sources, Bemoim was constantly accompanied by an exceptionally large retinue and enjoyed the following of innumerable merchants. In sub-Saharan Africa, as in Europe, the number of loyal supporters, dependent clients and the overall dimensions of the entourage were, as Suzanne Preston Blier writes, “one of the most potent symbols of royal wealth and power.”<sup>524</sup> The purported scope and size of Bemoim’s army was likewise considerable and perhaps not entirely credible. Yet it is equally certain that Bemoim chronically suffered from insufficient funds and was dogged by his inability to pay for merchandise, much to the dismay of Portuguese traders. The picture of Bemoim’s legendary court that emerges from these sources corresponds uncannily with Cadamosto’s enthusiastic, sympathetic description of the majesty of Jolof kingship three decades previously during the 1450s:

“it cannot be doubted that rulers like him are not there because they are rich in treasure or money since they possess neither, nor do they have any income to spend. Nevertheless, in terms of the ceremonial which surrounds them and the size of their retinues, they may truly be regarded as lords and rulers (*signori*) like any lords anywhere else. To speak the truth, they are more revered and feared by their subjects and better accompanied by more people than are our lords here [in Italy] by theirs.”<sup>525</sup>

In the late 1480s, as his financial troubles worsened, the complaints of unpaid Portuguese merchants escalated, and the internal dynastic struggles of Jolof intensified,

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<sup>523</sup> Pacheco Pereira, Duarte, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, edited by Augusto Epiphanyo da Silva Dias, Lisbon: Typographia Universal, 1905, p. 81.

<sup>524</sup> Blier, Suzanne Preston, *The Royal Arts of Africa: The Majesty of Form*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1998, pp. 13, 34.

<sup>525</sup> Leporace, Tullia Gasparini, ed., *Le navigazioni atlantiche del Veneziano Alvise da Mosto*, Rome: Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, 1966, pp. 52-53. Quote from Russell, 2000, p. 302.

Bemoim turned to the Portuguese King João II, since 1485 the ostentatiously self-styled “Senhor de Guiné,” for much needed assistance. In 1487 Bemoim sent an official embassy to the Portuguese court to request military aid in the form of arms and ships. Bemoim had been familiar for some time with Portuguese merchants, who, he claims, through interpreters had kept him well informed about the character of João II and had habituated him to the customs of the Portuguese court. The beleaguered *bumi* of Jolof was therefore deliberate about the people he chose to send on the embassy as well as the gifts he wished to have presented. Gonçalo Coelho, a knight of João II’s household, who was conducting business on the Senegal River with the Jolof, was invited to accompany the Senegambian embassy to the Portuguese court and to present the prized gifts to the king. It is significant that the king had members of his own household trading with the Jolof on the Senegal River at this time. According to Chaves, Bemoim’s ambassador boasted of his record of loyal and useful service to João II in an effort to show that he was in fact deserving of the political and military support he was now so urgently requesting in 1487.

The close commercial and diplomatic relationship Bemoim seems to have developed with Coelho, a knightly member of the king’s household, might lend support to the claim that he had intimate knowledge of the Portuguese court and had previously offered his services as well as gifts to João II. On this mission, Bemoim had Coelho present the Portuguese king with a “rico presente” of an unspecified large amount of gold. However, Pina and Resende describe the second gift of one-hundred young male slaves, who are qualified as being agreeable and compliant or, rather, “well-disposed” (“bem despostos”). These were the most desirable and valuable slaves, and Bemoim



seems to have perceptively recognized their worth in currying favor with the king. João II, like his father Afonso V, regularly gave slaves as gifts to visiting dignitaries to his court and proudly sent them to other European princes as courtly gifts.<sup>526</sup> This unique form of princely largesse symbolized the riches and resources of Africa and asserted Portuguese glory and power in controlling them. In fact, between 1486 and 1493, Elbl estimates that two-thirds of all slaves entering Portugal were distributed throughout Europe by the king as gifts.<sup>527</sup> According to Chaves, the Jolof ambassador had highlighted the evidence of the many slaves previously sent to the Portuguese court as confirmation of Bemoim's goodwill and longstanding desire to serve João II. We are further told that additional gifts of objects from Senegambia were offered by Bemoim, but the sources do not identify them.

As his official ambassador, Bemoim had selected his nephew, who remained nameless in the sources. The sending of a member of the royal family might have been intended to impress the Portuguese court with the seriousness with which the *bumi* of Jolof took the mission. Yet it might equally indicate how precarious Bemoim's position now was and how only close members of his own family could be trusted or were willing to assume the risk of supporting him in the wars of succession. Chaves, Pina and Resende greatly marveled at the symbolic object of an exceptionally large gold *manilla* (an object shaped like a thick bracelet), which the Jolof ambassador presented to João II as the African equivalent of the European practice of submitting letters of credentials. Chaves was particularly struck by the size and quality of the remarkable gold object itself, while

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<sup>526</sup> Elbl, Ivana, "The King's Business in Africa: Decisions and Strategies of the Portuguese Crown," in *Money, markets and trade in late medieval Europe: essays in honour of John H.A. Munro*, edited by Lawrin Armstrong, Ivana Elbl and Martin M. Elbl, Boston: Brill, 2007, pp. 89-118.

<sup>527</sup> Elbl, "The King's Business in Africa," 2007, p. 113.

Pina and Resende preferred to comment on how the diplomatic use of such symbolic objects in sub-Saharan Africa was standard procedure because of the lack of writing (“segundo seu costume e por defeito de letras”). Both Pina and Resende state that the Jolof ambassador requested “arms and ships” from the Portuguese king without revealing the justification. Chaves, however, expressly affirms that Bemoim required arms and ships, or more euphemistically, “help and assistance” (“ajuda e socorro”), in order to persist in his disastrous dynastic war, which was going alarmingly badly for him. Indeed, Chaves claims that when the ambassador arrived at court Bemoim had already been “badly defeated in war by the King his brother” (“desbaratado em guerra do dito Rej seu jrmão”).

Unfortunately for Bemoim, João II responded swiftly and unequivocally in the negative. Following standard Christian policy, he refused military aid to infidels, as Resende has it, or to non-Christians in Pina’s more tactfully ambiguous phrasing. It was well known at the Portuguese court since the late 1440s that the Jolof were Muslims, though as Russell comments, they were believed to be only “lukewarm” in their faith.<sup>528</sup> Indeed, Diogo Gomes recounts questionable stories of open religious debate at one of the Jolof courts he visited in the 1450s. Valentim Fernandes, the royal printer, considered most Jolof to be idolaters with little to no familiarity with their purportedly widespread Muslim faith.<sup>529</sup>

Apparently, this was not the first time Bemoim faced rejection from the Portuguese court. Allegedly basing parts of his text on later personal conversations with Gonçalo Coelho, Barros claims that Bemoim had sent a first embassy to the Portuguese

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<sup>528</sup> Russell, 2000, p. 302

<sup>529</sup> *Códice Valentim Fernandes*, edited by José Pereira da Costa, Lisbon: Academia Portuguesa da História, 1997, p. 59

court a year earlier. It included the same cast of characters as those of 1487, including Coelho and the same nephew as ambassador. Unsurprisingly, military aid was refused on identical religious grounds. However, to soften the blow and perhaps as an incentive to convert, João II sent Coelho back to Bemoim's court with five richly caparisoned horses. Moreover, the Duke of Beja, the future king Manuel I, thought fit to send Bemoim a horse, finely caparisoned, from his own personal, well-stocked stable.<sup>530</sup> Just as Bemoim later sent gold and black slaves, among the most highly prized exports, to the Portuguese court to curry favor, so João II and the Duke of Beja had previously presented Bemoim with the high-quality horses he so avidly sought for the prestige of his court and the effectiveness of his army. According to Barros, João II had Coelho return to the Senegal River with a negative response but with these esteemed gifts of prized horses and he was to remain at Bemoim's court in order to help persuade the *bumi* of Jolof to convert from Islam to Christianity. It seems that he accompanied Bemoim for over a year before revealing his frustration, complaining that Bemoim had no real intention to abandon his Muslim faith and that he was using the conspicuous Portuguese presence at his court as a political ploy to intimidate his enemies, who might, Bemoim hoped, think he enjoyed their favor and by implication their military support as well. According to Barros, it was at this critical juncture that Bemoim decided to send the embassy of 1487 to the Portuguese court.

This detailed review of the evidence for the interactions between Bemoim and the Portuguese court before his reception there in 1488 shows that they had begun to foster a promising relationship and had achieved a certain amount of familiarity. They had exchanged formal diplomatic missions and had secured ties of friendship through the

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<sup>530</sup> Teixeira da Mota, 1971, pp. 10-11

exchange of courtly gifts. Bemoim's presentation of slaves and gold as courtly gifts and the Portuguese court's reciprocation with gifts of numerous horses to Bemoim replicated the mutually beneficial commercial relationship that had existed between the Portuguese and Jolof for several decades. The Portuguese king and Senegambian prince understood and met each other's expectations. This should not be surprising, for Coelho, a knight of the king's household, had followed Bemoim's court for over a year and, during this time, had learned much about conceptions of Jolof ceremony and majesty, while also imparting knowledge about the customs and attitudes of the Portuguese court to Bemoim.

The Treaty of Alcáçovas-Toledo signed with Spain in 1479-80 awarded the Portuguese crown the exclusive right to navigation to and the monopoly on commerce in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>531</sup> According to this principle, known as *mare clausum*, Portugal controlled maritime access to sub-Saharan Africa as if the ocean were an extension of its national borders.<sup>532</sup> This policy was fiercely protected by the Portuguese throughout Europe with the support of the papacy. This novel diplomatic and legal situation in Europe produced a dramatic shift in the imperial ideology of the Portuguese court upon

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<sup>531</sup> Fonseca, Luís Adão da, *D. João II*, Lisbon: Circulo de Leitores, 2005, pp. 92-134; Oliveira e Costa, João Paulo, "D. Afonso V e o Atlântico: A Base do Projecto Expansionista de D. João II," in *D. João II, o Mar e o Universalismo Lusitano: Actas, III Simposio de História Marítima*, edited by Rogério d'Oliveira, Lisbon: Academia de Marinha, 2000, pp. 39-61; Oliveira e Costa, João Paulo, "D. Afonso V e o Atlântico," *Mare Liberum*, v. 17, 1999, pp. 39-71; Mendonça, Manuela, *As relações externas de Portugal nos finais da Idade Média*, Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 1994. For the Spanish perspective, see Armas, Antonio Rumeu de, *España en el África Atlántica*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Ediciones del Cabildo Insular de Gran Canaria, second edition, v. 1, 1996, pp. 132-136; Ysern, Paulina Rufo, "La expansión peninsular por la costa Africana: El enfrentamiento entre Portugal y Castilla (1475-1480)," in *Congreso Internacional Bartolomeu Dias e a sua Epoca: Actas: Economia e Comércio Marítimo*, edited by Luís Adão da Fonseca, Porto: Universidade do Porto; Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimientos Portugueses, 1989, v. 3, pp. 59-79; Edwards, John, *The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs, 1474-1520*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, pp. 37-38, 42, 56, 123, 189-90, 243-44. For the text of the treaty, see Albuquerque, Luís de and Maria Emília Madeira Santos, *Portugaliae monumenta Africana*, Lisbon: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical; Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimientos Portugueses; Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, v. 1, 1993, pp. 243-247.

<sup>532</sup> Fonseca, 2005, p. 136.

the accession of João II, who as prince had masterminded the groundbreaking treaty with Spain. For the first time, the Portuguese crown officially recognized the legitimacy of non-Christian African states and aggressively sought diplomatic and commercial relationships with them.<sup>533</sup> This was best achieved, João II believed, by sending diplomatic missions to sub-Saharan Africa and by receiving sub-Saharan African embassies in Portugal. João II's policy of "peaceful conquest," which consisted of diplomacy, commerce and evangelization, was epitomized by the addition of the new royal title of "Lord of Guinea" ("Senhor de Guiné").<sup>534</sup> From a European perspective, the title of "Senhor de Guiné" was intended to symbolize João II's claim to suzerainty over sub-Saharan Africa.

Strictly speaking, João II was correct in his response to Bemoim, protesting that he was technically forbidden by papal decree to furnish arms or naval support to Muslims. But this excuse provided convenient cover for two other objectives. First, João II possessed leverage by making conversion a requisite for military aid, and the conversion of a sub-Saharan Africa ruler to Christianity from Islam would greatly enhance the Portuguese king's prestige in Europe. Not only would it supply enormous propaganda value, but it would also serve to justify the Portuguese presence in sub-Saharan Africa, for one of Portugal's publicly disseminated priorities involved the salvation of souls and consequent triumph of Christianity. The sincerity of genuine religious objectives was undoubtedly a major motivating factor; it was indisputably meaningful, to an extent unknowable today. Nonetheless, the religious factor was never

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<sup>533</sup> Newitt, Malyn A., *History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 1400-1668*, Routledge, New York, 2005, pp. 41, 52-53, 55.

<sup>534</sup> Elbl, 2003, pp. 24, 26, 28.

the only one in play and its importance could be relative, easily and rather flexibly adjustable to the specific situation.<sup>535</sup>

A second possible cause for João II refusing military aid was his prudent policy of trying whenever feasible to avoid involvement in disputes between or within sub-Saharan African states. Here the Portuguese king was at a double disadvantage. Portugal conspicuously lacked sufficient resources to fight on behalf of sub-Saharan Africans. Instead its limited energies were devoted both to pursuing crusades against Muslims in North Africa, Portugal's traditional enemy, and to defending its exclusive right of access to sub-Saharan Africa from other European powers, who were always prepared to disregard diplomatic niceties if Portugal's vigilance were to slacken. In addition, the Portuguese court's knowledge of the intricate political network of sub-Saharan Africa remained too woefully inadequate in the mid-1480s to risk becoming embroiled in dynastic wars of succession with unfamiliar inland states. Moreover, Portuguese forces had routinely been bested by sub-Saharan military prowess with lethal results. The gamble was too great. If Portugal were to assist the losing side in any struggle, it might forfeit trading privileges with the victor and squander its investment of time, effort, money and lives in the area. From this outside perspective, it seemed better to remain neutral and await the outcome whereupon commerce would commence in peace again. Of course, conversion and certain overwhelmingly irresistible concessions might persuade João II to reconsider, as he eventually did with Bemoin in 1488 and later with the *Mani Kongo* in 1491. In both cases, Portuguese military involvement explicitly accompanied religious conversion.

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<sup>535</sup> Northrup, David, *Africa's Discovery of Europe 1450-1850*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 26-29.

#### 4. The Reception of Bemoim at the Portuguese Court in Setúbal, 1488

Sometime in the summer of 1488, the dynastic wars of succession to the Jolof empire seem to have come to an acrimonious end. Bemoim seems finally to have been defeated and subsequently exiled from the kingdom of Jolof. Chaves bluntly states that he was vanquished by his brother, the *Buurba Jolof*.<sup>536</sup> However, Pina and Resende directly blame his downfall on the treachery and sedition of his own people (“por trayção dos seus”).<sup>537</sup> It is not clear from their texts whether they refer to the perfidy of his own supporters or to some deceit perpetrated by his brother. Perhaps Chaves, a thorough military man and honorable noble knight, refused to believe the excuses of betrayal and treason proffered by Bemoim to explain his embarrassing defeat and exile. Perhaps Bemoim, or Pina in his text, fabricated these claims in order to convince the Portuguese that his overthrow was dishonorable and worthy of vengeance. Whatever the case, such claims, true or false as they may have been, certainly played to one of the concepts most dear to João II as king: the upholding of justice. It was a commonplace of his reign that João II was punctilious about ensuring the prosecution of justice.<sup>538</sup> Justice for the Portuguese king did not mean the strict observance of law and order, for in fact he frequently flaunted these when convenient. To João II, justice was more closely associated with aristocratic duty and honor. And as the self-titled “Senhor de Guiné,” João II would surely have been moved by Bemoim’s allegations of unjust treatment, especially as it regarded the privileges of royalty. It was ultimately ironic for João II to support Bemoim in part because of his rightful pursuit of honor and justice, for it would

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<sup>536</sup> Chaves, 1984, p. 322.

<sup>537</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 69; Resende, 1994, p. 268.

<sup>538</sup> Mendonça, 1995, pp. 313-328.

be the Portuguese king himself who would in the end permit the most unjust handling of the Jolof pretender.

In any case, after suffering military defeat and political exile at the hands of his brother, the *Buurba Jolof*, as Chaves would have it, or through the betrayal (“trayção”) of his people, as Pina and Resende alleged, Bemoim and a number of his loyal followers safely traveled, or perhaps more accurately fled, to the nearby Portuguese trading fort of Arguim. He and his retinue were apparently welcomed by the Portuguese there and put on a merchant vessel making the return journey to Lisbon. The chroniclers assert that Bemoim boarded the ship bound for Lisbon in order to “come in person to ask the king for help, succor, and justice.”<sup>539</sup> Having been dispossessed of his lands, it is impossible to know whether Bemoim had any other viable options than to seek refuge at the Portuguese trading fort. It is equally difficult to discern the opinion of the Portuguese merchants to whom Bemoim ostensibly owed money as they sent off their vanquished debtor to their king in Europe.

Nevertheless, Bemoim and the majestic remnants of his formerly swollen princely entourage from Senegambia arrived in Lisbon on 29 August 1488. João II, who evidently had been apprised in advance of his coming, had arranged for the swift transfer of the deposed Jolof prince and his retinue to the castle of Palmela outside of Setúbal, where the Portuguese king and his court were then currently residing. Bemoim arrived in Lisbon with an impressive group of about thirty to forty followers, which included two of his own sons, princes “of his royal blood” as well as several children of other illustrious Jolof families. After having Bemoim spirited away to the castle of Palmela, the stronghold of the knightly military Order of Santiago (the order to which Chaves belonged), João II

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<sup>539</sup> Chaves, 1984, p. 322; Pina, 1989, 69; Resende, 1994, p. 269.



implemented his complex and costly plans to provide for his stay as an official state guest.<sup>540</sup> Bemoim was received and handled in a manner befitting his status as royalty from Senegambia. Not only had the castle been properly outfitted to host a visiting prince, including with luxurious silver plate, but an entire staff had been appointed to run the princely household by appropriate European standards.<sup>541</sup>

The Portuguese king also bestowed, at his own hefty expense, fine clothing for Bemoim and each member of his princely entourage. Each high-quality outfit supplied was to correspond precisely to the rank and status of the receiver. Proper attire at court in fifteenth-century Europe was nuanced and subtle, painstakingly analyzed and of unbearable consequence. Court chronicles, diaries and ambassadorial reports are replete with obsessive, detailed and fussy descriptions and penetrating assessments of fashions and dress at the courts of Renaissance Europe. Pina and Resende's sharp eye and keen sense for style and clothing and their emphasis on its overriding importance, were not exceptional, but were matched by those of visiting diplomats to Iberia, such as Roger Machado from England and Hieronymus Münzer from Germany, and were surpassed by the rarefied distinctions of courtly attire and trends routinely offered by Georges Chastellain and Olivier de La Marche at the court of Burgundy and Philippe de Commynes in France. Luxury fabrics and textiles proclaimed the wealth, social status,

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<sup>540</sup> Since Bemoim was requesting military assistance, it was appropriate for him to be hosted and lodged by the knights of the Order of Santiago. For the history of the castle, see Fernandes, Isabel Cristina Ferreira, *O Castelo de Palmela: do islâmico ao cristão*, Lisbon: Edições Colibri; Palmela: Câmara Municipal de Palmela, 2004.

<sup>541</sup> For the protocol of receiving ambassadors at courts in Renaissance Europe, see Elbl, Ivana, "Cross-Cultural Trade and Diplomacy: Portuguese Relations with West Africa, 1441-1521," *Journal of World History*, v. 3, n. 2, 1992, pp. 165-204; Lowe, Kate, "'Representing' Africa: Ambassadors and Princes from Christian Africa to Renaissance Italy and Portugal, 1402-1608," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, v. 17, 2007, pp. 101-28; Lubkin, Gregory, "Strategic Hospitality: Foreign Dignitaries at the Court of Milan, 1466-1476," *The International History Review*, v. 8, n. 2, 1986, pp. 174-189; Mallett, Michael, "Ambassadors and their Audiences in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Studies*, v. 8, 1994, pp. 229-243; Mattingly, Garrett, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, New York: Cosimo, 2009

prestige and political authority of members of court and demarcated the very spaces of power.<sup>542</sup> Giovanni Pontano, writing at the Aragonese court of Naples in the 1490s, theorized and codified what was already standard practice at fifteenth-century courts, like those of Burgundy and Portugal, and proclaimed that opulent fabrics and sumptuous clothing were essential for the projection of princely magnificence and splendor and the creation of an exalted image of rule.<sup>543</sup>

However, modern scholars have been quick to see João II's decision to provide Bemoim and his entourage with princely attire as stained with racism. It is claimed that the provision of lavish courtly apparel forced Bemoim "to conform to European ideas of royal dress" and served as one of the "civilising hoops" intended to transform him outwardly into a European.<sup>544</sup> To a certain extent, this view is surely correct. But it forms only part of a more complex story. For instance, the circumstances of Bemoim's plainly precipitate flight from his Jolof homeland to the longed for security of the Portuguese fort of Arguim, in the midst of his military and political collapse, might easily have prevented him from transporting his regal Jolof attire. In addition, it was standard practice for the Portuguese court to present visiting dignitaries from sub-Saharan Africa with exquisite

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<sup>542</sup> Vale, Malcolm, *The Princely Court*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 93-135; Uytven, Raymond van, "Showing Off One's Rank in the Middle Ages," in *Showing Status: Representation of Social Positions in the Late Middle Ages*, edited by Wim Blockmans, Turnhout, 1999, pp. 19-34; Uytven, Raymond van, "Cloth in Medieval Literature of Western Europe," in *Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe*, edited by N.B. Harte and K.G. Ponting, London, 1983, pp. 151-183; Belozerskaya, Marina, *Rethinking the Renaissance: Burgundian Arts Across Europe*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 104-125; Belozerskaya, Marina, *Luxury Arts of the Renaissance*, Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005, pp. 89-133. The courtly emphasis on dress is amply demonstrated in Huizinga, Johan, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, translated by Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

<sup>543</sup> Pontano, Giovanni, *I Trattati delle Virtù Sociali*, edited by Francesco Tateo, Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1965, pp. 267-278. See also, Cole, Alison, *Virtue and Magnificence: art of the Italian Renaissance courts*, New York, H.N. Abrams, 1995, pp. 17-43; Welch, Evelyn, "Public Magnificence and Private Display: Giovanni Pontano's *De splendore* (1498) and the Domestic Arts," *Journal of Design History*, v. 15, n. 4, 2002, pp. 211-221.

<sup>544</sup> Russell, 1995, p. 157; Lowe, 2007, p. 119; Lowe, 2005, pp. 18, 44.

articles of European clothing.<sup>545</sup> For example, the ambassador from Benin who stayed at court in 1486 was given clothing for himself, his servant and his wife.<sup>546</sup> João II likewise presented the *Mani Kongo* in 1485 and 1491 with an abundance of high quality garments and textiles.<sup>547</sup> In 1489 the *Mani Kongo* returned the honor and presented the Portuguese king with luxury textiles closely associated with Kongolese royalty. For many sub-Saharan Africans, the acquisition of cloth and textiles constituted one of the most prominent forms of conspicuous consumption as manifestations of prestige, status and wealth.<sup>548</sup> The complex, refined system of values regarding cloth and textiles and the bewildering array of fashions, styles, colors and materials prevalent in the sophisticated courts of sub-Saharan African rulers at least ensured that the symbolic significance of the trendy European courtly garments furnished by João II would have been understood and appreciated by Bemoin. The *Mani Kongo* incorporated European articles of clothing and accessories given to him by the Portuguese king into the royal regalia of the Kongo.

To be sure, the Portuguese court, like most European courts, expected visiting princes, from Europe or from sub-Saharan Africa, to conform to rigid standards of dress, and the king himself in the role of generous host would provide suitable attire whenever necessary.<sup>549</sup> This was not just standard courtly protocol, but also a princely duty. The Portuguese sources convey a sense of pride in what they saw as the Portuguese king's magnanimous actions and courteous treatment of the Senegambian prince and his retinue, who probably arrived in Lisbon with relatively few belongings. As Elbl has noted, by

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<sup>545</sup> Elbl, 1992, p. 171.

<sup>546</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 57.

<sup>547</sup> See Chapter 2. Pina, 1989, pp. 112-135.

<sup>548</sup> Adenaike, Carolyn Keyes, "West African Textiles, 1500-1800," in *Textiles: Production, Trade and Demand*, edited by Maureen Fennell Mazzaoui, Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1998, pp. 251-262; Picton, John and John Mack, *African Textiles*, New York: Harper & Row, 1989, p. 33-35; Thornton, 1998, pp. 48-54.

<sup>549</sup> Lowe, 2007; Elbl, 1992; Mattingly, 2009; Lubkin, 1986.

providing housing, clothing and household staff to Bemoim, João II was undeniably operating according to the prescribed rules for the honorable reception of potentially useful political exiles at European courts during the late fifteenth century in Europe.<sup>550</sup> These gifts of clothing were intended as markers of esteem and respect. The wearing of European princely clothing might also have been meant to associate Bemoim as unambiguously as possible with European notions of majesty and royalty, and in the process to enhance and ensure recognition of Bemoim's authority and position at court. This exalted image of Bemoim would consequently reflect greater glory on João II and conform to European ideas of majesty.<sup>551</sup> This self-serving practice was widespread in Europe and not unique to the courtly reception of Bemoim. For example, the Portuguese king was immensely proud of the wedding celebrations he personally organized for the marriage of his son Prince Afonso to the Spanish Princess Isabel, the daughter of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, in Évora in October 1490. As the ideal manifestation of his royal magnificence, João II provided the wedding guests with spectacular courtly garments he had specifically purchased in Italy for this purpose. The pretender to the English throne, Perkin Warbeck, was likely wearing the clothing he received for his attendance at this very wedding in Évora when he arrived in Cork, Ireland, and astonished the local inhabitants with his fabulous clothing, thereby prompting them to proclaim him Richard, Duke of York, heir to the throne of England.

Since Bemoim was a Jolof prince and demanded being received as such, court etiquette demanded he dress in clothing befitting a prince in Europe. The material, quality, color, style and cost of the clothing provided to Bemoim and his entourage by

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<sup>550</sup> Elbl, 1992; Elbl, 2007.

<sup>551</sup> Russell 1995, p. 155.

João II certainly served to define and give concrete visual expression to the inner hierarchy of rank, status and function within the Senegambian princely household itself.<sup>552</sup> The wearing of European fabrics and dress likewise enabled recognition by members of the Portuguese court of these stratifications and distinctions of position within Bemoim's retinue and helped them avoid embarrassing blunders of precedence or protocol. Nevertheless, João II's distribution of clothing to Bemoim had a pointed political purpose that calculatedly corresponded with the objectives of the reception ceremony. At the courts of Europe, clothing and livery were routinely given as gifts by princes to reward vassals for service.<sup>553</sup> As preeminent princely gifts, sumptuous clothes and luxury fabrics were ostentatious external signs of personal affiliation and dynastic allegiance.<sup>554</sup> By wearing the lavish princely robes conspicuously given to him by the Portuguese king, Bemoim was publicly proclaiming, perhaps involuntarily or unwittingly, his personal bond and political affinity with João II. Moreover, from the perspective of the Portuguese court, these princely robes were not only intended to signify diplomatic allegiance and affiliation, but were also designed to connote Bemoim's dependent or vassal status within the terms of their relationship.

Bemoim resided in the castle of Palmela, amongst the knights of the Order of Santiago, for a couple of weeks from late August to the middle of October 1488 before being officially called to court at Setúbal. The sources are silent on his activities during this brief period, though one suspects preliminary meetings between Bemoim and members of the Portuguese court occurred. Much meticulous preparation and cautious negotiation necessarily preceded such an extraordinary ceremony. Indeed, the entire

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<sup>552</sup> Vale, 2001, pp. 93-96.

<sup>553</sup> Vale, 2001, pp. 93-94.

<sup>554</sup> Vale, 2001, p. 135.

courtly event, including the ceremonial reception and public audience with the king, greatly impressed Pina and Resende, seasoned courtiers, who both used the occasion to comment on João II's perfectionist tendencies regarding such concerns. As Pina observes, the king did "everything with great perfection, because in such matters which concerned his majesty, the king was above all very ceremonial and perfect" ("tudo em grande perfeição, porque el-rei nas coisas de propósito que tocavam seu estado era sobre todos mui cerimonial e perfeito"). Chaves, however, is not given to such hyperbole. Instead, he describes in scrupulous detail the sumptuous attire worn by the leading figures as well as the luxurious decoration of hanging textiles and tapestries, which adorned the splendid reception hall. He likewise lavishes attention on the etiquette and performance of the various elements of the ceremony as he witnessed them.

The central role of court ceremony and ritual in defining and articulating princely splendor and magnificence in the fifteenth century has long been recognized, especially by scholars of the Burgundian court, where its supreme importance and ostentatious extravagance were unmatched.<sup>555</sup> The performance of these ceremonies and rituals

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<sup>555</sup> Vale, Malcolm, *The Princely Court*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 200-246. For ceremony at the court of Burgundy, see Huizinga, Johan, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, translated by Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996; Cartellieri, Otto, *The Court of Burgundy*, New York, A. A. Knopf, 1929; Calmette, Joseph, *The Golden Age of Burgundy: The Magnificent Dukes and Their Courts*, London: Phoenix Press, 2001; Cauchies, Jean-Marie, ed., *A la cour de Bourgogne: le Duc, son entourage, son train*, Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1998; Vanderjagt, Arjo, "The Princely Culture of the Valois Dukes of Burgundy," in Gosman, Martin and Alasdair Macdonald, Arjo Vanderjagt, eds., *Princes and princely culture, 1450-1650*, vol. 1, Boston, Brill, 2003, pp. 51-79; Paravicini, Werner, "The Court of the Dukes of Burgundy: A Model for Europe?" in *Princes, patronage, and the nobility: the court at the beginning of the Modern Age, c.1450-1650*, edited by Asch, Ronald G. and Adolf M. Birke, Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 69-102; Armstrong, C.A.J., "The Golden Age of Burgundy: Dukes the outdid kings," in Dickens, A. G., ed., *The courts of Europe: politics, patronage, and royalty, 1400-1800*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1977, pp. 55-75. For studies of the Burgundian "Theatre-State," see Damen, Mario, "Princely entries and gift exchange in the Burgundian Low Countries: a crucial link in late medieval political culture," *Journal of Medieval History*, v. 33, 2007, pp. 233-249; Brown, Andrew, "Ritual and State-Building: Ceremonies in Late Medieval Bruges," in *Symbolic Communication in Late Medieval Towns*, edited by Jacoba van Leeuwen, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006, pp. 1-28; Brown, Andrew, "Bruges and the Burgundian 'Theatre-state': Charles the Bold and Our Lady of the Snow," *History* v. 84, 1999, pp. 573-589; Arnade, Peter, "City, State, and Public Ritual in

embodied and expressed princely power and gave substance to the court in both space and time; their performance constituted the principal means of fashioning and projecting the very image of kingship.<sup>556</sup> In particular, court ceremony and ritual were necessary to establish and confirm kinship and power relationships, to forge sacred and secular bonds, and to make promises and commitments binding. Every facet of courtly ceremony and ritual was resonant with meaning and each individual performance, imbued with deep symbolism, involved an infinite calibration and choreography, which directly and greatly impinged on and determined its meaning. Successful courtiers were those who were exceedingly sensitive to every nuance and gesture and who were able to decipher and properly interpret these signs. Ceremony and ritual formed the climax of court life. The ceremonies involving Bemoim created and affirmed the political and social reality which the Sengambian prince was to inhabit at the Portuguese court. The bonds forged between

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the Late-Medieval Burgundian Netherlands,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, v. 39, n. 2, 1997, pp. 300-318; Arnade, Peter., *Realms of Ritual: Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996. For the role of ceremony at the Portuguese court, see Mendonça, Manuela, “Cerimonias Régias na Corte de D. João II,” in *D. João II, o Mar e o Universalismo Lusitano: Actas, III Simposio de História Marítima*, edited by Rogério d’Oliveira, Lisbon: Academia de Marinha, 2000, pp. 13-25; Costa Gomes, Rita, *The Making of a Court Society: Kings and Nobles in Late Medieval Portugal*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

<sup>556</sup> For the role of ceremony in court culture in general, see Vale, Malcolm, *The princely court: medieval courts and culture in North-West Europe, 1270-1380*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001; Vale, Malcolm, “Courts, Art and Power,” in *The Renaissance World*, edited by John Jeffries Martin, New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 287-306; Vale, Malcolm, “Ritual, Ceremony and the ‘Civilizing Process’: The Role of the Court, c. 1270-1400,” in Gunn, Steven and Antheun Janse, eds., *The court as a stage: England and the low countries in the later Middle Ages*, The Boydell Press, Rochester, NY, 2006, pp. 13-27. For the use of ceremony in fashioning the image of the king, see Anglo, Sydney, *Images of Tudor Kingship*, London: Seaby, 1992; Anglo, Sydney, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997; Strong, Roy, *Art and Power: Renaissance festivals, 1450-1650*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. For royal ritual, see Bak, Janos, ed., *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*, University of California Press, 1990; Cannadine, David and Simon Price, eds., *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987. For useful surveys of ceremony and ritual in the Renaissance, see J.R. Mulryne, J.R. and Elizabeth Goldring, eds., *Court festivals of the European Renaissance: art, politics, and performance*, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002; Muir, Edward, *Ritual in early modern Europe*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

João II and Bemoim during these ceremonies and the honors the Portuguese king conspicuously bestowed upon him carried far reaching implications.

The chroniclers state that João II delayed his audience with Bemoim until the Senegambian prince was prepared to make his official entrance to the Portuguese court. Once Bemoim informed the king that he and his retinue were ready and the court had made all the proper arrangements to receive him, João II sent the finest horses and mules, all beautifully appointed and expensively caparisoned, to Bemoim and his entourage for their ostentatious, ceremonial journey from the castle of Palmela to court at nearby Setúbal. The king appointed the celebrated nobleman D. Francisco de Coutinho, the Conde de Marialva, *meirinho-mor* (the principal officer of justice) and royal councilor from a distinguished military family, to head the delegation of nobles and courtiers sent to receive Bemoim outside the town.<sup>557</sup> The Conde de Marialva's commission to accompany Bemoim to court also included the directive to all its participating members to dress in their most sumptuous courtly attire and costly accoutrements.

Bemoim was received at court on 13 October 1488. Pina informs us that the impending reception was to take place in the buildings of the Alfândega at Setúbal. Chaves provides a detailed description of the decorations. The walls of the palace were covered with silken cloths, damasks and Arras tapestries while the hall itself was draped with white and crimson brocaded velvets. The royal chair with its cushions and the dais were likewise upholstered with exquisite brocaded fabrics. Even the ceiling, Chaves claims, was hung with textiles. Porters bearing silver maces were positioned at the entrance to the hall. The brilliant jewels and precious stones embellishing the costumes of the assembled courtiers provided additional luxury and radiance. Queen Leonor and

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<sup>557</sup> Chaves, 1984, p. 126.



Prince Afonso were housed in separate quarters and were scheduled to meet with Bemoim separately after his audience with the king and D. Manuel, the Duke of Beja. The flower of the court was in attendance.

Chaves, whose various responsibilities included control over court ceremony, affirms that everything was done “by order of the King” (“por ordenança delRej”). Before Bemoim and his retinue along with the striking escort provided by the Conde de Marialva arrived, the king ordered the Duke of Beja to come out from the palace to await them at the top of the staircase. When Bemoim arrived the Duke welcomed him and they embraced. He raised his cap off his head, a sign of respect to Bemoim, and then took him by the hand and conducted him through the first set of doors with the Conde de Marialva following closely behind them. Bemoim noticeably did not remove his cap when he greeted the Duke of Beja, who had removed his cap in deference to the Senegambian prince. In this way, Bemoim clearly signaled his superior status to the duke and deliberately asserted his precedence. Once they were inside the antechamber, the Conde de Marialva stood on the left-side of Bemoim, who was now centrally positioned in between the Conde and the Duke. As they were thus arranged in the antechamber, João II moved away from the window next to which he had been standing in the audience chamber and walked over to the portal. Chaves specifies that the king went to the threshold of the antechamber and crossed it, but forcefully clarifies that he did not go beyond it. At this first encounter, Chaves implies, Bemoim received a great courtesy and honor. Yet it was an honor intelligible only to those who were knowledgeable of courtly etiquette and protocol. João II’s gracious gesture, then, was complimentary on two levels because it assumed that such refined courtly distinctions were decipherable to Bemoim,

who would appreciate the favor, even if this understanding had only recently been acquired.

To be sure, João II was also performing for the audience of Portuguese nobles who would likewise be expected to comprehend through such gestures the respect the king accorded the exiled Senegambian prince. In this regard, it is interesting to note the differences in the various descriptions of this moment of the ceremony. Chaves states that the king came from inside the reception hall to the threshold of the antechamber to acknowledge and honor Bemoim for the first time. Neither Pina nor Resende mention this royal action. However, as Russell observed, they nevertheless thought it a “special courtesy,” as indeed it was, for João II to have subsequently walked forward “two or three steps” from the royal dais to meet Bemoim within the audience chamber itself.<sup>558</sup> In addition, there are discrepancies in the sources regarding the salutations exchanged between the Portuguese king and Bemoim. Chaves writes that greetings were initially exchanged in the antechamber. Once in the royal presence, Bemoim made a show of exposing his head and in an exaggerated gesture, attempted to kiss the king’s hand in reverence as was customary in Portugal. For his part, João II refused to offer his hand and even took off his royal cap, raising it, a surprised Chaves remarked, high above his head; both gestures were unusual marks of esteem, typically accorded only to other royal figures. However, the king put the royal cap back on his head and then left Bemoim, the Duke of Beja and the Conde de Marialva in the antechamber.

Pina and Resende claim that Bemoim and his entourage entered the reception hall and prostrated themselves. According to their testimony, the Jolof retinue feigned that they gathered earth in their hands and then threw it over their heads as a sign of

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<sup>558</sup> Chaves, 1984, pp. 321-24.

submission and respect.<sup>559</sup> They believed this ritual gesture was accepted practice among the Jolof. Curiously, Chaves does not mention this, but discusses another ceremonial action Bemoim performed which frightened some Portuguese courtiers. When Bemoim later exchanged salutations with the queen and prince, he unexpectedly reached out his hand to touch the young prince's beard. Alarmed, the Conde de Marialva, who still accompanied him, stayed his hand. The shocked Conde later asked Bemoim what he meant to do and the Jolof prince replied that it was the custom in his land to touch the beards of sons of kings and then to kiss their hands. Despite the scare, the explanation was satisfactory and the celebrations in his honor continued unabated.

Despite these discrepancies, all sources agree that in the reception hall João II stood under the royal canopy next to the throne on the dais and that he brought Bemoim up there with him. The sources indicate that the entire formal reception and interview were conducted in this manner with the Jolof prince and Portuguese king standing together under the royal canopy, elevated above and before the assembled court. Before moving on to discussion of what the sources say transpired between João II and Bemoim on the dais, it is important to consider the different perceptions of Bemoim in order to understand the inconsistency in the sources about what each monarch pledged during the ceremony.

As Russell observed, it was advantageous to the Portuguese quest for fame and prestige in Europe to portray Bemoim as a powerful sovereign irrespective of the actual authority he might have wielded in practice.<sup>560</sup> By exaggerating Bemoim's magnificence, the Portuguese sources correspondingly enhanced João II's glory and renown. However,

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<sup>559</sup> Northrup, 2002, p. 25.

<sup>560</sup> Russell, 1995, p. 155.

the qualities emphasized and priorities revealed differ between the sources. Pina and Resende describe Bemoim as a “principe negro” who governed his kingdom with “great prosperity and much authority.” Chaves does not assign him a title or kingdom, but simply states that he possessed noble blood as the brother of the king of Jolof. More importantly, Chaves identifies Bemoim as a “grande senhor” and defines his power in strictly military terms by the enormous, possibly inflated, number of foot soldiers and mounted cavalry he could put in the field.

Pina and Resende focus on Bemoim’s supposed titles, kingdom and commercial prosperity in order to emphasize the legitimacy of João II’s intervention on his behalf and even his obligation to do so. However, Chaves perhaps more accurately assesses the situation from an aristocratic perspective, for Bemoim’s position and power in Senegambia ultimately most closely resembled that of other “great lords” of the European nobility, such as the Duke of Bragança and the Duke of Viseu in Portugal or the Duke of Buckingham in England.<sup>561</sup> These figures owed their stature at court, control of vast resources and command of significant military forces to their close blood relationship to the crowns of Portugal and of England, respectively, which they so keenly felt should have been theirs and not their king’s. In addition, these three European noblemen were executed for trying to usurp the crown in a manner which recalls Bemoim’s power play in the dynastic wars in Senegambia. An advantage of the European aristocratic perspective adopted by Chaves in his estimation of the Muslim Bemoim is the respect he accorded military power and valor regardless of race or religion. After evaluating Bemoim’s stature according to his military capacity, Chaves judges Bemoim according to

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<sup>561</sup> Fonseca, 2005, pp. 14-16, 64, 70-77, 210-212; C. S. L. Davies, “Stafford, Edward, third duke of Buckingham (1478–1521),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004; Harris, Barbara J., *Edward Stafford, third duke of Buckingham, 1478-1521*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986.

similarly chivalric values, concluding that “he [was ] very brave with his person” (“*elle muj valente de sua pessoa*”).<sup>562</sup>

For someone of Chaves’s chivalric background and courtly prominence, describing someone from Europe or sub-Saharan Africa as “very brave” (“*muj valente*”) was one of the most honorable of compliments, especially since his notes were kept for personal reasons and never intended for dissemination as propaganda. Typically, bravery or valor was a martial virtue and it was used most commonly in courtly writings to give supreme praise to a knight, “*valente cavaleiro*,” or to describe a courageous and valiant manner of fighting during battle. Along with honor, valor (“*valentia*”) was one of the primary chivalric virtues João II himself specifically singled out in the rule he composed on dubbing to knighthood as deserving of recognition and as worthy of knighthood.<sup>563</sup>

Chaves offers no other insights into Bemoim’s appearance or character; his concise assessment of knightly virtue was sufficient for him. However, Pina and Resende described his appearance and comportment according to courtly values and terminology. Although the accounts by Pina and Resende are often rather similar, the more aesthetically sensitive Resende frequently makes subtle but significantly different word choices. Physically, Bemoim seemed to the Portuguese court to be about forty years old and was said to have been a large man, well-built and well-proportioned. Both chroniclers comment that he appeared “*muito negro*” and sported a long, well-kept beard. In Resende’s opinion, Bemoim was good looking and possessed a gracious presence mixed with a demeanor which exuded authority.

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<sup>562</sup> In medieval Portuguese, “*valente*” likewise carried connotations of physical strength and robustness. See, Da Silva, Joaquim Carvalho, *Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa Medieval*, Londrina, Brazil: Editora da Universidade Estadual de Londrina, 2007, p. 281.

<sup>563</sup> Chaves 170-71. For the rules and ceremonies related to dubbing to knighthood, see Keen, 1984, pp. 64-82.

Bemoim's physical appearance and commanding presence impressed the Portuguese chroniclers, especially his lengthy beard ("barba muito comprida"). As Lowe has commented, the beard was widely seen in Renaissance Europe in general terms as a sign of elevated status and forceful virility.<sup>564</sup> According to Randolph Starn and Loren Partridge, beards were regularly and widely associated with martial ideals and commonly considered an attribute of majesty with princely, even imperial, connotations.<sup>565</sup> Although scholars have noted that beards were not fashionable in fifteenth-century Italy, the Portuguese king João II wore a beard his entire reign, which received comment.<sup>566</sup> Resende wrote that the king's "beard was black and well-kept," ("a barba tinha preta e bem posta") and that when the king turned thirty-seven, around the time of Bemoim's reception, grey hairs began to appear in it, which pleased the king. Mario Equicola, the courtier and chronicler of the court of Mantua, claimed that Francesco Gonzaga, the Marquis of Mantua, was the first Italian ruler to wear a beard continuously and that it recalled the beards of ancient Romans, presumably worthy emperors like Hadrian or Marcus Aurelius.<sup>567</sup> He appears most famously as a bearded Christian knight in Mantegna's painting of the Madonna of the Victory from 1496.<sup>568</sup> Although the Portuguese chroniclers do not reveal João II's motivations for continually wearing a beard, despite fashionable trends elsewhere, the associations Gonzaga intended to evoke

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<sup>564</sup> Lowe, 2005, p. 46.

<sup>565</sup> Partridge, Loren and Randolph Starn, *A Renaissance Likeness: Art and Culture in Raphael's Julius II*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981, pp. 44-46, 124-125. For a different interpretation of beards in the Renaissance, see Fisher, Will, "The Renaissance Beard: Masculinity in Early Modern England," *Renaissance Quarterly*, v. 54, n. 1, pp. 155-187.

<sup>566</sup> For descriptions of João II's beard, see Resende, 1994, p. 137; Pina, 1989, p. 152. For beards in Italy, see Gilbert, Creighton, "Piero della Francesca's Flagellation: The Figures in the Foreground," *The Art Bulletin*, v. 53, n. 1, 1971, pp. 41-51; Zucker, Mark J., "Raphael and the Beard of Pope Julius," *The Art Bulletin*, v. 59, n. 4, 1977, pp. 524-533.

<sup>567</sup> Bourne, Molly, *Francesco II Gonzaga*, Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 2008, pp. 287, 541; Gilbert, 1971.

<sup>568</sup> Alfonso d'Este sports a similar beard on his medal from 1492.

a few years later confirm the types of associations a beard was meant to suggest, such as notions of imperial majesty and Christian knighthood.

The chroniclers' mention of Bemoim's long beard, then, reinforced the image of him that the court was trying to project, which was that of a virile warrior and majestic prince from sub-Saharan Africa. The noteworthy length of the beard might have recalled his military defeat and poignant political situation, for it conveniently paralleled a story from Suetonius that Julius Caesar refused to shave from grief until his troops had avenged their defeat in battle.<sup>569</sup> Several decades later, around 1510, Pope Julius II similarly grew a long beard out of grief for military and political defeat, vowing not to shave again until victory had been attained.<sup>570</sup> In any case, both João II and Bemoim wore full beards, one with distinguished grey and the other distinctively long, when they shared the royal dais in Setúbal on 13 October 1488. Beards were likewise potent symbols of status and virility in North Africa and in sub-Saharan Africa. For the Muslims of North Africa, beards were connected to issues of honor and the taking of oaths, much as they were in Europe. In sub-Saharan Africa, beards were regularly considered symbolic attributes of rule, power, and authority. For instance, the stone *nomoli* and *pomdo* sculptures of heads and figures with beards are believed to represent ruling chiefs or distinguished warriors.<sup>571</sup> The Portuguese chroniclers were probably vaguely aware of such associations in sub-Saharan Africa and these would have suitably dovetailed with similar connotations in Europe.

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<sup>569</sup> Zucker, 1977.

<sup>570</sup> Starn and Partridge, 1981.

<sup>571</sup> See Chapter 4. Lamp, Frederick J., "Houses of Stones: Memorial Art of Fifteenth-Century Sierra Leone," *The Art Bulletin*, v. 65, n. 2, 1983, 219-237; Lamp, Frederick J., "Wood Figures from Sierra Leone: Implications for Historical Reconstruction," *African Arts*, v. 23, n. 2, 1990, pp. 48-103.

Resende's descriptions of the physical appearance and courtly bearing of João II and Bemoim reveal a sufficient number of similarities to indicate that they are in part stereotyped images of what sophisticated courtiers believed the ideal prince should look like and how the model prince should carry himself. Both men sport conspicuous beards and possess elegance and a gracious manner, preeminent courtly attributes. Yet, in Resende's judgment, the imposing presence and majestic air of both João II and Bemoim radiate a sense of authority and compel respect. Along these lines, Pina and Resende likewise attribute superior oratorical skills to Bemoim. The speech supposedly delivered by Bemoim before the assembled Portuguese court has understandably caused scholarly consternation and induced rightfully skeptical scholars to discredit these sources wholesale.<sup>572</sup> However, as Elbl has noted, Pina's startling comment inspired by Bemoim's rhetorical performance that "he did not seem like a black barbarian, but like a Greek prince raised in Athens," was intended to heighten admiration for Bemoim's exemplary qualities.<sup>573</sup> As Lowe has remarked, Pina was here inelegantly attempting to dissociate Bemoim from common negative perceptions of black slaves. But, as we will see, the speech Pina has Bemoim deliver should be regarded as an invention by the Pina for deliberate ideological and propaganda purposes.

After Bemoim entered the reception hall and João II walked forward to receive him, they ascended the royal dais and the room fell silent, pregnant with expectation. According to Chaves, João II spoke first to Bemoim through a now anonymous translator from sub-Saharan Africa. He welcomed the *bumi* of Jolof in courteous terms and expressed pleasure in his safe journey and arrival in Portugal. Although delighted to have

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<sup>572</sup> Russell, 1995; Lowe, 2005.

<sup>573</sup> Elbl, Ivana, "Group Identities in the Early Portuguese Overseas Expansion in Africa: Concepts and Expressions," *Portuguese Studies Review*, v. 15, n. 1-2, 2007, pp. 39-40.



the opportunity to meet Bemoim in person, João II confessed that the dreadful circumstances which necessitated his unprecedented voyage were unfortunate and disappointing. Nevertheless, Chaves affirms that João II proceeded, completely unprovoked, to address Bemoim's predicament without the Senegambian prince having yet said a word. According to Chaves's written recollection, the Portuguese king declared that God would "remedy" Bemoim's situation and then he vowed publicly to do everything in his power to support him.

In the report penned by Chaves, Bemoim only responded to João II's initial address. Contrary to Pina and Resende, he did not deliver an eloquent, moving and prolonged public account of the deplorable events which he had regrettably and unfairly suffered. In this version, the original purpose of the ceremony was not to provide a public forum for Bemoim to plead his case, persuade his audience and win support for his questionable cause. Instead, the Portuguese king intentionally designed the occasion to demonstrate his own royal magnificence and to stage his first and one of the most spectacular performances of his reign in the imperial role of "Senhor de Guiné." Chaves implies that through intermediaries João II had been in close and constant contact with Bemoim, safely ensconced at nearby Palmela, before the official ceremony of 13 October 1488 at Setúbal, and that the ceremony, following strict protocol, was meticulously scripted in advance.

Bemoim's response was immediate. Speaking through the same Jolof-speaking interpreter, he began auspiciously enough by rendering infinite thanks to God and to the Portuguese king to whom he professed his absolute devotion and loyalty. Chaves testifies that Bemoim fervently swore by his pledge to João II three times "with his nose, with his

hands, with his nerves, with his heart, etc.” This seems a curious form of oath taking not least because Chaves specifies that he swore only three times, but then mentions an open-ended series of meaningful gestures. After completing his oath of fealty, Bemoim affirmed his long-standing desire to meet João II and candidly marveled at his voyage over the Atlantic Ocean to Portugal, proclaiming the pioneering nature of his journey amongst the Jolof. The unforeseen seafaring experience was a revelation to him.

Moving on past his encounter with the sea, Bemoim next pronounced his desire to repay and serve the Portuguese king after regaining his kingdom by declaring his keen resolve to engage in battle alongside the Portuguese king against his enemies, regardless of whether they were Christian or Muslim. It is significant that Bemoim offered his services as a noble warrior to the Portuguese crown and that, by doing so, he considered his own military expertise and prowess as equal to that of any military force from Europe or Muslim North Africa. Confident of his ability successfully to undertake such a bellicose enterprise, he qualified his intended leadership role on potential battlefields as the king’s stalwart colleague and collaborator as his equal (“a paar de sj”). However, should his victorious return to Senegambia prove unattainable, Bemoim confessed his determination to reside at the Portuguese court with princely status or more precisely, in the words recorded by Chaves, as a member of the royal family, “as your relation” (“como de seu parente”).

In his version of the ceremony Chaves privileges the aristocratic ideals of noble status and knighthood, depicting Bemoim as feeling just as comfortable as a military leader on the field of battle as a grand prince gracing the sophisticated halls of court. For Chaves, Bemoim’s skill as a noble warrior and distinguished prince transcended location

and culture, for such superior talent could succeed in sub-Saharan Africa as easily as in Europe. This at least is the opinion he has Bemoim express to the Portuguese court. And although Bemoim seems to have ultimately failed militarily in Senegambia at the hands of his fellow Jolof as well as with the Portuguese, all the sources unconditionally acclaim his sensational achievements at court. To a certain extent, the universal values of elite warrior societies as well as qualities of *courtesie* and *prouesse* transcended apparently thorny issues of race and religion.<sup>574</sup> Chaves, like many other noble Portuguese knights, clearly judged, respected and bonded with Bemoim according to this chivalric scale of values.

Neither Pina nor Resende mention the opening speech made by João II, nor do they refer to the promises and pledges Bemoim supposedly proffered in Chaves's account. Instead Pina and Resende highlight lofty issues of religion, specifically conversion from Islam to Christianity, and imperial suzerainty, particularly the legitimacy of Bemoim's rule in Senegambia and the validity of João II's title of "Senhor de Guiné." For Pina and Resende, these two elevated issues of religion and international diplomacy constitute the very core of the relationship between Bemoim and João II and the purpose behind it. Certainly, these are the principal terms in which the Portuguese court wished other European courts to view the situation.

Yet following Chaves, it seems Bemoim perceived the circumstances differently. The discrepancy between the sources here is of major significance. Both Chaves and Pina were intimately involved in the assumption of the royal title "Senhor de Guiné." Chaves personally participated in the meetings of the royal council when the title was being debated and defined, and Pina was secretary to the embassy sent to the newly elected

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<sup>574</sup> Elbl, "Group Identities," 2007, p. 55; Elbl 1992, p. 196

Pope Innocent VIII in 1485 when it was first publicly proclaimed on the European diplomatic stage. Both men fully understood the significance of invoking the suzerainty in sub-Saharan Africa that the title decreed. The speech Pina eloquently puts in the mouth of Bemoim in his official royal chronicle must be seen as a forceful articulation of Portuguese imperial ideology in sub-Saharan Africa and Pina's embellished version of the ceremony as the practical embodiment and fulfillment of that policy.

Before summarizing parts of the alleged speech and transcribing others, Pina and Resende offer some general observations on Bemoim's rhetorical virtuosity, persuasive manner of presentation and vigorous style of delivery. It should be recalled that Bemoim was speaking through an interpreter throughout the address and scholars have fairly suggested that the Jolof-speaking interpreter more than Bemoim deserves credit for the successful performance and reception of the speech, if it ever even took place.<sup>575</sup> Lowe has commented on how the praise of Bemoim's oratory by the Portuguese chroniclers was intended to indicate to readers "that he had passed the test of entry into the Renaissance 'club.'"<sup>576</sup> Surely, the refined elegance, actual words and complicated ideological content of the speech Pina and Resende doubtfully have Bemoim deliver is most implausible. Yet their comment that he spoke "with great deliberation, discretion, and much gravity" ("com grande repouso, discrição e muita gravidade") should not be dismissed as complete fabrication.

It seems unlikely both from Chaves's contrary testimony and from the ideological content of the ostensible speech itself that Bemoim actually delivered an oration that resembled the one Pina and Resende attribute to him. But the argument they put forth on

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<sup>575</sup> Lowe, 2007, p. 113.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid.

his behalf sheds light on how the Portuguese court wished to articulate their imperial ideology in sub-Saharan Africa and, equally importantly, how they wished other European courts to perceive their implementation of it in practice. First, Bemoim is identified as a rightful prince of the Jolof kingdom, who practiced good government in his territory, which was manifest in its evident prosperity. By introducing Bemoim in these terms, Pina establishes the legitimacy of his rule and lawful claim to his kingdom. Consequently, his overthrow is seen to be orchestrated by deceit and treachery and portrayed correspondingly as dishonorable and unjust. In Pina's rendition, Bemoim explicitly appeals to João II as an imperial suzerain in his feudal capacity as self-appointed "Senhor de Guiné," which, Pina has Bemoim claim, obligates the Portuguese king to honor and defend the rights of his vassals in sub-Saharan Africa when they were blatantly violated. As Pina explains, Bemoim requested support from the Portuguese king in the name of justice and piety, and "principally because he was Senhor de Guiné, whose vassal he was" ("principalmente por ser senhor de Guiné, cujo vassalo era"). This feudal reasoning and emphasis on honor and justice validates João II's intervention on Bemoim's behalf and his obligation to do so. Yet it is likewise intended to demonstrate to other European courts the recognition of his title and authority by the rulers of sub-Saharan Africa.

To preempt another routine rejection from the Portuguese king on the standard religious grounds to his urgent plea for military aid, Pina has Bemoim express his fervent desire and firm resolve to convert from Islam to Christianity. According to Pina, João II was overjoyed with this sacred promise at the conclusion of his hypothetical oration. Allegedly João II was inspired to respond that such a conversion would in this world

secure Bemoim hope of assistance and “the restitution of his kingdom” as well as glory and eternal salvation in the next. The issue of conversion and subsequent missionary efforts to proselytize receive the dominant emphasis in Pina and Resende’s texts as well as in Teixeira’s oration and the letter by the Italian merchant. They show João II fulfilling one of his principal roles as “Senhor de Guiné,” which was spreading Christianity in Africa.

After the conclusion of the ceremonial reception, Bemoim was escorted to the queen’s apartments where, as planned, he met with both the queen and prince. From there, Chaves informs us, he was conducted with much pomp to the house of Vasco Queimado in Setúbal where he spent the night. On 14 October, the next day, Bemoim was again scheduled to meet with João II in rather different circumstances and with different objectives. Chaves recounts with punctilious specificity the ceremonial greetings and protocol followed, which were both more elaborate and more formal than the day before. The Portuguese king officially summoned Bemoim to the royal palace and, when he arrived, did not remove the royal cap. João II immediately asserted his authority and position and lucidly defined their newly forged relationship. The Portuguese king ordered the palace to be vacated and all sources agree that João II and his interpreter remained alone with the Jolof prince. Chaves lovingly describes the sumptuous chair João II had placed in the room for Bemoim’s prolonged and grueling interrogation. The scene is fantastic. The Portuguese king personally interrogated Bemoim at great length with an endless series of challenging questions. Chaves simply states that João II wished to speak privately with Bemoim about his business (“a falar a

seus negoceos”). Pina and Resende praise Bemoim’s adept performance during the interview. João II seems not only to have grilled Bemoim for precise information about the commercial and political situation of his own territories on the Senegal River, but also to have required much coveted comprehensive reports on activities up river and overland deep into the unfamiliar interior. Pina and Resende applaud Bemoim’s intelligence, judgment, prudence and discretion, and commend him for expertly responding to all the king’s queries “like a very wise man” (“como homem muy sabido”). Indeed, the Portuguese chroniclers approvingly testify that João II “was very satisfied” (“el-rei ficou muito contente”) with Bemoim and the valuable responses he provided to his probing questions.

After João II and Bemoim, along with the Jolof interpreter, finally emerged from their intense and evidently successful interrogation, the Portuguese king ordered the court to spend the rest of the day in extravagant celebration. Pina writes that João II held the festivities in honor of Bemoim because of the respect he had for the *bumi* of Jolof (“por respeito dele”). Resende goes further, claiming that João II organized courtly celebrations out of love for Bemoim (“por amor delle”), surely referring to the royal bond of fraternal love that was presumed to exist between princely peers, who by birth were wholly distinct from the rest of mankind.<sup>577</sup> The king arranged for a variety of standard entertainments for the court. The festivities began with the traditional bull-fighting. These were then followed by chivalric jousts and tournaments, called *canas*, the requisite highlight of court entertainment during the fifteenth century.<sup>578</sup> The evening and night

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<sup>577</sup> Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957. For African conceptions of kingship, see Northrup, 2002, p. 7; Blier, 1997, pp. 9-42.

<sup>578</sup> Keen, 1984, pp. 83-101, 200-218.

program was occupied with diverse, less violent and more elegant, amusements, such as farces, mimes and dances in the Moorish and Jewish styles. Not only did João II greatly honor Bemoim with these lavish courtly entertainments, which explicitly proclaimed the esteem in which the *bumi* of Jolof was held by the Portuguese king as well as the royal favor he enjoyed. But he also further enhanced Bemoim's status by the privileged and prominent viewing position he was accorded throughout the spectacular performances. Indeed, Bemoim sat on an elevated chair in front of the whole court directly below and in front of the king. Such visible proximity to the royal presence was a special, potent mark of favor.

However, the celebrations and performances were, much to the delight and surprise of the court, not one-sided. Bemoim's retinue rather unexpectedly put on an impressive show of their own which astonished both Resende and João II. Resende initially described the Jolof men, "honored persons" ("honrradas pessoas"), who accompanied the *bumi* of Jolof to the Portuguese court, as "very agreeable and noble men" ("muito bem despostos e gentis homens"). As Elbl has demonstrated, courtly status, martial prowess and wealth were forcefully expressed through horse ownership and skilled horsemanship in Senegambia, much as it was in Renaissance Europe.<sup>579</sup> Since Bemoim's entourage seems to have been composed of eminent figures, "men of much merit and of great esteem" ("de muita valia e grande estima"), from his inner circle, they would have been necessarily expected to possess and display expertise at horsemanship. The Portuguese court was surely already aware of the talent of Jolof riders in general, for

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<sup>579</sup> Elbl, Ivana, "The Horse in Fifteenth-Century Senegambia," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, v. 24, n. 1, 1991, pp. 85- 110; Anglo, Sydney, *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 227-70; Keen, 1984, pp. 9, 16, 23-24, 26, 224-25, 240, 245, 249.



Portuguese merchants had been providing horses to them for several decades and courtiers in the Portuguese king's employ, such as Gonçalo Coelho, would have witnessed their accomplished horsemanship first hand in Senegambia. Nevertheless, this general awareness did nothing to decrease the amazement or lessen the revelation when Bemoim's entourage performed difficult feats of horsemanship for the assembled court. With characteristic courtly hyperbole, a flabbergasted Resende avowed that the Jolof riders were "the most confident men on thoroughbreds that had ever been seen" ("os mais desenvoltos homens aa gineta que nunca foram vistos"). He proceeded to detail several of the various exploits presented, such as standing upright on the back of galloping horses and then, while running the course, moving around on horseback, leaning down, and after that standing up again. The Jolof riders also jumped from the saddle while the horses were galloping and then vaulted themselves back up onto the saddle without slowing down at all. Resende further recounts how a course was set up with eggs and small stones. The Jolof riders ran the course and, leaning down from the saddle, gently picked up all the eggs and stones. Resende assures us that they performed various other complicated deeds. Ultimately, he describes their equestrian skills and exploits as "amazing feats" ("cousas espantosas"), professing that such ability "had until that time never been seen" before in Portugal. A delighted João II, who prided himself on his own horsemanship, was so impressed that he repeatedly requested ever more displays of their horse riding capabilities ("el-rei muitas vezes fez fazer perante si"). Clearly, the Jolof aristocracy of horse-owning warriors proved their worth to the overawed Portuguese monarch. The virtuosity, martial skills and 'manly' virtues of the equestrian nobility from Senegambia were greatly admired and respected at the Portuguese court.

Lowe has commented that physical prowess, especially martial skills, “was one of the few accomplishments of black Africans that was valued” in Renaissance Europe.<sup>580</sup> She cites the performance of Bemoim’s entourage as key evidence that “African horsemanship was...acknowledged as a skill in its own right.” The Portuguese were compelled by their own experience of sub-Saharan African military strength to acknowledge the martial skills of equestrian warrior aristocracies like the Jolof in Senegambia. Indeed, they helped to support their lifestyle by trading horses for slaves. But horsemanship and martial prowess were skills which were highly valued in both Senegambia and in Portugal; they were mutually comprehensible and compatible. European chivalry was likewise founded on the values of a mounted warrior aristocracy, which viewed the possession of a horse and expertise in handling it as the principal mark of social identity.<sup>581</sup> Although Lowe observes that intellectual powers and other signs of civilization were rarely attributed to sub-Saharan Africans during the Renaissance period, the Portuguese chroniclers offer an extraordinary example of a more open perception of sub-Saharan African royalty.<sup>582</sup> They clearly emphasize Bemoim’s courtly comportment, eloquent speech and intellectual acumen over physical abilities. As Keen has remarked, *courtoisie*, the refined manners befitting the ceremony and sophistication of court life, formed the necessary complementary quality to honor and martial prowess in the

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<sup>580</sup> Lowe, 2005, p. 32

<sup>581</sup> Keen, 1984, pp. 103-104.

<sup>582</sup> For important studies of Portuguese perceptions of sub-Saharan Africans during the second half of the fifteenth century, see Horta, José da Silva, “A representacao do Africano na literature de viagens, do Senegal a Serra Leoa (1453-1508),” *Mare Liberum*, v. 2, June, 1991, pp. 209-339; Horta, José da Silva, “A imagem do Africano pelos portugueses antes dos contactos,” in *O Confronto do Olhar: O encontro dos povos na época das Navegações portuguesas, Séculos XV e XVI: Portugal, África, Ásia, América*, edited by António Luís Ferronha, Lisbon: Caminho, 1991, pp. 41-70; Horta, José da Silva, “Primeiros olhares sobre o Africano do Sara Ocidental à Serra Leoa (meados do século XV-inícios do século XVI),” in *O Confronto do Olhar*, 1991, pp. 73-126.

definition of chivalry.<sup>583</sup> Bemoim is therefore portrayed as possessing all the requisite princely virtues.

Bemoim's first two official days at the Portuguese court at Setúbal on 13 and 14 October 1488 were both exhausting and exhilarating. They were also wildly successful from the perspective of both parties. However, the court ceremonies and festivities came to an end on the third day, 15 October. Chaves informs us that on this final day he and another courtier, the *estribeiro-mor* (royal equerry), Álvaro da Cunha, were summoned to the royal palace by João II. They met with the king to draw up the acts of the reception, to record the promises João II made in his speech, and to formalize the alliance as well as the details of the intense, confidential discussion between the *bumi* of Jolof and the Portuguese king. Chaves proudly claims to have personally drafted the documents with the king. João II then convened the royal council to discuss the matter of Bemoim. Chaves affirms that the king and his royal council decided on several resolutions, but his text breaks off at precisely this point. We do not know the opinions, proposals or objections voiced at this session, whether the royal council supported or opposed the king's proposed plans. Nevertheless, it is significant that João II's decisions regarding Bemoim and the Portuguese presence in Senegambia were official measures taken in conjunction with the royal council. This makes the conclusion of the entire enterprise all the more shocking.

##### 5. Bemoim and the Conversion to Christianity

It is impossible to know whether Bemoim initially willingly volunteered to reject his Muslim faith and to convert to Christianity in order to obtain military support from

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<sup>583</sup> Keen, 1984, pp. 2, 7, 11, 21, 33.

the Portuguese or whether João II took advantage of Bemoim's powerlessness and inability to refuse aid in order to impose conversion on him. Pina and Resende would have us believe that Bemoim experienced an epiphany and eventually underwent a conversionary experience. Regardless of whether conversion resulted from political efficacy on either side or it derived from meaningful religious experience, there is no doubt that the Portuguese court wished to use this element of the Bemoim episode to greatest advantage for prestige and propaganda purposes in Europe. Indeed, they seem to have succeeded brilliantly in this part of the endeavor.

After Bemoim's festive, pivotal two days at court, he seems to have spent some time receiving instruction in Christian doctrine. Pina and Resende confess that João II thought it best for Bemoim to learn some basic tenets of the Christian religion before being baptized. Pina, however, implies that Bemoim's devotion to the Muslim faith was intrinsically feeble, since it probably resulted, he writes, not from sincere conviction, but merely from proximity to and intercourse with the Berber-speaking Idzagen or Azenegue. Indeed this was a long-standing view at the Portuguese court. On All Saints Day, 1 November 1488, Bemoim and his entourage attended their first Christian mass in the choir of the church of Santa María de Todos os Santos. The stage was set for Bemoim, for this was a particularly elaborate ceremony personally attended by the king in full regalia. The chroniclers contend that, at the critical moment of the mass, at the elevation of the host, Bemoim instantly converted, convinced, we are told, that Christianity was the true religion.

The process of conversion and baptism accelerated rapidly after this very public and histrionic epiphany. For the next two days João II dined in state in full regalia with

Bemoim. Such deliberately formal and opulent state functions ostentatiously signaled the advent of another momentous court ceremony. The lavish banquets João II hosted to herald Bemoim's conversion included sumptuous decoration of the dining hall as well as extravagant performances and entertainments, all indispensable elements of the princely splendor and conviviality banquets were intended to embody during the fifteenth century in Europe.<sup>584</sup> The body of the king was clothed in the most luxurious garments, while exquisite brocaded velvets were draped behind the king as the royal cloth of honor and canopy. The royal presence was fittingly framed by plush fabrics and textiles. Moreover, the walls of the dining hall were hung with tapestries and the richest silver plate and tableware was employed in serving the royal dishes and delicacies. To mark the banquets as official state events, João II ordered the highest ceremonial court officials, such as the Kings of Arms and the bearers of the silver maces, to attend. In addition to this display of splendor, João II provided the pageantry and spectacle of minstrels, dances and music as the evening entertainment. Both Pina and Resende highlight these two banquets as exemplary of João II's obsession with following proper courtly protocol for ceremonies and with projecting an ideal image of royal majesty.

The baptism itself seems to have occurred under peculiar circumstances.<sup>585</sup> On 3 November Bemoim and six of the principal figures of his entourage were baptized as

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<sup>584</sup> For contemporary conceptions of princely splendor and conviviality, see Pontano, Giovanni, *I trattati delle virtù sociali: De liberalitate, De beneficentia, De magnificentia, De splendore, De conviventia*, translated by Francesco Tateo, Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1965. For banquets, see Normore, Christina, *Feasting the Eye in Valois Burgundy*, Ph.D. University of Chicago, 2008; Jeanneret, Michel, *A feast of words: banquets and table talk in the Renaissance*, translated by Jeremy Whiteley and Emma Hughes, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. 39-61.

<sup>585</sup> The problem of knowing when to make conversions of non-Christian rulers public or of recognizing the need to keep them private continued to plague the Portuguese for decades in Africa and in Asia. For a detailed study of these issues, see Strathern, Alan, *Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth-Century Sri Lanka: Portuguese Imperialism in a Buddhist Land*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Strathern, Alan, "The Conversion of Rulers in Portuguese-Era Sri Lanka," in *Re-exploring the links: history*

Christians in the queen's apartments "at two hours of night." The timing of the ceremony at first seems odd, though neither Pina nor Resende think it unusual. Padre Henrique Pinto Rema believes, I think correctly, that the baptism actually took place in early evening at two hours after sunset and not at the curiously late hour of 2:00 A.M. as most scholars generally assume with disturbing implications.<sup>586</sup> In either case, it would seem that the chroniclers stressed the exact place and time of baptism as if they were recording the birth of new Christian souls just as one records the birth of a new child. Although the queen was famously fervent in her Christian devotion, it is not explained why the baptisms, the supposed climax of the Bemoim episode, were conducted in the privacy of her apartments, as opposed to the king's residence or a church, when the other courtly ceremonies honoring Bemoim were executed with such elaborate, public fanfare.

Bemoim was blessed in his Christian endeavor with six exalted godparents, including the king and queen, the Prince Afonso and the Duke of Beja, an unnamed "comissário do papa," who conveniently happened to be at the Portuguese court, and the Bishop of Tangiers. The baptism itself was officiated by the Bishop of Ceuta, the Italian humanist Justo Baldino, who had been the king's tutor. Predictably, Bemoim adopted the new name of João in reverence to the king and as an indication of his desire to follow his patron into the ranks of royalty and to become the King of Jolof. However, it was customary in the fifteenth century for converts to take on the name of their sponsors. For instance, Jewish converts to Christianity in England typically assumed the name of the

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*and constructed histories between Portugal and Sri Lanka*, edited by Jorge Flores, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007, pp. 127-143.

<sup>586</sup> Rema, Padre Henrique Pinto, "Baptismo de príncipe jalofo em 1488 na corte de D. João II e o método missionário na época dos Descobrimientos," *Congresso Internacional Bartolomeu Dias e a sua época*, Porto: Universidade do Porto; Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimientos Portugueses, v. 4, 1989, pp. 495-522.

reigning monarch who technically acted as their patron. The presence of the pope's representative, who in the chronicles appears on the scene for the first time as a godparent to Bemoim, is significant in determining the staging of the events as well as their textual representation.

In his chronicle, Pina emphasizes the religious elements of the Bemoim episode. The title and first sentence of his chapter concentrate on the theme of conversion. Pointedly, in Pina's description of the reception ceremony, he has João II respond to Bemoim's pleas and offer his unmitigated support only after Bemoim proclaims his resolve to convert to Christianity. He relates, at some length, Bemoim's epiphany while at mass and subsequent baptism ceremony. Pina's emphasis on religion cannot be easily dismissed as a self-righteous façade, for as P.E.H. Hair has demonstrated, Pina openly celebrated João II's blatantly secular, commercial and political motivations for constructing the fort of São Jorge da Mina in modern Ghana in 1481.<sup>587</sup> Yet the discrepancies with Chaves' text should not be forgotten. Certain elements of the chronicles of Pina and Resende, especially the extended oration they fabricate, belong to the realm of ideology and representation.

This strategy was evidently orchestrated from within the Portuguese court itself, perhaps emanating directly from the king. Not only was the papal commissioner appointed as godfather to Bemoim, but João II had a letter written to the pope in Bemoim's name, explaining his circumstances and manner of conversion. It is thought that the letter was composed in Latin by Pina.<sup>588</sup> In addition to the letter to the pope, the importance of Bemoim's conversion was effectively disseminated and seized by the

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<sup>587</sup> Hair, 1994.

<sup>588</sup> Russell, 1995, p. 159.

popular imagination. On 20 November 1488, just a few weeks after Bemoim's conversion, an Italian merchant residing in Lisbon, Paolo d'Olivieri, sent an ecstatic letter to his uncle Sandro di Paolo Pagagnotti in Florence.<sup>589</sup> According to d'Olivieri, Bemoim, who he believed to be "re di Giloffo," had traveled to the Portuguese court with his royal retinue in order to receive the Christian faith and to return to Senegambia with various ecclesiastical figures who would then spread Christianity throughout his territories. After mentioning Bemoim's baptism, d'Olivieri affirms that in response to Bemoim's purely spiritual requests, João II had prepared twelve ships and over 300 men, mostly priests and monks, to sail to Senegambia to evangelize and to construct churches and other structures necessary "to minister the divine cult." In d'Olivieri's view, Bemoim's sole purpose in visiting the Portuguese court was to obtain the requisite means "to make all of that black sect return to the Christian faith...and those who will not come back will die" ("fare tornare alla fede christiana tutta quella setta nera...e chi non vorrà morrà"). D'Olivieri boasted that the entire affair was "the most wonderful thing that had ever been heard, worth of great remembrance and of immense fame for this kingdom..." ("la più mirabile chosa che mmai s'udisse, dengia di grandissima memoria e ffama per questo rengnio..."). No mention is made in the letter of Bemoim's military and political predicament or of the primary objective of the embassy to secure arms and naval support.

The conviction that Bemoim was the legitimate King of Jolof ("re di Giloffo") and that his sojourn at the Portuguese court was a bona fide "miraculous occurrence" ("chosa miracholosa"), focused exclusively on religion, did not derive from d'Olivieri's personal interpretation. In fact, these very ideas feature prominently in the renowned

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<sup>589</sup> Zafarana, Zelina, "Per la storia religiosa di Firenze nel Quattrocento," *Studi Medievali*, v. 9, 1968, pp. 1109-1110.



oration later delivered at court in March 1489 by the Royal Chancellor of Portugal. Unlike the foreign merchant from Italy, D. João Teixeira, the royal chancellor, belonged to Portugal's intellectual and political elite. Teixeira was a close personal friend of the illustrious Jewish humanist Isaac Abravanel and maintained unusually intimate ties with the Italian humanist Angelo Poliziano.<sup>590</sup> Not only did he exchange elegant correspondence in Latin with Poliziano, but Teixeira's three sons lived and studied for many years in Poliziano's household in Florence. Before assuming the position of chancellor, Teixeira had become a doctor of law, engaged in high level diplomacy and earned a reputation for his interest in Italian humanism and his rhetorical skills.

The ceremony staged for the elevation of D. Pedro de Meneses (1425-99), a member of the royal council and former governor of Ceuta, to the rank of Marquis of Vila Real was closely coupled in the minds of contemporaries with the reception of Bemoim the previous autumn by virtue of their unparalleled extravagance and luxury.<sup>591</sup> But this unsurpassed splendor, which united them outwardly, was intended to signal much deeper ideological connections as well. While the ceremony in honor of Bemoim showcased João II's majesty in his role as the imperial suzerain "Senhor de Guiné" and was directed at a broad international audience, including other European courts and Senegambian states, the ceremony in honor of Meneses celebrated João II's majesty as sovereign and targeted the restricted internal audience of Portuguese nobility. By promoting Meneses to the title of marquis, second only to duke, João II made him the

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<sup>590</sup> *Isaac Abravanel: Letters*, edited by Cedric Cohen Skalli, Walter de Gruyter, 2007, pp. 41-49, 58, 70, 119; Netanyahu, Benzion, *Don Isaac Abravanel, statesman and philosopher*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.

<sup>591</sup> Mendonça, 1995, pp. 376-380.

highest ranking nobleman outside of the royal family.<sup>592</sup> Only the Prince Afonso and the queen's brother and eventual heir to the throne, D. Manuel, the Duke of Beja, ranked above him. No other nobleman held the title of marquis and D. Manuel was the only duke in the realm. In this ceremony, João II distinguished Meneses from all other nobleman and defined his rank and determined his precedence. This action exalting a single nobleman reflected the glory and power of the king. It also paralleled the reception of Bemoim who, in exchange for loyalty, good service and obedience (i.e. conversion), publicly received the king's special favor, had his princely status explicitly recognized, and obtained considerable military support in his endeavor to regain territory in Senegambia. In both instances, João II forcefully demonstrated his unique ability and unrivaled power as king. Together they constitute the ceremonial climax of his reign.<sup>593</sup>

Teixeira's oration is divided into two parts.<sup>594</sup> The first half praises João II and, like a mirror of princes, espouses the virtues an ideal prince should possess. The second half of the oration reviews the career and qualities of Meneses, which justify his elevation to marquis. It has not before been noticed that the Bemoim episode appears prominently in the first half of the oration in praise of João II. Teixeira commends the Portuguese king for his unprecedented success in overseas expansion and discovery. In particular, Teixeira claims, the construction of fortresses and the erection of *padrões*, stone pillars capped by crosses, deserve special admiration. For Teixeira, the Bemoim affair epitomizes the primary purpose and principal benefit of overseas expansion, which is the salvation of souls in Africa:

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<sup>592</sup> Chaves, 1984, pp. 141-150.

<sup>593</sup> Mendonça, 1995, pp. 376-80. For discussion of D. Pedro de Meneses, see Chapter 4.

<sup>594</sup> Teixeira, João, *Oração que teue Ioam Teyxeira chancarel mór destes Reynos...*, Coimbra: Ioam Alvarez, 1562 (Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Lisbon, RES. 80//2 V).

“By which discovery the bodies and souls, which were previously black, but now with the dye of holy baptism, which was brought to them through this Most Christian King, they have become clean and white [*alua*], in which cause the Redeemer of life receives much benefit. As we have seen [in practice] some days ago when Your Highness converted [*fez*] the King of the Jolofs to Christianity, and we hope that this most holy purpose with little pomp [*aparato*] is followed by an exceedingly great multitude and that many and very powerful kings from those parts [of Guinea], disdaining the long voyages and great toils of the sea, will send ambassadors with much haste to meet and see you, because those [kings] who cannot see you will at least know from those [ambassadors] who come to [meet] Your Highness how great your religion and virtue are.”

Ironically, the most striking metaphor employed by Teixeira, the eminent humanist, directly evokes ancient and medieval notions equating the color black with darkness and ignorance, a concept which was then applied to the character of black Africans and used to justify slavery.<sup>595</sup> Teixeira manipulates this faulty logic to his purpose of exalting the benefits of conversion to Christianity and of emphasizing the salvation of souls as the necessary objective of overseas expansion. Through baptism, Teixeira writes, the black bodies and souls of sub-Saharan Africans become clean and

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<sup>595</sup> For attitudes towards the issue of black slavery in Portugal see, Sweet, James H., “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, v. 54, n. 1, 1997, pp. 143-166; Russell-Wood, A. J. R., “Before Columbus: Portugal’s African Prelude to the Middle Passage and Contribution to Discourse on Race and Slavery,” in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, edited by Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995, pp. 134-68; Russell-Wood, A. J. R., “Iberian Expansion and the Issue of Black Slavery: Changing Portuguese Attitudes, 1440-1770,” *The American Historical Review*, v. 83, n. 1, 1978, pp. 16-42. For broader European perspectives on black slavery during the Medieval and Renaissance periods, see Medeiros, Francois de, *L’Occident et l’Afrique, XIIIe-XVe siècle: images et représentations*, Paris: Editions Karthala, 1985; Goldenberg, David M., *The Curse of Ham. Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003; Braude, Benjamin, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, v. 15, n. 1, 1997, pp. 103-42; Evans, William McKee, “From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea: The Strange Odyssey of the ‘Sons of Ham’,” *American Historical Review*, v. 85, 1980, pp. 15-43.

white, that is, they are purified and enlightened by accepting Christianity, as in the example of Bemoim.<sup>596</sup>

Teixeira expresses an aristocratic manner of thinking, pervasive at the Portuguese court, according to which the world was viewed from the perspective of court ceremony and the actions and decisions of the elite. In order to introduce Christianity to sub-Saharan Africa, Teixeira argues, kings and other heads of state from Africa must first convert to Christianity. Since most rulers would likely be unable to travel to the Portuguese court, Teixeira recommends that they send ambassadors whose purpose would be to meet and speak with the king directly. Presumably, the idea was that these dignitaries from Africa would be so overwhelmed by the inimitable splendor, magnificence and virtue of João II as a Christian king that they would be persuaded to abandon their own religious beliefs and practices and to convert to Christianity. It is noteworthy that Teixeira fails to mention the existence of religious conviction or doctrine and that the institution of the church along with its ecclesiastical figures is entirely neglected. Teixeira evinces no interest in sending missionaries to Africa and shows no concern for the salvation of the souls of those outside the ruling elite. He places the onus of conversion on sub-Saharan Africans who are admonished to brave the arduous ocean voyage to Portugal. As Elbl and others have noted, the Portuguese crown showed little awareness or willingness to acknowledge that conversion from the predominant religion to an alien or inimical one would gravely threaten the authority of most rulers in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>597</sup>

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<sup>596</sup> For analysis of similar kinds of thinking, encapsulated in the the Early Modern English expression “washing the Ethiopie white,” see Hall, Kim, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995.

<sup>597</sup> Elbl 1992, p. 181.

Teixeira's position, officially proclaimed in the presence of the king, accurately reflects the general policy of the Portuguese court. Teixeira's focus in the oration on court ceremony and the reception of ambassadors from sub-Saharan Africa as the most effective means of enhancing the power, prestige and glory of the Portuguese king in Europe is consistent with other manifestations of João II's policy of peaceful conquest, a plan which Teixeira, as royal chancellor, probably helped to formulate and certainly had to articulate and convey to other European courts. However, Teixeira's *précis* ignores the priests and monks who did in fact travel to Senegambia with Bemoim. This omission betrays Teixeira's indifference to the souls of those without power, while likewise revealing his courtly view of the world, a perspective that both permitted the institution of slavery and enabled the celebration and honoring of Bemoim. The conversion of Bemoim meant far more to a room full of Portuguese noblemen than the spiritual health of the masses in Europe or Senegambia. In the oration, Teixeira suggests that João II's majesty would convert those ambassadors from Africa who visit the court and that African kings would be charmed by its indirect brilliance, receiving only second-hand reports of it from envoys.

Because he was the only prince from sub-Saharan Africa to visit the Portuguese court and to convert to Christianity in Europe, Bemoim embodied this political and religious strategy for Teixeira. By referring to Bemoim as King of Jolof ("Rey dos Gelofoss"), Teixeira assumes the success of the military expedition sent to Sengambia and consequently enhances João II's supposed authority as "Senhor de Guiné" through imperial and spiritual suzerainty. But Teixeira also emphasized the religious aspects of João II's relationship with Bemoim because the Portuguese had not won any significant

military triumphs in sub-Saharan Africa. Instead this was their best claim to glory. On the other hand, D. Pedro de Meneses, who descended from the first Governor of Ceuta, was celebrated as exemplifying the Portuguese tradition of noble knights engaged in Reconquest or crusade against Muslims in North Africa. In the oration, Bemoim represented João II's spiritual triumph in sub-Saharan Africa, while Meneses embodied the martial honor and valor exhibited in North Africa.

## 6. Knighthood and Nobility

Four days after Bemoim's baptism, on 7 November 1488, in an eminently chivalric ceremony, João II personally dubbed Bemoim to knighthood, bestowed official noble status on him, and awarded him his own specially designed coat of arms, incorporating prominent elements of the Portuguese king's own royal coat of arms. Bemoim instantly became a full-fledged, high-ranking member of the elite Portuguese knightly nobility. Henceforth in Portuguese documents, Bemoim invariably received the lofty, honorific title of "Dom," signifying princely status in Europe. Yet despite his recently acquired Christian name and aristocratic title, his princely Jolof designation was never removed. He frequently appears in documents with the curious amalgamation of European and Senegambian markers of elite status as "D. João Bemoim."

The Portuguese king had made Bemoim's favored status abundantly clear in the traditional heraldic, knightly and noble terms of European chivalry, which emphasized his *courtoisie*, military prowess and princely status in Senegambia. In the fifteenth century, formal dubbing ceremonies to knighthood were complex and subtle.<sup>598</sup> They were dignified affairs and their repercussions were consequential and far-reaching. The

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<sup>598</sup> Keen, 1984, pp. 64-82.

full implications and deeper meanings of Bemoim's dubbing to knighthood by João II have not been appreciated by scholars who, following Huizinga, unfairly dismiss it as an empty, exaggerated and polite veneer.<sup>599</sup>

By conferring knighthood on Bemoim, João II officially recognized and celebrated Bemoim's superior military prowess and horsemanship skills. He equally acknowledged and endorsed his *courtoisie*, his refined behavior, courtly manners and deportment. To be sure, courtly virtue and martial honor were obligatory qualities for knighthood, but there were fundamental political issues involved here as well. Typically, knighthood entailed the assumption of vassalage and allegiance.<sup>600</sup> Consequently, the close association between knights and those who dubbed them has been likened to a kinship relationship.<sup>601</sup> Conventionally, knights received horses and arms as gifts at dubbing ceremonies. In exchange, knights became vassals of the man who dubbed them, frequently swearing fealty and paying homage to him. This was precisely João II's purpose. By knighting Bemoim, he was permitted to provide him with the arms he had desperately requested. Likewise, the freshly dubbed Bemoim instantly became a vassal of the Portuguese king. Bemoim was now doubly dependent on João II, as suzerain in Senegambia and now as sovereign and godparent in Europe. Not only had Bemoim declared himself to be the subject of João II in his capacity of "Senhor de Guiné," but he also became his vassal according to European feudal conceptions of hierarchy and knighthood. João II diplomatically justified his military intervention in Senegambia on two levels which excluded possible interference from other Europeans.

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<sup>599</sup> Huizinga, 1996, pp. 30-155; Keen, 1984, pp. 3, 219-20.

<sup>600</sup> Keen, 1984, pp. 64-82; Keen, Maurice, "Chivalry and the Aristocracy," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History: c. 1300-1415*, v. 6, edited by Michael Jones, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 209-221

<sup>601</sup> Keen, 1984, pp. 64-82; Ibid.

After the ceremony of dubbing to knighthood, João II had Bemoim make the relationship between knighthood and vassalage explicit. Like all noble subjects of the realm, Bemoim was required to swear obedience to the Portuguese king (“*deu obediência e fez menagem a el-rei*”). This was of particular significance in Portugal for in the early 1480s João II had revised the form this oath taking and obedience was to take, and this had caused much strife and dissension among the aristocracy.<sup>602</sup> Bemoim was now a noble in Africa and in Europe. None of the chroniclers mention the presence of an interpreter for Bemoim’s oath swearing ceremony, and, presumably, for the oath to be valid Bemoim had to speak the words himself. Once again both Pina and Resende praise his rhetorical skill and impressive voice. After the oath taking ceremony, the remainder of Bemoim’s entourage, totaling another twenty-four persons, was baptized in the Casa dos Contos in Setúbal.

The simple yet symbolically charged coat of arms João II conferred on Bemoim consisted of a solid red field with a large golden cross as the principal charge.<sup>603</sup> (Fig. 3.1) The surrounding silver border, occupied by eight blue “*quinas*” or shields, each adorned with five silver bezants, was taken directly from the Portuguese royal coat of arms where each “*quina*” represents one of the five shields from the legendary battle of Ourique. At this famous battle of the Reconquest against the Muslims, Afonso Henriques, the Burgundian founder of Portugal, had five shields shatter successively in his hands as enemy weapons were hurled against him. This miraculous defense was attributed to divine intervention. In his Oration of Obedience to Innocent VIII delivered by Vasco Lucena de Fernandes in Rome in 1485, João II had the symbolism of the Portuguese

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<sup>602</sup> For the ceremony, see Chaves, 1984, pp. 105-109; Mendonça, 1995, pp. 195-208.

<sup>603</sup> For heraldry, see Keen, 1984, pp. 125-42.



royal coat of arms explained in detail. According to João II's interpretation, the "quinas" directly evoke the divine protection enjoyed by the Portuguese crown as well as its crusader mission as a realm founded on the military defeat of Muslims and concomitant expansion of Christianity. The significance of these blue escutcheons charged with silver bezants is heightened by the association in heraldry of blue with loyalty. The conspicuous large central cross on Bemoim's coat of arms obviously refers to his conversion, while the choice of gold color alludes to his *noblesse*. His princely status and royal aspirations are manifest in the European royal crown with a cross capping the arms in strict imitation of the rules of heraldry governing the armorial bearings of European sovereigns. The red field also probably connotes military prowess.

In this way, the Portuguese King of Arms designed armorial bearings for Bemoim which communicated a somewhat ambiguous message. The gold cross and royal crown proclaim Bemoim's princely stature in Europe even though this status derived directly from his position in the royal family of Jolof in Senegambia; yet no reference is anywhere made to his African origins. In fact, the "quinas" located in the borders pronounce Bemoim's close affiliation with the Portuguese crown, confusingly comprising an alliance of equals between himself and João II as well as his vassalage relationship, which had been formalized after his dubbing ceremony. He is pronounced a Christian king by the crown with a cross. Yet the royal crown refers to his quest to assume the title of King of Jolof, a goal which could be accomplished only through the military prowess signified by the red field. The King of Arms successfully designed a coat of arms for Bemoim which clearly communicated the principal points of his story as João II wished it to be represented to other Europeans in the traditional noble language of

heraldry. This seamlessly incorporated Bemoim into the culture of European courts and made their version of his complicated story lucid and comprehensible.

### 7. A Threatening Armada, A Futile Fort and a Scandalous Murder

Bemoim's baptism, the conferral of knighthood and a coat of arms, and his oath of loyalty and assumption of vassal status completed the elaborate series of ceremonies João II had planned for the Senegambian prince. The chronicles state that the Latin letter, grandiosely summarizing all that had so rapidly occurred, was sent to the pope at the conclusion of these "miraculous" events. Bemoim and his recently converted entourage were now fully prepared to return from exile to the Senegal River to reclaim their lost territory and to secure his title.

In his typical deadpan manner, Pina affirms that João II only now agreed to grant Bemoim the "aid and assistance" ("socorro e ajuda") he had so urgently requested several weeks previously at his formal reception at court. Both Pina and Resende claim that this royal support took the form of an intimidating armada of twenty caravels with the influential nobleman Pero Vaz da Cunha, known as "o Bisagudo," "one-eyed" or "scar face," appointed as captain.<sup>604</sup> Indeed, on 15 November, barely more than a week after the dubbing ceremony, the royal bureaucracy began to generate documents ordering the organization of this impressive armada. These records, which account for the presence of 320 men on the various ships, suggest that the number of caravels in the armada was

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<sup>604</sup> Since other member's of Pero Vaz's family were also referred to as Bisagudo, it is possible that it did not literally mean that Pero Vaz specifically had lost one eye.

probably closer to fourteen than to the twenty counted by Pina and Resende, although allowance should be made for possible loss of documents.<sup>605</sup>

The objective of the sizeable armada, quickly organized, was three-fold. The single-minded purpose of the prolonged interview between João II and Bemoim, along with their Jolof interpreter, held on 14 October, began to crystallize in material form. Certainly, the primary goal of the armada, the one which made the other two permissible, was to restore Bemoim. Nevertheless, these other two objectives reveal the extent of the concessions Bemoim made in order to obtain the support of imposing military force. First, Bemoim allowed the construction of a permanent Portuguese fort at the mouth of the Senegal River. He agreed to surrender any claim to control over this fort in future, ensuring it would remain in possession of the Portuguese. Secondly, Bemoim permitted the active, large-scale presence of Portuguese missionaries and the construction of permanent religious structures on his territories. João II's justifications and motivations for undertaking this major military and missionary enterprise were varied. He was pursuing political, strategic, commercial and religious goals.

Following a practice cleverly devised in the early 1480s for the construction of the fort of São Jorge da Mina, João II had the majority of the stone and wood elements of the fort cut and prepared in advance in Portugal.<sup>606</sup> The building material, along with skilled carpenters and masons, was boarded on the caravels and shipped wholesale to the Senegal in order to accelerate the construction of the fort. Not only did this ingenious method protect against the lack of suitable building material on site, but it also enabled rapid construction of the fort before attack from hostile local leaders could prevent it or

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<sup>605</sup> Teixeira da Mota, 1971, pp. 18-30.

<sup>606</sup> Pina, 1989, pp. 6-11.

before the extinction of the labor force from the fatal tropical diseases to which Europeans were susceptible.

João II had gained Bemoim's acquiescence to the construction of the fort at the mouth of the Senegal River, a position then believed to be of enormous strategic and commercial value. Pina specifies that the fort "was not given to the said Bemoim, but was to belong to the king forever." This new fortress would be conveniently located between the established Portuguese forts of Arguim to the north and Mina to the south.<sup>607</sup> Pina admits João II's secular and commercial interests in constructing the fort on the Senegal, just as he had done when discussing the foundation of Mina.<sup>608</sup> Indeed, Pina comes close to making these material motivations superior to the religious concerns surrounding Bemoim's conversion, which he had earlier so fervently described at some length. A Portuguese fort on the Senegal would protect and contribute to the already profitable local trade with the Jolof, particularly the lucrative, large volume trade in slaves. However, privileged access to the gold trade and fairs located in the interior seems to have been the overriding factor. As Pina writes,

"One of the foremost, primary reasons which motivated the king [to send] this armada and principally [to order] the construction of the fortress at the entrance of this river was the certainty, which he had, that the said river, penetrating deep into the interior, reached the cities of Timbuktu and of Mombare, in which cities there is found the most profitable gold trade and gold markets in the world..."<sup>609</sup>

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<sup>607</sup> Fonseca, 2005, pp. 101.

<sup>608</sup> This episode has been exhaustively analyzed by Hair, 1994.

<sup>609</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 72: "E uma das causas mais principais que moveram el-rei para esta armada e principalmente para o edificação da fortaleza na entrada deste rio foi a certidão que tinha de o ditto rio, bem metido no sertão, vir para a cidade de Tombucutu e para Mombare, em que são os mais ricos tratos e ferias de ouro que há no mundo..."

It is clear that João II had obtained this precious information directly from Bemoim during their intense, extended conversation in October. To be sure, the Portuguese had been actively cultivating and promoting diplomatic and commercial relations with the Jolof in the areas between the Senegal and Gambia rivers for several decades, since the 1450s, and were familiar with and deeply interested in tapping into the substantial river trade and gaining greater access to gold. But Bemoim seems to have provided João II with more specifically useful information than the Portuguese had previously acquired. For instance, Bemoim seems to have discussed the Mossi people with João II, firing his imagination with the distant hope of finding Christians or even Prester John himself. Indeed, João II immediately embarked on an ambitious campaign of sending various diplomats and envoys, who traveled extensively throughout the unknown interior of West Africa. Regular trade was conducted at Tucorol, up the Senegal River, ambassadors were sent to the Emperor or Mansa of Mali, to Timbuktu and to the ruler or Askiya of the Songhay Empire. As a result of their relationship with Bemoim, the Portuguese were able to familiarize themselves more knowledgeably with the states and commerce of the West African interior.

The construction and defense of forts in sub-Saharan Africa were integral to João II's comprehensive policy of overseas expansion, although they were persistently controversial and João II's various proposals were often vigorously opposed by the royal council. These forts were intended to benefit Portuguese commerce by facilitating greater potential profit and providing indispensable security partly from Africans, but mostly from the intrusion of other Europeans.<sup>610</sup> With a permanent foothold on the mainland of sub-Saharan Africa, in carefully chosen strategic locations, the Portuguese could more

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<sup>610</sup> Hair, 1994, p. 5; Elbl, 1992, p. 176

easily explore the coast and investigate additional trading networks and opportunities.<sup>611</sup>

The Portuguese presence would also enable the creation of more extensive diplomatic alliances with sub-Saharan African states and facilitate the establishment of regular contact and lasting relations with the interior.

However, beyond promoting reliable and lucrative trade, forging friendships and alliances and creating bonds of patronage and protection, these forts, like the one planned for the Senegal River, would be vital to missionary activity and the formation of Christian communities in Africa. Indeed, the oration delivered to the pope in 1485 made the explicit connection between the fort at Mina and the spreading of Christianity in the surrounding areas. Likewise, in his oration of 1489 Teixeira repeated this fundamental ideological tenet and directly linked the setting up of *padrões*, “*cruzes & outros sinaes*,” the construction of forts and the consequent conversion and salvation of Africans.

These were João II’s commercial, martial and religious objectives when the substantial armada of fourteen to twenty *caravels*, “this armada of Dom João de Bemoim” (“*esta armada de dom Joham bemoym*”), left Portugal, after much anxious delay caused by inclement weather, soon after 28 January 1489. This last dated document accounts for the presence of at least 320 men on the armada and Resende underlines the fact that the *caravels* took much artillery on board. It is unclear how much artillery was intended for the fort and how much was to remain on the *caravels* and to be used fighting on behalf of Bemoim. Both Pina and Resende testify that the most senior figure on the mission, the “the most principal person” (“*pessoa mais principal*”), was “*mestre Álvaro, pregador de el-rei*,” the king’s own highly respected Dominican preacher. Many other religious figures accompanied him in his ambitious missionary activity. The unprecedented size of

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<sup>611</sup> Elbl, 1992, pp. 176-179.

the armada and the stature of the figures appointed to it demonstrate the importance of the mission.

The number of ships and soldiers assigned specifically to assist Bemoim is unknown. Whatever the amount, we know what Bemoim was willing to concede—a permanent Portuguese fort on the Senegal as well as conversion and the presence of Christian missions—in order to receive it. However, it seems that Bemoim was to remain with the captain Pero Vaz da Cunha and the Portuguese fleet until the fort was constructed. Perhaps the Portuguese were to fight for Bemoim only after they were safely ensconced in their new fort. We know that several additional caravels set sail for the Senegal River in April 1489 and these might have been intended as reinforcements.<sup>612</sup> Whatever the case, as pretender to the throne, Bemoim seems to have garnered little immediate support from his former Jolof subjects in the bitter dynastic struggles there.

Ivana Elbl claims that João II proposed to restore Bemoim to his lawfully inherited estates but not to his former office.<sup>613</sup> This seems to be a modern scholarly distinction. The sources clearly state that Bemoim was to be fully restored to his kingdom and after his departure for Senegambia, the Royal Chancellor Teixeira publicly referred to him in an official capacity as King, “Rey dos Gelofoss,” implying that the Portuguese believed Bemoim would successfully attempt to win the office of *Buurba Jolof*. In addition, the royal crown surmounting his coat of arms explicitly proclaims his royal title and claims to the office of king. Moreover, the map from circa 1489 attributed to Henricus Martellus, now in the British Library (Add. Mss. 15760), includes a legend at the Senegal River which reads, “don giouai bemu rex cenage e bicigeri expianos nouos.”

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<sup>612</sup> Teixeira da Mota, 1971, p. 26.

<sup>613</sup> Elbl, 1992, p. 198.

Like the letter written by Paolo d'Olivieri, the map both describes Bemoim as king ("rex cenage") and emphasizes his conversion to Christianity ("expianos novos"). This inaccurate information was surely deliberately disseminated by the Portuguese court. As Russell remarked, the chroniclers were probably prone to inflate Bemoim's importance and status in order to enhance João II's prestige for having acquired such a magnificent ally and vassal. Yet it would reflect poorly in equal measure on the Portuguese king if he failed to restore Bemoim, and Teixeira's statement reveals that the Portuguese court actively propagated the belief that they were supporting Bemoim in his quest to become king.

Quite unexpectedly Pina and Resende affirm that the captain Pero Vaz da Cunha entered the Senegal River with Bemoim and the full armada, but that he soon stabbed Bemoim to death with his own hands on board his ship. This harrowing action shocked the chroniclers and the Portuguese court. It continues to haunt modern scholars, who have offered a variety of bemused explanations. In their chronicles, Pina and Resende, echoed later by Barros, seem to form a reasonable consensus on what transpired on the Senegal. However, their texts become evasive and cagey when describing the outrage which erupted at the Portuguese court upon receiving the appalling news and most especially when trying, weakly and reluctantly, to rationalize the conspicuous lack of punishment of the principal perpetrator. Both writers effectively convey João II's initial fury as well as the frustration at his own incapacity to react in an appropriate manner.

Presumably, Pina and Resende were privy to the information conveyed to the king and to his reaction to it. They were also likely aware of the circumstances constricting his potential range of action and forcing his distasteful, improper leniency. Most scholars,



such as Russell, Pagden and Lowe, have viewed this murder and “failure to punishment regicide” as proof of racism and the inability of Europeans to take sub-Saharan Africans seriously despite the inflated rhetoric and lionization at court.<sup>614</sup> Others, like Hair, have suggested that the Portuguese doubted Bemoim’s commitment to Christianity and suspected he would be of only slight usefulness and, by implication, would perhaps plague them later as a nuisance.<sup>615</sup> Another view, propounded by Ann Wroe, contends that Bemoim’s assassination constituted, for the Portuguese court, little more than an offense against courtesy and hospitality.<sup>616</sup> Although these arguments possess merit, they completely discount the meaning and importance of ceremony and ritual at court and they categorically dismiss João II’s tremendous rage at the murderous act and his dissatisfaction at being prevented from pursuing the normal course of justice against Pero Vaz as a polite veneer entirely lacking both credence and substance.

However, familiarity with the narrative sources and with João II’s personality and consistent actions and positions throughout his reign suggests a more nuanced approach is necessary. From the evidence available, the Portuguese court, including the king, expressed the unanimous conviction that Pero Vaz had committed a heinous crime from a variety of depraved motives. The charges as they applied to Pero Vaz were not denied by the chroniclers. Curiously, the question of what, beyond allegations of racism and religious zealotry, might have inhibited João II in his reprisal for the murder has never been asked. This element is the least plausible in contemporary accounts of the murder. I offer two possible explanations for, in Russell’s words, João II’s failure to punish

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<sup>614</sup> Russell, 1995, pp. 161-162; Lowe, 2005, pp. 43-44; Pagden, 1993, pp. 4-5.

<sup>615</sup> Hair, 1994, p. 40.

<sup>616</sup> Wroe, Ann, *The Perfect Prince: The Mystery of Perkin Warbeck and His Quest for the Throne of England*, New York: Random House, 2003, p. 39.

regicide. The first factor involves João II's unpopular decision precisely at this time to construct three new forts, one in North Africa and the other two in sub-Saharan Africa, including the one on the Senegal River, against the advice and wishes of the royal council. All three of these projects would immediately fail, two ending in ignoble disaster. This severely weakened João II's position vis-à-vis the royal council and noblemen who resisted these designs. This humbling of the monarchy strengthened Pero Vaz's position. The second, infinitely more complicated factor somewhat surprisingly involves João II's fragile and intricate relations with Henry VII and the frequently lethal vagaries of the Tudor court.

A review of the events and evidence is essential before examining the delicate political factors limiting João II's actions after the murder. Pina and Resende confirm that Pero Vaz and Bemoim along with the rest of the armada safely sailed to West Africa and carefully entered the Senegal River. They then selected the strategic location for the construction of the fort and dropped anchor. Barros claims that they remained on the Senegal long enough to begin construction of the fort, laying the foundation and parts of the walls. Again according to Barros, many of the Portuguese quickly fell ill from tropical diseases and soon started to die. This is crucial information. In any case, Pina and Resende affirm that Pero Vaz unjustly and dishonorably murdered Bemoim with his own hands, stabbing him on board his captain's ship. As Resende writes,

“...with the burning desire that the said Pero Vaz had of returning to the kingdom [of Portugal] and fearful [receo] of dying in that land from disease, without any cause whatsoever he killed [matou] the said Bemoim with his dagger inside his ship.”<sup>617</sup>

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<sup>617</sup> Resende, 1994, p. 274.

Resende adds that Pero Vaz and the armada set sail for Portugal immediately after the assassination. Upon his return to court, Pero Vaz claimed that he believed Bemoim was guilty of disloyalty and harbored suspicions of possible treason. Pina succinctly summarizes his pathetic defense, “Pero Vaz...because of the suspicions he harbored against Bemoim of disloyalty and treason, or, more truthfully, with the desire he had of returning to the kingdom, he killed the said Bemoim with a dagger” (“Pêro Vaz...por tomar contra Bemoim suspeitas desleais e de traição ou, mais verdadeiramente, com desejo que tinha de se tornar para o reino, matou o dito Bemoim a ferro”).<sup>618</sup> Resende likewise gives Pero Vaz’s desperate wish to return to Portugal and fear of disease as primary motives for slaying Bemoim. Moreover, Resende goes further than Pina in rejecting the falsified charges of disloyalty and treason against Bemoim. Resende stresses how Bemoim and his retinue were “very greatly pleased with the king, because in addition to the assistance that he gave them and the many honors he bestowed upon him, [the king] at their departure also showered him and his men with many favors and gifts” (“em grande maneyra contente d’ el-rey, porque allem do socorro que lhe deu e muitas honrras que lhe fez, tambem lhe fez aa partida muytas merces e dadivas a elle e aos seus”).<sup>619</sup> For Resende, the ceremonies, receptions and feasts in honor of Bemoim were not at all the empty gestures that modern scholars writing on the affair believe them to be. Resende saw them as the most valid and convincing possible of the Portuguese court’s commitment to the Senegambian prince and, in turn, of his loyalty and obligation to and dependency on the Portuguese crown. Speaking of Pero Vaz’s fabricated accusations of disloyalty and treason, Resende cuttingly confirms that “many said that this was not true”

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<sup>618</sup> Pina, 1989, p. 73.

<sup>619</sup> Resende, 1994, p. 274.

(“muytas deziam que nam foram verdadeyras”).<sup>620</sup> We must assume that Resende obtained this information from those directly involved in the events on the Senegal.

The Portuguese king’s sharp witted courtier and worthy confidant assertively repudiates Pero Vaz’s incriminating allegations against Bemoim on the basis of the relationship of honor and trust forged between João II and Bemoim and because of the mutually binding series of reciprocal obligations they had jointly and publicly initiated. The solemn court ceremonies were ritually performed for precisely this reason, to seal sacred bonds of kinship and obligation as godparents and knightly vassal and lord. Resende refused to countenance the possibility that Bemoim would dismiss these sacred oaths under any circumstance. In a display of circular reasoning, Resende emphatically insists that Pero Vaz certainly falsified the charges of disloyalty and treason and that he unlawfully killed Bemoim because, quite simply, Bemoim would never exhibit such behavior or entertain such thoughts. Among Resende’s various justifications for his support of Bemoim are the following: “because of the great goodness and immense wisdom of Bemoim, and, moreover, because he went very satisfied with the king, and with good reason, and with the hope of soon being restored to his kingdom with the help of the king” (“por a muyta bondade e muyto saber de Bemohi, e assi por yr com tanta rezam muyto contente d’ el-rey, e com esperança de ser cedo com sua ajuda restituydo a seu reynado”).<sup>621</sup> In Resende’s estimation, Bemoim’s character, his “great goodness,” and his intelligence and judgment, his “immense wisdom,” ensured against his acting so foolishly. Not only was Bemoim defenseless and vulnerable on board the Portuguese armada, but he also seems to have lacked any significant allies or supporters among the

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<sup>620</sup> Ibid.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid.

Jolof in Senegambia, on whom he could rely to come to his aid. In addition, Resende remarks that it would have been absolute folly to have taken such an ill-advised risk when he was on the verge of being restored to his kingdom and to power with the help of the Portuguese. From his personal experience with Bemoim, Resende fiercely believed these types of decisions, as reported by Pero Vaz, to be wholly out of character and fantastically improbable. Far from excusing the murder as modern scholars claim, Resende, and to a lesser extent Pina, champion Bemoim's innocence and expose Pero Vaz's manifest culpability.

The chronicles state that the Portuguese court was residing at Tavira when the news was delivered to João II. Both Pina and Resende lament the dismal failure of the mission, for Bemoim had been killed, the fort had not been constructed, and the unique opportunity to send out missionaries to spread Christianity had evaporated. Both chroniclers describe the Portuguese king's violent reaction and shock. They attest to João II's conviction that Pero Vaz and others on the armada were indisputably guilty and that their actions warranted severe punishment. Resende specifies that Pero Vaz and his numerous accomplices deserved to be executed, "because having to give punishment, it would be necessary to execute many who were guilty in this affair..." ("porque avendo de dar castigo, compria que matasse muitos que nisso foram culpados...").<sup>622</sup>

Furthermore, a flabbergasted João II objected that even if Bemoim's dubiously disloyal and treasonous conduct were admitted, Pero Vaz had still acted improperly and unjustly. According to João II, Pero Vaz simply did not possess the authority to execute Bemoim, regardless of the validity of his suspicions or the gravity of the circumstances. Bemoim had been entrusted to Pero Vaz by João II as a Senegambian prince as well as a recently

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<sup>622</sup> Ibid.

knighted noble vassal of the Portuguese king. João II contended quite rightly that only he as sovereign was authorized to prosecute justice and mete out capital punishment. Pero Vaz had arbitrarily usurped vital prerogatives of the monarchy and he had done so on outrageously flimsy grounds. Regardless of whether João II did not consider Bemoim his rightful royal brother or even as equal to other Portuguese noblemen, as some scholars argue, and was not genuinely concerned about punishing the crime of his murder, it is incredible that João II would tolerate such a conspicuous usurpation of royal justice, power and authority; an insolent repudiation of royal policy and of explicit royal commands; the capricious squandering of royal resources; and the dishonorable mockery and shameful negation of the costly ceremonies the Portuguese king respectfully hosted in Bemoim's honor as well as the oaths and promises he had solemnly made and sworn.

This point deserves special emphasis. By murdering Bemoim in cold blood, Pero Vaz had committed homicide, perhaps even regicide. Yet the ramifications of this stabbing were equally damning. The usurpation of royal justice by Pero Vaz was a serious offense to the crown and these overt transgressions of royal authority typically received swift and severe responses from the monarchy. Both Pina and Resende insist on the significance of this aspect of his crime. What is more, Pero Vaz had, single-handedly, completely dismantled and categorically rejected the political plans and objectives of João II. The king had made these diplomatic and strategic decisions only after intense personal research and profound contemplation. João II had even presented these matters of state to the royal council for deliberation. Moreover, Pero Vaz disobeyed explicit instructions from his king to restore Bemoim to his Jolof kingdom, to build a fortress on the Senegal River and to remain as its captain for an unspecified number of years,

pursuing potential riches in the gold trade up river. Such insolence was, as a rule, not endured by monarchs who had any pretensions to upholding their title. Not only did Pero Vaz's impetuous return destroy João II's political and strategic goals in Senegambia, but it also resulted in staggering real and potential financial losses. The promise of opening up commerce on the Senegal River and in other locations and markets further inland had vanished. But the considerable cost to the monarchy of organizing and outfitting the armada was likewise irresponsibly squandered by Pero Vaz. A large percentage of the royal naval fleet had been dedicated to the mission; stone and wood building materials for the construction of the fortress and churches had been cut and prepared; an impressive amount of precious artillery had sailed on the ships; food supplies for several months had been stocked for over three-hundred persons; and the salaries supporting this mammoth labor force would have to be paid.

In addition to murder, Pero Vaz was culpable for disobeying royal commands, violating royal authority and justice, defying and contravening the highest matters of state, and incurring immense potential and actual financial losses for the crown. But his gravest offense was probably to the honor, reputation and majesty of the king himself. By assassinating Bemoim, Pero Vaz desecrated the courtly rituals and ceremonies which João II had performed in order to forge secular and sacred bonds with Bemoim. The enactment of these courtly ceremonies defined the honor and majesty of the monarchy and they were inseparable from the image and representation of kingship. The formal court ceremonies given in honor of Bemoim were likewise intended to articulate João II's imperial ideology in sub-Saharan Africa. When Bemoim was slain, Pero Vaz simultaneously attacked and insulted, in a malicious manner, the king's majesty. The

killing of such an honored, high-ranking guest of the court would also damage João II's reputation in Europe and in sub-Saharan Africa. Other European courts could now rightly question João II's legitimacy and commitment to his royal title of "Senhor de Guiné." Wary Senegambians would likely distrust the Portuguese who unpredictably betray their own allies and subjects and breach the rules of hospitality and decorum. Barros recognized the potential damage to the king's reputation in Africa, but tried to argue rather unconvincingly that the show of force alone might have intimidated Africans and impressed them with the kind of support that could be expected from an alliance with the Portuguese.

Pero Vaz had been appointed as captain of the armada and instructed to construct the fort on the Senegal River. He was then to lead the forces sent to restore Bemoim. After these successes he was to remain on the Senegal as governor of the fort for several years, exactly as Diogo d'Azambuja had done at Mina during the early 1480s. After Azambuja's tenure as governor of Mina, he returned to court where he was showered with rewards and appointed to the royal council. Pero Vaz came from a background similar to Azambuja's and would reasonably expect to receive similar honors and promotions on his return from a similarly successful tenure. Surely, Pero Vaz received this prestigious, high-profile appointment only because he enjoyed the king's confidence and respect as a knight of the king's household.<sup>623</sup> He owed his lofty placement in the court to his father, Luís Alvares Pais, who had held the prominent post of *mestre-sala* to two kings, D. Duarte I and D. Afonso V. In addition, his family seems to have had long-standing connections to England, an intriguing fact which later proved to be of significance.

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<sup>623</sup> Teixeira da Mota, 1971, p. 48: "Fidalgo da casa del-Rei."



It seems certain that Pero Vaz belonged to the noble knightly faction at court that strenuously opposed João II's designs for the construction of permanent forts in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>624</sup> Although we do not know the opinion of the royal council on his plans to construct the fort on the Senegal River, we do know that the royal council vigorously resisted his efforts to construct the fort at Mina in 1481 and the one at Graciosa in North Africa in 1489. The usual arguments against the forts involved the exorbitant costs and insuperable difficulties of manning and supplying them. The legitimate fear of disease in sub-Saharan Africa and the constant anxiety of being surrounded by hostile forces in North Africa were further typical concerns. Both João I in 1415 and João II in 1481 encountered unexpectedly defiant refusals from candidates when trying to appoint governors to the forts of Ceuta and Mina, respectively. It is little wonder, then, that Meneses and Azambuja who took up the posts at Ceuta and Mina, were handsomely compensated for their troubles. However, Pina and Resende firmly place Pero Vaz in the category of the warrior nobility, who, as a class, disagreed with the construction of forts in sub-Saharan Africa, when they cite his terror of succumbing to disease as his primary reason for departing as well as his horror at the thought of remaining in Senegambia for several more years. Barros is the only source to give any credit to Pero Vaz's suspicions of Bemoim, implying that Bemoim might have sabotaged the construction of the fort by intentionally suggesting a dangerous location for its siting.

Nevertheless, when Pero Vaz returned to Portugal with news of his failure, the knightly noble faction had the upper hand at court. In February 1489, right after the

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<sup>624</sup> The study of court factions has been led by scholars of the Tudor court, see Starkey, David, *The Reign of Henry VIII: Personalities and Politics*, New York: Vintage, 2002; Mears, Natalie, "Courts, Courtiers, and Culture in Tudor England," *The Historical Journal*, v. 46, n. 3, 2003, pp. 703-722; Gunn, Steven, "The Structures of Politics in Early Tudor England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, v. 5, 1995, pp. 59-90.

departure of Pero Vaz and Bemoim at the end of January, João II decided, in the disapproving words of Pina, “without counsel and against counsel,” to construct the fortress of Graciosa, upstream from the sea on the river Loukkos, treacherously close to the Kingdom of Fez in Morocco.<sup>625</sup> Believing, incorrectly, that the river was navigable throughout the year, João II sent caravels amply loaded with prefabricated materials, but with relatively few men. Arriving in July 1489, the Portuguese fleet immediately met with numerous impediments, such as the dangerous drying up of the river, making access and reinforcements problematic; the laboriously slow pace of construction of the fort; and the outbreak of malaria. Worse of all, the incomplete fortress with its sickly, undermanned garrison soon came to the attention of a furious Sultan Muhammad ash-Shaykh, the King of Fez, who vehemently objected to the Portuguese intrusion, which threatened Alcacer-Quibir. In fact, João II had traveled to Tavira in order more easily and quickly to receive updates from Graciosa. The news was consistently dire. Soon an unnerved João II and his alarmed court became engulfed in the ensuing calamity. When the forces of Sultan Muhammad ash-Shaykh eventually descended upon the fort, panic erupted at the Portuguese court. In desperation, João II sent some of his finest advisors and best soldiers to Graciosa hopelessly to defend the indefensible and even threatened to rescue the fort in person. Despite pervasive anxiety and a bleak predicament, it took João II months to concede his mistake. The king had gambled by disregarding what turned out to be the wise advice of his own royal council and his terrible blunder stung deeply. It was precisely at this time when João II was frantically pouring his military resources into Graciosa and relying heavily on the support of the petulant knightly noble class that Pero

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<sup>625</sup> For the disaster of Graciosa, see Pina, 1989, pp. 74-78; Fonseca, 2005, pp. 84-85; Disney, 2009, v. 2, p. 8; Cook, W. F., *The Hundred Years War for Morocco: Gunpowder and the Military Revolution in the Early Modern Muslim World*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994, 116-118.

Vaz returned from Senegambia with additional humiliating reports of disappointment and catastrophe relating to his pet project of constructing overseas fortresses.

The on-going debacle of Graciosa surely compelled João II to temper his reaction to Pero Vaz's crime. Both Pina and Resende insist that he nevertheless deserved punishment for murdering Bemoim and for usurping the king's authority to execute justice. Pina believed the punishment should have been "severe," while Resende demanded the death sentence. Instead Pero Vaz received inconceivable leniency from a king whose reputation was founded on his inordinate sensitivity to any slight whatsoever, no matter how trivial, to his majesty and on his readiness to punish such offenders swiftly and ruthlessly. Likewise, his strict adherence to the pursuit of justice, broadly understood, was legendary and uncompromising. Pero Vaz needed more than the fortuitous coincidence of the king's embarrassment of Graciosa to escape with his life. In fact, he seems to have been banished from court and prohibited from obtaining any official post in future. For a third generation courtier this was painful to swallow, but it was hardly commensurate with the crime.

#### 8. João II and the Tudor Court of Henry VII

Surprisingly, Pero Vaz, whose family had long-standing connections to England, seems to have benefited from his relationship, however tenuous, with Sir Edward Brampton (Duarte Brandão) and with the soon to be infamous Yorkist impostor and pretender to the throne of England, Perkin Warbeck, who was a notable member of Pero Vaz's household. Furthermore, Pero Vaz was able, wickedly, to profit from João II's

delicate yet important relationship with the Tudor monarch Henry VII (1457–1509) during these very months.<sup>626</sup>

João II and Edward IV (1442–1483), king of England, had maintained an amicable relationship. In 1482 João II had sent an impressive embassy headed by Rui de Sousa to press Edward IV to recognize the Portuguese king's exclusive rights to sub-Saharan Africa, according to the principles of *mare clausum*, and to prevent ships from sailing from England to West Africa. A favorably disposed Edward IV readily acknowledged João II's claims to West Africa and duly prohibited ships leaving English ports to sail there. Indeed, the Portuguese embassy was received warmly and it seems João II was even elected to the Order of the Garter at this time (though this was later voided). Congenial relations between the two countries seem to have been facilitated by one of Edward IV's favorites, the converted Portuguese Jew, Sir Edward Brampton.

As courtier, diplomat, merchant and knight, Brampton enjoyed a colorful and dynamic career at the royal courts of England, Burgundy and Portugal.<sup>627</sup> After allegedly killing a man for insulting his background, the Jewish Brampton fled Portugal for

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<sup>626</sup> For the relationship between João II and Henry VII, see Aubin, Jean, "D. João II et Henry VII," in *Le Latin et L'Astrolabe: recherches sur le Portugal de la Renaissance, son expansion en Asie et les relations internationales*, Paris: Centre Culturel Calouste Gulbenkian, 1996, v. 1, pp. 83-92; Ramalho, Américo da Costa, *Estudos sobre a época do Renascimento*, Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian; Junta Nacional de Investigação Científica e Tecnológica, 1997, pp. 9-29; Wroe, Ann, *The Perfect Prince: The Mystery of Perkin Warbeck and His Quest for the Throne of England*, New York: Random House, 2003. For more on Henry VII, see Chrimes, S. B., *Henry VII*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999; Gunn, S. J., "Henry VII (1457–1509)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. For more on Perkin Warbeck, see also, Gunn, S. J., "Warbeck, Perkin [Pierrehon de Werbecque; alias Richard Plantagenet, duke of York] (c.1474–1499)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; Arthurson, Ian, *The Perkin Warbeck conspiracy, 1491-1499*, Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1994.

<sup>627</sup> For Brampton, see Roth, Cecil, "Perkin Warbeck and his Jewish master," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, v. 9, 1918–20, pp. 143–62; Roth, Cecil, "Sir Edward Brampton: An Anglo-Jewish Adventurer Dur-ing the Wars of the Roses," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, v. 16, 1952, pp. 121-27; Horrox, Rosemary, "Brampton, Sir Edward (c.1440–1508)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; Berek, Peter, "The Jew as Renaissance Man," *Renaissance Quarterly*, v. 51, n. 1, 1998, pp. 128-162; Varela, Consuelo, *Inglese en España y Portugal (1450-1515): aristócratas, mercaderes e impostores*, Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 1998, pp. 141-157.

England where he soon converted to Christianity and rapidly rose to prominence in Edward IV's court, mostly for his military exploits and commercial success. He then served Charles the Bold in Burgundy from 1475-79 before returning to the court of Edward IV where he was again celebrated for his martial achievements, eventually becoming a member of the royal council as well as earning appointment as captain and governor of Guernsey. Richard III (1452–1485), Edward IV's brother, retained Brampton's coveted services, granted him knighthood and paid him noticeably substantial sums for rather mysterious operations. The date of these payments coincides suggestively with the imprisonment of the two Yorkist princes in the Tower of London.<sup>628</sup> Wroe has hypothesized Brampton's possible involvement in this episode and subsequent murder.<sup>629</sup> Then the ill-fated king, now a widower, sent Brampton as ambassador to the Portuguese court in 1485 to negotiate a marriage with João II's only sister, the Princess Dona Joana. Both João II and his sister were Lancastrians, the direct descendants of John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster and son of Edward III, and the proposed marriage would have strengthened Richard III's claims of legitimacy to the throne of England. Moreover, the Portuguese court favored the union, for João II, as his royal council admonished him, badly needed allies in Europe. Fortunately for Brampton, he was engaged on this mission to the Portuguese court when Henry Tudor butchered Richard III at Bosworth.

Although Brampton had shrewdly used his diplomatic position to renew his profitable ties to the Portuguese court, he quickly departed after receiving news of Richard III's death and traveled around northern Europe pursuing his commercial

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<sup>628</sup> Wroe, 2003, p. 22.

<sup>629</sup> Ibid.

interests before eventually settling in Bruges. By spring 1487 he was in the employ of João II and about to become the intimate of a third monarch. Around Easter 1487, João II sent the *Rainha* (The Queen's Ship) to Bruges to retrieve Brampton and bring him safely to Portugal. This was an exceedingly rare honor. The *Rainha* was famous across Europe as the prize vessel of the legendary Portuguese fleet. At the time, the *Rainha* would have been one of the most impressive vessels in any port in Europe. The fact that João II ordered the *Rainha* to sail to Bruges exclusively to transport Brampton and his family to Portugal reveals the exceptionally high value the king placed on obtaining his services and on publicly acknowledging him as one of his favorites. Intriguingly, Perkin Warbeck also traveled on the *Rainha* as a member of Brampton's household.

Once in Portugal, Brampton was promptly showered with lucrative privileges and influential positions. Yet Brampton had already endeared himself to the Portuguese crown, and in the process had made his support indispensable, in the late 1470s when he had financed Afonso V's desperate and protracted visit to the courts of Louis XI of France and Charles the Bold of Burgundy. Then in 1485 João II had granted him an enviable monopoly on malagueta pepper, the famous "grains of paradise," imported from West Africa, and in February 1487 he was described in official royal documents as a knight and member of the royal council ("Duarte Bramdam cavalleiro do nosso Comsselho").<sup>630</sup> In the same year, Brampton relieved João II of an enormous burden he had inherited from his father, Afonso V, and paid the dowry of Empress Leonor of Portugal for her marriage in 1452 to the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III to their son,

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<sup>630</sup> Albuquerque, Luís de and Maria Emília Madeira Santos, *Portugaliae monumenta Africana*, Lisbon: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical; Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimientos Portugueses; Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, v. 1, 1993, pp. 343, 382-383.

Maximilian I.<sup>631</sup> Brampton was likewise essential to the wildly profitable commerce the Portuguese pursued with sub-Saharan Africa, for he maintained the trading networks between Africa, London and Antwerp.<sup>632</sup> Apart from his involvement with Warbeck and his evidently pivotal role in João II's dealings with Henry VII, Brampton was a formidable figure at the Portuguese court. The Portuguese king relied heavily on his financial resources and his expertise and connections were necessary to secure and maintain the king's commercial enterprise in sub-Saharan Africa, one of the crown's most important sources of revenue.<sup>633</sup>

However, immediately after his arrival at the Portuguese court on board the *Rainha* in 1487, the charismatic Perkin Warbeck rather conspicuously left Brampton's employ and entered the household of Pero Vaz. The sensational, high profile return of Brampton, the renowned intimate of Edward IV and Richard III, to a position of prominence at the Portuguese court was surely knowingly orchestrated by João II to attract the watchful attention of the ever suspicious, vigilant and vulnerable Tudor king Henry VII. Recently, it has been proposed by Ann Wroe that the colorful presence of Warbeck at the Portuguese court likewise piqued the uneasy king of England's interest.<sup>634</sup> Because of his impeccable Lancastrian lineage, João II himself had been proposed during the War of the Roses as a distant though remotely possible candidate for the English throne.<sup>635</sup> Now with Brampton and the growing rumors of Warbeck at his

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<sup>631</sup> Ibid..

<sup>632</sup> Arthurson, 1994, p. 38. For Brampton's connections to the network of English merchants, see Childs, Wendy R., "Anglo-Portuguese Trade in the Fifteenth Century," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, v. 2, 1992, pp. 195-219.

<sup>633</sup> Elbl, Ivana, "The King's Business in Africa: Decisions and Strategies of the Portuguese Crown," in *Money, markets and trade in late medieval Europe: essays in honour of John H.A. Munro*, edited by Lawrin Armstrong, Ivana Elbl and Martin M. Elbl, Boston: Brill, 2007, pp. 89-118.

<sup>634</sup> Wroe, 2003, pp. 43-45.

<sup>635</sup> Arthurson, 1994, p. 107.

court, João II evidently succeeded in capturing the attention of an alarmed Henry VII and in gaining leverage against the Tudor monarch in the convoluted, furtive diplomatic struggles enlivening the courts of Europe.

Even before Brampton's return to Portugal in early 1487, Henry VII was nervous about João II. In 1486-87, Sir Edward Woodville, as the false Lord Scales, traveled through Lisbon twice on his way to fight the Moors in Granada. He made great efforts and deliberately went out of his way to meet with the Portuguese king. As an irrepressible knight-errant and the brother of Edward IV's wife, Woodville was fêted at the Portuguese court. He was the uncle of the real Duke of York. Chaves, who personally attended Woodville on his visit, records his reception.<sup>636</sup> He pointedly mentions João II's numerous expressions of admiration of and affection for the late Edward IV during Woodville's visit. Chaves also indicates that Woodville proposed a marriage between one of Edward IV's daughters and D. Manuel, Duke of Beja, the brother of João II's queen. Chaves claims that Woodville was following up on the proposals previously made by Brampton on behalf of Richard III in 1485. In this regard, it is interesting to note that in 1483 Richard III had declared Woodville a rebel and had sent Brampton to hunt him down.<sup>637</sup> Although much about this flashy visit remains obscure, Henry VII keenly followed and orchestrated its developments from all angles. He paid Woodville a large sum for his pains and also doled out significant remuneration to a Scottish spy embedded in Woodville's entourage.<sup>638</sup>

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<sup>636</sup> Chaves, 1984, pp. 45-46; Pina, 1989, p. 54. See also, Varela, Consuelo, *Ingleses en España y Portugal (1450-1515): aristócratas, mercaderes e impostores*, Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 1998, pp. 107-130.

<sup>637</sup> Roth, 1918-20, p. 154; Arthurson, 1994, p. 35.

<sup>638</sup> Wroe, 2003, pp. 43-44.



A year later, in 1488, João II sent several envoys to the Tudor court to request the arrest of the fugitive Portuguese nobleman D. Lopo de Albuquerque, Conde de Penamacor, who was in London, preparing to send ships to conduct illicit commerce in West Africa.<sup>639</sup> The Conde de Penamacor had been implicated in the Bragança conspiracy of 1484 against the Portuguese king's life and had been convicted of high treason. João II desperately wanted his head. But Henry VII skillfully played the situation to his own advantage. In September 1488 he finally agreed to imprison the Conde de Penamacor in the Tower of London, but repeatedly refused demands to execute or extradite him. Indeed, the Conde was valuable to Henry VII as a source of information on the Portuguese court and on commerce with sub-Saharan Africa. He was also a bitterly hated enemy of the Portuguese king. If João II retained Brampton as a favorite, then Henry VII would surely hold on to the valuable Conde de Penamacor. Indeed, years later the Conde, known in England as "Therle of Portingale," briefly attained a very public position of honor at the Tudor court before being reunited at the end of his life with his family living in exile at the court of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon.

During these years from 1488-89, Henry VII took a uniquely deep interest in Portugal.<sup>640</sup> Ann Wroe lists numerous payments to various spies and agents Henry VII sent to the Portuguese court.<sup>641</sup> It would seem that the distrustful Tudor monarch maintained regular, intensive surveillance on the activities of the proscribed exile Brampton and possibly, as Wroe suggests, on the enigmatic Perkin Warbeck. The climax of this peculiar relationship between João II and Henry VII came in April 1489 when an

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<sup>639</sup> Pina, 1989, pp. 65-66; Fonseca, 2005, pp. 37, 78, 181. See also Varela, Consuelo, *Ingleses en España y Portugal (1450-1515): aristócratas, mercaderes e impostores*, Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 1998, pp. 48-50.

<sup>640</sup> Wroe, 2003, pp. 43-47; Aubin, 1996; Ramalho, 1997.

<sup>641</sup> Wroe, 2003, p. 44.

embassy consisting of Dr. Thomas Savage, Sir Richard Nanfan, and the trusted diplomat and King of Arms Roger Machado arrived at the Portuguese court after having first negotiated the marriage treaty between the Tudor Prince Arthur, son of Henry VII, and Catherine of Aragon, daughter of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, at Medina del Campo. This was a most distinguished embassy. Savage was dean of the Chapel Royal and eventual Archbishop of York; Nanfan was a recent member of the Tudor king's council and the future deputy lieutenant of Calais; and Machado held the post of Richmond Herald, a title which signified his distinguished, long-standing and loyal service to Henry VII.<sup>642</sup> Machado was closely and consistently involved in Henry VII's tense diplomatic maneuvers in the elusive pursuit of Warbeck, beginning it would seem with this embassy to Portugal in 1489.

In early April the prestigious English embassy entered Portuguese territory en route to Beja where the court was residing. They were greeted by various exalted personages along the way, including the Chancellor of Portugal, D. João de Teixeira. On their approach into Beja, they were met by Rui de Sousa, D. Pedro de Meneses, the Marquis of Vila Real and D. Francisco de Coutinho, the Conde de Marialva. Machado particularly singled out for praise the extravagant banquet the Marquis of Vila Real hosted in their honor. On 22 April the embassy was lavishly received by João II. On 26 April João II held the requisite bullfights and dances and then after several more ostentatious banquets and feasts, the Portuguese king solemnly received the Order of the Garter on 2 May from the hands of Sir Richard Nanfan. The oration, a copy of which is

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<sup>642</sup> Arthurson, Ian, "Nanfan, Sir Richard (1445–1507)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; Gunn, S. J., "Savage, Thomas (d. 1507)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; Ailes, Adrian, "Machado, Roger (d. 1510)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

extent, was delivered in Latin by Dr. Thomas Savage in the name of Henry VII. The festivities and gastronomic delights continued unabated until the embassy departed for Lisbon on 25 May, accompanied by Justo Baldino, the Bishop of Ceuta, Rui de Sousa and Chancellor Teixeira. Before their departure, João II presented the embassy with gold cups replete with gold coins. As he had done with Bemoim, the Duke of Beja presented Nanfan with a richly caparisoned horse named Teliz, a legendary charger, reputedly the best in the realm.

On 30 May, the embassy arrived in Lisbon, staying at the Estaus palace in the Rocio, where they remained for an unusually long period, putting out to sea only on 7 July. According to Machado, they were entertained splendidly by Brampton on at least several occasions. Machado writes that the ambassadors were received in Lisbon by Brampton, “who during the time that they were in the said city accompanied them about and did them all the honor which was in his power, and entertained them at his house twice or thrice most honorably.”<sup>643</sup> It is possible that the embassy lodged with Brampton for part of their stay. This genteel affability is not the interaction between a proscribed political exile and an official diplomatic delegation representing Henry VII. Indeed, Brampton had inexplicably returned to London temporarily in 1488 and this might have initiated a dialogue, for the decision to elect João II to the Order of the Garter seems to have been taken by Henry VII in December 1488.

After the English delegation arrived in London on 10 August 1489 and the Treaty of Windsor (1386/87) between England and Portugal had been renewed, Machado was sent back to Portugal “pour certaines affaires.”<sup>644</sup> Certainly, one of Machado’s primary

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<sup>643</sup> Roth, 1918-20, p. 157.

<sup>644</sup> Aubin, 1996, p. 87.

diplomatic responsibilities on this return voyage to the Portuguese court was to deliver the extraordinary “General Pardon” Henry VII had issued to Brampton on 21 August. The pardon Brampton received is puzzling both for having been issued at all and for the unusual language attached to it. Henry VII added a striking provision making the pardon ambiguously conditional, “provided that the said Edward produce sufficient security in the King’s chancery for bearing himself as a faithful liege should bear himself towards the King’s person and majesty.”<sup>645</sup>

Both João II and Brampton had obtained full satisfaction from Henry VII in 1489 under somewhat mysterious circumstances. We know João II was immensely proud of his election to the Order of the Garter. Both Pina and Resende describe with pleasure how João II happily took advantage of every opportunity to showcase the insignia of the Garter during the magnificent wedding celebrations of his son Prince Afonso to Princess Isabella, the eldest daughter of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, in the autumn of 1490.<sup>646</sup> Yet it is curious that neither Pina nor Resende ever mention the banquets, ceremonies and orations surrounding the presentation of the Order of the Garter to João II by Savage, Nanfan and Machado. This is a striking omission from their chronicles for, as we have seen, they consistently delighted in providing minutely detailed reports on the reception of embassies and all the pageantry and ceremony surrounding these events, which were crucial for the self-representation and image-making of the court.

Brampton’s qualified pardon is likewise anomalous. Its peculiar phrasing seems to imply that Henry VII continued to distrust Brampton and that the pardon was the result

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<sup>645</sup> Roth, 1918-20, p. 161; Wroe, 2003, p. 197.

<sup>646</sup> Resende, 2007, p. 168.

of some kind of deal, of certain unwritten conditions having been satisfied for the moment. Wroe suggests that Henry VII with his razor-sharp instincts had already targeted Brampton's relationship with Perkin Warbeck as a latent threat. Indeed, for Wroe, Henry VII's interest in the Portuguese court and the spies, agents and embassies he consequently sent there derived almost entirely from his growing concern about the figure and fame of Warbeck. Yet Warbeck had been absent from the Portuguese court for at least several months in 1489. He had accompanied Pero Vaz and Bemoim to the Senegal River, leaving at the end of January. In addition, Brampton himself was intimately involved in this adventure for he had been, at João II's request, responsible for obtaining provisions for the two caravels which were sent in April to the Senegal River as reinforcements.<sup>647</sup> These additional caravels probably headed for Senegambia around the time of the arrival of the English embassy at the Portuguese court. Moreover, with his profitable commercial monopoly on malagueta pepper, Brampton had an additional vested interest in following the developments with Bemoim in Senegambia. Furthermore, it should be recalled that Warbeck transferred from Brampton's household to that of Pero Vaz shortly after his arrival at court. These three figures—Brampton, Pero Vaz and Warbeck—were connected on several different levels with each other, with Bemoim and Senegambia, and with the Portuguese king's dealings with the Tudor monarchy.

As we have seen, Pina and Resende were at pains to explain away the apparently involuntary clemency João II seemed compelled to exercise on Pero Vaz and his associates for the murder of Bemoim. Among the several excuses Pina and Resende proffered for João II's failure to uphold justice was the large number of people implicated in the crime. Resende states that João II was hindered from disciplining Pero Vaz because

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<sup>647</sup> Teixeira da Mota, 1971, p. 26.

he would have to dispense justice to many others, who, by implication, must have approved the murder of Bemoim in advance and possibly even participated as co-conspirators. If he were to prosecute one, Resende's doubtful thinking goes, then he would have to prosecute all guilty parties. In Resende's view, this option, though just, was unacceptable, but he does not say why. Pina is more specific. He affirms that João II could not punish Pero Vaz as well as many others. In Pina's view, João II simply could not mete out justice; he was not thwarted by the sheer number of guilty persons, but was impeded in his task absolutely. One reason, already proposed, involves the resistance of the nobility who were already hostile to João II and his policies in sub-Saharan Africa. The disaster of Graciosa weakened João II's position vis-à-vis the nobility and increased his dependence on them.

The second explanation concerns the vital role Brampton, Pero Vaz and Warbeck played in João II's diplomatic maneuvers with Henry VII. From the meager evidence available, it seems that Brampton was fundamental to João II's obscure diplomatic strategy. Likewise, it would seem that Brampton played his role successfully to the satisfaction of both monarchs, João II and Henry VII, for a mere couple of weeks after the conclusion of the embassy's mission to Portugal, Brampton triumphantly received his general pardon. In addition, if Wroe's supposition is correct, it would seem that Brampton derived most of his leverage from his association with Warbeck, who, as a member of his household, accompanied Brampton to Portugal in the *Rainha*. Soon thereafter, as we have seen, Warbeck left Brampton and transferred to Pero Vaz. Perhaps Brampton and Pero Vaz had previously bonded over their ties to England. In any case, João II selected Pero Vaz as captain of the armada sent to restore Bemoim and Brampton

was responsible in an official capacity for outfitting part of it. It is likely that Pero Vaz took the gracious Warbeck, ever desirous of adventure, with him on board his ship to Senegambia. No records attest to Warbeck's presence on the armada, but those named in the documents were captains and pilots and others performing equally technical tasks. However, we know that Warbeck served in Pero Vaz's household until December 1490 and it would be probable that he would have traveled with Pero Vaz in his prestigious new post of captain. As a dynamic member of Pero Vaz's entourage, his company would have been welcomed. If Warbeck had indeed accompanied Pero Vaz, then he might have been one of the many on the armada who were implicated in the murder of Bemoim and, according to Pina and Resende, deserved to be brought to justice.

The exact date of Pero Vaz's return to Portugal from Senegambia remains undocumented. It is possible that it coincided with the unusually lengthy visit of the English embassy. It is certainly no accident that Henry VII's trusted servant Machado was included on this mission and that he was, a few years later, to become the principal diplomat most active in garnering knowledge and support across Europe against Warbeck, then widely regarded as the Duke of York. This complex network of connections offers a possible political explanation for João II's unjust and unreasonable behavior towards his recently converted and knighted princely vassal, Bemoim. It explains as well his wholly uncharacteristic tolerance of a grave and outrageously public display of contempt for his royal authority and majesty. The explanation presents itself in the person of Sir Edward Brampton. Brampton seems to have acted as protector and patron of Pero Vaz and, more selfishly perhaps, of Perkin Warbeck. Henry VII's official court poet, Bernard André, later declared that Warbeck had been carefully groomed and

educated in the legends and ways of the courts of the Yorkist monarchs Edward IV and Richard III by Brampton himself. Yet Brampton had been cautious and cunning enough to place Warbeck first with his wife and later with Pero Vaz in order to be able to distance himself from possible charges of conspiracy. If the complicated web of intrigue surrounding the relations between João II, Henry VII and Brampton were to avoid total collapse, Pero Vaz and Perkin Warbeck would have to escape execution for the murder of Bemoim. The justice João II owed Bemoim seems to have been sacrificed to a scheme with the Tudor monarchy hatched in conjunction with Brampton. Ironically, Pero Vaz, the perpetrator, was to be associated on his ill-fated voyage with two pretenders to kingship: Bemoim, pretender to the throne of Jolof in Senegambia, and Perkin Warbeck, soon to explode on the European scene as Duke of York, pretender to the throne of England.

## 9. Conclusion

Bemoim was the victim of a complicated series of power negotiations in Europe of which he was unaware. Despite achieving success with his courtly performances, earning respect for his courtly and chivalric virtues (the terms by which they were perceived by the Portuguese), and winning admiration for his commanding personality, Bemoim ultimately fell prey to the ruthless machinations of courtly intrigue and deceit.

Bemoim was murdered by Pero Vaz da Cunha not only because the Portuguese noble feared dying of disease in Sengambia, but also because he opposed João II's policy of constructing fortifications in sub-Saharan Africa and, consequently, was unwilling to die in its pursuit. The Portuguese king was forced to accept Bemoim's murder because it



coincided with the humiliating debacle of Graciosa in North Africa, which had greatly strengthened the power of the noble faction to which Pero Vaz belonged. Moreover, João II's position vis-à-vis the noble faction in favor of crusade and hostile to "peaceful conquest" was precarious even before the disaster and ignominy of the Bemoim affair and of Graciosa. The Portuguese king had executed the Duke of Bragança and personally assassinated the Duke of Viseu, both members of the royal family, only a few years earlier and a significant portion of the aristocracy remained sympathetic to their cause.

Bemoim's murder was a rejection of João II's policies in sub-Saharan Africa and the Portuguese king, though deeply wounded and angered by the affront to his authority and majesty, could not risk another direct confrontation at this point. In addition, it would seem that Bemoim was the unlikely victim of João II's fragile and risky power struggles with the Tudor monarchy. His political objectives and the precise nature of his relationship with Henry VII and Sir Edward Brampton remain enigmatic. Even in the 1490s, in an attempt to curry favor with the anxious Tudor monarch, Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon continued to send ambassadors to the Portuguese court to interview Brampton and others who had associated with Perkin Warbeck during his time there.<sup>648</sup> Ultimately, João II was disinclined to sacrifice whatever advantage or leverage he held over Henry VII in order to grant Bemoim the justice he knew he fully deserved.

In the tangled and lethal web of court politics and power struggles in Senegambia and in Europe, Bemoim was invariably the least important player and the most disposable character. The two situations are intimately related. Bemoim sought the aid and support of the Portuguese king because he had been defeated, deposed and exiled by contenders

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<sup>648</sup> Suárez Fernández, Luis, *Política internacional de Isabel la Católica: estudio y documentos*, Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, v. 4, 1971, pp. 526-529.

to the throne of Great Jolof. Bemoim was painfully vulnerable and perhaps somewhat naïve to rely solely on the Portuguese. It is perhaps correct to claim that the unjust and dishonorable treatment of Bemoim had some relation to negative racial attitudes. Nevertheless, the dominant issue in João II's decision to sacrifice Bemoim to court politics was likely the fact that Bemoim possessed no supporters and no allies in Europe and in Senegambia. The Portuguese court had been his only friend. João II realized that he would not face any retaliation or retribution for the murder from other Europeans or sub-Saharan Africans.

Nevertheless, the primary sources written by leading figures of the Portuguese court who were close to the Portuguese king and supported his policies celebrated Bemoim and the relationship the king forged with him. Pina and Resende, in particular, used the ceremonial reception of Bemoim at the Portuguese court to glorify the majesty of João II and to enhance his prestige and honor in Europe by highlighting Bemoim's conversion to Christianity and by legitimating and increasing his title of imperial suzerainty of "Senhor de Guiné." In their official chronicles, Pina and Resende manipulated their narratives describing Bemoim's reception and residence at court and seized it as the ideal opportunity to articulate João II's imperial ideology of peaceful conquest in sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, the ceremonial reception of Bemoim was the most successful embodiment of those goals and objectives.

The chroniclers were likewise able to turn Bemoim's murder to the advantage of the king. Pina and Resende forcefully and unequivocally accuse Pero Vaz of murdering Bemoim, whom they emphasize was a prince in Europe and in Africa. They exonerate João II and restore his honor by describing his justified anger at the crime and by

explaining that he was prevented from pursuing justice by forces or factors beyond his control. In this way, the opponents of the king take full responsibility and are made, deservedly so, to look despicable. Quite deliberately, neither Pina nor Resende mentions João II's relationship with Henry VII or the embassy the Tudor monarch sent to Portugal at this time. This information was knowingly omitted, perhaps from fear of associating these maneuvers with Brampton, Pero Vaz and Warbeck, and by implication, with Bemoim's murder.

## Chapter 4

### Luso-African Ivories at the Portuguese Court of D. Manuel I (1469-1521)

#### 1. Introduction

During the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, over the course of about three decades, prominent members of the Portuguese court, including the king, directly commissioned refined objects of art from Temne and Bullom artists living in the area of Sierra Leone. (Fig. 4.1) The conspicuous patronage, collecting, circulation and exchange of West African art by the Portuguese court formed an integral part of the king's larger artistic program intended to enhance his prestige, reputation, and honor in Europe and to promote his messianic imperial ideology to other European courts.<sup>649</sup> Known as Luso-African ivories, these magnificent objects of luxury art, made by African artists in Africa, participated in decisive ways to the construction of the personal mythology of the king D. Manuel I (1469-1521; r. 1495-1521) and to the fashioning of an iconology of royal power.<sup>650</sup> Luso-African ivories contributed in significant ways to creating the image of kingship in Portugal during the reign of Manuel I.<sup>651</sup>

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<sup>649</sup> For Manuel I's imperial ideology, see Thomaz, Luís Filipe F. R., "L'idée impériale manuéline," in *La Découverte, le Portugal et l'Europe: Actes du Colloque*, edited by Jean Aubin, Paris: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, Centre Culturel Portugais, 1990, pp. 35–103; Thomaz, Luís Felipe F.R. and Jorge Santos Alves, "Da cruzada ao Quinto Império," in *A Memória da nação: Colóquio do Gabinete de Estudos de Simbologia*, edited by Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto, Lisbon: Livraria Sá da Costa Editora, 1991, pp. 81–165; Thomaz, Luís Filipe F. R., "A 'Política Oriental' de D. Manuel I e suas contracorrentes," in *De Ceuta a Timor*, Lisbon: Difel, 1994, pp. 189-206.

<sup>650</sup> For the relation of art and architecture to Manuel I's imperial ideas, see Alves, Ana Maria, *Iconologia do Poder Real no Período Manuelino*, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 1985; Pereira, Paulo, *De Aurea Aetate: O Coro do Convento de Cristo em Tomar e a Simbólica Manuelina*, Lisbon: Instituto Português do Património Arquitectónico, 2003; Pereira, Paulo, "'Divinas Armas' – A propaganda régia, a arquitectura manuelina e a iconologia do poder," in *Propaganda e Poder: Congresso Peninsular de História de Arte*, edited by Marisa Costa, Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 2001, pp. 151-167; Pereira, Paulo, "A

## 2. Approaches to Luso-African Ivories

Since 1959 when William B. Fagg, who as Keeper of Ethnography at the British Museum pioneered the study of sub-Saharan African art, first identified Luso-African ivories as a coherent group of objects, they have been exhaustively studied by historians of African art, historians of the arts of Portuguese expansion, and, more recently, historians of the culture of Renaissance Europe.<sup>652</sup> (Fig. 4.2) Ezio Bassani and Kathy Curnow have provided the most thorough analyses of the form, style and imagery of the ivories.<sup>653</sup> Their work is fundamental to all future study of Luso-African ivories. From roughly the early 1490s until the 1520s, Temne and Bullom artists in Sierra Leone carved

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simbólica manuelina: Razão, celebração, segredo,” in *História da Arte Portuguesa: Do ‘Modo’ Gótico ao Maneirismo*, edited by Paulo Pereira, Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 1995, pp. 115-155.

<sup>651</sup> The approach to images of kingship adopted in this chapter is based on a number of studies of contemporary kings and queens, such as Henry VII and Henry VIII in England, François Ier in France, Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, and the Emperor Charles V. See, Anglo, Sydney, *Images of Tudor Kingship*, London: Seaby, 1992; Anglo, Sydney, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; Walker, Greg, “Henry VIII and the Politics of the Royal Image,” in *Persuasive fictions: faction, faith, and political culture in the reign of Henry VIII*, Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1996, pp. 72-98; Lloyd, Christopher and Simon Thurley, *Henry VIII: Images of a Tudor King*, Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1990; Thurley, Simon, *The royal palaces of Tudor England : architecture and court life, 1460-1547*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993; String, Tatiana C., *Art and Communication in the Reign of Henry VIII*, Ashgate: 2008; Lecoq, Anne-Marie, *François Ier Imaginaire: Symbolique et politique à l'aube de la Renaissance française*, Paris: Editions Macula, 1987; Fernández Alvarez, Manuel, ed., *Isabel la Católica: la magnificencia de un reinado*, Madrid: Sociedad Estatal de Conmemoraciones Culturales; Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 2004; Ballesteros Gallardo, Angel, ed., *Ysabel, la Reina Católica: una mirada desde la catedral primada*, Toledo: Arzobispado de Toledo, 2005; Liss, Peggy, “Isabel of Castile (1451-1504), Her Self-Representation and Its Context,” in *Queenship and political power in medieval and early modern Spain*, edited by Theresa Earenfight, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005, pp. 120-144; Checa Cremades, Fernando, *Carlos V: la imagen del poder en el Renacimiento*, Madrid: Ediciones El Viso, 1999.

<sup>652</sup> Fagg, William, *Afro-Portuguese Ivories*, London: Batchworth Press, 1959.

<sup>653</sup> For only the principal publications of Bassani, see Bassani, Ezio, *Ivoires d'Afrique dans les anciennes collections françaises*, Paris: Musée du Quai Branly, 2008; Bassani, Ezio, *African Art and Artefacts in European Collections 1400-1800*, edited by Malcolm McLeod, London: The British Museum, 2000; Bassani, Ezio, “Additional Notes on the Afro-Portuguese Ivories,” *African Arts*, v. 27, n. 3, 1994, pp. 34-45, 100-101; Bassani, Ezio and William Fagg, *Africa and the Renaissance: Art in Ivory*, New York: Center for African Art; Neues Publishing Company, 1988. For Kathy Curnow, who focuses on the context of the production of art in Sierra Leone, see Curnow, Kathy, “Oberlin's Sierra Leonean saltcellar: documenting a bicultural dialogue,” *Allen Memorial Art Museum Bulletin*, v. 44, n. 2, 1991, pp. 12-23; Curnow, Kathy, “Alien or Accepted: African Perspectives on the Western ‘Other’ in 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Century Art,” *Visual Anthropology Review*, v. 6, n. 1, 1990, pp. 38-44; Curnow, Kathy, *The Afro-Portuguese ivories: classification and stylistic analysis of a hybrid art form*, Thesis (Ph.D.), Indiana University, 1983.

ivory saltcellars, oliphants (hunting horns), pyxes, dagger handles, and spoons and forks for Portuguese patrons, ranging from lowly sailors to elite members of court.<sup>654</sup> Although it has been estimated that nearly 90% of the total production of ivory carving by Temne and Bullom artists during these years has been lost, a considerable number of objects, varying significantly in quality, survives, including over sixty saltcellars, almost forty oliphants, three pyxes, several dagger handles, and just over ten forks and spoons.<sup>655</sup>

These portable luxury objects, resulting from fruitful cross-cultural interaction, have been characterized as hybrid in their combination of African and European features and qualities. On the basis of form, style and imagery, Bassani and Curnow have, independently, divided the ivories into two separate categories depending on the perceived dominance of distinctive African or European elements, respectively. (Fig. 4.3-4) Curnow accounted for these seeming differences by proposing that the ivories displaying greater European influence were produced by artists working on the coast, who had been exposed more directly and frequently to the Portuguese presence there. By the same token, in Curnow's model, ivories exhibiting greater African influence would have been carved by artists working inland, farther away from the coast and, as a consequence, with less contact and interaction with Europeans.

Curnow's emphasis on the role of the location of production of the ivories in Sierra Leone and of the degree and type of interaction between the West African artists and their European patrons has been widely accepted as has her key suggestion that

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<sup>654</sup> These dates correspond to the main period of production of the group of Luso-African ivories I am investigating in this chapter. Ivory carving in Sierra Leone continued into the seventeenth century.

<sup>655</sup> Mark, Peter, "Towards a Reassessment of the Dating and the Geographical Origins of the Luso-African Ivories, Fifteenth to Seventeenth Centuries," *History in Africa*, v. 34, 2007, pp. 189-211; Massing, Jean Michel, "Stone Carving and Ivory Sculpture in Sierra Leone," in *Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16th & 17th Centuries: Essays*, edited by Jay A. Levenson, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2007, pp. 64-75, 266-271.

*lançados* or *tangos mãos* (Portuguese who had settled in West Africa) were essential both to facilitating communication between the Temne and Bullom artists and potential European patrons and to enabling the commissioning and purchasing of the Luso-African ivories. Curnow also pointed to the importance of the settlements on the Cape Verde Islands as integral to the development of these effective commercial relations. Moreover, by focusing on the depiction of the figures on the ivories and by pursuing issues of identity, Curnow has revealed African perceptions of and interactions with Europeans during the first period of contact.<sup>656</sup> Indeed, Peter Mark has embraced this line of reasoning and asserted that the Luso-African ivories “constitute the earliest products of what is now commonly known as cultural *métissage*.”<sup>657</sup>

In a recent series of publications, Mark has forcefully advanced the theory that Luso-African ivories should be seen primarily as the “direct response” by Temne and Bullom artists “to a hybrid Luso-African cultural presence,” that is, as an artistic response in ivory to the demands of *lançados* and *tangos mãos*, who served as social, cultural and commercial intermediaries between West Africans and Europeans along the coast from Senegal to Sierra Leone.<sup>658</sup> The *lançados* and *tangos mãos* were Portuguese who had permanently settled in West Africa, assimilated into local African communities and married African women.<sup>659</sup> Through their acculturation, social connections and kinship

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<sup>656</sup> Blier adopted and expanded Curnow’s model in Blier, Suzanne Preston, “Imaging Otherness in Ivory: African Portrayals of the Portuguese ca. 1492,” *The Art Bulletin*, v. 75, n. 3, 1993, pp. 375-396.

<sup>657</sup> Mark, Peter, “Double Historiography—France and Sierra Leone: The Luso-African Ivories at the Quai Branly,” *African Arts*, v. 42, n. 1, 2009, pp. 1-4.

<sup>658</sup> Mark, Peter, “Towards a Reassessment of the Dating and the Geographical Origins of the Luso-African Ivories, Fifteenth to Seventeenth Centuries,” *History in Africa*, v. 34, 2007, pp. 189-211; Mark, Peter, “Portugal in West Africa: The Afro-Portuguese Ivories,” in *Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16th & 17th Centuries: Essays*, edited by Jay A. Levenson, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2007, pp. 76-85, 271-273.

<sup>659</sup> For the *lançados* and *tangos mãos* in Senegambia and Sierra Leone, see Boulègue, Jean, *Les Luso-Africains de Sénégambie, XVIe-XIXe siècles*, Lisbon: Ministério da Educação; Instituto de Investigação

relations, the *lançados* and *tangos mãos* as well as their Euro-African descendants were uniquely empowered to act as middlemen and to facilitate commerce between European traders and West African artists. For Mark, the Luso-African ivories reflect the important cultural presence of the *lançados* communities in Sierra Leone and testify to the close commercial relations between West Africa and Portugal, especially as they were articulated and consolidated through the Cape Verde Islands.

Mark's emphatic statement that "the ivories are definitely West African, and they are assuredly not a product of Portuguese culture," constitutes a reasonable rejection of the sometimes exaggerated claims of scholars writing on the arts of Portuguese expansion for the decisive role of Portuguese patrons and European artistic sources in their creation. Most scholarship dedicated to the presence and reception of Luso-African ivories in Europe has focused on their perceived status and value in Europe as dazzling luxury objects, as exotic in style and material, and as precious portable objects pleasing for their refined beauty and for the expert skill and technique displayed by West African artists in their manufacture.<sup>660</sup> The conclusion is that these luxury and exotic qualities made them

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Científica Tropical, 1989; Brooks, George E., *Landlords and Strangers: Ecology, Society, and Trade in Western Africa, 1000-1630*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993; Mark, Peter, "The Evolution of 'Portuguese' Identity: Luso-Africans on the Upper Guinea Coast from the Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century," *The Journal of African History*, v. 40, n. 2, 1999, pp. 173-191; Horta, José da Silva, "Evidence for a Luso-African Identity in 'Portuguese' Accounts on 'Guinea of Cape Verde' (Sixteenth-Seventeenth Centuries)," *History in Africa*, v. 27, 2000, pp. 99-130; Mark, Peter, "*Portuguese*" *Style and Luso-African Identity: Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002.

<sup>660</sup> Sobral, Luís de Moura, "The Expansion and the Arts: Transfers, Contaminations, Innovations," in *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800*, edited by Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 390-459; Pinto, Maria Helena Mendes, "Elementos para o Estudo Formal e Decorativo de Peças Afro-Portuguesas," in *IV Simpósio Luso-Espanhol de História da Arte: Portugal e Espanha entre a Europa e Além Mar*, edited by Pedro Dias, Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra, 1988, pp. 153-87; Pinto, Maria Helena Mendes, *Os Descobrimentos portugueses e a Europa do Renascimento: "Cumpriu-se o mar": A arte e a missão na rota do oriente*, Lisbon: Presidência do Conselho de Ministros, 1983; Dias, Pedro, "A Presença Portuguesa na África Atlântica," in *História da Arte Portuguesa no Mundo (1415-1822): O Espaço do Atlântico*, Lisbon: Circulo de Leitores, 1995, pp. 91-105; Pereira, Fernando António Baptista, "El Encuentro de Culturas y la Recepción de lo Exótico: El renacimiento portugués y los Nuevos Mundos," in *El arte en la época del Tratado de Tordesillas*, edited by



appealing to wealthy merchants and powerful princes and eminently appropriate to their aristocratic collections of curiosity, or *Kunstkammern*, which featured naturalia, artificialia and exotica.<sup>661</sup> Certainly, this standard though limited assessment is correct regarding the collecting of Luso-African ivories in the sixteenth century after they had been dissociated from the context of the Portuguese court of Manuel I, but it does not fully account for the purposes motivating their original commission and immediate circulation and exchange at the courts of Europe beginning in the 1490s. More importantly, this prevalent but narrow understanding assumes an uninformed fascination by the Portuguese court with Luso-African ivories which, as this chapter demonstrates, is overly generalized and incorrect.

A few scholars have tried to go beyond this apparent impasse in conceptualizing the presence of sub-Saharan African art in Renaissance Europe. Bassani has investigated how the oliphants featuring carved hunting imagery participated in the courtly culture related to the complex of ideas associated with literary and visual representations of the hunt.<sup>662</sup> In a different vein, Rafeal Moreira has observed that after decades of familiarity with the art and architecture of North Africa, members of the Portuguese court appropriated its artistic traditions by employing North African artists and by building in a

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Eloisa García de Wattenberg, Valladolid: Consejería de Cultura y Turismo de la Junta de Castilla y Leon; Lisbon: Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 1994, pp. 269-72.

<sup>661</sup> For only the most recent example, see Blier, Suzanne Preston, "Capricious Arts: Idols in Renaissance-era Africa and Europe (The Case of Sapi and Kongo)," in *The idol in the age of art: objects, devotions and the early modern world*, edited by Michael Wayne Cole and Rebecca Zorach, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009, pp. 11-30.

<sup>662</sup> Bassani and Fagg, 1988, pp. 90-109; Bassani, Ezio, "Les cornes d'appel en ivoire de la Sierra Leone (XVIe Siècle)," *L'Ethnographie*, v. 85, n. 2, 1981-82, p. 151-68; Bassani, Ezio, "Gli olifanti Afroportoghesi della Sierra Leone," *Critica d'Arte*, n. 163-65, 1979, pp. 175-201.

*mudéjar* architectural style.<sup>663</sup> For Moreira, the patronage of Temne and Bullom artists followed this familiar pattern of interaction, patronage and appropriation. By concentrating on specific iconographic and heraldic elements, Moreira argues that certain ivories were official royal commissions expressly made for particular courtly ceremonies and events and for identifiable recipients. Luso-African ivories, according to Moreira, were sumptuous instruments of royal propaganda intended to proclaim Manuel I as universal sovereign, as emperor and lord of the world.<sup>664</sup> More than any previous scholar, Moreira examined the connections of the ivories to what is known as the Manueline style in architecture. He declared that the style, ornament and iconography of the Luso-African ivories belonged so completely to the aesthetic and visual world of Manueline architecture that they should be renamed “afro-manuelinos.” For Moreira, the Luso-African ivories are astonishing examples of Manueline art sculpted by West African artists.

Luso-African ivories have likewise captured the imagination of recent historians of the culture of Renaissance Europe. In his elegant and refreshing attempts to characterize the Renaissance from a global perspective, Jerry Brotton has emphasized the central role played by non-Western cultures and luxury objects in the formation and delineation of Renaissance culture in Europe.<sup>665</sup> Brotton asserts that the style and forms of Luso-African ivories “demonstrate that African design had a significant impact upon

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<sup>663</sup> Moreira, Rafael, “Cultura Material e Visual,” in *História da expansão portuguesa: Formação do império (1415-1570)*, edited by Francisco Bethencourt and Kirti Chaudhuri, Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 1998, pp. 455-486.

<sup>664</sup> This notion had been formulated by Susan Ellen Davidson, who, inspired by Francis Yates, interpreted the Luso-African ivories as “symbols of imperial rule” promoting D. Manuel I’s position as “Dominus Mundi.” See, Davidson, Susan Ellen, “African Ivories from Portuguese Domains: Symbols of Imperial Rule in European Courts,” M.A. Thesis, George Washington University, 1985.

<sup>665</sup> Brotton, Jerry, *The Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006; Brotton, Jerry, *The Renaissance Bazaar: From the Silk Road to Michelangelo*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

the art and architecture of the European Renaissance.” Indeed, Brotton believes that the design of Luso-African ivories directly determined the style of Manueline architecture. When Claire Farago presciently endeavored to redefine the Renaissance in her groundbreaking volume, *Reframing the Renaissance*, she highlighted Luso-African ivories as the most compelling case study for theorizing “a new program for the study of Renaissance visual culture.”<sup>666</sup> At the time, Farago advocated a thorough re-evaluation of the Renaissance and suggested approaching and conceptualizing the history of art in Renaissance Europe by focusing on the complexities of cross-cultural interaction and exchange as well as the conditions of reception of objects.<sup>667</sup> Farago and Brotton have confirmed the importance of Luso-African ivories to the history of art in Europe, introduced them to a broader range of critical issues and theoretical approaches, and invited them into a larger art historical conversation.

Building on these diverse foundations, I will address the different concerns, questions and interests of historians of sub-Saharan African art, historians of the court culture of Portugal, and historians of Renaissance Europe, especially those dedicated to investigating the myriad implications of a global Renaissance.

### 3. Background: African Art at the Portuguese Court during the Fifteenth Century

Manuel I’s decision to commission carved ivory objects from Temne and Bullom artists in Sierra Leone was the climax of a long-standing practice of the Portuguese court.

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<sup>666</sup> Farago, Claire, “Introduction,” in *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America, 1450-1650*, edited by Claire Farago, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, pp. 1-20.

<sup>667</sup> This timely call for a comprehensive research project was immediately advanced by scholars like Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton. See, Jardine, Lisa, and Jerry Brotton, *Global Interests: Renaissance Art between East and West*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000; Jardine, Lisa, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998; Jerry Brotton, *Trading Territories: Mapping the Early Modern World*, London: Reaktion Books, 1997.

During the 1450s, about four decades before Manuel I's accession to the throne, the Infante D. Henrique (1394-1460) had established peaceful diplomatic and commercial relations with African rulers in Senegambia through the exchange of gifts.<sup>668</sup> Indeed, African rulers had regularly presented Portuguese representatives, such as Cadamosto and Diogo Gomes, with impressively large elephant ivory tusks as symbols of their political power and military prowess and as proof of the boundless wealth and natural abundance of their lands. The Infante D. Henrique greatly valued and avidly collected these prized gifts.<sup>669</sup> On at least one occasion, in about 1456, he sent an elephant foot and an enormous elephant ivory tusk he had just received as a gift from a Senegambian prince to the famously magnificent court of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy (1396-1467). The Infante D. Henrique had the elephant tusk presented to his sister Isabella of Portugal, the Duchess of Burgundy (1397-1471), in order to represent and celebrate the diplomatic accomplishments and commercial successes the Portuguese had achieved in Senegambia during the 1450s.<sup>670</sup>

The first documented record of the collecting of African art in Renaissance Europe once again involved the Portuguese at the court of Burgundy. In March 1470, D. João de Albuquerque, a Portuguese nobleman, presented Charles the Bold (1433-1477), the subsequent Duke of Burgundy and only son of Philip the Good and Isabella of

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<sup>668</sup> This paragraph summarizes parts of Chapter One.

<sup>669</sup> Cadamosto in Brásio, António, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria Africana: África Ocidental (1342-1499)*, Lisbon: Agência Geral do Ultramar, second series, vol. 1, 1958, p. 361.

<sup>670</sup> Alvise da Ca da' Mosto, "Le navigazioni di Alvise da Ca' da Mosto e Pietro di Sintra" in Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Navigazioni e Viaggi*, edited by Marica Milanese, Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1978, v. 1, p. 531: "...qual etiam apresentai al prefato signor infante con un dente dodici palmi lungo, qual con detto piede grande mandó a donare all signore duchessa di Bergogna per un gran presente.", and in the Marciana manuscript with slight but important differences, Brásio, 1958, pp. 361-362: "...el pie grande etiam apresentai al prefato signor Infante con vno dente de alifante che iera 12 palmj longo e ben fato el qual dente con el dito pie manda il dito signor apresentar ala Duchesa de Brogogna per vno grande presente..." Valentim Fernandes confirms this exchange, see *Códice Valentim Fernandes*, edited by José Pereira da Costa, Lisbon: Academia Portuguesa da História, 1997, p. 184 "Trouuerom hũu dente de 12 palmos o qual mandou o Jffante aa duqueza de Bergonha su jrmãa." For the date, see Paviot, 1995, p. 82.

Portugal, with gifts from West Africa.<sup>671</sup> These included a sword and an unspecified number of human figures carved in wood which the document described as “idols”: “aucuns personnages de bois comme ydoilles.” Based on the date and the description, it is possible that these wooden idols came from the Los Islands (Fr., Îles de Los; Port., Ilhas dos Idolos) off Conakry, Guinea or from Sierra Leone to the south.<sup>672</sup> This is the earliest recorded instance of the circulation, exchange and collecting of objects of sub-Saharan African art at the courts of Europe.

D. João de Albuquerque was a noteworthy visitor to the Burgundian court.<sup>673</sup> As a former knight of the Infante D. Henrique’s household and as a member of the royal council, Albuquerque was closely connected to the Portuguese King D. Afonso V and had distinguished himself on the battlefield fighting with the king against Muslim forces in North Africa.<sup>674</sup> His gift of an African sword, possibly a war trophy, to Charles the Bold was certainly intended to refer to the crusading exploits of the Portuguese in North Africa. It was appropriate for Albuquerque, as a participant in these wars, to give the sword to Charles the Bold, whose legendary passion for weaponry and crusading zeal made him the ideal recipient.<sup>675</sup> The presentation of wooden idols might have been meant to symbolize the spreading of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa and the elimination of pagan religious practices and beliefs. Yet these religious objects had not been destroyed

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<sup>671</sup> Paviot, Jacques, ed., *Portugal et Bourgogne au XVe siècle (1384-1482): Recueil de documents extraits des archives bourguignonnes*, Paris: Centre Culturel Calouste Gulbenkian, 1995, p. 436: “A Alvare de Verre, serviteur de messire Jehan d’Aulvekerque, chevalier portugalois, la somme de vingt une livres dudit pris que mondit seigneur luy a de sa grace donnee pour une fois quant nagaires il luy a presenté une espee et aucuns personnages de bois comme ydoilles; pour ce, par sa quittance, laditte somme de xxj £.”

<sup>672</sup> Bassani, 2000, pp. xxii, 171.

<sup>673</sup> Paviot, 1995, p. 439. Charles the Bold was infuriated by the poor reception accorded Albuquerque in Bruges in April and May 1470.

<sup>674</sup> Moreno, Humberto Baquero, *A Batalha de Alfarrobeira: antecedentes e significado histórico*, Coimbra: Biblioteca Geral da Universidade, 1979, pp. 691-694.

<sup>675</sup> DeVries, Kelly and Robert Douglas Smith, *The Artillery of the Dukes of Burgundy, 1363-1477*, Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2005, pp. 137-202; Vaughan, Richard, *Charles the Bold: The Last Valois Duke of Burgundy*, Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 2002, pp. 197-229.

and were not being publicly derided, but had been carefully preserved, eagerly collected and formally presented to the Duke of Burgundy by a veteran crusading warrior. Their exotic origin and unfamiliar appearance might have contributed in large measure to this attitude, and it is not possible, based on the evidence, to attribute an ethnographic interest either to Albuquerque or to Charles the Bold.

Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that small-scale wood carvings of human figures, most likely from the area broadly defined at the time as Sierra Leone, were being collected at the Portuguese court by 1470 at the latest and that these “idols” were seen as suitable and worthy objects to give to the Duke of Burgundy. This demonstrates, at an unexpectedly early date, personal familiarity with and keen interest in the carving traditions of West Africa by noblemen at the Portuguese court. It also shows that aristocratic members of the Portuguese court deliberately emphasized and publicly exploited their associations with North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa at other European courts, such as the Burgundian court, through the circulation and exchange of objects of African art. The purpose of these exchanges of African objects was to enhance the honor, prestige and reputation of the Portuguese court through its achievements in Africa and to forge a distinctive identity based on this unprecedented and unique involvement in Africa.

When João II succeeded his father Afonso V in 1481, he already possessed a clear plan for pursuing exploration in sub-Saharan Africa. His ships first contacted the mighty Kingdom of Kongo in 1483 and Portuguese diplomats returned there a couple of years later. It was in response to this that the official embassy commissioned by the *Mani Kongo*, or King of Kongo, presented João II in a lavish reception at the Portuguese court

in January 1489 with several elephant ivory tusks, exquisitely carved ivory horns, known as *mpungi*, and luxury raffia textiles, known as *lubongo*.<sup>676</sup> Through the commissioning of a special chronicle detailing the whole affair, João II used these prestigious gifts of Kongolese royal art to substantiate his claims to imperial suzerainty in sub-Saharan Africa. He also displayed and discussed sub-Saharan African objects with visiting dignitaries to his court, such as the German Hieronymus Münzer. The Portuguese king believed that these objects of Kongolese royal art embodied and increased the imperial title of “Lord of Guinea” (Senhor de Guiné) he had officially adopted in 1485. These precious objects of Kongolese royal art, especially the carved ivory horns, were the best, most powerful symbols of João II’s personal claim to glory and were seen as the ideal manifestation of the Portuguese king’s imperial ideology in sub-Saharan Africa. In this way, Kongolese royal art became central to the Portuguese court’s identity in Europe.

As the brother of Queen Leonor, the wife of João II, and as third in line to the throne, D. Manuel, then Duke of Beja, was a member of the royal council and a ubiquitous, principal participant in all major court ceremonies. He was fully aware of the central role played by royal African art at the court of his predecessor João II. Indeed, even as Duke of Beja, D. Manuel was especially dedicated to the patronage of art and architecture as the necessary means of displaying his power and manifesting his magnificence and as the preferred means of propagating his peculiar personal mélange of political symbolism.<sup>677</sup> As king, he inherited the tradition at the Portuguese court, initiated in the 1450s, of collecting and circulating objects of African art as a prominent

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<sup>676</sup> This paragraph summarizes parts of Chapter Two.

<sup>677</sup> Costa, João Paulo Oliveira e, *D. Manuel I, 1469-1521: Um Príncipe do Renascimento*, Lisbon: Circulo de Leitores, 2005, pp. 61-63.

feature of international diplomacy and as a distinctive contribution to the perpetual and unremittingly fierce competition and rivalry amongst the courts of Europe.

#### 4. The Inheritance of the Infante D. Henrique

D. Manuel I's sophisticated patronage of highly skilled African artists and his unusual sensitivity to African art, which he incorporated into his larger program of artistic patronage, were probably related to his devotion to the Infante D. Henrique and to his fervent promotion of the cult of the Infante as the mastermind and divinely inspired originator of Portuguese overseas expansion in the Atlantic Ocean and along the coasts of West Africa.<sup>678</sup> During his lifetime, the Infante D. Henrique was governor of the crusading Order of Christ (formerly the Templars), which derived much wealth and power from its intimate involvement in overseas expansion, and was primarily responsible for overseeing most facets of it. Since he never married and had no children, he designated his nephew the Infante D. Fernando, the brother of King D. Afonso V and father of D. Manuel, as his son and heir.<sup>679</sup> After D. Henrique's death in 1460, the Infante D. Fernando succeeded him as governor of the Order of Christ and inherited his

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<sup>678</sup> Costa, João Paulo Oliveira e, *D. Manuel I, 1469-1521: Um Príncipe do Renascimento*, Lisbon: Circulo de Leitores, 2005, pp. 36, 38, 61, 226

<sup>679</sup> Albuquerque, Luís de and Maria Emília Madeira Santos, *Portugaliae monumenta Africana*, Lisbon: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical; Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimientos Portugueses; Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, v. 1, 1993, pp. 95-107. (The source will hereafter be referred to as PMA.) For the Infante D. Fernando, see Lopes, Sebastiana Alves Pereira, *O Infante Dom Fernando e a nobreza fundiária de Serpa e Moura (1453-1470)*, Beja: Câmara Municipal de Beja, 2003; Moreno, Humberto Baquero, "O infante dom Fernando, mestre da Ordem de Santiago," in *As Ordens Militares em Portugal e no Sul da Europa*, edited by Isabel Cristina Fernandes and Paulo Pacheco, Lisbon: Edições Colibri; 1997, pp. 325-343; Costa, João Paulo Oliveira e, 2005, pp. 29-41.



possession of the enormously important Atlantic islands of Madeira and the Azores as well as the Cape Verde Islands, opposite Senegambia.<sup>680</sup>

The legendary, prestigious inheritance of Infante D. Henrique passed to D. Manuel in 1484 after the assassination of his brother D. Diogo, Duke of Viseu, at the hands of João II.<sup>681</sup> Consequently, from an early age, D. Manuel had a deep personal investment in sub-Saharan Africa and possessed expert familiarity with and detailed knowledge about the worlds of Atlantic Africa, especially the Cape Verde islands. D. Manuel was certainly aware of the Infante D. Henrique's practice of collecting and circulating African objects he received as gifts from African rulers as evidence of his friendships and the diplomatic and commercial relationships he had successfully established with them, and as proof of the benefits to be gained from such an arrangement. It is this inheritance from the Infante D. Henrique—the governorship of the Order of Christ, investment in peaceful trade in Atlantic Africa and possession of the Atlantic Islands, and the practice of collecting and circulating African objects to enhance his glory and reputation—and the relentless celebration of it which inspired D. Manuel's patronage of Temne and Bullom artists from Sierra Leone.

In addition to inheriting the titles, positions, rights and possessions of the Infante D. Henrique, D. Manuel was likewise heir to his passionate chivalric and crusading spirit and his obsession with waging holy war against the Muslims of North Africa.<sup>682</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>680</sup> PMA, 1993, v. 1, pp. 120-121; Albuquerque, Luís de and Maria Emília Madeira Santos, *História geral de Cabo Verde: Corpo Documental*, Lisbon: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical; Direcção-Geral do Património Cultural de Cabo Verde, 1988, v. 1, pp. 15-18.

<sup>681</sup> Albuquerque, Luís de and Maria Emília Madeira Santos, *História geral de Cabo Verde: Corpo Documental*, Lisbon: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical; Direcção-Geral do Património Cultural de Cabo Verde, 1988, v. 1, pp. 49-50, 65-66; PMA, 1993, v. 2, pp. 13-16.

<sup>682</sup> For the importance of chivalry and crusade to the Infante D. Henrique, see Russell, Peter E., *Prince Henry "the Navigator": A Life*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000; Elbl, Ivana, "The state of research: Henry 'the Navigator'," *Journal of Medieval History*, v. 27, 2001, pp. 79-99; Elbl, Ivana, "Man

the Infante D. Henrique had been the principal proponent of crusade at the Portuguese court and he bequeathed his infectious enthusiasm and alluring ideals to his nephews: King D. Afonso V and his adopted son and heir the Infante D. Fernando. Both Afonso V and D. Fernando gained international reputations for their chivalric exploits and military conquests in North Africa, including Alcácer-Seguer (1458), Anafé (1468), Arzila and Tangier (1471).<sup>683</sup> Although Afonso V and D. Fernando continued actively to support exploration and commerce in sub-Saharan Africa and aggressively directed and closely monitored all activities and developments there, they celebrated their chivalric deeds and crusading victories in North Africa as heroic and honorable endeavors most worthy of prestige and glory.<sup>684</sup>

To commemorate these famed events, Afonso V immediately commissioned an elaborate series of four tapestries, now known as the Pastrana Tapestries, which depict in detail his battles and military triumphs in North Africa, particularly Arzila. (Fig. 4.5) He was also likely responsible for the monumental panels of São Vicente de Fora painted by his court painter Nuno Gonçalves, whom he knighted, as a form of ex-voto commissioned in gratitude for his crusading successes.<sup>685</sup> (Fig. 4.6) In this regard, the

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of His Time (and Peers): A New Look at Henry the Navigator,” *Luso-Brazilian Review*, v. 28, n. 2, 1991, pp. 73-89.

<sup>683</sup> For Afonso V and the Infante D. Fernando’s military offensives in North Africa, see Gomes, Saul António, *D. Afonso V: o Africano*, Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 2006, pp. 172-198; Braga, Paulo Drumond, “A Expansão no Norte de África,” in *Nova História da Expansão Portuguesa: A Expansão Quatrocentista*, edited by A. H. de Oliveira Marques, Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1998, pp. 237-337; Farinha, António Dias, *Os Portugueses em Marrocos*, Lisbon: Instituto Camões, 1999.

<sup>684</sup> For Afonso V’s involvement in sub-Saharan Africa, see Costa, João Paulo Oliveira e, “D. Afonso V e o Atlântico,” *Mare Liberum*, v. 17, 1999, pp. 39-71; Costa, João Paulo Oliveira e, “D. Afonso V e o Atlântico: a Base do Projecto Expansionista de D. João II,” in *D. João II, o Mar e o Universalismo Lusitano: Actas III Simposio de História Marítima*, edited by Rogério d’Oliveira, Lisbon: Academia de Marinha, 2000, pp. 39-61. For the Infante D. Fernando, see Costa, João Paulo Oliveira e, 2005, pp. 29-41.

<sup>685</sup> For Afonso V’s court painter Nuno Gonçalves and the highly controversial retable, see Almeida, Jorge Filipe de and Maria Manuela Barroso de Albuquerque, *Os Painéis de Nuno Gonçalves*, Lisbon: Editorial Verbo, 2003; Abrantes, Anapaula, ed., *Nuno Gonçalves: novos documentos: Estudo da pintura portuguesa do Séc. XV*, Lisbon: Instituto Português de Museus/Reproscan, 1994; Castello Branco, Theresa Schedel de,

architectural patronage of the Infante D. Fernando is especially fascinating for the prominence of the mudéjar decoration and style of the buildings associated with him, such as the Ermida de São Brás, Évora with its circular turrets with conical pinnacles and Islamic merlons, and the Convento da Conceição, Beja with its ogive arches, conical pinnacles, tiles (*azulejos*) and tower.<sup>686</sup> (Fig. 4.7-8) Through the patronage of monumental sacred architecture, the Infante D. Fernando deliberately referred to the Islamic artistic traditions of North Africa and Iberia and powerfully evoked his involvement with Morocco and, possibly, his crusading adventures there. Indeed, North Africa had become integral to his courtly identity just as it had come to define the reign of Afonso V, who became known by the epithet “O Africano” (“The African”).

Since the capture of Ceuta in 1415, Portuguese overseas expansion had been represented in part as a continuation of the Iberian Reconquest. Afonso V’s artistic commissions of tapestries and monumental panel paintings, and the emergence of a mudéjar architectural style supported from within the court, can be justifiably interpreted as triumphal symbols of victory, subjugation and appropriation.<sup>687</sup> The collecting and circulating of weapons, such as swords, as military trophies would likewise belong to this tradition. However, following Maria Rosa Menocal’s observations on the influence of Arabic literature in Europe, scholars have explored more complex and expansive

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*Os painéis de S. Vicente de Fora: As Chaves do Mistério*, Lisbon: Quetzal Editores, 1994; Markl, Dagoberto, *O retábulo de S Vicente da Sé de Lisboa e os documentos*, Lisbon: Editorial Caminho 1988.

<sup>686</sup> Silva, José Custódio Vieira da, *O Tardo-Gótico em Portugal: A Arquitectura no Alentejo*, Lisbon: Livros Horizonte, 1989; Dias, Pedro, “Arquitectura mudéjar portuguesa: tentativa de sistematização”, *Mare Liberum*, v. 8, 1994, pp. 49–89. For an introduction to mudéjar architecture, see Dodds, Jerrilynn, “The Mudejar Tradition in Architecture,” in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, edited by Salma Khadra Jayyusi and Manuela Marín, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992, pp. 592–7.

<sup>687</sup> This idea is best expressed in Shalem, Avinoam, *Islam Christianized: Islamic portable objects in the medieval church treasuries of the Latin West*, New York: Peter Lang, 1996.

interpretations that are increasingly sensitive to specific context.<sup>688</sup> For example, it has been shown that Roger II of Sicily incorporated Islamic artistic traditions and motifs into preeminent royal commissions, such as his royal mantle and the imagery of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, to enhance his majesty and to form a cosmopolitan royal image associated with expropriation and mastery of the highest artistic achievements of Islam.<sup>689</sup> Along similar lines, the intentional use by the Portuguese court of the mudéjar artistic style and decoration in royal and princely architectural projects, particularly on Christian churches, could signify the incorporation of Islamic cultural traditions in a way which recognized and manipulated their sophistication and elegance in order to bolster the achievements of Afonso V and the Infante D. Fernando in North Africa.

As a result of his chivalric and crusading successes, the Infante D. Fernando now commanded the wealth, power and artistic skill necessary to commission such ambitious architectural projects. By implication, Islamic artistic traditions in the form of mudéjar architecture would likewise serve to enhance the glory and honor of the Infante D. Fernando who had helped to bring North Africa and its refined cultural heritage under Portuguese control. Indeed, Paulo Pereira has insisted on the erudite, programmatic and

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<sup>688</sup> Menocal, Maria Rosa, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1987, pp. 27-70; Dodds, Jerrilynn D., "Islam, Christianity, and the Problem of Religious Art," in *Art of Medieval Spain A.D. 500-1200*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993, pp. 27-37; Robinson, Cynthia, "Mudéjar Revisited: A Prologoména to the Reconstruction of Perception, Devotion, and Experience at the Mudéjar Convent of Clarisas, Tordesillas, Spain (Fourteenth Century A.D.)," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, v. 43, 2003, pp. 51-77; Ruggles, D. Fairchild, "The Alcazar of Seville and Mudejar Architecture," *Gesta*, v. 43, n. 2, 2004, pp. 87-98.

<sup>689</sup> Hoffman, Eva R., "Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian Interchange from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century," *Art History*, v. 24, n. 1, 2003, pp. 17-50. See also, Tronzo, William, "The Mantle of Roger II of Sicily," in *Robes and Honor: the medieval world of investiture*, edited by Stewart Gordon Edition, New York: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 241-254; Tronzo, William, *The cultures of his kingdom: Roger II and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.

emphatically courtly character of mudéjar architecture in Portugal.<sup>690</sup> According to Pereira, the court patronage of mudéjar architecture and the presence of Islamic objects and textiles at court were essential and prominent elements in a deliberate strategy to fashion a distinctive identity for the court, one which would differentiate it from other European courts, while simultaneously promoting its claims to prestige and glory. Nevertheless, the patronage of a mudéjar architecture with specifically local characteristics also aligned the Portuguese court with the royal and imperial traditions in Spain and Sicily.

D. Manuel carefully studied the objectives and patronage practices of his father the Infante D. Fernando, as well as those of his uncle Afonso V, and was profoundly influenced by them. As heir to his father and, through him, to the Infante D. Henrique, D. Manuel cherished the crusading ideal and amplified its importance to his own reign as king.<sup>691</sup> The collecting and circulating of African objects by the Infante D. Henrique and the patronage of mudéjar architecture, combined with the prominent use of heraldry and personal emblems on these buildings, by the Infante D. Fernando, were decisive for the

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<sup>690</sup> Pereira, Paulo, *A Obra Silvestre e a Esfera do Rei*, Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra, 1990, pp. 74-82, 203; Pereira, Paulo, "A Arquitectura Manuelina e o Problema do Exotismo," *Oceanos*, n. 33, 1998, pp. 151-160.

<sup>691</sup> For the enormous prestige crusading in North Africa continued to enjoy in Portugal, see Thomaz; Elbl, Ivana, "Prestige Considerations and the Changing Interest of the Portuguese Crown in Sub-Saharan Atlantic Africa, 1444-1580," *Portuguese Studies Review*, n. 2, v. 10, 2003, pp. 15-36; Humble, Susannah, "Prestige, ideology and social politics: The place of the Portuguese overseas expansion in the policies of D. Manuel (1495 – 1521)," *Itinerario*, v. 24, 2000, pp. 21–43. For equally lofty perceptions of crusade at the Burgundian court, see Paviot, Jacques, "Noblesse et croisade à la fin du Moyen Âge," *Cahiers de Recherches Médiévales: La Noblesse en question (XIIIe-XVe siècle)*, edited by Philippe Contamine, v. 13, 2006, pp. 69-84; Paviot, Jacques, "La croisade bourguignonne aux XIVe et XVe siècles: un idéal chevaleresque?," *Francia*, vol. 33, n. 1, 2006, pp. 33-68; Paviot, Jacques, "Burgundy and the Crusade," in *Crusading in the Fifteenth Century: Message and Impact*, edited by Norman Housley, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 70-80; Paviot, Jacques, *Les ducs de Bourgogne, la croisade et l'Orient (fin XIVe siècle - XVe siècle)*, Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris - Sorbonne, 2003; Paviot, Jacques, "Angleterre et Bourgogne: deux voies vers la croisade au XVe siècle," in *L'Angleterre et les pays bourguignons: relations et comparaisons (XVe-XVIe s.)*, edited by Jean-Marie Cauchies, Neuchâtel: Publication du Centre Européen d'études bourguignonnes, v 35, 1995, pp. 27-35.

form, design and intended meanings of some of the Luso-African ivories commissioned by D. Manuel. In addition, an appreciation of the courtly, chivalric and crusading mentality cultivated and fostered by D. Manuel as a result of his connections to the two Infantes is essential to understanding something of the perceptions of Luso-African ivories, which was intimately related to medieval oliphants, influenced by the Fatimid art of Egypt, and to the ivories carved at the courts of Umayyad Spain in Córdoba and Medinat al-Zahra’.

##### 5. The Carving Traditions of Sierra Leone in Portuguese Sources

Portuguese ships first reached the area of Sierra Leone around 1460, probably shortly before the death of the Infante D. Henrique. The flourishing artistic traditions of the area were immediately recognized and commented on by Europeans. Under the aegis of Afonso V, Alvise Cadamosto and Pero de Sintra soon returned to the area of Sierra Leone in 1461-62 to continue to explore the islands, rivers and coasts and to initiate peaceful contact with any Africans they might encounter. On this trip, Cadamosto and Sintra discovered the existence of sculptures of human figures carved in wood in two separate locations. On the Bissagos Islands off the River Geba in Guinea-Bissau, they claimed to have “found statues of idols of wood” inside the otherwise bleak houses of the inhabitants.<sup>692</sup> On the Los Islands across from Conakry in Guinea, they ascertained that the inhabitants “venerated the statues of wood in the form of men” and offered some thoughts on ritual practices, believing that the Africans made offerings to the idols before

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<sup>692</sup> Cadamosto, *Le Navigazioni Atlantiche del Veneziano Alvise da Mosto*, edited by Tullia Gasparini Leporace, Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1966, p. 118: “atrovarono statue de idole de legno”.

eating or drinking.<sup>693</sup> The wood idols carved in the form of human figures given to Charles the Bold by D. João de Albuquerque in March 1470 probably came from one of these two locations.<sup>694</sup>

Duarte Pacheco Pereira, an adventurer, ship's captain and cosmographer, spent several years during the 1480s in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the area of Sierra Leone, presumably exploring the islands, coasts and complex, dangerous river systems he encountered there. He eventually got sick on the small island of Príncipe in the Gulf of Guinea and was forced to return to Portugal in 1488. He then soon joined João II's personal body guard, a position of great confidence, and was appointed a prominent member of the delegation which negotiated the Treaty of Tordesillas. Pereira later gained celebrity status at the court of Manuel I as a military hero. However, while residing at court, during a period of quiet around 1505-08, he composed a book, *Esmeraldo de situ orbis*, which, based on his own personal experience, was principally an account of the coasts of Africa, but which nevertheless contained precious information on the artistic traditions and practices of the region.<sup>695</sup> Speaking of the Los Islands, Pereira explained that they were originally named the "Ilhas dos Idolos" (Islands of the Idols) by the Portuguese because, when they first went ashore, they discovered many idols there.<sup>696</sup> Pereira clarified that the Africans worshipped these idols and that they brought the idols to the fields with them when they planted rice.

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<sup>693</sup> Cadamosto in Leporace, 1966, p. 119: "adorano le statue de legno de forma de homini".

<sup>694</sup> Bassani, 2000, pp. xxii, 171.

<sup>695</sup> For the value of the text to African history, see Hair, P. E. H., "The Early Sources on Guinea," *History in Africa*, v. 21, 1994, pp. 87-126; Fage, J. D., "A Commentary on Duarte Pacheco Pereira's Account of the Lower Guinea Coastlands in His "Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis," and on Some Other Early Accounts," *History in Africa*, v. 7, 1980, pp. 47-80

<sup>696</sup> Pacheco Pereira, Duarte, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, edited by Augusto Epiphanyo da Silva Dias, Lisbon: Typographia Universal, 1905, p. 93: "os negros d'esta terra, quando aly vão fazer sua sementeira d'aRoz, leuam seus idolos em que adoram, e por que aly foram achados muitos d'elles quando se esta terra descobrio, se pos este nome de ilha dos Idolos..."

Moving down the coast a short distance to the Scarcies River in Sierra Leone, Pereira observed that the people living in the area of the river were called Temne and that very fine gold and slaves could be obtained there.<sup>697</sup> In addition, he stated that “in this land they make very beautiful mats of palm leaf and also ivory spoons.”<sup>698</sup> (Fig. 4.9) He then commented in a rather straightforward manner that the Temne were idolaters, but offered no details on the appearance of their idols. He also claimed somewhat cryptically that João II had built a fort in this part of Sierra Leone but was later forced by undisclosed circumstances to order its destruction.<sup>699</sup>

Following the precise geographical organization of his book, Pereira next turned his attention to the people living in the mountainous region of Sierra Leone, the “jente d’esta serra Lyoa,” the majority of whom, he claimed, were called Bullom.<sup>700</sup> According to Pereira, the Bullom, like the Temne, were idolaters, but, unlike the Temne, he also described the Bullom as “feiticeiros,” that is, as diviners, sorcerers or fetish-men, who consulted omens and oracles. Moreover, in Pereira’s opinion, the Bullom were a warlike people only rarely at peace. To contribute to their fearsome reputation, he also reported that the Bullom filed their teeth to sharp points, which was almost certainly accurate, and that on special occasions they practiced cannibalism, which was possibly a sensationalist reaction to their obviously formidable and, to Pereira, terrifying military prowess. Yet it seems that the idea of cannibalism as a metaphor for defeat and capture in war was

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<sup>697</sup> Pereira claimed that the all peoples living on the coast from the area of Conakry across from the Los Islands to Cabo Ledo were Temne. Pacheco Pereira, Duarte, 1905, pp. 94-95.

<sup>698</sup> Pacheco Pereira, 1905, p. 94: “ha jente d’este Rio sam chamados Teymenes; e aquy há ouro muito fino, ainda que he em pouca cantidade, e escrauos...e nesta terra fazem hūas esteiras de palma muito fermosas e asy collares de marfin.”

<sup>699</sup> Pacheco Pereira, 1905, p. 95.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid.



current in Sierra Leone in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>701</sup> The purpose behind the practice or rumor of cannibalism as a military ritual was to display the ferocity of the warriors and to intimidate the enemy.<sup>702</sup> This notion would coincide with the impression made on Pereira by the sharpened teeth of the Bullom, as he claimed that they gave the fierce appearance of dog's teeth.

Speaking from what seems like first-hand experience, Pereira repeatedly warned his Portuguese readers against the Bullom and solemnly cautioned acute and intense vigilance when visiting or passing by their territory.<sup>703</sup> Characterizing the Bullom as “jente belicosa” and as “muito maa jente,” Pereira testified that the Bullom possessed deadly bows and arrows and made war in the waterways of Sierra Leone in their enormous *almadias* (large canoes carved from a single tree) capable of carrying over fifty warriors. He anxiously alerted his readers that the Bullom, armed in their intimidating *almadias*, would try to overtake Portuguese ships. Although he never explicitly admitted the fact, the obvious implication throughout the section on the Bullom was that they were dangerous and that they had indeed achieved military success against Europeans. Nevertheless, despite his evident distrust and dread of the Bullom, Pereira expressed unreserved admiration for their artistic skills and creations. He wrote: “in this land they make the most ingenious spoons of ivory and the most highly worked than in any other part [of Africa], and thus they also make very beautiful, high-quality palm mats, which they call ‘bicas’” (“...nesta terra se fazem os mays sotis collares de marfim e melhor laurados que em nenhũa parte, e asim fazem esteiras de palma, a que elles chamam

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<sup>701</sup> Shaw, Rosalind, *Memories of the slave trade: ritual and the historical imagination in Sierra Leone*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, pp. 227-229.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid.

<sup>703</sup> Pacheco Pereira, 1905, pp. 97, 102.

“bicas,” muito fermosas e boas...”).<sup>704</sup> In addition, Pereira remarked that there were many elephants living in Sierra Leone and that, as a consequence, the Portuguese obtained much ivory from the Bullom.<sup>705</sup> Although we do not learn as much as we would like to know from Pereira, he does seem to have been familiar enough with the Temne and Bullom of Sierra Leone to discern some of the perceptible differences between them and he confirms that both the Temne and the Bullom carved exquisitely delicate ivory spoons and wove beautiful palm leaf mats.

A royal document from 14 February 1496 confirms that ivory spoons from Sierra Leone were being traded and collected by the Portuguese on the Cape Verde Islands during the early 1490s.<sup>706</sup> The quittance to Afonso Eannes do Campo, a knight of the king’s household and *almoxarife* (royal tax collector) of the Cape Verde Islands, certifies that he had received fourteen ivory spoons during the three years he served in office from 1491-93. As a result of the Infante D. Fernandos’s initiative, enterprise and desire to encourage settlement and increase revenue, the Cape Verde Islands had since 1466 enjoyed considerable trading privileges with the area of Sierra Leone, an arrangement which the island residents had readily exploited.<sup>707</sup>

Another document, dated 25 May 1497, reveals that Estêvão Pestana had acquired three ivory spoons from Africa while he was serving as Master of the Wardrobe

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<sup>704</sup> Pacheco Pereira, 1905, p. 96.

<sup>705</sup> Pacheco Pereira, 1905, pp. 96, 98.

<sup>706</sup> For Portuguese documents relating to the Luso-African ivories, see Teixeira da Mota, Avelino, “Gli avori africani nella documentazione portoghese dei secoli XV-XVII,” *Africa*, v. 30, n. 4, 1975, pp. 580-92; Ryder, A. F. C., “A Note on the Afro-Portuguese Ivories,” *The Journal of African History*, v. 5, n. 3, 1964, pp. 363-365; PMA, 1993, v. 2, pp. 237-238; Albuquerque, Luís de and Maria Emília Madeira Santos, *História geral de Cabo Verde: Corpo Documental*, Lisbon: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical; Direcção-Geral do Património Cultural de Cabo Verde, 1988, v. 1, pp. 101-102.

<sup>707</sup> PMA, 1993, v. 1, pp. 147-149; Boulègue, Jean, “L’Impact Économique et Politique des Navigations Portugaises sur les peuples côtiers: les cas de la Guinée du Cap Vert (XVe-XVIe Siècles),” *Revista da Universidade de Coimbra*, v. 34, 1988, pp. 431-438; Albuquerque, Luís de and Maria Emília Madeira Santos, *História geral de Cabo Verde: Corpo Documental*, Lisbon: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical; Direcção-Geral do Património Cultural de Cabo Verde, 1988, v. 1, pp. 19-22, 25-28

(Guardaroupa) to João II from 1488-1495.<sup>708</sup> Evidently, carved ivory spoons from Africa were being collected at the Portuguese court already during the reign of João II and some of them at least seem to have reached the court during these years through trade between Sierra Leone and the Cape Verde Islands. Although only a single, random account book of the *Casa de Guiné* (the royal institution overseeing trade with Africa) survived the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, its contents are informative. During the year running from September 1504 to September 1505, ships arriving in the port of Lisbon from sub-Saharan Africa, having made stops in Sierra Leone and the Portuguese fort of São Jorge da Mina in Ghana, registered some one-hundred-and-thirty-one ivory spoons and three ivory saltcellars in the taxable import records.<sup>709</sup> Clearly, the commerce in carved ivory objects from Sierra Leone, in the form of spoons and saltcellars, was well established by the early years of the sixteenth century. However, it should be noted that the records of the *Casa de Guiné* would not necessarily register objects commissioned by or intended for the king. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that the quality of the carved ivory objects listed by the *Casa de Guiné* was identical to the quality of those surviving ivories explicitly made for the king or elite members of the court.

## 6. Valentim Fernandes

Carved ivory objects from Sierra Leone were certainly familiar to and appreciated by the Portuguese court in the 1490s and the first several years of the sixteenth century. In addition to the documentary records already mentioned, we have the invaluable evidence of Valentim Fernandes, who, from about 1505 to 1508, composed the most

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<sup>708</sup> Teixeira da Mota, 1975, p. 581.

<sup>709</sup> Teixeira da Mota, 1975; Ryder, 1964; Curnow, 1983, p. 28; Bassani, 2000, pp. XVI, XXV; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 60.

important detailed account of Sierra Leone.<sup>710</sup> Fernandes was one of the more intriguing cultural figures at the Portuguese court.<sup>711</sup> Voraciously curious, he was simultaneously royal printer, editor, translator, author, royal notary for the German merchant and banking community in Lisbon, and insatiable collector and principal disseminator of information on Portuguese expansion. Originally hailing from Moravia, Fernandes seems to have spent a good deal of time early in life in the major German cities of Augsburg and Nuremberg, where he became close friends with the *Stadtschreiber* Conrad Peutinger (1465-1547), who was the privileged humanist advisor to Maximilian I, correspondent of Erasmus, and “good friend” of Albrecht Dürer.<sup>712</sup> Peutinger is most famous today as an antiquarian and owner of the “Peutinger Map” (Codex Vindobonensis 324).

The burgeoning and enduring relationship between Fernandes and Peutinger was of major significance. While residing in Augsburg and Nuremberg, leading centers of print culture in Europe, Fernandes seems to have become involved in the publishing

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<sup>710</sup> *Códice Valentim Fernandes*, edited by José Pereira da Costa, Lisbon: Academia Portuguesa da História, 1997, pp. 100-115. The manuscript, “BSB - Codex Hispanus n. 27,” belongs to the Staatsbibliothek München and is available online: <http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/bsb00007891/images/>

<sup>711</sup> The bibliography on Fernandes is, happily, growing rapidly, see, Hendrich, Yvonne, *Valentim Fernandes: ein deutscher Buchdrucker in Portugal um die Wende vom 15. zum 16. Jahrhundert und sein Umkreis*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007; Justen, Helga Maria, *Valentim Fernandes e a literatura de viagens*, Lagos, Portugal: Câmara Municipal de Lagos, 2007; Lopes, Marília dos Santos, “‘Vimos oje maravilhosas’ Valentim Fernandes e os Descobrimentos Portugueses,” in *Portugal--Alemanha--Africa: do imperialismo colonial ao imperialismo político: actas do IV Encontro Luso-Alemão*, edited by A.H. de Oliveira Marques, Alfred Opitz, and Fernando Clara, Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 1996, pp. 13-23; Alves Dias, João José, ed., *No quinto centenário da Vita Christi: os primeiros impressores alemães em Portugal*, Lisbon: Instituto da Biblioteca Nacional e do Livro, 1995; Anselmo, Artur, “L’Activité Typographique de Valentim Fernandes au Portugal (1495-1518),” in *L’humanisme portugais et l’Europe : actes du XXIe Colloque international d’études humanistes, Tours, 3-13 juillet 1978*, edited by Jean-Claude Margolin and José V. de Pina Martins, Paris: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian; Centre culturel portugais, 1984, pp. 781-818; Anselmo, Artur, *Origens da imprensa em Portugal*, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional—Casa da Moeda, 1981; Andrade, António Alberto de, “O Auto notarial de Valentim Fernandes (1503) e o seu significado como fonte histórica,” *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Português*, pp. 521-545.

<sup>712</sup> For Peutinger’s role in the world of art and scholarship, see the fascinating recent studies by Wood and Silver: Wood, Christopher S., *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008; Silver, Larry, *Marketing Maximilian: the Visual Ideology of a Holy Roman Emperor*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008. See also, Hutchison, Jane Campbell, *Albrecht Dürer: a biography*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.

industry, perhaps encouraged in the endeavor by his humanist friends. Nevertheless, by 1493 he was living in Seville, probably working as a printer, before traveling to the Portuguese court in 1494 as translator to Hieronymus Münzer, a German doctor, humanist and diplomat from Nuremberg, who was visiting the court of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon as well as the court of João II. Like Peutinger, Münzer was deeply interested in overseas expansion. Indeed, the purpose of his diplomatic mission to the courts of Iberia might have been primarily to obtain information on this topic. Münzer even wrote a clever Latin treatise on Portuguese exploration in Africa and the Atlantic while he was resident at court in Evora.<sup>713</sup>

The myriad talents of Fernandes were readily perceived by the Portuguese court and, immediately after Münzer's departure, he entered the household of Queen Leonor, wife of João II. Shortly thereafter, in 1495, he was explicitly commissioned by the queen to print the four volumes of *Vita Christi*, a landmark publication in Portugal.<sup>714</sup> In the following years, his printing and bookselling establishment thrived and he received considerable royal patronage from Manuel I. In 1502 in order to pique interest in and garner support for Portuguese expansion in India, Fernandes translated and published in Portuguese an edition of Marco Polo, along with other travel writers like Nicolò Conti. The lengthy, substantive introduction he wrote for it is of major significance for understanding Manuel I's imperial ideology.<sup>715</sup> The next year, in 1503, Manuel I appointed Fernandes royal notary to the German community in Lisbon. The investment

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<sup>713</sup> Münzer, Jerónimo, "Do Descobrimento da Guiné pelo Infante D. Henrique," in *Monumenta Missionaria Africana: África Ocidental (1342-1499)*, edited by António Brásio, Lisbon: Agência Geral do Ultramar, second series, vol. 1, 1958, pp. 214-253.

<sup>714</sup> See the excellent exhibition catalogue dedicated to this incunabula, Alves Dias, João José, ed., *No quinto centenário da Vita Christi: os primeiros impressores alemães em Portugal*, Lisbon: Instituto da Biblioteca Nacional e do Livro, 1995.

<sup>715</sup> Costa, 2005, pp. 175-179.

of German banks and merchants in Portuguese overseas expansion and commerce was essential and, accordingly, of paramount importance to the crown. As a well-connected royal agent, Fernandes became the principal intermediary between the German community and the Portuguese crown. Surely, Manuel I intended to exploit Fernandes's intimate relationship with Peutingger. Not only was Peutingger city secretary of Augsburg, attorney to Jacob Fugger, and confidant of the Holy Roman Emperor, but he had also married into the powerful Welser banking family and was instrumental in articulating the interests of German merchants as well as those of the emperor. Through his regular correspondence, carried out in German, with Peutingger and other German humanists, Fernandes disseminated vital information about Portuguese activities and objectives overseas. Indeed, his letter to his "most dear brother" Peutingger, which included a drawing, about the Indian rhinoceros named Ganda, who had been sent to Manuel I in 1514 by the Sultan of Gujarat, was shown to the artist Albrecht Dürer. Through the offices of Peutingger, Fernandes's letter probably served as the basis for Dürer's famous drawing and woodcut print of the unlucky rhinoceros, who later drowned at sea en route to Italy.<sup>716</sup>

In addition to his participation in the financial and commercial aspects of Portuguese expansion, Fernandes continued to work as principal royal printer to Manuel I. In this capacity, he made critical contributions to the king's overarching reform projects and robust attempts at imposing greater centralization and uniformity in the kingdom. For example, he received the prestigious commission to print the new rule of

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<sup>716</sup> Massing, Jean Michel, "The Quest for the Exotic: Albrecht Dürer in the Netherlands," in *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, edited by Jay A. Levenson, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991, pp. 115-119; Massing, Jean Michel, *Circa 1492*, 1991, p. 300. For the rhinoceros, see Bedini, Silvio, *The Pope's Elephant*, Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd, 1997, pp. 111-136.

the Order of Christ in 1504, a project in which the king, as governor of the order, was personally involved. A decade later, Fernandes was still admirably fulfilling his lucrative and distinguished duties as the king's printer. In 1514, he received the commission to print and distribute Manuel I's comprehensive legal reforms known as the *Ordenações Manuelinas*, a copy of which had to be presented to every municipal government in the realm.<sup>717</sup>

Fernandes clearly enjoyed Manuel I's confidence and his connections to an international network of esteemed humanists, and powerful investors interested in Portuguese overseas expansion were promoted and exploited by the king.<sup>718</sup> As royal printer and notary, he possessed great authority over the control, regulation and dissemination of knowledge and information. Moreover, his writings and the prints prominently featured in his official royal publications strategically made crucial contributions to the formation of the images of kingship. Because of his various positions of influence at court, Fernandes was allowed to interview crews returning from overseas voyages and he meticulously recorded and compiled what he learned from them in manuscript notebooks. His voluminous manuscript, which was bequeathed to Peutingen after his death, is a singular document. Among many other things, the manuscript contains extraordinary accounts of Sierra Leone and the island of São Tomé in the Gulf of Guinea. Fernandes likely wrote these lengthy reports around 1505-1508.

Fernandes's detailed description of Sierra Leone was based on extensive conversations he had with Alvaro Velho de Barreiro. Velho had lived in Sierra Leone,

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<sup>717</sup> Dias, João José Alves, ed., *Ordenações Manuelinas*, Lisbon, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Centro de Estudos Históricos, 2002.

<sup>718</sup> For the interest of German humanists in overseas expansion more generally, see Johnson, Christine R., *The German discovery of the world: Renaissance encounters with the strange and marvelous*, Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008.

among the Temne and the Bullom, for eight years, probably from the mid-1490s. In order to gather information about the peoples and cultures of West Africa, the Portuguese court would, when appropriate, offer condemned criminals the opportunity to commute their sentences and to live for a specified number of years in West Africa to learn as much as possible about the area, especially about the customs, commerce and languages of the communities among whom they were consigned to dwell.<sup>719</sup> It seems that Alvaro Velho was such a criminal and had been sentenced to live among the Temne and Bullom in Sierra Leone for a period of eight years. It is possible, therefore, that Fernandes conducted his exhaustive interview with Velho in an official capacity and that the extensive report Velho provided to him was the final, but key, component in his obligation to the crown.

Fernandes's written description of the Temne and Bullom societies in Sierra Leone is unusually specific and sympathetic. It is the only known substantive account of Sierra Leone from the early decades of first contact with Europeans.<sup>720</sup> The lengthy text discusses, in various degrees of detail, languages, religious practices, political structures, the procedures and organization of war, justice, customs of marriage and inheritance, commerce, food, hunting, architecture, clothing and physical appearance. Moreover, the text provides the richest and most comprehensive account of art produced in Sierra Leone

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<sup>719</sup> Russell-Wood, A.J.R., "Settlement, Colonization, and Integration in the Portuguese-Influenced World, 1415-1570," *Portuguese Studies Review*, v. 15, n. 1-2, 2007, pp. 1-35. For a number of examples, see Albuquerque, Luís de and Maria Emília Madeira Santos, *Portugaliae monumenta Africana*, Lisbon: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical; Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses; Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 3 vols., 1993.

<sup>720</sup> For assessments of the text, see Hair, P. E. H., "The Text of Valentim Fernandes's Account of Upper Guinea," *Bulletin de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire*, ser. B, v. 31, 1969, pp. 1035-1038; Hair, P. E. H., "The Early Sources on Guinea," *History in Africa*, v. 21, 1994, pp. 87-126; Justen, Helga Maria, *Valentim Fernandes e a literatura de viagens*, Lagos, Portugal: Câmara Municipal de Lagos, 2007. See also, the classic though dated general historical studies incorporating information from Fernandes by Fyfe and Kup: Fyfe, Christopher, *A History of Sierra Leone*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962; Fyfe, Christopher, *Sierra Leone Inheritance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964; Kup, A. P., *A History of Sierra Leone, 1400-1787*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961.



around 1500.<sup>721</sup> The Bullom and Temne artists in these areas carved a large number and broad range of sculpture in wood, clay and ivory. The detailed discussion of wood figure sculpture focuses on the specific ritual use and significance of these objects, often referred to as “idols.” The amount and type of information on wood sculpture and its ritual context reveals a deep level of understanding and sensitivity to the prominent role of art in these societies.

According to Fernandes, the area of Sierra Leone extended from the Los Islands off Conakry, Guinea to Cape Mount in modern Liberia and it was inhabited by the Temne, who, he specified, lived in the interior, and by the Bullom, who, he related, occupied the coastal regions. The information Fernandes obtained from Velho on their carving traditions focused principally on two main areas of settlement: one on the Greater and Lesser Scarcies Rivers and delta, and the other around the Sierra Leone estuary and peninsula, in the area of modern Freetown.<sup>722</sup> He affirmed that the Temne and Bullom spoke different languages. However, with a few notable exceptions, they seem to have shared common artistic traditions and religious practices.

The text amply testifies to the abundance and great diversity of wood idols as well as to their powerful presence and pronounced visibility.<sup>723</sup> In general, idols were wood sculptures of human figures. Fernandes succinctly makes the blanket statement that the Temne and Bullom believed their idols helped them with their needs. Among the many different types of idols Fernandes mentions, he draws special attention to various healing

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<sup>721</sup> Hart provides the only sustained analysis of Fernandes’s text in relation to the art of Sierra Leone, see his excellent but regrettably rarely cited study: Hart, W. A., *Continuity and Discontinuity in the Art History of Sierra Leone*, Quaderni Poro, v. 9, Milan: Carlo Monzino, 1995.

<sup>722</sup> Hart, 1995, pp. 31-32, 63; Hart in *Africa: The Art of a Continent*, edited by Tom Phillips, London: Royal Academy of Arts; New York: Prestel, 1995, p. 468; Hart and Fyfe, 1993.

<sup>723</sup> Hart, 1995, pp. 44-46. For a useful overview of art and society in Sierra Leone, see Curnow, 1983, pp. 81-162.

idols, idols belonging to men's and women's societies, idols of war, an idol of the sun, idols commemorating honored ancestors and distinguished warriors, an idol the Bullom associated with capital punishment, and the great universal idol of the Temne, protected by serpents. Fernandes provides the names of these idols and is surprisingly specific about the purposes, powers and ritual contexts of use of these idols. He also includes valuable descriptions of the location and display of idols as well as pertinent information on patronage and possession of idols.

Because of the depth, breadth and variety of material discussed by Fernandes, it possible only to suggest with a few examples something of the awareness at the Portuguese court of the artistic traditions of Sierra Leone. Every village possessed a general idol called *Cru* which was located in the middle of each village. This *Cru* was actually an ancient baobab tree which they referred to as *manipeyro*. Continuing this association of wood with special powers, idols associated with sicknesses were carved of wood in the form of men. These healing idols and others, also of wood, which possessed the power to respond to requests for assistance with various kinds of problems, seem to have been ubiquitous. They were found in houses, on farms, in the center of villages and even, outside of settlements, by roadsides where they were sheltered in covered dwellings said by Velho to resemble chapels. Wood idols, again carved in the form of men, were important elements of both the men's and women's societies of Sierra Leone. These wood carvings were inaccessible to members of the opposite sex. The idol of the women's society, for instance, was named *Pere*, sculpted in the form of a man, and it was housed in its own enclosed church. Velho reported that the women spoke to the idol as if it were alive, though, he confessed, the idol never replied.

In a revealing section, Fernandes discusses the idol of war called *Ymell*. Sacrifices were made to *Ymell* to determine whether to go to war or to maintain peace. He indicates that the idol was named after “a very courageous warrior” from the remote past. Indeed, Fernandes further clarifies that the idol was believed to have been carved in the likeness (“*semelhança*”) of this famous heroic warrior *Ymell*. Along these lines, Fernandes later mentions that it was customary in Sierra Leone to make memorials of the dead. He specifies that the idols commemorating honored men were made in their likeness. However, the idols of commoners and slaves were crudely and rather abstractly and generically carved, with little descriptive detail, in wood. The fact that Fernandes does not provide information on the medium of the idols commemorating honored men, said to be made in their likeness, has given rise to speculation that these might have been carved in stone rather than in wood.<sup>724</sup> We will return to this contentious issue and its implications below. Nevertheless, regardless of the medium, these idols carved as memorials to the dead were definitely placed in thatched roof structures where sacrifices could be made to them.

The idol *Bemthema* was anomalous in several respects. It was, significantly, molded in malleable clay and not carved of wood and, in Velho’s opinion, it was intentionally given “the most hideous appearance.” It must have been a fairly large-scale sculpture because Velho claimed that numerous entire elephant tusks were used as its teeth. These enormous tusks certainly contributed to the desired terrifying effect of the figure. Without further explanation, Velho told Fernandes that the idol *Bemthema* was made to resemble the sun.

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<sup>724</sup> Lamp, Frederick J., “Houses of Stones: Memorial Art of Fifteenth-Century Sierra Leone,” *The Art Bulletin*, v. 65, n. 2, 1983, pp. 219-237.

Only twice does Fernandes distinguish between idols belonging exclusively either to the Bullom or to the Temne. Fernandes partly confirms Pacheco's statement that the Bullom, and not the Temne, were formidable warriors. The section of the text dealing with war begins with a description of the weapons employed in Sierra Leone. These included, among others, spears and extremely poisonous arrows. Yet Fernandes also highlights the use of swords and daggers as noteworthy, and this fact might have some relevance to the commissioning by the Portuguese of ivory dagger hilts from artists in this area. Not having personally engaged in battle in Sierra Leone, Fernandes, unlike Pereira, openly praises the manner in which they conduct their wars, comparing it favorably to European tactics and organization, and describes their *almadias* as being even larger—capable of carrying about one-hundred-and-twenty fully armed warriors—than the ones desperately feared by Pacheco. In addition, Fernandes seems to corroborate Pacheco's report that these warriors practiced cannibalism as a military ritual, adding details on the method of preparation and consumption of their enemies. The section on war concludes with the declaration that the Bullom especially were doggedly resolute and courageous warriors. This admiration for the martial abilities of the Bullom in particular likewise seems to validate Pacheco's testimony. These military traits seem to have influenced the exercise of justice among the Temne and Bullom. For instance, Fernandes claims that the Bullom practiced capital punishment for murder, but that the Temne forbade executions absolutely. As a consequence, the idol *Anyma* was specific to the Bullom. Those guilty of murder would be brought to *Anyma* and executed before the idol by the village leaders. As they performed the execution before the idol *Anyma*, the Bullom leaders were supposed to dance and sing.

According to Velho, the great universal idol of the Temne was located in the land known as *Hatschinch*, probably near what is today Robertsport in Liberia, in the forest outside the town of *Catell*. Fernandes says the celebrated idol, to which the Temne willingly made arduous pilgrimages, was called *Tschyntschn*. The word, as understood by Velho from his Temne informants and conveyed by him to Fernandes, seems ultimately to derive from the Arabic word *jinn*, meaning spirit.<sup>725</sup> The name *Tschyntschn*, as it appears in the manuscript, reveals something of Fernandes's impressive aptitude for languages as well as his limitations.<sup>726</sup> It shows Fernandes transcribing African words as they were heard and repeated by Velho, a Portuguese speaker, according to his native German phonetics.<sup>727</sup> So we have a German speaker writing a text in Portuguese which attempts to record African words, concepts and customs.

Velho confessed to Fernandes that he personally visited *Tschyntschn* and that it was the most frightening experience of his life. The idol was a life-size wood statue made in the figure of a man and was dressed in a colorful shirt and wore a cap on its head. He held a spear in one hand and sported gold earrings and gold nose rings as well as a huge jewel on his head. *Tschyntschn* was sited in a clearing in the forest, but protected in the shade by a specially designed canopy of trees. The idol was cared for by his own special chaplain and was constantly guarded by numerous serpents. These serpents lived off the

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<sup>725</sup> Hart, 1995, p. 45; see Nafafé, José Lingna, *Colonial Encounters: Issues of Culture, Hybridity and Creolisation Portuguese Mercantile Settlers in West Africa*, New York: Peter Lang, 2007.

<sup>726</sup> Fernandes published in and translated from a variety of languages, including German, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Latin.

<sup>727</sup> Hair, P. E. H., "The Text of Valentim Fernandes's Account of Upper Guinea," *Bulletin de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire*, ser. B, v. 31, 1969, pp. 1035-1038.

sacrifices made to the idol and were believed to devour anyone who approached the idol without his dedicated chaplain. Velho, fearing his encounter with the idol in the isolated forest location, trembled at the sight of these serpents, but later marveled at their enormous size.

After his lengthy narrative description of the Temne idol *Tschyntschn*, Fernandes concludes his account of Sierra Leone with comments on Luso-African ivories. He writes: “The men of this land are very clever Blacks in manual art, namely, in making saltcellars and spoons of ivory. Thus, whatever work they draw for them, they carve it in ivory” (“Os homens desta terra som muy sotijis negros de arte manual—a saber—de saleyros de marffim e collares E assi qualquer obra que lhes debuxam os cortam em marffim”).<sup>728</sup> Earlier in the text, Fernandes had initiated his general discussion of the finished products, animals, and natural resources to be found in the area of Sierra Leone by highlighting first the excellence of ivory carving by the local artists: “In Sierra Leone, the men are very clever and very ingenious; they make works in ivory that are very marvelous to see. They make all of the things that they are asked to make, namely, some make spoons, others saltcellars, others hilts for daggers and any other fine work” (“Em Serra Lyoa som os homens muyto sotijis muy engeniosos / fazem obras de marffim muy marauilhosas de ver de todallas cousas que lhes mandam fazer—a saber—hũus fazem colheyros outros saleyros outros punhos pera dagas e qualquer outra sotileza”).<sup>729</sup> Before introducing the methods and techniques employed in the hunting and capture of elephants in Sierra Leone, Fernandes makes the direct connection between the presence of elephants, the ability to hunt and kill them to obtain the tusks, and the skill to use the

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<sup>728</sup> *Códice Valentim Fernandes*, 1997, p. 115.

<sup>729</sup> *Códice Valentim Fernandes*, 1997, p. 111.

ivory to create exquisite works of art. He comments: “In this land there are many elephants of which they have an infinite number of tusks, which are ivory, and they make all their excellent works from it” (“Em esta terra ha alliffantes muytos de que tem jnfijndos dentes que he marffim de que fazem todas suas obras louçãas”).<sup>730</sup> When an elephant is killed, a feast is held in honor of the hunter and the meat is consumed. The tusks are then transformed into precious works of art.

In another part of his manuscript Fernandes engages in a broad discussion of the Sapi peoples and cultures in the larger area of Sierra Leone. Sapi was the general term employed by the Portuguese to designate the Temne and Bullom, and some other groups, such as the Baga, found in this region of West Africa. In this section, Fernandes emphasizes the admirable artistic abilities of the Sapi, particularly in metalwork and ivory carving. It is nevertheless clear that he is referring specifically to the Temne and Bullom. Fernandes writes: “These Sapis... in this land skillfully make many iron objects by hand, such as arrows, spears, harpoons, partisans, axes and daggers, which they call *abides*. And they make swords which they call *abide saban*, which is to say a large sword. And they make refined objects of ivory like spoons, saltcellars and bracelets” (“Estes çapijs...fazem nesta terra muytos artificios manuales de ferro assi como frechas e azagayas e farpões e partesanas e machados e dagas que elles chamam abides / E fazem spadas que elles chaman abide saban / que quer dizer spada grande / E assi fazem cousas sotijs de marffim como colheres saleyros e manilhas”).<sup>731</sup> In his text, Fernandes directly couples metalwork in swords and daggers with the carving in ivory of spoons, saltcellars and bracelets. The implication is that the same peoples were responsible for making both

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<sup>730</sup> Ibid.

<sup>731</sup> *Códice Valentim Fernandes*, 1997, p. 98.

kinds of objects. Since Fernandes had elsewhere noted that the Temne and Bullom used swords and daggers in war and also carved delicate ivory objects, he was surely referring to them in this instance when he used the term Sapi. Indeed, Fernandes had also observed that the Temne and Bullom carved ivory hilts for daggers, thereby combining both arts of metalwork and ivory carving. However, this is the only textual reference to the carving of ivory bracelets by the Sapi in Sierra Leone around 1500.<sup>732</sup>

The text by Fernandes furnishes significant comments on the skill and techniques of artists working in a variety of media and reveals a high level of aesthetic appreciation of the sculptures they produced. His remarks on ivory carving convey admiration for the virtuosic skill of the artists and the dazzling beauty of small-scale ivory sculptures in the form of spoons, dagger hilts, bracelets and saltcellars. It is necessary to look more closely at the language Fernandes employs and the theoretical concepts he applies when discussing some of the carved wood idols and the Luso-African ivories created by Temne and Bullom artists. The theoretical sophistication of his concise comments on sub-Saharan African art has not been appreciated. The technical and critical vocabulary available to Fernandes when writing about art might have been more circumscribed by the obligation to compose his text in Portuguese rather than in German or Latin. Nevertheless, his text reveals awareness of some of the most current and more theoretically advanced categories being used by intellectuals and artists to talk about and understand art in Europe. This is not entirely unexpected since Fernandes, as a printer and publisher, was a central figure in the intellectual life of the court and his very survival as a courtier and as a publisher depended entirely on his ability to harness and control information and knowledge. Moreover, his text rewards close attention and warrants

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<sup>732</sup> This text appears in Curnow, 1983, p. 62.



careful analysis because Fernandes, as publisher, editor, translator and author, was an expert on the written word. Therefore, the connotations and implications of the words he purposely chose to describe the art and artists of Sierra Leone demand detailed consideration. In addition, Fernandes's sensitivity to artistic values, and visual images more generally, is amply demonstrated by his intimate involvement with the design and layout of his own books. Not only did he procure prints from other publishers in Spain and France and use them in creative ways in his own publications, but he also commissioned original prints from artists working in Portugal. For instance, Fernandes was responsible for commissioning and printing the first Portuguese prints, which appeared in 1495 in his incunabula the *Vita Christi*. These Portuguese prints included depictions of the coats of arms as well as the emblems of the king and queen, and scenes of the royal couple praying before the Crucified Christ.

Fernandes celebrates the aesthetic qualities of the ivories carved by Temne and Bullom artists. It is important to underline the fact that he both praises the beauty of traditional ivory objects carved for local African use and admires the appearance of the Luso-African ivories produced for the Portuguese. When speaking about the hunting of elephants and consequent acquisition of their ivory tusks, Fernandes observes that the Temne and Bullom used the ivory obtained in this fashion to “make all their excellent works” (“fazem todas suas obras louçãas”). When discussing the production of high-quality weaponry in Sierra Leone, Fernandes likewise adds that they make similarly laudable “refined objects of ivory like spoons, saltcellars and bracelets” (“E assi fazem cousas sotijjs de marffim como colheres saleyros e manilhas”). Given the context and

phrasing of these statements, Fernandes likely refers to the ivory carving tradition of the Temne and Bullom.

In another statement, Fernandes expressed his admiration for the ivory saltcellars and spoons carved by the Temne and Bullom, and he then quickly inserted the remark that the various other kinds of objects that the Portuguese asked them to carve, from drawings they provided to the artists, were equally impressive. The implication is that the Temne and Bullom already possessed a thriving ivory carving tradition, making what the Portuguese perceived to be saltcellars and spoons, and that the Portuguese had to supply drawings of other kinds of objects they wanted to have carved by them. Fernandes did not perceive any difference in the beauty and quality of the saltcellars and spoons carved for local use and those carved for the Portuguese. This unusual flexibility further testifies to the abilities of the artists. Elsewhere, Fernandes again refers directly to Luso-African ivories when he writes: “They make all of the things that they are asked to make, namely, some make spoons, others saltcellars, others hilts for daggers and any other fine work.” He claims that these works are “marvelous to see.” These quotes also demonstrate that the Temne and Bullom made a broader range of objects for the Portuguese than the spoons, saltcellars and dagger hilts that are explicitly cited. When Duarte Pacheco Pereira extols the beauty and craftsmanship of the ivory carvings by the Temne and Bullom, it is unclear whether he refers to objects made for local use or those made on commission from the Portuguese (the Luso-African ivories) or to both.

This distinction is important because it means that some of the saltcellars should probably not be classified as Luso-African ivories, but as Temne and Bullom. It also indicates that the Portuguese were sensitive and responsive to the local carving traditions

of Sierra Leone and were likely interested in obtaining, and amenable to collecting, these wholly African objects. The standard scholarly assumption has been that the Portuguese were forced to commission objects with European imagery from the Temne and Bullom because they were appalled by the possible religious implications of the African imagery and were, therefore, inhibited from collecting these ivories even though they admired the skill of the carving.<sup>733</sup> Instead I argue that it was recognition and acceptance of the exceptional beauty and superb skill of the ivories that convinced the Portuguese of the unsurpassed talent and incomparable inventive abilities of the Temne and Bullom artists. The change in perspective is enormous. It was appreciation of this excellence in ivory carving, exceeding the artistic talent available to Portuguese patrons in Europe, which inspired the Portuguese to commission art from Temne and Bullom artists. The ideological intentions of this patronage will be dealt with below.

Indeed, the vocabulary and conceptual categories Fernandes employs to describe the Temne and Bullom artists as well as the precious works of art they created attest to an extraordinary admiration of sub-Saharan African art. He describes these Temne and Bullom artists as “muy sotijs negros de arte manual” and as “homens muyto sotijs muy ingeniosos,” while suggesting the “muytos artificios manuales” they exercised in the process of creation. These words are not innocent, but carry intellectual connotations and moral implications. Both the artists and the ivories are qualified as being “muyto sotijs.” Deriving from the Latin *subtilis*, this adjective evokes the subtle, delicate and highly refined nature of the ivory carvings themselves, an interpretation which is reinforced by his classification of the exquisite objects as a “sotileza.” As a description of the

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<sup>733</sup> Curnow, 1983, p. 18; Curnow, Kathy, “Oberlin's Sierra Leonean saltcellar: documenting a bicultural dialogue,” *Bulletin: Allen Memorial Art Museum*, Oberlin, OH, v. 44, n. 2, 1991, p. 14.

intellectual qualities possessed by the Temne and Bullom artists, “sotijis” suggests a penetrating, sharp and quick mind. Moreover, Fernandes claims that these incisive intellectual abilities are possessed by the Temne and Bullom to an unusually high degree. The notion of a *subtil* mind directly evokes in Latin the concept of *ingenium*, and this is confirmed by Fernandes by his deliberate coupling of the two terms in his compelling phrase “homens muyto sotijis muy engeniosos.” The overtones of the Portuguese *engenho*, like those of its Latin root *ingenium*, are complex and exalted. By acknowledging and celebrating the *ingenium* of the artists of Sierra Leone, Fernandes was paying tribute to their innate talents as creative artists. An *engenhoso* artist was one who possessed, as inherent qualities, great powers of invention and imagination as well as the skill and talent to execute the objects.

Fernandes was sensitive to the emerging division in theories of art in Europe between the idea or invention of the artist and its manual execution and he was quick to credit the artists of Sierra Leone with excellence in both. Fernandes thought it necessary to clarify that the Temne and Bullom artists were “muy sotijis negros” specifically as ivory carvers, as practitioners of a manual art (“de arte manual”). He likewise focuses on the actual manufacture of these ivory objects by beginning his sentences on them with the verb, *fazer*, to make. However, his somewhat enigmatic phrasing of “muytos artificios manuales” intentionally suggests the layered associations of the Portuguese *artificio* with the Latin *artificium* and *artifex*. Fernandes’s use of *artificio* here implies skill and talent in the physical production of these carved objects, incorporating *arte* and *techne*, and broadly denoting craftsmanship. However, *artificio* further signifies that something was

made with artistry or ingenuity and that it necessarily displays in its manufacture evidence of the artist's *engenho*, or *ingenium*.

The aesthetic properties of the ivory carvings themselves are acclaimed by Fernandes as “cousas sotijs” and as “obras louçãas.” Pereira likewise describes the carved ivories from Sierra Leone as “sotijs” and “fermosas” and as being “milhor lavrados.” The adjective *loução* complements and expands on the meanings of “sotijs.” Application of the adjective *loução* confers a more gracious and elegant quality to the delicate and refined features of the ivories. In addition, it provides commentary on a harmonious and well-composed object pleasing in a suave and sophisticated way in its overall effect. The suggestion in the use of *loução* of a certain dynamism and liveliness in the carving of the ivories is reinforced by Pereira's remark that the objects were “milhor lavrados” or the most highly worked ivories that he had encountered in all of Africa. Pereira's observation on the density and polish of the ornament and the skillfulness of the carving with the phrase “milhor lavrados” is again seen as contributing to the harmonious composition of the whole and is given a satisfying aspect by its description as being “muito fermosas.”

The web of ideas associated with the words Fernandes and Pereira used to describe the Temne and Bullom artists and their artistic creations is coherent and corresponds richly with some of the surviving ivories. The precious material of the ivory and the skill and talent, the artistic virtuosity, involved in the execution of the objects is fully acknowledged in these writings. What is more, Fernandes effusively recognizes the intellectual aspects of artistic creation, highlighting the *ingenium*, the innate talent and powers of invention and imagination, of the Temne and Bullom artists. In some respects, Fernandes seems to want to understand ivories from Sierra Leone in terms of the

concepts and categories defining lofty objects of virtue in Europe.<sup>734</sup> In addition to celebrating the aesthetic qualities of the ivories, Fernandes applies the theoretical concepts of art criticism of Renaissance Europe to analysis of them and praises the virtuosity of the artists as well as their powers of invention, among the highest of compliments available to Renaissance artists. In this way, he attributes intellectual value to the genesis and production of the objects and highlights, above all, the intelligence of the artists.

The extraordinary nature of the language and ideas expressed by Fernandes around 1505-1508 about the art of the Temne and Bullom from Sierra Leone can be gauged by comparison to the famous words Albrecht Dürer wrote about Aztec art from Mexico in 1520. When comparing the categories, concepts and terms found in Fernandes to Dürer's text, there seems to be a good deal of similarity in the reception, judgment, and description of non-European art. Around 1519, the Aztec king Motecuhzoma presented the conquistador Hernán Cortés with an array of extravagant gifts, including objects of art and feather headpieces. Cortés immediately sent the gifts and treasure to his sovereign Charles V, who subsequently exhibited them in Brussels in the Coudenberg Palace, where Dürer saw them on a visit to the emperor on 17 August 1520.<sup>735</sup> Dürer's renowned diary entry about his encounter with Aztec objects is as follows:

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<sup>734</sup> Syson, Luke and Dora Thornton, *Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy*, Los Angeles: Getty Museum, 2001, pp. 135-181.

<sup>735</sup> Dürer's text has been championed and endlessly quoted by scholars as "an extraordinary record," affirming the appreciation of Mesoamerican art in Renaissance Europe. See Massing, Jean Michel, "The Quest for the Exotic: Albrecht Dürer in the Netherlands," in *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, edited by Jay A. Levenson, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991, pp. 115-119; Massing, Jean Michel, "Early European Images of America: The Ethnographic Approach," in *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, 1991, pp. 514-520; Farago, "Introduction," *Reframing the Renaissance*; Miller, Mary Ellen, *The Art of Mesoamerica: From Olmec to Aztec*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 1996, pp. 201-202; Jones, Julie, "Gold of the Indies," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, v. 59, n. 4, 2002, pp. 3-4; Colburn, Forrest D., "From Pre-Columbian Artifact to Pre-Columbian Art," *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton*

“Also I saw the things which were brought to the King from the New Golden Land: a sun entirely of gold, a whole fathom broad; likewise, a moon, entirely of silver, just as big; likewise, two rooms full of armor of the people there, and all manner of wondrous weapons of theirs, harness and darts, very strange clothing, beds, and all kinds of wonderful objects of human use, all of which is fairer to see than prodigies. These things were all so precious that they were valued at 100,000 guilders. But I have never seen in all my days that which so rejoiced my heart, as these things. For I saw among them amazing artistic objects, and I marveled over the subtle ingenuity of the men in these distant lands. Indeed I cannot say enough about the things which were there before me.”<sup>736</sup>

As scholars have observed, Dürer’s astonishment and enthusiasm were due in part to the exotic character of the objects as well as to their perceived monetary value.<sup>737</sup>

Nevertheless, he clearly admired the superb craftsmanship and evident beauty they exhibited. The palpable excitement the objects inspired in Dürer and his poetically expressed inability to articulate the moving affect the objects had on him were caused, for the most part, by the unexpected shock of something that was overwhelmingly new and wholly unfamiliar. The almost rapturous tone of his confessional diary entry differs dramatically from Fernandes’s tempered text which, mediated through Velho, evinces a

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*University*, v. 64, 2005, pp. 36-41; Kubler, George, “Aesthetics since Amerindian Art before Columbus,” in *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past: A Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks*, edited by Elizabeth Hill Boone, Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1993, pp. 35-48.

<sup>736</sup> “Auch sah ich Dinge, die man dem König aus dem neuen Goldland gebracht hat: Eine ganz goldene Klafter briet, desgleichen einen ganz silbernen Mond, ebenso groß, desgleichen zwei Kammern voll Rüstungen der Leute dort, desgleichen allerlei Wunderliches von ihren Waffen, Harnischen und Geschossen; gar seltsame Kleidung, Bettgewand under allerlei wundersame Gegenstände zu menschlichem Gebrauch, was da viel schöner zu sehen ist, als Wunderdinge. Diese Sachen sind alle so kostbar gewesen, daß man sie hunderttausend Gulden wert schätzt. Ich aber habe all mein Lebtage nichts gesehen, das mein Herz so erfreut hätte, wie diese Dinge. Denn ich sah darunter wunderbare, kunstvolle Sachen und verwunderte mich über die subtilen Ingenia der Menschen in fremden Landen. Ja ich kann gar nicht genug erzählen von den Dingen, die ich da vor mir gehabt habe.” P. 38

<sup>737</sup> For critical assessments of Dürer’s text, see Feest, Christian, “Dürer et les Premières Evaluations Européennes de l’Art Mexicain,” in *Destins croisés: cinq siècles de rencontres avec les Amérindiens*, edited by Joëlle Rostkowski and Sylvie Devers, Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1992, pp. 107-119; Feest, Christian, “The collecting of American Indian artefacts in Europe, 1493-1750,” in *America in European Consciousness, 1493-1750*, edited by K. O. Kupperman, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995 pp. 324-350; Christian F Feest, “The European collecting of American Indian artefacts and art,” *Journal of the History of Collections*, v. 5, n. 1, 1993, pp. 1-11; Pasztory, Esther, “Still Invisible: The Problem of the Aesthetics of Abstraction for Pre-Columbian Art and Its Implications for Other Cultures,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, n. 19/20, 1990/1991, pp. 104-136.

greater level of familiarity with and knowledge about the peoples, cultures, and objects under discussion.

The objects of art Dürer was probably able to examine intimately and at length included fine examples of Aztec art, such as feather headdresses, figures made of gold, turquoise objects, and mosaic masks.<sup>738</sup> (Fig. 4.10) Confronted with these stunning objects of non-European art, Dürer, like so many of his contemporaries, often reverted to the language of marvel and wonder. Indeed, Fernandes had also declared that the ivory carvings from Sierra Leone were objects “marvelous to see.” However, when Dürer commented on the abilities of the Aztec artists who had created such “amazing artistic objects,” he singled out and “marveled over” what he perceived to be their “subtle ingenuity” (“subtilen Ingenia”). Dürer’s extended phrase “die subtilen Ingenia der Menschen in fremden Landen” is nearly identical to the one, already examined, by Fernandes: “Em Serra Lyoa som os homens muyto sotijs muy engeniosos.” Apparently, the pairing of *subtilis* and *ingenium* was naturally made by humanists and artists when wishing to compliment the intellectual aspects of artistic creation. This must have been especially so when writing about objects of art whose purpose, meaning and iconography were unknown or only dimly understood by the author.

As we have seen, Fernandes offered substantive comments on the wood and ivory carving traditions of the Temne and Bullom. The language and concepts Fernandes employed in this text are, in places, almost identical to those later used by Dürer when he described Aztec art, over fifteen years after Fernandes had written on the art of Sierra Leone. In addition, Fernandes provided more insightful and sustained observations on

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<sup>738</sup> Feest, Christian, “Vienna’s Mexican Treasures: Aztec, Mixtec, and Tarascan Works from 16th Century Austrian Collections,” *Archiv für Völkerkunde*, v. 45, 1990, pp. 1-64.



African art than Dürer did on the objects of Mesoamerican art he was able to study in the Coudenberg Palace in Brussels. Christian F. Feest has compared Dürer's comments to the written reactions of other humanists and courtiers who had likewise studied the objects Cortés had sent from Mesoamerica.<sup>739</sup> Feest has found that most authors with favorable reactions to them tended to focus on the exotic or valuable materials, the technical qualities of their manufacture and the ingenuity of the artists. Much of this later material on Aztec art was broadly similar to what Fernandes had written decades earlier about the art of the Temne and Bullom with the crucial exception that Fernandes's account of the art of Sierra Leone is fully integrated into his larger discussion of the culture of the Temne and Bullom. Whereas the examples of Aztec art were ultimately assimilated more as objects of marvel and wonder and exhibited by Charles V as the embodiment of conquest and universal rule, the sculptures of the Temne and Bullom were perceived by Fernandes and other Portuguese courtiers as belonging to a living artistic tradition within a vibrant and increasingly familiar culture.<sup>740</sup> As Fernandes indicates, the Portuguese purposely made efforts to understand these artistic traditions and to participate in them as patrons. The ivory carvings were not seen as representatives of an alien culture, but as the

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<sup>739</sup> Feest, Christian, "Dürer et les Premières Evaluations Européennes de l' Art Mexicain," in *Destins croisés: cinq siècles de rencontres avec les Amérindiens*, edited by Joëlle Rostkowski and Sylvie Devers, Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1992, pp. 107-119.

<sup>740</sup> For the ideas related to the collecting of objects from the New World, see Yaya, Isabel, "Wonders of America: The curiosity cabinet as a site of representation and knowledge," *Journal of the History of Collections*, v. 20, n. 2, 2008, pp. 173-188; Turpin, Adriana, "The New World collections of Duke Cosimo I de'Medici and their role in the creation of a Kunst- and Wunderkammer in the Palazzo Vecchio," in *Curiosity and wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, edited by R.J.W. Evans and Alexander Marr, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006, pp. 63-85; MacDonald, Deanna, "Collecting a New World: The Ethnographic Collections of Margaret of Austria," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, v. 33, v. 3, 2002, pp. 649-663; Shelton, Anthony Alan. "Cabinets of Transgression: The Renaissance Collections and the Incorporation of the New World," in *The Cultures of Collecting*, edited by J. Elsner and R. Cardinal, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994, 177-203; Markey, Lia, *The New World in Renaissance Italy: A Vicarious Conquest of Art and Nature at the Medici Court*, PhD, University of Chicago, 2008.

artistic creations of the sophisticated cultures of Sierra Leone with which the Portuguese had established peaceful relations.

The purpose of the comparison between Fernandes and Dürer is to draw attention to Fernandes's application of advanced theoretical categories developed for understanding European art to sub-Saharan African art at a very early date. Approaching African art with the visual tools and linguistic categories of this European model was both unavoidable and inevitably inappropriate. Nevertheless, Fernandes's text reveals an unexpectedly positive and surprisingly knowledgeable appreciation of African art at the Portuguese court that deserves recognition. As we have seen, Fernandes was a prominent, well-connected figure at court. Although the majority of information in his text on Sierra Leone depends on the perceptions and opinions of Velho, his comments on Luso-African ivories seems to derive from direct observation. His text demonstrates that positive appreciation and informed admiration of the ivory carvings by Temne and Bullom artists were circulating in the elite, highly restricted circles of court society, closest to the king.

### 7. Luso-African Ivories and *Nomoli* and *Pomdo* stone sculptures in Sierra Leone

Although the Luso-African ivories were made for Portuguese patrons, they should be understood, as Peter Mark has emphasized, as West African sculptures created within the context of the cultures of Sierra Leone.<sup>741</sup> Portuguese textual sources and French visual sources from printed books date the Luso-African ivories to the beginning of the 1490s and the first two decades of the 1500s.<sup>742</sup> Duarte Pacheco Pereira and Valentim Fernandes, writing around 1505-1508, confirm these dates and locate the production of

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<sup>741</sup> Mark, 2007, pp. 189-190.

<sup>742</sup> For the use of European prints as visual sources for Luso-African ivories, see Massing, 2007, pp. 73-75; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, pp. 110-121; Bassani, 2000, pp. 290-291; Bassani, 2008, pp. 65-68.

the ivories to the area of Sierra Leone, running from the Los Islands, Guinea to Cape Mount, Liberia, and attribute them to Temne and Bullom artists. This location in Sierra Leone is corroborated to a certain degree by documentary records, such as those of the *Casa de Guiné* and others relating to commerce with the Cape Verde Islands.

In order to better understand the Luso-African ivories in particular, and the history of art of Sierra Leone in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in general, numerous scholars have investigated the relationship between the ivories and the wood and stone carving traditions of Sierra Leone, artistic traditions which certainly predate, and possibly overlap with, the carving of the Luso-African ivories. The small-scale stone figure sculptures are widely known in Mende as *nomoli* and in Kissi as *pomdo*.<sup>743</sup> (Fig. 4.11-12) The two names relate to the different geographical locations where the soapstone or steatite sculptures have been found buried in the earth.<sup>744</sup> These two areas are occupied today by the Mende and Kissi ethnic groups. However, the terms *nomoli* and *pomdo* likewise designate the two different broad stylistic categories and general figure types

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<sup>743</sup> The literature on the figures is growing. See, Massing, Jean Michel, "Stone Carving and Ivory Sculpture in Sierra Leone," in *Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16th & 17th Centuries: Essays*, edited by Jay A. Levenson, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2007, pp. 64-75, 266-271; Hart, William A., *Continuity and Discontinuity in the Art History of Sierra Leone*, (Quaderni Poro, v. 9), Milan: Carlo Monzino, 1995; Hart, William A. and Christopher Fyfe, "The Stone Sculptures of the Upper Guinea Coast," *History in Africa*, v. 20, 1993, pp. 71-87; Lamp, Frederick John, ed., *See the Music, Hear the Dance: Rethinking African Art at the Baltimore Museum of Art*, New York: Prestel, 2004, pp. 194-197; Lamp, Frederick, *La Guinée et ses héritages culturels*, Conakry, République de Guinée: Service d'information et de relations culturelles, Ambassade des Etats-Unis, 1991; Lamp, Frederick, "Ancient Wood Figures from Sierra Leone: Implications for Historical Reconstruction," *African Arts*, v. 23, n. 2, 1990, pp. 48-59+103; Lamp, Frederick J., "House of Stones: Memorial Art of Fifteenth-Century Sierra Leone," *The Art Bulletin*, v. 65, n. 2, 1983, pp. 219-237; Tagliaferri, Aldo, *Pomdo, mahen yafe et nomoli*, Paris: J. Levy, Art Primitif, 2003; Tagliaferri, Aldo, *Stili del potere: antiche sculture in pietra dalla Sierra Leone e dalla Guinea*, Milan: Electa, 1989; Vogel, Susan Mullin, *African Aesthetics: The Carlo Monzino Collection*, New York: The Center for African Art, 1986, pp. 29-35; Tagliaferri, Aldo and Arno Hammacher, *Fabulous Ancestors: Stone Carvings from Sierra Leone & Guinea*, New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1974; Atherton, John H. and Milan Kalous, "Nomoli," *Journal of African History*, v. 11, n. 1, 1970, pp. 303-317; Dittmer, Kunz, "Bedeutung, Datierung und kulturhistorische Zusammenhänge der 'praehistorischen' Steinfiguren aus Sierra Leone und Guinée," *Baessler Archiv: Beiträge zur Völkerkunde*, v. 40, 1967, 183- 238.

<sup>744</sup> For a study of the stone types, see Person, Yves, "Les Kissi et leurs statuettes de pierre dans le cadre de l'histoire ouest- africaine," *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire*, v. 23, series B, 1961, pp. 1-59.

into which the objects can be roughly divided. The *nomoli* sculptures belong to what has been called the coastal style, whereas the *pomdo* figures define the style of the interior. In addition, life-size steatite heads, supported on bases like pedestals, have been labeled *mahai-yafei* and, on the whole, are more closely related stylistically to the *nomoli* than to the *kissi*. (Fig. 4.13)

The stylistic features of the *nomoli* have been frequently described by art historians. *Nomoli* figure sculptures typically measure about 15cm or less in height. They represent human figures in a limited range of poses and positions, either standing or sitting or crouching. Animals, such as elephants or crocodiles, sometimes appear. The figures symbolically mount or ride elephants, which are depicted as diminutive beasts. (Fig. 4.14) The crocodiles, however, enigmatically appear on the backs and necks of the figures. (Fig. 4.15) The heads of *nomoli* stone figures are large and rounded and the faces project forward from the neck, creating a sense of facial convexity. Certain facial features tend to be given prominence and sharp definition. (Fig. 4.16) For instance, the eyes are huge and rounded with heavy lids; the nose is large with open, flaring nostrils; the lips are full; and the distinctive ears are conspicuous. They feature a compact composition and full, smoothly rounded forms. Unusually in African art, *nomoli* figures have a strong horizontal orientation.<sup>745</sup>

The *pomdo* figures, by contrast, possess a strict vertical axis and an elongated cylindrical or columnar form. (Fig. 4.12) As sculptures, they are more angular and linear in conception than the heavy forms of the more fully rounded *nomoli* pieces. The *pomdo* are most obviously characterized by a large open mouth baring filed and pointed teeth; a

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<sup>745</sup> Vogel, Susan Mullin, *African Aesthetics: The Carlo Monzino Collection*, New York: The Center for African Art, 1986, pp. 29-33.

prominent aquiline nose; and on the head an elaborate coiffure or ornate cap. In line with their elongated cylindrical forms, the *pomdo* figures have thick necks and often seem to be shown in a kneeling position or with thick, squat legs, possibly truncated. With more descriptive detail than the *nomoli*, the *pomdo* figures feature vigorously textured areas, such as deeply ribbed hair.

The main differences in form and style between the *nomoli* and *pomdo* figures are readily apparent. However, these characteristics were not necessarily mutually exclusive and there are numerous examples of convergence or overlap between the two groups. In general, the *mahai-yafei*, a third distinct group consisting of life-size stone heads, seems closer in conception to the *nomoli* figures though they often combine elements of both the *nomoli* and *pomdo* sculptures. The *mahai-yafei* in the National Museum of African Art resembles other *nomoli* sculptures, whereas the one in the Metropolitan Museum of Art provides a subtle combination of *nomoli* and *pomdo* characteristics. (Fig. 4.17; 4.13) For instance, the backward tilt of the massive head and the forward thrust of the jaw recall the horizontal emphasis of the *nomoli*. Furthermore, the representation of the globular eyes, the broad nose, full lips, and ears seem more closely related to the *nomoli* than to the *pomdo* sculptures. Nevertheless, the open mouth with prominent, individually and sharply articulated teeth, the elaborate beard and coiffure, shown with a highly textured surface, the conspicuous presence of scarification patterns and pieces of jewelry suggest a connection to the depiction of *pomdo* figures.

Many art historians, especially Bassani, Curnow, Lamp, and, most recently, Massing, have investigated and championed the similarities in form and style, as well as in the conception and treatment of the human figure, between the Luso-African ivories

and the various groups of soapstone sculptures.<sup>746</sup> The figure holding a shield and riding a symbolically diminutive elephant on the lid of the ivory saltcellar in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna is nearly identical to similar stone *nomoli* figures on elephants. (Fig. 4.18) A lone seated figure, formerly in Zurich, carved as part of a lid for a saltcellar likewise exhibits a relatively uncomplicated relationship to the *nomoli*.<sup>747</sup> (Fig. 4.19) However, the figures and imagery on the magnificent ivory saltcellar in the British Museum (Af1867,0325.1.b) provide a good case study of the more complex formal and stylistic relationship between the ivories and the *nomoli* sculptures. (Fig. 4.20) The heads and faces of the figures of men and women sitting around the base of the saltcellar display several of the characteristics of typical stone *nomoli* figures. The heads of the ivory figures, especially those of the women, are unusually large and the faces seem to project forward with a horizontal emphasis. The eyes, nose, lips and ears are exaggerated and sharply defined, but contribute to an overall roundness, creating what Lamp has described as a voluptuous style. Although the eyes are noticeably smaller than the eyes of the *nomoli* figures, the conception of the head and depiction of facial features, such as the dominant broad nose with open, flaring nostrils, on the ivory figures are close to those of the *nomoli* sculptures. However, the scarification patterns decorating the bodies of the

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<sup>746</sup> Bassani and Fagg, 1988, pp. 49, 61, 89; Bassani, Ezio, "Additional Notes on the Afro-Portuguese Ivories," *African Arts*, v. 27, n. 3, 1994, p. 36; Curnow, 1983, pp. 83, 91-93, 148-149; Curnow, Kathy, "Review: Africa and the Renaissance: Art in Ivory," *African Arts*, v. 22, n. 4, 1989, pp. 76-77; Curnow, Kathy, "Rejoinder," *African Arts*, v. 23, n. 4, 1990, pp. 16+18+20+22+89-90; Curnow, Kathy, "Oberlin's Sierra Leonean saltcellar: documenting a bicultural dialogue," *Allen Memorial Art Museum Bulletin*, v. 44, n. 2, 1991, pp. 15, 17; Lamp, Frederick John, ed., *See the Music, Hear the Dance: Rethinking African Art at the Baltimore Museum of Art*, New York: Prestel, 2004, pp. 194-197; Lamp, Frederick, *La Guinée et ses héritages culturels*, Conakry, République de Guinée: Service d'information et de relations culturelles, Ambassade des Etats-Unis, 1991; Lamp, Frederick, "Ancient Wood Figures from Sierra Leone: Implications for Historical Reconstruction," *African Arts*, v. 23, n. 2, 1990, pp. 48-59, 103; Lamp, Frederick J., "Houses of Stones: Memorial Art of Fifteenth-Century Sierra Leone," *The Art Bulletin*, v. 65, n. 2, 1983, pp. 219-237; Massing, Jean Michel, "Stone Carving and Ivory Sculpture in Sierra Leone," in *Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16th & 17th Centuries: Essays*, edited by Jay A. Levenson, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2007, pp. 64-75, 266-271.

<sup>747</sup> Bassani, 1994, p. 38; Bassani, 2000, p. 289

women recall the *pomdo* figures with their usual contrast between smooth and highly textured areas. The menacing serpents wrapped around the lid with teeth bared and the fierce crocodiles, which are devouring prostrate human figures, likewise seem to convey something of the ferocious tone detected on some of the *pomdo* figures.

Bassani and Curnow have argued that ivories featuring a greater degree of European influence tend to share similarities to the *nomoli* sculptures, whereas those ivories with a greater presence of African elements seem to display the characteristics of *pomdo* figures.<sup>748</sup> However, the two surviving ivory dagger hilts feature all of the general characteristics of the stone *pomdo* figures and Fernandes reports that these were also made for the Portuguese. The dagger hilt in the Seattle Museum of Art is elongated on a vertical axis and is conceived, according to its function, in a cylindrical form with no articulation of arms or legs. (Fig. 4.21) Its mouth is opened to display sharpened teeth and it sports a finely carved coiffure. The facial features are carved in an appropriately angular style and are accented with strongly linear patterns. The threatening appearance of the ivory would seem suitable to its purpose. The dagger hilt in the British Museum is even more abstractly indicated, relying largely on raised lines for articulation. (Fig. 4.22) The enigmatic presence of a crocodile on the back of the figure's neck reinforces the menacing appearance of the figure and likewise has parallels with stone sculptures. Characteristics of *pomdo* sculptures are also present on ivory saltcellars, such as the fragment in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Munich and the lid terminating in a large double-faced or Janus head in the Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen. (Fig. 4.23-24)

The ivory lid of a saltcellar in the British Museum (Af.7398.a-b) is a wonderful combination of the various styles and forms found on the stone sculptures. (Fig. 4.25)

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<sup>748</sup> Bassani and Fagg, 1988, pp. 49, 61, 89; Curnow, 1983, pp. 83, 91-93, 148-149.

The two bodiless or decapitated heads with stylized beards resting on the back of the mysterious quadruped beast recall the single heads of the *mahai-yafei* and, like them, possess a dramatically pronounced horizontal orientation. However, like examples of *pomdo* sculptures, the mouths of both heads are open to reveal numerous filed teeth, which resemble needles or spikes. The head and facial features of the unidentified quadruped beast are conceived and treated in a manner very similar to those of the heads on its back. However, the body of the beast is completely covered in a highly textured pattern of rows of small beads divided by lines running the length of the body and limbs that echo the pattern appearing in alternating stripes on the body of the saltcellar itself, as if it were made of the animal's hide.

It is difficult and perhaps unfair to compare sculpture in the two very different materials of ivory and stone. In his text, Fernandes focuses on sculpture in wood and gives the vivid impression that it was abundant and ubiquitous in Sierra Leone. Unfortunately, sculpture carved in the perishable material of wood is much more difficult to preserve than sculpture in stone or ivory and its survival from this time period is extremely rare. However, Lamp has identified four examples of wood sculpture that exhibit striking similarities in form and style to the Luso-African ivories and the *nomoli* and *pomdo* stone sculptures.<sup>749</sup> Indeed, these exceptional wood sculptures are perhaps closer to the Luso-African ivories than to the stone figures.<sup>750</sup> One of these figures, now in the Baltimore Museum of Art, has been dated by scientific carbon analysis to the late

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<sup>749</sup> Lamp, Frederick, *La Guinée et ses héritages culturels*, Conakry, République de Guinée: Service d'information et de relations culturelles, Ambassade des Etats-Unis, 1991; Lamp, Frederick, "Ancient Wood Figures from Sierra Leone: Implications for Historical Reconstruction," *African Arts*, v. 23, n. 2, 1990, pp. 48-59, 103; Lamp, Frederick John, ed., *See the Music, Hear the Dance: Rethinking African Art at the Baltimore Museum of Art*, New York: Prestel, 2004, pp. 194-197.

<sup>750</sup> Hart, 1995, pp. 34, 44-46.



fourteenth century, if not earlier, predating the arrival of the Portuguese in Sierra Leone by over sixty years at the minimum. (Fig. 4.26)

Because of the evident stylistic similarities between Luso-African ivories and the *nomoli* and *pomdo* soapstone sculptures, it would seem that both the ivories and stone sculptures emerged from a common artistic and cultural tradition.<sup>751</sup> Curnow has even suggested that the ivories and stones were carved by the same Temne and Bullom artists.<sup>752</sup> However, William A. Hart has rigorously and skeptically analyzed the alleged association between the ivory and stone sculptures and has repeatedly argued that they are not as closely or directly related as is regularly assumed by scholars.<sup>753</sup> Although admitting a common artistic and cultural origin for both kinds of carvings, Hart has emphasized the “significant differences” between the Luso-African ivories and the stone sculptures and other impediments to a direct connection between them, such as dating and geography.<sup>754</sup> According to Hart, the vast majority of the *nomoli* and *pomdo* stone sculptures have been found in a relatively restricted geographical area, mostly in southeastern Sierra Leone, close to the coast, in Liberia and in Western Guinea.<sup>755</sup> This limited geographical distribution, Hart stresses, does not correlate with the areas of ivory carving, as indicated by Pereira and Fernandes, around the Scarcies River and the Sierra Leone estuary and peninsula. As already mentioned, the *nomoli* and *mahai-yafei* have

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<sup>751</sup> Hart, 1995; Lamp, 1983; Lamp, 1990; Lamp, 1991; Lamp, 2004; Bassani and Fagg, 1988; Massing, 2007.

<sup>752</sup> Curnow, 1983, pp. 83, 91-93, 148-149; Curnow, Kathy, “Review: Africa and the Renaissance: Art in Ivory,” *African Arts*, v. 22, n. 4, August, 1989, pp. 76-77; Curnow, Kathy, “Rejoinder,” *African Arts*, v. 23, n. 4, 1990, pp. 16+18+20+22+89-90; Curnow, Kathy, “Oberlin’s Sierra Leonean saltcellar: documenting a bicultural dialogue,” *Allen Memorial Art Museum Bulletin*, v. 44, n. 2, 1991, pp. 15, 17.

<sup>753</sup> Hart, William A., *Continuity and Discontinuity in the Art History of Sierra Leone*, (Quaderni Poro, v. 9), Milan: Carlo Monzino, 1995; Hart, William A. and Christopher Fyfe, “The Stone Sculptures of the Upper Guinea Coast,” *History in Africa*, v. 20, 1993, pp. 71-87.

<sup>754</sup> Hart and Fyfe, 1993; Hart, 1995.

<sup>755</sup> Hart, 1995, pp. 31-32, 63; Hart in *Africa: The Art of a Continent*, edited by Tom Phillips, London: Royal Academy of Arts; New York: Prestel, 1995, p. 468; Hart and Fyfe, 1993.

been found in the coastal areas, while the *pomdo* sculptures have been discovered exclusively in inland areas. Hart is the most forceful and vociferous proponent of the idea that these steatite soapstone figures and heads were carved before the arrival of the Portuguese in Sierra Leone and that since there is no explicit evidence about them in Portuguese sources, they were no longer being produced by the 1460s.<sup>756</sup>

Certainly, Hart is correct to highlight the differences between the ivory and stone sculptures. While select examples of Luso-African ivories and stone sculptures share many stylistic features, as we have seen, many others have much less, and fewer elements, in common. This is partly due to differences in medium and partly because both the ivories and stones are quite diverse as a group and display a wide range of features and styles. It should also be pointed out that neither the ivories nor the stones served any single function or purpose.<sup>757</sup> Although this conclusion can be inferred from the physical and visual evidence of the existing carvings themselves, it is also explicitly affirmed by Fernandes with reference to ivory carving and wood sculpture. Therefore, attempts to study either group of carvings, ivory or stone, as a unified whole are of only limited value.

Nevertheless, the stylistic affinities between the ivory, wood and stone sculptures are sufficiently close, despite possible differences in date and geographical distribution, to justify the claim that they emerged from the same artistic traditions of the Temne and Bullom in Sierra Leone. Because the ivory, wood and stone sculptures were almost certainly produced by Temne and Bullom artists, the comments and observations Fernandes provides on the art and culture of Sierra Leone are valuable when exploring

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<sup>756</sup> Hart, 1995, p. 25, 80-81; Hart in *Africa: The Art of a Continent*, 1995, p. 468

<sup>757</sup> Hart in *Africa: The Art of a Continent*. 1995, p. 469.

the possible significance and ritual use of the objects and attempting to decipher the possible identity and meaning of their imagery.

In his text on Sierra Leone, Fernandes does not explicitly mention the production of stone sculpture. However, his detailed discussion of the burial of high ranking men and honored warriors and his related description of the sculptures made to commemorate them were seen by Lamp as relevant to understanding some of the *nomoli* figures.<sup>758</sup> Fernandes fails to specify the medium of these commemorative sculptures, but does state that those made for commoners and slaves were carved from wood. The implication is that durable materials, which designated status, would be used to carve the commemorative figures of prominent or authoritative persons. Regardless of the validity of this argument, which has been contested, it is clear that the attributes, decoration and depiction of some of the *nomoli* and ivory figures indicate that these represent persons of rank and status and that these elements correspond to Fernandes's description of honored persons in Sierra Leone society.

When discussing the wood idol of war *Ymell* and when describing the figures made to commemorate distinguished persons and honored warriors, Fernandes writes that they were made in the likeness (“*semelhança*”) of the men. Fernandes's repeated use of the Portuguese term *semelhança*, or likeness, to describe these figures implies that he or his informant Velho considered them to be portraits of these important individuals. At the least, the vocabulary Fernandes employs to explain the context of the carving of these figures clearly indicates that the figures were seen as having been given individualized features and attributes and were carved for specific individuals for specific occasions with specific commemorative functions. Likewise, the carved wood figure of the specific

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<sup>758</sup> Lamp 1983.

individual named *Ymell* was chosen after his death to function as the idol of war because of *Ymell*'s personal qualities and feats as a warrior. In order to access or retain the power of his characteristics and achievements through the idol after his death, it was vital Fernandes seems to state to ensure that the idol preserved his particular likeness.

Examination of the *nomoli*, *pomdo* and *mahai-yafei* sculptures demonstrates that some of them depicted similarly honored persons and were surely carved to serve similar purposes.<sup>759</sup> This can be seen in the various attributes depicted on some of the figures. For instance, the *mahai-yafei* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art displays a variety of attributes which secure its identity as a commemorative representation of a man of rank and distinction. This massive head conspicuously features visible, filed teeth; nose rings and earrings; prominent scarification patterns; and an elaborate coiffure—all markers of status and rank. Another *mahai-yafei* with nose rings at the British Museum, as well as the one at the National Museum of African Art, sports a full beard finely carved in different types of textures to indicate the directions of growth of the hair. In the Temne and Bullom cultures, the beard signified authority and wisdom.<sup>760</sup> *Nomoli* and ivory figures shown symbolically astride animals, such as elephants, were likewise intended to be metaphors of power and control or could represent warrior-chiefs.<sup>761</sup> However, other stone and ivory figures, such as those wielding weapons or carrying shields, refer more explicitly to celebrated warriors. Figures carved seated in chairs seem to represent the burial of chiefs. As Fernandes describes the process, dead chiefs, holding their weapons, were tied to such chairs and placed on platforms to be honored before internment. In contrast to those sporting an elaborate coiffure, there are figures, such as the one in the

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<sup>759</sup> Lamp, 1983.

<sup>760</sup> Lamp, 1983, pp. 224-225.

<sup>761</sup> Lamp, 1983, p. 227; Hart in *Africa: The Art of a Continent*, p. 469; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 79.

National Museum of African Art, and heads, like the one in Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, which prominently wear some kind of twisted or braided textile around their rounded, bald heads. (Fig. 4.27-28) These have been interpreted by Lamp as the headdress or turban worn by chiefs at installation ceremonies.<sup>762</sup>

Fernandes's text and the evidence of the sculptures themselves demonstrate the importance of the ornamentation of the body to indicate status and prestige. The Sapi peoples, which included the Temne and Bullom cultures, were said to wear gold jewelry, such as noserings and earrings, and ivory bracelets. Chiefs were reported to wear necklaces composed of leopard's teeth. The Sapi wore colorful or elaborate hats and devoted much care and attention to the style of their hair and attributed special symbolic value to the growing of beards. They also designed scarification patterns on their skin. The symbolic riding of powerful beasts, such as elephants, is an obvious metaphor of authority and rule, while the brandishing of weapons and decapitated heads clearly refers to military prowess. Both Fernandes and Pereira comment on the martial abilities of the Bullom in particular and the Bullom exclusively practiced capital punishment. Moreover, Pereira states that only the Bullom filed their teeth to sharp points.

It should be clarified that only some and not all of the stone sculptures feature these attributes and should be interpreted as memorial figures, preserving the likeness and commemorating the deeds of warriors and the status and authority of honored men. Most of the attributes of rank and prestige depicted on the figures are discussed by Fernandes and Pereira. However, the purpose and meaning of these kinds of representations are less clear when they appear on the figures peopling the Luso-African ivory saltcellars. However, if the stone sculptures were carved before the arrival of the Portuguese in

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<sup>762</sup> Lamp, 1983, p. 227; Lamp, 1990, pp. 57, 103.

Sierra Leone in the 1460s, then many prominent aspects of the style and decoration of the Luso-African ivories, which are likewise common to the stone sculptures, must have been developed and elaborated within the artistic tradition of Sierra Leone wholly independent of influence from the Portuguese. This point is important for understanding certain elements like the twisted and braided or plaited elements and other textured surfaces that appear consistently and prominently on the Luso-African ivories and that seem to develop in a coherent manner from the *nomoli* and *pomdo* sculptures. These features especially resonate with some of the stylistic characteristics of Manueline architecture. However, it has been regularly argued that these stylistic features and decorative patterns derive directly from Manueline architecture. This creates a problem. Perhaps the stone sculptures continued to be produced after contact with the Portuguese or perhaps the stone and ivory sculptures from Sierra Leone influenced the style of Manueline architecture. Another possibility is that the artistic traditions of the Temne and Bullom resonated with the dominant artistic style in Portugal and this contributed, in part, to the great appeal of the sculptures from Sierra Leone to the Portuguese who saw them. These kinds of questions will be raised in the following sections.

#### 8. Luso-African Ivories and the Image of Kingship in Portugal: The Saltcellar in the Ethnologische Museum, Berlin

The extraordinary ivory saltcellar in the Ethnologische Museum, Berlin, is a masterpiece of West African sculpture. (Fig. 4.29-30) It was certainly carved by Temne or Bullom artists in Sierra Leone, probably around the year 1495 or slightly thereafter. The exquisite ivory is also one of the most magnificent of the small scale luxury objects

commissioned by Manuel I and one of the most important for creating and conveying Manuel I's highly particular image of kingship and peculiar imperial ideology. It deserves recognition as the secular and princely counterpart of the celebrated gold monstrance (1506) designed and executed by Gil Vicente, the court goldsmith and renowned playwright, for the Jerónimos monastery of Belém, now in the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon. (Fig. 4.31) Like the Belém monstrance, the Berlin saltcellar was designed to fashion an image of kingship related to overseas expansion and, like the Belém monstrance, the Berlin saltcellar employed similar means. The precious materials of gold and jewels on the monstrance correspond to the ivory of the saltcellar and both small scale objects transform their luxury materials through invention, artistic skill and refined technique to create delicate, openwork pieces featuring royal devices and emblems.

The dazzling ivory saltcellar stands at about 21cm in height. The openwork base is delicately carved and features a profusion of ornament. It supports a container carved in the form of an armillary sphere, the personal device of Manuel I, which is inscribed with his motto. This exceptional saltcellar was intended to be a virtuoso display of artistic invention and skill. The inimitable technical ability, imagination and talent of the artists from Sierra Leone, the specific style of the carving of the saltcellar, and the distinctive imagery and symbolism of the object combine to create a unique image of kingship and to express explicit ideological content.

A close analysis of the object is necessary before interpreting the complexity and significance of its imagery and style. The convex, circular base of the saltcellar consists of three individualized sections. The outer section seems to be composed of numerous

interlaced ropes that have been carved completely in the round and do not appear to be connected to the inner sections. This elegant, intentionally fragile and ostentatiously wasteful section is in fact attached to the rest of the saltcellar solely by the forelimbs of the three lions, who straddle the various sections of the base in sphinx-like poses, balancing escutcheons displaying the royal arms between their majestic paws. The rhythmic pattern of the middle section of the base resembles the intertwined bodies of striped serpents with the stripes along their bodies suggested by three rows of beads divided by two plain lines. The ivory within the rounded shapes created by the interweaving of the hypothetical serpent bodies has again been carved away to produce an openwork design. The innermost section is the only solid piece and the convex elevation of the base is most visible in this part. The surface of this section is completely encrusted in a highly textured and controlled design of gently curving rows of beading separated and contained by plain lines, which generate a lively pattern and impart a sense of visual energy to the entire base.

The escutcheons with the arms of Manuel I appear along the bottom rim, crowned by the heads of the lions with their mouths open and teeth exposed. Lions, the royal beasts par excellence, were ubiquitous in medieval heraldry and in general signified courage, strength and *noblesse*. Their resting position was known in the terminology of medieval heraldry as *couchant* and their forked tails were called *queue-forché*. These majestic heraldic beasts, bearing the royal arms, also appear as supports for three surviving, and possibly related, pyxes. The printer's mark of Valentim Fernandes provides a similar contemporary heraldic use of the lion. His complex printer's mark



included a crowned, standing or *regardant* lion with a forked tail shown holding the emblem of Fernandes. (Fig. 4.32)

The three pairs of entwined serpents biting the backs of the lions form a remarkable image and serve an essential function in the overall design of the piece. These serpents, enormous relative to the scale of the sculpture, dwarf the lions. Their eyes are large and their open mouths reveal their teeth. Serpents appear on most Luso-African saltcellars and are frequently shown in confrontation with other animals, most commonly with dogs and sometimes parrots. They were surely the product of the artistic traditions and cultural beliefs of the Temne and Bullom. Although the significance of the serpents, possibly pythons, remains obscure, they were certainly related in some way to notions of power and wealth and spirituality.<sup>763</sup> Fernandes describes Velho's terrifying encounter with pythons as the guardians of *Tschyntschnyn*, the great universal idol of the Temne, and his treasure. The Portuguese were probably at least vaguely aware of some of the general associations and the network of meanings these snakes and their representation had for the Temne and Bullom. There is no record indicating what the Portuguese might have thought about the indigenous ideas related to the carving of the serpents, especially their aggressive attitude and antagonistic relationship to other beasts on the ivories. Their representation parallels, in important respects, Velho's testimony about them acting as ferocious guardian of idols, as defenders and protectors of something precious and dear. The Portuguese clearly appreciated and approved of the virtuosic manner in which these serpents were carved by the Temne and Bullom artists, for they are nearly omnipresent

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<sup>763</sup> Blier, 1993, pp. 382, 393; Blier, Suzanne Preston, *The Royal Arts of Africa: The Majesty of Form*, Abrams, 1998, p. 214; Blier, 2009, pp. 23-25; Curnow, 1983, pp. 82, 136; Curnow, 1991, p. 17.

on Luso-African ivory saltcellars and they are almost always prominent and pivotal elements in the conception and design of the pieces.

On the Berlin saltcellar, the two bodies of the three pairs of entwined pythons are differentiated by their markings. In each pair, one snake sports the familiar pattern of lines dividing rows of beading, while the body of the other snake features a dense, richly textured cross-hatching design. The effortlessly entwined bodies of the snakes emphasize the dominance of smoothly curved shapes in the saltcellar. In fact, the three pairs of serpents function as rounded arches supporting the armillary sphere. As a whole, the design of the base of the saltcellar is both audacious and extravagant. Its daring derives from the fact that the base and its support consist of very delicately carved elements of twisted ropes and entwined snakes. Its lavish quality stems from the large amount of ivory material which had to be carved away in order to fashion such an open, light and dynamic object. Indeed, the animated, buoyant base is composed of a surprisingly small amount of ivory, the majority of it having been removed to exhibit the carver's skill in fashioning an elephant tusk into such lacy arabesques.

The container in the form of an armillary sphere does not rest directly on the backs of the snakes, but on an intermediary pedestal, which repeats design elements from the base, such as rows of beads arranged vertically and twisted ropes encircling the ivory in a horizontal direction. The shape of the container itself, more ovoid than spherical, seems suggests the form of an egg. Nevertheless, the vertical and horizontal bands and transverse ecliptic indicate irrefutably that the object is meant to represent an armillary sphere. This conclusion is confirmed by the inscription on the ecliptic, which reads, "Espera in Deo." This is an abbreviated variant in Portuguese of Manuel I's lengthier

official Latin motto, “Spera in deo e fac bonitatem.” Both the Portuguese and Latin mottos were commonly inscribed on the ecliptics of armillary spheres that appeared on the title pages of illuminated manuscripts commissioned by the king, such as the *Leitura Nova*. (Fig. 4.33) The shorter Portuguese version of Manuel I’s motto, “Spera in Deo,” accompanying an armillary sphere appears in books printed by João Pedro Buonhomini da Cremona. Buonhomini, who collaborated on several projects with Valentim Fernandes, worked in Lisbon as a printer from 1501 to 1517. On the Berlin saltcellar, isolated tree branches with leaves have been carved in between the letters of the motto on the ecliptic band.

The vertical and horizontal bands are defined by the twisted ropes and lines of beads which were found on the base of the saltcellar. The three horizontal bands feature abstract designs. Beaded zig-zag lines fill the interior of the bottom band, while a complex curvilinear interlace design occupies the upper band. The thicker central band repeats the densely textured cross-hatching patterns from the base. On the areas of the central band that align with the plain, smooth areas of the container, there is a different element. This is defined by a straight horizontal line with two lines extending from each end in the form of a sideways “V.” Twisted rope motifs appear again above and below these lines. However, the vertical bands alternate between those with abstract interlace designs and those with birds and crocodiles. Like the serpents, the crocodiles regularly appear on Luso-African ivories and likewise probably signify notions of power and wealth and might even suggest ideas of protection. Unlike the serpents, the crocodiles are not shown in confrontation with other animals. Instead they are sometimes represented in the striking act of devouring human figures, such as on the saltcellar in the British

Museum (Fig. 4.20), but they are more typically shown isolated as important symbolic yet decorative elements, covering the curved expanses of containers (Pitt Rivers Museum, Fig. 4.34) and lids (Copenhagen, Fig. 4.24) or perched on the columnar supports of openwork bases (Modena, Fig. 35). The crocodiles on the Berlin saltcellar do not seem to trouble the birds. Most of the birds carved on the Luso-African ivories should be identified as parrots. However, the birds shown on the Berlin saltcellar are quite different and with their long, straight beaks seem to resemble water birds, probably pelicans.<sup>764</sup> If these water birds should be identified with pelicans, as Blier has perceptively suggested, then this would significantly enhance the implications of the imagery, for the pelican was the personal device of João II. Moreover, the Cross of Christ, the symbol of the Portuguese military order, is strategically placed at the highest point of the ecliptic, where it intersects with one of the vertical bands.

The fact that Manuel I, or someone in his inner circle, had his personal device and motto carved in ivory by Temne and Bullom artists from Sierra Leone reveals the high esteem in which these artists were held by the king and his court as well as the critical role these West African artists and West African ivory played in the construction of the king's image and in the communication of his personal mythology and imperial ideology. As a consequence, the Berlin saltcellar should be interpreted within the king's larger program of artistic patronage and image-making. This entails analysis of the artists the king patronized, the material used, the artistic styles employed, and the imagery displayed on the Berlin saltcellar.

The Berlin saltcellar participates in a spectacular manner in one of the most important, though now largely undervalued, fields of royal patronage and propaganda:

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<sup>764</sup> Blier, 1993, p. 393.

the realm of dynastic symbolism and heraldry. All forms of dynastic symbolism proliferated during the late fourteenth century in Europe and badges, devices and emblems enjoyed an unprecedented vogue among the aristocracy. The numerous badges of the Tudors—the red dragon dreadful, the portcullis, greyhound, and the “rose both red and white”—are perhaps the most familiar.<sup>765</sup> Yet the Valois dynasty in France was perhaps even more fascinated with devices and emblems as the array of imperial images selected by Charles VIII, the porcupine of Louis XII, and the famous salamander of Francis I amply attest.<sup>766</sup> In Spain, Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon forged an extraordinary coat of arms which combined the armorial bearings, devices, emblems and mottos of both monarchs. The virtually omnipresent reproduction of these arms throughout their kingdoms constituted an effective tool in securing and solidifying their contested political objectives.<sup>767</sup>

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<sup>765</sup> Anglo, Sydney, *Images of Tudor Kingship*, London: Seaby, 1992; Henderson, Virginia, “Retrieving the ‘Crown in the Hawthorn Bush’: The Origins of The Badges of Henry VII,” in *Traditions and transformations in late medieval England*, edited by Douglas Biggs, Sharon D. Michalove, and Albert Compton Reeves, Boston: Brill, 2002, pp. 237-260; Coss, Peter R. and Maurice Hugh Keen, eds., *Heraldry, pageantry and social display in medieval England*, Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 2002.

<sup>766</sup> Scheller, Robert W., “Imperial Themes in Art and Literature of the Early French Renaissance: The Period of Charles VIII,” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, v. 12, n. 1, 1981 - 1982, pp. 5-69; Hochner, Nicole, “Louis XII and the porcupine: transformations of a royal emblem,” *Renaissance Studies*, v. 15, n. 1, 2000, pp. 17-36; Scheller, Robert W., “Ensigns of Authority: French Royal Symbolism in the Age of Louis XII,” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, v. 13, n. 2, 1983, pp. 75-141; Sherman, Michael, “Pomp and Circumstances: Pageantry, Politics, and Propaganda in France during the Reign of Louis XII, 1498-1515,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, v. 9, n. 4, 1978, pp. 13-32; Lecoq, Anne-Marie, ‘La salamandre royale dans les Entrées de François Ier’, in *Les Fêtes de la Renaissance*, edited by Jean Jacquot and Elie Konigson, Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1975, v. 3, pp. 93-104; Lecoq, Anne-Marie, *François Ier: Imaginaire: symbolique et politique à l'aube de la Renaissance française*, Paris: Macula, 1987, pp. 35-52.

<sup>767</sup> Pidal, Faustino Menéndez, “‘Tanto monta’: El escudo de los Reyes Católicos,” in *Isabel la Católica vista desde la Academia*, edited by Luis Suárez Fernández, Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2005, pp. 99-138; Iglesias, Juna Antonio González, “El Humanista y los príncipes: Antonio de Nebrija, inventor de las empresas heráldicas de los Reyes Católicos,” in *Antonio de Nebrija: Edad Media y Renacimiento*, edited by Carmen Codoñer Merino and Juan Antonio González Iglesias, Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1994, pp. pp. 59-76; Soria, José Manuel Nieto, ed., *Orígenes de la monarquía hispánica: Propaganda y legitimación (ca. 1400-1520)*, Madrid: Librería-Editorial Dykinson, 1999.

In Portugal, Afonso V and João II, certainly understood the value of devices and mottos, but did not exploit their myriad possibilities with the same fervor, consistency and dedication as did Manuel I. Indeed, Manuel I's use of dynastic symbolism and personal devices differs markedly from that of his predecessors, but shows some affinities with the use of devices by his father the Infante D. Fernando.<sup>768</sup> Although it has been claimed that Manuel I's programmatic use of dynastic symbolism was indebted to the strategies of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, this is difficult to demonstrate.<sup>769</sup> However, what Manuel I did probably learn from them was the captivating power and unlimited potential of dynastic symbolism.

Heraldry and personal devices and mottos functioned like portraits in fashioning the identity of aristocrats and intellectuals and this relationship was widely recognized and exploited. During the last half of the fifteenth century, coats of arms were frequently represented on the reverse sides of panel portraits, as in the portrait of Francesco d'Este by Rogier van der Weyden, c. 1460, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Fig. 4.36-37) For intellectual gratification and flattery, devices and mottos were likewise paired with portraits as in the double-sided panel of Ginevra de' Benci by Leonardo da Vinci, 1474/1478, at the National Gallery of Art. (Fig. 4.38-39) Coins and medals were similar to these painted portraits in their combination of portrait likenesses and heraldry or emblems. Yet unlike painted portraits, coins and medals were durable and portable small-

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<sup>768</sup> Pereira, Paulo, "A simbólica manuelina: Razão, celebração, segredo," 1995, p. 135; Pereira, Paulo, *A Obra Silvestre e a Esfera do Rei*, Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra, 1990; Costa, 2005, p. 41

<sup>769</sup> Pidal, 2005.

scale objects whose purpose was to circulate the image, understood in a broad sense, of the person represented.<sup>770</sup>

However, the Berlin saltcellar represents Manuel I solely through the use of heraldry, devices and mottos. Manuel I's device and motto served as a portrait and as an image of his kingship in particular, for it triumphantly articulated his personal mythology. Manuel I celebrated the unlikely, circuitous manner in which he succeeded to the throne and actively promoted the notion that his succession was designed by God, who had destined him for greatness, specifically, in the form of overseas expansion. The idea that Manuel I had been chosen by God to rule a global empire, spread Christianity through crusade, and achieve universal peace was said by contemporaries to have been presaged and manifested through the device of the saltcellar that João II had selected for him in 1483.<sup>771</sup> Incredibly, eight other people had to die first to make Manuel I's providential accession to the throne possible. This made Manuel I's initial position upon his miraculous and prophetic accession rather tenuous and unsure.<sup>772</sup> This strange combination of megalomaniacal messianism, dynastic insecurity and personal vulnerability caused, in part, Manuel I's obsessive recourse to heraldry, devices and mottos to fashion and disseminate his identity and to strengthen his position.

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<sup>770</sup> Syson, Luke, "Circulating a Likeness? Coin Portraits in Late Fifteenth-Century Italy," in *The Image of the Individual: portraits in the Renaissance*, edited by Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson, London: British Museum Press, 1998, pp. 13-25; Scher, Stephen K., *The Currency of fame: portrait medals of the Renaissance*, New York: H.N. Abrams, 1994.

<sup>771</sup> For Manuel I's imperial ideology, see Thomaz, Luís Filipe F. R., "L'idée impériale manuélina," in *La Découverte, le Portugal et l'Europe: Actes du Colloque*, edited by Jean Aubin, Paris: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, Centre Culturel Portugais, 1990, pp. 35-103; Thomaz, Luís Filipe F.R. and Jorge Santos Alves, "Da cruzada ao Quinto Império," in *A Memória da nação: Colóquio do Gabinete de Estudos de Simbologia*, edited by Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto, Lisbon: Livraria Sá da Costa Editora, 1991, pp. 81-165; Thomaz, Luís Filipe F. R., "A 'Política Oriental' de D. Manuel I e suas contracorrentes," in *De Ceuta a Timor*, Lisbon: Difel, 1994, pp. 189-206.

<sup>772</sup> Costa, 2005, pp. 69-74; Aubin, Jean, *Le Latin et L'Astrolabe: recherches sur le Portugal de la Renaissance, son expansion en Asie et les relations internationales*, Paris: Centre Culturel Calouste Gulbenkian, 1996.

The armillary sphere became the ubiquitous, preeminent symbol of the king.<sup>773</sup> Several courtiers offered their own views on its meaning as the king's personal device. Manuel I had originally received his device from João II in 1483 when he was supposed to travel to Spain to the court of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon where he was to reside for several years as part of the requirements of the Treaty of Alcaçovas. In order to bolster Manuel I's princely status during this upcoming, prolonged sojourn at the Spanish court, João II provided him with his own retinue, musicians, tapestries, luxury objects and a princely device. Garcia de Resende, a diplomatic secretary and leading literary figure of the court, reflected on it in the following manner: "E entam lhe deu el-rey por devisa a espera; cousa certo de misterio e profecia por que lhe deu a esperança de sua real soçessam como ao diante se seguio, avendo entam muytas pessoas vivas que ante dele eram herdeyros; hos quaes todos depois faleceram para ele vir herdar."<sup>774</sup>

Resende also composed two remarkable verse poems on the king's device. For his monumental *Cancioneiro Geral*, compiled and completed by 1516, Resende wrote the following poem on the device: "Em este segre çintel / rreyna el rrey dom Manuel, / que rrecolhe em seu anel / sua devisa, & sseu synal / Por que he muy virtuoso, / exçelente, & justiçoso, / deo ho fez / tam poderoso, rrey de çetro imperial."<sup>775</sup> In his later entertaining

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<sup>773</sup> For studies of the armillary sphere, see Alves, Ana Maria, *Iconologia do Poder Real no Período Manuelino*, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 1985, pp. 117-36; Alves, Ana Maria, "A Esfera Armilar: Génese e Evolução de um Símbolo," *Prelo*, v. 1, 1983, pp. 51-62; Pereira, Paulo, "Divinas Armas' – A propaganda régia, a arquitectura manuelina e a iconologia do poder," in *Propaganda e Poder: Congresso Peninsular de História de Arte*, edited by Marisa Costa, Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 2001, pp. 151-167; Pereira, Paulo, "A simbólica manuelina: Razão, celebração, segredo," in *História da Arte Portuguesa: Do 'Modo' Gótico ao Maneirismo*, edited by Paulo Pereira, Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 1995, pp. 115-155; Pereira, Paulo, "A esfera armilar na arquitectura do tempo de D. Manuel," *Oceanos*, n. 4, 1990, pp. 43-50; Pereira, Paulo, *A Obra Silvestre e a Esfera do Rei*, Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra, 1990; Anselmo, Artur, 1991, pp. 152-157.

<sup>774</sup> Resende, 1994, pp. 224-225.

<sup>775</sup> *Cancioneiro* v. 5 p. 181; Pereira, Paulo, *A Obra Silvestre e a Esfera do Rei*, Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra, 1990, p. 83; Pereira, Paulo, "A esfera armilar na arquitectura do tempo de D. Manuel," *Oceanos*, n. 4, 1990, pp. 43-50.



verse account of contemporary events, entitled *Miscellanea*, Resende returned to the theme of the armillary sphere: “El-rey Dom Manoel era / filho mais moço do iffante / teve por divisa esphera / esperou, foi tanto avante / quanto sua honra prospera; / he muito para espantar / que por elle viir / herdar seys herdeiros falleceram / hos quaes todos ouveram / antes delle, de reynar.”<sup>776</sup>

Many of the key concepts for defining the image of Manuel’s kingship are present in Resende’s writings. However, they are balanced by the remarks made by Rui de Pina, the diplomat, royal chronicler and keeper of the national archives, who emphasized a slightly different though complementary aspect of the princely device: “e lhe deu mais por divisa uma esfera, que he a figura dos Ceeos, e da Terra, em que como por verdadeira profecia lhe deu a certa esperança de sua legítima, e Real soçessam como adiante se sguiu...”<sup>777</sup>

From the outset of Manuel I’s reign, then, the armillary sphere was seen as foretelling his succession and as assuring his success in overseas expansion. In his musings, Resende used several pointedly interrelated words such as *espera*, *esperança*, *esphera* and *esperar*. Resende deliberately played on the false etymology in Latin and Portuguese between the Latin *Sphaera* and Portuguese *espera* for sphere and the Latin *Spero* and Portuguese *espera* to connote hope, trust, wait, and expectation. The intentional implications were that the device of the sphere provided Manuel I with a legitimate hope and expectation to succeed to the throne and endowed him with the ability to wait patiently and knowingly for the opportunity to succeed because he trusted in the fulfilling of his destiny. This is all elaborated by Resende and other writers by

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<sup>776</sup> Resende, 1994, p. 547

<sup>777</sup> Pina, 1977, chapter xiv, p. 39.

explaining the play on *esphera* and *espera*. This association was fortified and given a distinctly Christian overtone by Manuel I's motto in Portuguese, *Espera in Deo*, which alluded to his belief that God had selected and destined him for greatness.

Resende comments on how João II's decision to present Manuel I with the device of the sphere was a "misterio e profecia" and this is echoed by Rui de Pina, who described the deed as a "verdadeira profecia." But the device of the sphere, Resende proclaims in the *Cancioneiro Geral*, did not simply foretell his accession to the throne, but also just as forcefully and truthfully prophesied his achievements in overseas expansion, more particularly his successful claim to an imperial title and dream of universal empire. These exalted messianic notions likewise appear in the writings of Duarte Pacheco Pereira and in the introduction written by Valentim Fernandes to his translation of Marco Polo, published in 1502. Pina more plainly and succinctly explains these associations. He specifies that the device João II bestowed on Manuel I was in fact what we identify as an armillary sphere. Pina describes it precisely as "a sphere which is the figure of the Heavens and of Earth." In his official chronicle of the reign of Manuel I, published in 1566, Damião de Góis, formerly youthful courtier at the court of Manuel I and renowned humanist, clarified the type of sphere it was understood to be. He writes that it was the sphere used by Mathematicians to represent the celestial spheres and the earth with all its elements.<sup>778</sup>

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<sup>778</sup> "Neste tempo, D. Emanuel não era casado, nem tinha tomado divisa segundo costume dos Príncipes, pelo que el Rei D. João lhe deu por divisa a figura da Sphera, porque os Matemáticos representam a forma de toda a máquina do céu e da terra como todos os outros elementos, coisa de espantar e que parece que não careceu de mistério profético, porque assim como estava ordenado por Deus que ele houvesse de ser herdeiro de el-rei D. João assim quiz que o mesmo Rei, a quem havia de suceder, lhe desse uma tal divisa por cuja figura se demonstrasse a entrega e cessão que já lhe fazia para como seu herdeiro prosseguir depois da sua morte na verdadeira aucção que tinha na conquista e domínio da Ásia e África como fez com muito louvor seu e honra destes reinos." Gois vol.1, chapter 5 p. 12-13

In the late fourteenth century, the armillary sphere was in use in Europe as a mathematical and astronomical measuring instrument that represented the form of the heavens and earth along with all of the other elements. It was a practical, mechanical instrument whose technology and scientific knowledge could be seen, symbolically, as referring to advances in nautical science and as enabling the Portuguese project of expansion and exploration. This was precisely the view propounded by Góis. However, the armillary sphere was also a commonly and widely used symbol which possessed an ancient and medieval pedigree and which was quickly accumulating humanist overtones.

According to Platonic and Neo-platonic ideas, the sphere represented totality, perfection, and the absolute. Marsilio Ficino, the great Florentine philosopher, believed that the sphere alone could render the perfection of god. In the medieval period, the sphere symbolized the cosmos and the universe. It became the accepted attribute of Urania and represented the liberal art of Astronomy. In general, the sphere signified *scientia* or human knowledge as opposed to divine wisdom. In the 1470s, the armillary sphere appeared in the *studioli* of Federico da Montefeltro in Urbino and in Gubbio as the attribute of Urania, the symbol of Astronomy and the sign of human knowledge.<sup>779</sup> The armillary sphere is the focus of the painting attributed to Giorgione of the youthful nobleman Giovanni Borgherini and his tutor, dating from 1500-10 and now in the National Gallery of Art. (Fig. 4.40) The scientific instrument is accompanied by the scroll with the inscription: “NON VALET. / INGENIVM.NISI / FACTA/ VALEBVNT”

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<sup>779</sup> Raggio, Olga, “The Liberal Arts Studiolo from the Ducal Palace at Gubbio,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, v. 53, n. 4, 1996, pp. 3-35; Fabiański, Marcin, “Federigo da Montefeltro's "Studiolo" in Gubbio Reconsidered. Its Decoration and Its Iconographic Program: An Interpretation,” *Artibus et Historiae*, v. 11, n. 21, 1990, pp. 199-214; Cheles, Luciano, “The Inlaid Decorations of Federico da Montefeltro's Urbino Studiolo: An Iconographic Study,” *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, v. 26, n. 1, 1982, pp. 1-46.

(Talent has no worth unless accomplishment follows).<sup>780</sup> In this image, the armillary sphere serves as the symbol par excellence of the practical, technical, or worldly knowledge that the tutor had labored to impart to his noble charge. It signifies the acquired knowledge, *scientia*, and technical skills that must necessarily accompany and perfect the innate talent of untamed youth.

The form of the sphere itself recalls a globe, the terrestrial universe, and denotes universal power or sovereignty. Resende, Pina and Góis suggest that Manuel I's sphere intimated his future successes in expansion and eventual attainment of universal empire. It signified the unification of the world as well as the centralization of power under Manuel I. The Cross of Christ featured on the ecliptic of the Berlin saltcellar explicitly referred to his dreams of universal crusade and the evangelization of the world. The motto across the ecliptic likewise testified to Manuel I's fulfilling of God's plan.

The armillary sphere, Cross of Christ, and royal coat of arms formed a spectacular triumvirate of symbols of the king. They appear together frequently on the Luso-African ivories and on other forms of art and architecture patronized by Manuel I. The Cross of Christ refers to his position as general of the order, while the royal heraldry refers to his reign as king. These are both unchanging symbols of institutionalized positions.

However, the device of the armillary sphere was unique to the individual person of Manuel I. This distinctive device held universal implications, which contributed to his messianism. The sphere began as a personal symbol and then, when D. Manuel became Duke of Beja in 1484, it represented an illustrious noble family descended from the Infante D. Fernando and the Infante D. Henrique. Upon Manuel I's accession in 1495, the device developed into a royal emblem and eventually an imperial one. Through ingenious

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<sup>780</sup> [http://www.nga.gov/cgi-bin/tinfo\\_f?object=54757&detail=ins](http://www.nga.gov/cgi-bin/tinfo_f?object=54757&detail=ins)

interpretation of its form, found in the writings of contemporaries, it was seen to connote Manuel I's centralization of power, imperial ambitions and unification of the world under the Christianity.

### 9. The Berlin Saltcellar and Manueline Architecture

More than other Luso-African ivories, the Berlin saltcellar has been celebrated as a uniquely mobile, miniature form of Manueline architecture.<sup>781</sup> Closer investigation of the nature of the connection of the Berlin saltcellar, especially, to Manueline architecture is essential to understanding the ideas it was meant to embody and the messages it was intended to convey.<sup>782</sup> Yet artistic influence was not one-sided and examination of the style and iconography of the Berlin saltcellar enhances scholarly conceptions of Manueline architecture.

The study of Manueline architecture has long been a contested and controversial field. Nevertheless, following the recent work of Paulo Pereira, Fernando António Baptista Pereira, Vítor Serrão and Nuno Senos, the main characteristics of this distinctive architectural style can be briefly outlined.<sup>783</sup> Manueline style is principally an ornamental style that combines in a decidedly syncretic manner the decorative vocabulary of late Gothic from France and northern Europe with elements of Mudejar ornament and other

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<sup>781</sup> Moreira, Rafael, "Cultura Material e Visual," in *História da expansão portuguesa: Formação do império (1415-1570)*, edited by Francisco Bethencourt and Kirti Chaudhuri, Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 1998, pp. 455-486.,

<sup>782</sup> Stylistic similarities between Luso-African ivories and elements of Manueline architecture were recognized early on by Ezio Bassani.

<sup>783</sup> Senos, Nuno, *O paço da Ribeira, 1501-1581*, Lisbon: Notícias Editorial, 2002; Pereira, Fernando António Baptista, "O Manuelino ou as vantagens da designação," in *História de Portugal: dos tempos pré-históricos aos nossos dias*, edited by João Medina, Amadora, Portugal: Ediclube, 1995, v. 4, pp. 249-274; Serrão, Vítor, *História da Arte em Portugal: O Renascimento e o Manierismo*, Lisbon: Editorial Presença, 2001

intentionally exotic features.<sup>784</sup> The prevailing scholarly opinion is that the explicit purpose of this original decorative style was to create an architectural style that was exclusively associated with the kingdom of Portugal and more specifically with the reign of Manuel I. The style began to emerge before Manuel I's accession, while he was still Duke of Beja. It was always identified with him personally, and not simply with a royal style, through his active patronage, personal involvement in the design of buildings, and the consistently excessive display of heraldry and personal devices and emblems on all his commissions. Manueline architecture formed a unique image of power and the image of the king for the duration of Manuel I's reign from 1495 to 1521.

Manuel I had his architects and artists fashion a distinctive architectural style which through its ornament was readily recognizable and easily exportable. In this way, the king used a decorative style in tandem with heraldry as part of his larger political program to centralize power and unify his kingdom. Similarly, he was thus able to export his style throughout the Portuguese overseas empire to assert his authority and presence. Like his emblems of the armillary sphere and the Cross of Christ, Manuel I's architectural style was believed to possess the power to unify and evangelize the world. Consequently, the king's buildings were increasingly expected to exhibit complex iconographic programs whose erudite symbolism was intended to carry sophisticated ideological content. The best expressions of this tendency are the choir at Tomar, the seat of the Order of Christ, commissioned from Diogo de Arruda around 1510-13 and the Jerónimos monastery and cloister of Belém built by Diogo Boitac from 1502 to 1516 and

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<sup>784</sup> Some scholars have emphasized the dependence of Manueline style on Spanish architectural styles, such as mudéjar, the Hispano-Flemish style, and plateresque. Although these styles certainly played a role in the formation and appearance of Manueline, the objective of the style was to be different, in an obvious way, from those other styles. The degree to which this aim was achieved in practice is open to debate, but the desire for difference should not be dismissed.

João de Castilho from 1517 to c. 1530. (Fig. 4.41-42) The complex and learned programs of these projects and the imperial ideology they were built to express have been analyzed extensively by Paulo Pereira.<sup>785</sup> Typical iconographic elements at Tomar include stone tree trunks and branches, coral and seaweed, artichokes, foliage and knotted and twisted rope motifs. Other characteristic features of Manueline decoration include nautical references, alluding to the navigational exploits of the Portuguese, and the depiction of various sea vegetation and exotic flora and fauna. These oceanic themes are accompanied by traditional Christian iconography and these multifaceted iconographic programs reveal messianic themes, frequently portraying Manuel I in the role of Solomon or David and proclaiming his inauguration of the so-called “Fifth Empire” of universal peace. The twisted columns and braided and knotted ropes which form the hallmarks of Manueline architecture have been seen simultaneously as symbols of Portuguese maritime achievement and as calculated evocations of Solomonic themes. Representations of the king’s personal emblems, such as the royal coat of arms, the Cross of the Order of Christ, and the armillary sphere are repeated excessively throughout the interior and exterior decoration of the choir of Tomar.

The overall forms and proportions, the importance of heraldry, and certain aspects of the decorative vocabulary of Manueline architecture emerge from late Gothic architecture and share many features in common with Hispano-Flemish, Mudéjar and Plateresque styles flourishing in Spain. Its syncretic combination of select elements of

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<sup>785</sup> See especially, Pereira, Paulo, *De Aurea Aetate: O Coro do Convento de Cristo em Tomar e a Simbólica Manuelina*, Lisbon: Instituto Português do Património Arquitectónico, 2003; Pereira, Paulo, “‘Divinas Armas’ – A propaganda régia, a arquitectura manuelina e a iconologia do poder,” in *Propaganda e Poder: Congresso Peninsular de História de Arte*, edited by Marisa Costa, Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 2001, pp. 151-167; Pereira, Paulo, “A simbólica manuelina: Razão, celebração, segredo,” in *História da Arte Portuguesa: Do ‘Modo’ Gótico ao Maneirismo*, edited by Paulo Pereira, Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 1995, pp. 115-155; Pereira, Paulo, *A Obra Silvestre e a Esfera do Rei*, Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra, 1990.

these various styles was unprecedented, but it was the rich, complex and opulent ornament that was most extraordinary and characteristic. Paulo Pereira has argued that the mudéjar style and other exotic qualities of Manueline were the result of familiarity and acculturation with the artistic traditions of North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa respectively.<sup>786</sup> The purpose of incorporating and foregrounding these elements was to fashion an original architectural style that alluded to and celebrated Manuel I's unique claim to glory and prestige in Europe, his success in overseas expansion in Africa, and articulated his dreams of founding a universal "Fifth Empire."<sup>787</sup>

Pereira has related the development of Manueline architecture to courtly fashions and the taste at court for exotic performances and the collection and circulation of Islamic and African objects.<sup>788</sup> Indeed, several scholars have emphasized the dominant influence of the luxury arts, particularly precious metalwork, in the design, composition and application of decorative elements in Manueline architecture.<sup>789</sup> In fact, the court goldsmith, playwright and poet, Gil Vicente has been credited with the design of the famous west façade at Tomar.<sup>790</sup> This fluid relationship between Manueline architecture and portable luxury objects, such as Luso-African ivories, should be reexamined.

The lush, densely textured surfaces of the Berlin saltcellar seem most closely to resemble the exuberant sculptural decoration of the Cappellas Imperfeitas by Mateus Fernandes and the opulent carving of naturalistic forms on the screens in the Claustro Real by Diogo Boitac at Batalha.<sup>791</sup> (Fig. 4.43-44) The combination of beads and twisted

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<sup>786</sup> Ibid.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid.

<sup>788</sup> Ibid.

<sup>789</sup> Ibid.

<sup>790</sup> Ibid.

<sup>791</sup> Silva, José Custódio Vieira da, *The Monastery of Batalha*, London: Scala; Lisbon: Ministério da Cultura: Instituto Português do Património Arquitectónico, 2007.



forms on the saltcellar appears most commonly at Batalha in the form of beaded, twisted columns. Moreover, the looped ropes on the outer edge of the base of the saltcellar and the interlaced ropes or snakes in the middle circle recall the twisted and braided rope forms found at Tomar. (Fig. 4.45) The three pairs of twisted serpents that seem to bite into the backs of the three royal lions and serve as a beautiful openwork support for the spherical container clearly recall the twisted columns at the Igreja de Jesus in Setúbal, which, obviously, also serve as supporting members. The church at Setúbal was commissioned by Manuel I and designed by Boitac around 1494–8.<sup>792</sup> It is the earliest example of Manueline architecture. (Fig. 4.46)

Questions of artistic influences are difficult to frame in a productive manner and issues of artistic interaction and exchange are frequently even more difficult to define.<sup>793</sup> The nature of the relationship between the design and decoration of Luso-African ivories, such as the Berlin saltcellar, and the ornamental vocabulary of Manueline architecture is ambiguous. Scholars such as Paulo Pereira and Fernando António Baptista Pereira have seen the emergence of the Manueline style as the result, in part, of an increasing interest in and familiarity with North African and sub-Saharan African art and architecture at the Portuguese court from the 1450s onward. However, most scholars of African art, such as Ezio Bassani, Peter Mark, and Jean Michel Massing, and historians of Portuguese art like Rafael Moreira and Vítor Serrão claim that many of the decorative elements on the Luso-African ivories derive directly from Manueline architecture. Due to the ambiguous nature

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<sup>792</sup> Almeida, C. A. Ferreira de, “A igreja de Jesus de Setúbal,” *Revista da Faculdade de Letras, Oporto*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, v. 7, 1990, pp. 267-279; Silva, José Custódio Vieira da, *A igreja de Jesus de Setúbal*, Setúbal, 1987; Silva, José Custódio Vieira da, *Setúbal*, Lisbon: Editorial Presença, 1990, pp. 55-61.

<sup>793</sup> Hoffman, Eva R., “Christian-Islamic Encounters on Thirteenth-Century Ayyubid Metalwork: Local Culture, Authenticity, and Memory,” *Gesta*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (2004), pp. 129-142; Hoffman, Eva R., “Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian Interchange from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century,” *Art History*, v. 24, n. 1, 2003, pp. 17-50.

of the evidence, it is impossible to offer definitive answers, but it is important to highlight the uncertainties in the nature of the artistic interactions and exchanges between Temne and Bullom artists and those artists and architects responsible for the creation of the Manueline style.

The relationship between Manueline style and Luso-African ivories is seen most clearly in non-figurative decorative features, such as twisted, braided or plaited elements like the ones on the Berlin saltcellar. Another feature is the omnipresent beading arranged in straight or spiral lines or bands, often dividing the surface of the ivories. These elements are carved in a lush, dense manner and seem to be accompanied by a certain *horror vacui*, both reminiscent of the Manueline style. The virtuosic knots carved on the ivory spoons have likewise been seen as deriving from the knotted rope motifs of Manueline architecture, such as at Tomar. In addition, the portal suggested in the background of the scene of the taking of Christ on the pyx in the Walters Art Gallery seems to represent the typical decoration of a Manueline doorway. (Fig. 4.47)

But the issue of how Temne and Bullom artists knew about certain aspects of the decorative style of Manueline architecture is problematic. Fernandes wrote around 1505-08 that the artists of Sierra Leone were skilled at making carvings based on drawings the Portuguese provided to them. Bassani and Massing have demonstrated that figurative imagery on some Luso-African ivories is based on prints found in books of hours published in France during the late 1490s and first decade or so of the 1500s. The dates of construction of the principal monuments of Manueline architecture, such as Batalha, Belém, Tomar, and the Tower of Belém, likewise range from the first to second decades of the 1500s. Setúbal is, in fact, one of the few examples of a building showcasing

Manueline style that was completed before 1500. Moreover, Fernandes wrote his description of Luso-African ivories before most of these examples of Manueline architecture had been completed. Documents also demonstrate that Luso-African ivories were already being carved before the dates associated with these architectural monuments. The dates for the production of the Luso-African ivories and the dates of construction of these examples of Manueline architecture certainly roughly coincide. Nevertheless, the actual relationship between the two is extremely difficult to reconstruct in any plausible way in terms of influence.

What is more, the pervasive presence of twisted and braided forms resembling ropes on the Luso-African ivories is found on *nomoli* stone sculptures. On the *nomoli* sculptures, these twisting, braided and plaited elements usually indicate the turbans worn by chiefs or signify the beard worn by those in authority. Yet these *nomoli* stone sculptures were carved before the arrival of the Portuguese in Sierra Leone and therefore date from at least the first half of the fifteenth century if not much earlier. Consequently, the twisted and braided forms on the Luso-African ivories would seem to some extent to be a continuation of the artistic traditions of Sierra Leone.

The ivories are characterized by the prevalence of beading in straight or spiral lines, while the use of beading to form densely carved surfaces appears less frequently on *nomoli* stone sculptures. The dense patterning found on *mahai-yafei* more closely resembles cross-hatching. However, beading is the principal design element on the Luso-African ivories that have been classified by Curnow as “Type B” and Bassani as “Type 2” saltcellars. (Fig. 4.48) These saltcellars are supposed to exhibit predominantly African characteristics because the carvers are thought to have had least exposure to the

Portuguese and little awareness of European art.<sup>794</sup> Type B saltcellars have a cylindrical base with an openwork support consisting of caryatid figures or posts or columns carved in the round. These supports can take the form of twisted columns or ropes and some are also decorated with lines of beads. A thin disc serves as a transition between the cylindrical base and the lidded container of the upper section of the saltcellar. These containers feature parallel lines of beading or other abstract designs, such as circles, done in lines of beads or deeply carved zigzag patterns. Some containers display heavily textured surfaces, while others alternated between textured surfaces or designs and smooth, highly polished areas. In addition, these Type B saltcellars have double-faced or Janus heads as finials and are predominantly decorated with crocodiles, but only rarely with snakes or parrots. As we have seen, Janus heads and crocodiles also appear on *nomoli* sculptures, which were never subject to Portuguese suggestion.

Curnow has emphasized the close similarities and strong resemblances between Type B saltcellars and *nomoli* stone sculptures. Bassani has claimed that the forms of these saltcellars and the designs and images they carry are wholly African in origin without European prototype or precedent. In addition, Blier has commented on the unusual shape of the containers of these saltcellars.<sup>795</sup> She believes they purposely take the form of an egg and could represent either the primeval egg or well-spring of life or the egg of the python, signifying life and wealth. In either case, the shape and iconography seem indisputably African.

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<sup>794</sup> Curnow, 1983, pp. 94-97; Curnow, Kathy, "Alien or Accepted: African Perspectives on the Western 'Other' in 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Century Art," *Visual Anthropology Review*, v. 6, n. 1, 1990, pp. 38-44; Curnow, 1991, p. 15; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, pp. 62-82.

<sup>795</sup> Blier, 2009, p. 25; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 81

Curnow hypothesized that Type B saltcellars were not made on commission for the Portuguese, but were carved by artists working in the interior. According to Curnow, these ivories were then traded to the coast, possibly through *lançado* intermediaries, where the Portuguese were able to purchase them, never having been in direct contact with the artists.<sup>796</sup> Indeed, Curnow succinctly summarizes her argument: “The Type B artists clung to local forms and motifs, producing relatively few different types of objects for the Portuguese market; even those pieces they did make may not have differed too much from prestige pieces made for their own rulers, for only a minimal adjustment to foreign tastes is evident on their works.”<sup>797</sup>

The evident presence on Type B saltcellars of the stylistic features that seem to be most closely related to similar stylistic elements of Manueline architecture raises several issues. It is difficult to see how identical stylistic characteristics and designs can be attributed to the influence of Manueline architecture on one type of saltcellar, but interpreted as being of African origin on another. It is likewise difficult to explain the presence of these same or similar features in the indigenous stone carving traditions of Sierra Leone as deriving from the decorative style of Portuguese architecture. The ivory horn, now in the collection of the Musée du quai Branly, is thought to have been made by Temne and Bullom artists for a local chief.<sup>798</sup> (Fig. 4.49) It exhibits many of these same stylistic qualities. It is difficult to accept that Luso-African ivories were carved in Sierra Leone in the style of Manueline architecture at the very moment that this style was in the process of being developed and articulated and when the buildings which are considered

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<sup>796</sup> Curnow, 1990.

<sup>797</sup> Curnow, 1983, pp. 152-53

<sup>798</sup> Bassani, 2008, pp. 77-79; Hart, William A., “Afro-Portuguese echoes in the art of Upper Guinea,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, v. 51, 2007, pp. 77-86.

to be representative of the style had not yet been completed. Even if the possibility is admitted that drawings depicting certain stylistic features of Manueline architecture had been provided to artists in Sierra Leone by the Portuguese, it is difficult to imagine that these artists would have been able to produce, in such a short period of time, such magnificent objects in a previously and completely unknown style if they had not already been carving such motifs. Objects like the Berlin saltcellar or any of the so-called Type B saltcellars are clearly the product of a mature and highly sophisticated artistic tradition of ivory carving in Sierra Leone. What is more, the artists of Sierra Leone creatively employed beading motifs and twisted or plaited forms, such as the African snakes, in ways that are foreign to Manueline architecture.

It is not always useful to try to separate European and African styles and motifs and to identify origins and influences. Perhaps the artistic traditions of Sierra Leone coincided in certain respects with those of Portugal and this might have contributed in part to the desire of the Portuguese to commission objects from them. The available evidence prohibits making any conclusive or definitive statements. Nevertheless, it seems likely that Luso-African ivories could have contributed in decisive ways to the fabrication and meaning of the decorative style of Manueline architecture.

As Sydney Anglo has shown, it was necessary for rulers to make themselves, their dynastys and their possessions instantly recognizable.<sup>799</sup> This was achieved through the obsessive use of badges, which were immediately identifiable. The use of individual badges along with an intentionally recognizable court style fashioned and gave visual expression to dynastic mythology as well as political ideology.<sup>800</sup> The Luso-African

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<sup>799</sup> Anglo, 1992, pp. 5, 28, 35.

<sup>800</sup> Anglo, 1992; Vale, Malcolm, *The Princely Court*, 2001, pp. 247-260.

ivories participated in these standard patterns of court patronage and display and, consequently, were integral to shaping the distinctive identity of Manuel I, defining the nature of his kingship and affirming the legitimacy of his reign.

The style, iconography and technique of the ivory carving proclaimed Manuel I's control of the highest quality skill, artistic talent and creative imagination of Sub-Saharan Africa. In European court culture, the ability to secure and maintain the services of famous artists and musicians contributed to the glory, luster and prestige of the court. The presence of the exotic and rare served similar purposes. In the realization of the ivory armillary sphere, his personal device, Manuel I found a way to broadcast his imperial ambitions in Africa through an object that displayed the skills of West African artists in transforming West African ivory in the the shape of Portuguese hope for global power. Africa in the form of African artistic skill and style as well as African imagery had become integral to Manuel's identity, an equivalent in stylistic and visual terms to his personal devices, emblems and mottos.

The Luso-African ivories contributed in a unique way to the cosmopolitan nature of the Portuguese court and expanded the range of eclecticism that defined court art in Europe.<sup>801</sup> As precious objects of luxury art, they enhanced the magnificence and splendor of the court. All these factors increased the prestige and reputation of the Portuguese court among its European friends and rivals. Perhaps intended for the royal table or royal collection, the Berlin saltcellar was designed to be a conversation piece and it demanded close looking. Many elements of the saltcellar or images on it were topics of conversation at the court of Manuel I's predecessor. In 1494, Hieronymus Münzer traveled around court and country carefully inspecting and conversing with king João II

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<sup>801</sup> Vale, 2001, pp. 251-252.

about the fruits of Portuguese activities in sub-Saharan Africa. He was particularly struck by the crocodiles, pythons, pelicans, and elephant tusks he was shown. These all appear on the Berlin saltcellar.

Yet the Berlin saltcellar was likewise intended to convey an imperial message. By having his personal device carved by Temne and Bullom artists from ivory obtained from elephants in Sierra Leone, Manuel I was proclaiming through artistic patronage his control among European powers over sub-Saharan Africa. Manuel I had inherited a monopoly on maritime access to and commerce with sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>802</sup> The Berlin saltcellar blatantly advertised the material riches of West Africa through the lavish use of ivory and it likewise celebrated the wealth of skill and talent among the artists of Sierra Leone.

The somewhat strange shape of the Berlin saltcellar merits comment. In fact, it is not a perfect sphere, even though it is clear that it was certainly meant to represent an armillary sphere. The shape of the container is also unlike the usual shapes of most of the other Luso-African ivories. Its closest few parallels belong to Type B saltcellars, although these, such as the saltcellar formerly in Lisbon or the one in Seattle, seem more overtly to resemble the shape of a python egg. (Fig. 4.48; 4.50) The shape of the container on the Berlin saltcellar and the strange finial crowning it subtly suggest the pomegranate fruit. Since Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon had conquered the Kingdom of Granada in 1492, the pomegranate had been incorporated into their royal coat of arms. This heraldic aspect will be discussed below in relation to Luso-African oliphants. Nevertheless, the possible double evocation on the Berlin saltcellar of a python egg through the shape of the container and a pomegranate fruit through the peculiar finial

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<sup>802</sup> See, Chapters 1 and 2.



might suggest Manuel's imperial ideology of universal empire. For instance, the egg in European iconography was a symbol of hope and resurrection or supernatural birth. The play on the shape of an egg, an iconographic form connoting hope or supernatural birth, with the representation of an armillary sphere, the device which was intentionally conflated with hope and which was seen as confirming the providential nature of Manuel I's birth and the messianic purpose of his life, seems inevitable. The pomegranate carries similar Christological associations as the egg. However, the pomegranate was a common symbol of fertility, abundance and prosperity and often signified the church because of the inner unity of its countless seeds. These connotations of the pomegranate might refer to Manuel I's universal empire and desire to evangelize the world, inaugurating the universal peace of the "Fifth Empire" and the abundance and prosperity which it would beget. The symbolism of the sphere and the pomegranate, then, would both represent Manuel I's dream to unify the world. The fact that the Berlin saltcellar was carved by artists from Sierra Leone would suggest Manuel I's success in his endeavors. Moreover, the pomegranate might relate to the ideas present in the forms of Manueline architecture. The pomegranate resonated powerfully with the reign of King Solomon for it was featured prominently in the Song of Songs and on the architectural decoration of the Temple of Solomon. This would certainly contribute to the Solomonic themes Paulo Pereira has identified as motivating the form and iconography of Manueline architecture, such as the twisted columns, especially at Tomar. Manuel I not only exploited the association of pomegranates and twisted columns with Solomon's temple, but also Solomon's status as a king and the courtly and religious connotations this provided.

## 10. Luso-African Oliphants

A large number of ivory horns, known as oliphants, were commissioned by the Portuguese court from the artists of Sierra Leone.<sup>803</sup> In Europe, oliphants were ostentatious wind instruments used at court on ceremonial occasions. They also functioned as hunting horns, signaling different phases of the chase, or as instruments of war, being sounded to rouse soldiers in battle, to indicate field positions or warn of danger.<sup>804</sup> Ivory horns were likewise important instruments of the ceremonial culture of Sierra Leone. Ivory horns with decorative patterns similar to the ones found on the Luso-African ivory saltcellars that have been classified as Type B seem to have accompanied local chiefs.<sup>805</sup>

The possession of large-scale ivory horns as conspicuous luxury objects, which signified elite status and power, was common to the Portuguese court and the Temne and Bullom cultures of Sierra Leone. However, Valentim Fernandes does not mention the carving of ivory horns in Sierra Leone and they do not appear in the surviving import records of the *Case de Guiné*. Fernandes's silence about them is a curious oversight since, presumably, he would have had ample opportunity to see them at court. Nevertheless, the oliphants have been securely attributed to Temne and Bullom artists based on stylistic comparison with the ivory saltcellars.<sup>806</sup>

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<sup>803</sup> Bassani, 2008, pp. 57-64; Bassani, 2000; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, pp. 90-109; Bassani, Ezio, "Les cornes d'appel en ivoire de la Sierra Leone (XVIe Siècle)," *L'Ethnographie*, v. 85, n. 2, 1981-82, p. 151-68; Bassani, Ezio, "Gli olifanti Afroportoghesi della Sierra Leone," *Critica d'Arte*, n. 163-65, 1979, pp. 175-201.

<sup>804</sup> For the oliphant in Europe, see Shalem, Avinoam, *The Oliphant: Islamic Objects in Historical Context*, Boston: Brill, 2004; Ebitz, David, "The Oliphant: Its Function and Meaning in a Courtly Society," *Houston German Studies: The Medieval Court in Europe*, v. 6, 1986, pp. 123-41.

<sup>805</sup> Henggeler, Joe, "Ivory Trumpets of the Mende," *African Arts*, v. 14, n. 2, 1981, pp. 59-63; Hart, William A., "Afro-Portuguese echoes in the art of Upper Guinea," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, v. 51, 2007, pp. 77-86; Hart, 1995, p. 44; Massing, 2007, pp. 272-273; Curnow, 1983, p. 115.

<sup>806</sup> Bassani and Fagg, 1988, pp. 90-109.

Luso-African oliphants, like the stunning example in the National Museum of African Art (2005-6-9), measuring 64.2 cm in length, follow the natural curve of the elephant tusk. (Fig. 4.51) Unlike horns from Sierra Leone, which have mouthpieces on the concave sides of the tusk, Luso-African horns are end blown with the mouthpiece located at the tip of the tusk. The mouthpiece itself emerges from the jaws of a vicious-looking animal. The head of this animal is covered in a sort of decorative bridle, which is sometimes inlaid with jewels. In accord with European custom, the lugs, to which chains or suspension straps were originally attached, are placed on the concave side of the tusk. These lugs are carved in geometric shapes or in the form of various fantastic and ferocious animals. The convex side of the tusk features three figures, invariably men, carved in high relief. These figures seem to depict hunters for they typically carry prey animals across their shoulders or, with their arms extended, hold on to chains that restrain their hunting dogs. The length of the horn is divided horizontally into six separate zones (not counting the mouthpiece) of varying widths by decorative bands. Within these zones, the artist has carved in low relief a variety of European scenes and motifs, such as hunting scenes, animals attacking or engaged in struggles, isolated animals, and heraldry, devices, emblems and mottos. The imagery in some zones is arranged horizontally, while the representations in others are conceived vertically.

The decorative vocabulary of the oliphant is similar to that of the saltcellars. It consists of lines of beading and twisted, braided or plaited rope forms, as well as rhythmically interlaced and knotted rope designs. The oliphant in the National Museum of African Art belongs to a group of four horns, which features the coat of arms of Manuel I, his personal device of an armillary sphere, and the Cross of the Order of Christ,

as well as the arms, devices and motto of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon. These precisely and accurately rendered heraldic elements enable a relatively reliable dating of the oliphants and permit speculation on the occasion for which they might have made to be given as gifts by Manuel I to the Catholic Monarchs. This topic will be examined in depth below.

The hunting scenes and depictions of a wide range of animals, from standard European game animals to African animals to fantastic and mythical beasts, serve metaphorical and symbolic functions. The representations of hunters pursuing and slaying their quarry and of predatory animals attacking prey signify ideas of aggression, domination, power and prowess. Since the horns were to be used potentially in hunting, war and court ceremony, the images on them are metaphors for the strength, courage and authority of the aristocratic or princely owner of the horn. The imagery seems to derive from marginal illustrations in books of hours printed in France by Phillipe Pigouchet and Thielman Kevler, which were published in several successive editions during the late 1490s and first couple decades of the sixteenth century.<sup>807</sup> These same printed illustrations from the same publications were likewise the primary visual sources of much of the figural imagery of the Unicorn Tapestries, now in the Cloisters Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, produced around the same time as the Luso-African ivories, between 1495 and 1505.<sup>808</sup> The Luso-African oliphants, then, belong in certain

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<sup>807</sup> Massing, 2007, pp. 73-75; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, pp. 110-121; Bassani, 2000, pp. 290-291 Bassani, 2008, pp. 65-68.

<sup>808</sup> For the Unicorn Tapestries, see Cavallo, Adolfo Salvatore, *The Unicorn Tapestries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1998; Freeman, Margaret B., and Linda Sipress, "The Unicorn Tapestries," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, v. 32, n. 1, 1973-1974, pp. 177-224.

respects to a common courtly culture in Europe which was quite fashionable at this precise moment.

Indeed, the imagery, style, meanings and function of the Luso-African oliphants knowingly participate in and reconfigure the familiar tradition of medieval oliphants. The word oliphant derives from the French epic *The Song of Roland (La Chanson de Roland)*, possibly the earliest surviving *chanson de geste*.<sup>809</sup> The poem recounts the military struggle in Spain between Christian knights, lead by Charlemagne and Roland, and the Muslim warriors who have invaded and conquered Iberia. Roland's oliphant plays a prominent and dramatic role in his epic battles and eventually in his death. Charlemagne retrieves Roland's oliphant and later presents it to a church as a holy relic of the fallen crusading hero and, in Avinoam Shalem's phrase, as an *aide-mémoire* intended to commemorate a specific event or person and evoke the relevant narrative.<sup>810</sup> In the poem, the oliphant was the symbol of the military hero Roland, a warrior who died fighting Muslims in Spain. Consequently, oliphants became the key attribute of valiant knights along with their swords and horses. Shalem has suggested that Roland's oliphant was understood by contemporary readers of the epic to be a war trophy taken by Roland after having emerged victorious from an earlier battle.<sup>811</sup> Illuminated manuscripts indicate that his oliphant was believed to have been of Islamic manufacture.<sup>812</sup>

The production of medieval oliphants in twelfth-century Europe is attributable to the associations of the oliphant with the Christian crusading hero Roland, which popularized the ivory horn as a principal attribute or symbol of valiant knighthood. As

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<sup>809</sup> For the importance of *La Chanson de Roland* to understanding medieval oliphants, see Shalem, 2004, pp. 4-5, 101-104, 132, 136.

<sup>810</sup> Shalem, 2004, pp. 5-6, 96, 117-118.

<sup>811</sup> Shalem, 2004, pp. 101-104.

<sup>812</sup> *Ibid.*

the emblem or relic of Roland after his death, the oliphant, therefore, connoted the qualities of chivalry and virtues of knighthood, such as valor, loyalty, honor, noble courage, hardiness, strength and prowess.<sup>813</sup> Not only were oliphants closely connected to chivalry and knighthood, but they were also directly linked to crusade against Islam and, more specifically, to participation in the Reconquest of Iberia.<sup>814</sup>

It is necessary to examine the surviving medieval oliphants and to consider Shalem's claim that the ivory horn of Roland was believed to be a war trophy and, as a consequence, a product of the ivory carving traditions of Islamic art. These so-called "Saracenic" oliphants were probably carved by Arab craftsmen working in Europe, possibly, but not necessarily exclusively, in Sicily or in southern Italy, during the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. The style and motifs of these oliphants strongly resemble the art of Fatimid Egypt.<sup>815</sup> Shalem has conjectured that some of these ivory objects might have been carved by artists trained in Fatimid Egypt and were even carved, possibly, in Fatimid Cairo.<sup>816</sup>

These medieval oliphants were possibly Islamic objects and were certainly characterized by a style that strongly evoked Fatimid art. The design of the oliphants featured animals inhabiting scrolls or medallions, such as the oliphant at the Metropolitan

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<sup>813</sup> Keen, Maurice, *Chivalry*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, pp. 1-63.

<sup>814</sup> For the Reconquest in Iberia, see O'Callaghan, Joseph F., *Reconquest and crusade in medieval Spain*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003; Barton, Simon and Richard A. Fletcher, *The world of El Cid: chronicles of the Spanish reconquest*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000; Fletcher, Richard A., "Reconquest and Crusade in Spain c. 1050-1150," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, v. 37, 1987, pp. 31-47.

<sup>815</sup> For Fatimid art, see Bloom, Jonathan M., *Arts of the city victorious: Islamic art and architecture in Fatimid North Africa and Egypt*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007; Contadini, Anna, "Le arti del periodo Fatimide," in *Il Mediterraneo e L'Arte nel Medioevo*, edited by R. Cassanelli, Milan: Jaca, 2000, pp. 118-137; Contadini, Anna, *Fatimid Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1998; Barrucand, Marianne, ed., *L'Egypte fatimide: Son art et son histoire*, Paris: Presses de l'université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999. For the history of the Fatimids, see Brett, Michael, *The Rise of the Fatimids: The World of the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the Fourth Century of the Hijra, Tenth Century CE*, Boston: Brill, 2001.

<sup>816</sup> Shalem, 2004, pp. 70-73, 75, 79

Museum of Art, or animals running after each other in horizontal zones running the length of the horn, such as the oliphant in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello.<sup>817</sup> (Fig. 4.52-53) Sometimes the two different design formats were combined in various ways. Two bands, with a smooth surface in the middle, wrap around the horns. These areas were created for the placement of precious metalwork for the attachment of suspension straps. The arrangement of animals in medallions, scrolls or vertical rows is characteristic of Fatimid wood carving.<sup>818</sup> The carved decoration on these oliphants is dense and the surface is crowded. Like the Luso-African oliphants, these medieval oliphants are ornamented with hunters, warriors, savage predators and prey animals, as well as fantastic and mythological creatures like griffins and harpies.<sup>819</sup>

Shalem has proposed that these medieval oliphants were commissioned by Norman warriors and that this type of decoration, featuring armed hunters or warriors with wild, exotic and fantastic animals, expressed the qualities of their ideal noble warrior, both ferocious and courageous.<sup>820</sup> Indeed, much of the imagery and its meanings on the oliphants correspond with the decoration of the Palatine Chapel in Palermo. The fact that a standard iconography of hunting and stereotyped depictions of strong and weak animals appear on both the medieval oliphants and the Luso-African oliphants was surely intentional. On both types of ivory horns, the images conveyed nearly identical metaphorical messages of courage, strength and domination and these similes were applied to similar audiences of noble, valiant knights.

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<sup>817</sup> Shalem, 2004, pp. 52-53, 63-64, 70-73.

<sup>818</sup> Shalem, 2004, pp. 75, 79.

<sup>819</sup> Shalem, 2004, pp. 63-64.

<sup>820</sup> Shalem, 2004, pp. 104-105, 133-137.

Moreover, the style of the medieval oliphants was deliberately ambiguous, belonging to the complicated world of the international Fatimid style.<sup>821</sup> The style and decoration of these medieval ivory horns were hybrid, exotic and cosmopolitan. Likewise, the style and decoration of Luso-African ivories were by design hybrid and cosmopolitan, having been carved by artists from Sierra Leone for the Portuguese court. The parallels between the medieval and Luso-African ivory horns can be extended further, for both groups of ivories were made for chivalric knights in pursuit of the ideals of crusade, specifically engaged in the Reconquest of Iberia.

The Luso-African oliphant, now in the Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, Madrid (21.348), measures 64 cm in length and is similar in design and style to the group of oliphants centered on the horn in the National Museum of African Art. (Fig. 4.54) However, the ivory horn in Madrid displays the royal coat of arms and the motto, “Aleo,” carved on what appears to be a banner, carried by two angels. Unusually, the Cross of the Order of Christ and armillary sphere are absent. The Latin inscription “Ave Maria” wraps around one of the zones, while, uniquely among the oliphants, a religious image, the Lamentation, occupies another zone. The oliphant in Madrid epitomizes the deliberate association of the Luso-African oliphants with the ideals of Crusade and the Reconquest and the virtues and values of Christian knighthood and chivalry.

The motto “Aleo” that is prominently displayed on the Madrid oliphant was the famous motto of the powerful noble family of the Meneses. D. Pedro de Meneses participated heroically in the conquest of Ceuta in 1415 and was appointed its first

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<sup>821</sup> Shalem, 2004, pp. 70-73; 136.



captain (1415-1437).<sup>822</sup> The conquest of Ceuta was seen by contemporaries as the triumphant continuation of the Reconquest across the straits into North Africa and as the strategic and symbolic initiation of Portuguese overseas expansion in Africa.<sup>823</sup> It was reported that “Aleo” had been the battle cry of the Portuguese as they took Ceuta from the Muslims. After assuming the captaincy of Ceuta, Meneses appropriately adopted “Aleo” as his personal motto and later made it obligatory for his heirs to take on the motto as well.<sup>824</sup> In 1467 the captaincy of Ceuta became a hereditary position bestowed by the crown on the Meneses family. In effect, Ceuta and the Meneses had become synonymous. As Nuno Silva Campos has argued, Meneses made Ceuta essential to national politics and the developing ideology of expansion, while Ceuta provided Meneses with the opportunity to assume a permanently prominent and preeminent role amongst the titled nobility.<sup>825</sup> In addition, the royal chronicler Gomes Eanes de Zurara (c. 1405-1474) was commissioned during the reign of the crusading king Afonso V to write a chronicle celebrating the conquest of Ceuta and another one, akin to a sequel, dedicated exclusively to the glory and deeds of arms achieved during the captaincy of Meneses.<sup>826</sup> Zurara claimed that Meneses had been given all the powers of a king in Ceuta and the royally endorsed chronicle on his tenure in office certainly treated him like one. In addition to this rare historiographic commemoration of his noble military prowess, the

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<sup>822</sup> Campos, Nuno Silva, *D. Pedro de Meneses e a construção da Casa de Vila Real (1415-1437)*, Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 2004.

<sup>823</sup> Unali, Anna, *Ceuta 1415: alle origini dell'espansione europea in Africa*, Rome: Bulzoni, 2000; Drummond, Isabel M.R. Mendes and Paulo Drummond Braga, *Ceuta portuguesa (1415-1656)*, Ciudad Autónoma de Ceuta: Instituto de Estudios Ceutíes, 1998.

<sup>824</sup> Campos, 2004, pp. 174-175.

<sup>825</sup> Campos, 2004, pp. 139, 172.

<sup>826</sup> Zurara, Gomes Eanes de, *Crónica da tomada de Ceuta, Mems Martins Codex*, edited by Reis Brasil, Lisbon: Publicações Europa-América, 1992. Zurara also wrote another chronicles on the military exploits of a member of the Meneses family, see Zurara, Gomes Eanes de, *Crónica do Conde Dom Pedro de Meneses*, edited by Maria Teresa Brocardo, Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1997. For these editions, see Brocardo Maria Teresa, “Editar uma Crónica de Zurara,” *Cahiers de linguistique hispanique médiévale*, v. 20, 1995, pp. 257-267.

motto “Aleo” was conspicuously carved on the tomb of D. Pedro de Meneses in the church of Santa Maria da Graça in Santarém to secure his identity with Ceuta for eternity.

(Fig. 4.55)

The Madrid oliphant was commissioned by the crown, probably by Manuel I, as a gift to a leading member of the Meneses family. It could have been made for three possible members of the illustrious family. D. Pedro de Meneses (1425-1499) was the grandson of his namesake, the first captain of Ceuta. In 1489 he received a singular honor from João II when in a grandiose ceremony he was elevated to the title of Marquis of Vila Real. He was thus the only nobleman with the rank of marquis in Portugal and, beside the king, was second only to D. Manuel, the Duke of Beja and future king. He thus became the highest ranking nobleman outside of the royal family. Later on, in 1498, when, as king, Manuel I left Portugal to make an extended diplomatic visit to Spain, Meneses was charged, along with the king’s sister, with looking after the affairs of the kingdom in the king’s absence. He died soon thereafter in 1499.

In addition, Manuel I was particularly close to D. Diogo da Silva da Meneses (c. 1430-1504), another descendent of the legendary first captain of Ceuta.<sup>827</sup> Early on in life, D. Diogo da Silva distinguished himself in battle in North Africa, accompanying the Infante D. Fernando and Afonso V on their campaigns against the Muslims, and impressively repulsed the threat to Portugal from Castile during the wars of succession. He was implicitly trusted by Afonso V’s son, João II, who appointed D. Diogo da Silva in 1481 as the tutor of D. Manuel, then Duke of Beja, making him largely responsible for the upbringing of the young duke. In 1489, he negotiated with the Kingdom of Fez in

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<sup>827</sup> Silvério, Silvina, “D. Diogo da Silva de Meneses e a política régia portuguesa,” in *A Alta nobreza e a fundação do estado da Índia; actas do colóquio internacional*, edited by João Paulo Oliveira e Costa e Vítor Luís Gaspar Rodrigues, Lisbon: Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2004, pp. 239-258.

Morocco to extricate João II from the disastrous and humiliating military blunder of Graciosa. With the accession of Manuel I, D. Diogo da Silva reached the height of his power and influence, joining the royal council and receiving appointment as “escrivão de puridade” or keeper of the privy seal. Holding great affection for and trust in D. Diogo da Silva, Manuel I sent him to Castile to negotiate his first marriage and relied on him for other delicate matters. He received a title of nobility, Count of Portalegre, from Manuel I on 6 February 1498. This title of nobility was granted only a month before D. Diogo da Silva accompanied the king to the court of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon.

The third and final possible candidate for whom the Madrid oliphant might have been made is D. Fernando de Meneses, the second Marquis of Vila Real. D. Fernando de Meneses and Manuel I seem to have been close friends. He accompanied D. Diogo da Silva to Spain to make arrangements for Manuel I’s first marriage and was later sent to Spain to receive and escort the king’s second wife, the Infanta Maria, to Portugal. In 1502, D. Fernando de Meneses traveled with the king on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. On the journey through Galicia, the second Marquis of Vila Real impersonated the king, who, as a safety precaution, traveled in disguise.

The ancestral association of the Meneses family and especially their motto “Aleo” with the ideals of the Iberian Reconquest, a theater of crusade focused on the Muslims of North Africa, and the values of chivalry and virtues of knighthood that they stood for corresponded seamlessly with the meanings and messages conveyed by the medieval oliphants as the attribute of noble warriors discussed above. Like Roland, the Meneses were engaged in crusade against Muslims who threatened the Iberian peninsula. Like the

medieval oliphants, the Madrid oliphant symbolized, in certain respects, the everlasting military confrontation between Islam and Christianity.

The Madrid oliphant displays the usual types of hunting scenes and savage predatory beasts as the other Luso-African oliphants and, like them and the earlier medieval oliphants, they function as metaphors of courage, power and prowess. However, the explicit Christian imagery and the peculiar style of the Madrid oliphant, characterized by unusually dense lines of beads which visually proliferate across the surface of the horn, make it unique among the surviving Luso-African oliphants. Nevertheless, the Christian imagery and thickly and heavily beaded figure style on the ivory horn seem to relate to the series of three pyxes, designed presumably as liturgical objects.<sup>828</sup>

The Madrid oliphant represents the Lamentation with the Virgin shown facing forward and holding the dead, stiff body of Christ. (Fig. 4.56) Like much Renaissance religious imagery, the figure of the Virgin is shown larger than the figure of Christ. Two unidentified praying figures, shown in profile, kneel to either side of the Virgin. A fifth, unidentified figure, holding a palm branch in the left-hand and raising the right-hand in a blessing gesture, directly faces the viewer. The figure seems to be located in the background, to the Virgin's left and above Christ's head. A cross is depicted above the Virgin's head, referring to the previous moment of the Descent. None of the figures has a halo. The Virgin and one other figure wear some sort of hood, while the wounds of the stigmata are visible on Christ's body and the crown of thorns remains on his head. The Marian character of the scene is emphasized on the oliphant by the inscription "Ave

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<sup>828</sup> The pyxes are now in the collections of the Walters Art Museum, the Museu de Grão Vasco, and a private collection in Estoril.

Maria” carved in Gothic script around the horn. The religious imagery carved on the horn confirms that the hunting scenes and savages animals should be seen as referring specifically to Christian knighthood.

The original practical function of the oliphant as a wind instrument to be blown as a call to battle, rousing the spirits and courage of the troops, parallels the sounds of the war cry of “Aleo.” Moreover, the invocation to the Virgin in the form of the prayer, “Ave Maria,” also carved on the horn, strengthens the connection of the oliphant with musical sounds, words, and verbal incantations, both martial and religious. The combination of the prayer and lamentation scene was designed to invoke the protection of the Virgin and lend the horn a decidedly Marian undertone.

Although the image of the dead Christ might suggest notions of sacrifice on the battlefield in defense of the Christian faith, the overall tenor of the Marian imagery seems rather to belong to the Christian military tradition of beseeching the aid and protection of the Virgin before and during battle. During the centuries of Reconquest in Iberia, flags with images of the Virgin, believed to possess extraordinary powers, were brought on campaigns, while miraculous visions of the Virgin were often said to have converted or defeated Muslim armies. The connection between crusading knights and devotion to the Virgin derives from the influence of chivalric ideals. The presence of the motto “Aleo” and the prayer “Ave Maria” unequivocally makes evident on the horn the bond between noble Christian warriors and devotion to the Virgin, whose aid and protection in battle they invoke.

It is noteworthy that the image of a globe or orb surmounted by a cross is carved in the band containing the inscription “Ave Maria.” This royal and religious emblem,

known as the *globus cruciger*, was a common symbol of divine majesty and served as an insignia of Christian temporal power or sovereignty. The iconography of the *Salvator Mundi* required Christ to be shown holding the *globus cruciger*. The presence of the *globus cruciger* on the Madrid oliphant was surely intended to refer to Manuel I's unquenchable thirst for crusade and his fervent yearning for inaugurating the "Fifth Empire." His peculiar blend of crusade was deliberately dominated by messianism inspired by a strand of Franciscan thought.<sup>829</sup> It is known that D. Diogo da Silva was connected to the Observant Franciscans and, as tutor, was primarily responsible for imbuing the young duke with the ideas of the observants and for helping to shape the future king's imperial ideology from the beginning.

Roland's oliphant and the coherent group of medieval oliphants from the twelfth century that it inspired are characterized by a style that evokes Islamic art. The Fatimid style of these medieval oliphants was an international and cosmopolitan court style emanating from Fatimid Cairo and by the twelfth century, when the ivory horns were carved, it was an archaic style whose continued use was meant to refer to earlier glories.<sup>830</sup> The style and decorative motifs of the Luso-African oliphants, carved by artists in Sierra Leone, were likewise unusual and distinctive in relation to the artistic styles dominating the production of art in Europe. In addition, the specific European

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<sup>829</sup> For the ideological dimensions of Manuel's conception and promotion of crusade, see Thomaz, Luís Felipe F.R. and Jorge Santos Alves, "Da cruzada ao Quinto Império," in *A Memória da nação: Colóquio do Gabinete de Estudos de Simbologia*, edited by Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto, Lisbon: Livraria Sá da Costa Editora, 1991, pp. 81–165; Humble, Susannah, "Prestige, ideology and social politics: The place of the Portuguese overseas expansion in the policies of D. Manuel (1495 – 1521)," *Itinerario*, v. 24, 2000, pp. 21–43.

<sup>830</sup> Grabar, Oleg. "Qu'est-ce que l'Art Fatimide?" in *L'Egypte fatimide: Son art et son histoire*, edited by Marianne Barrucand, Paris: Presses de l'université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999, pp. 11-18; Grabar, Oleg, "Fatimid Art, Precursor or Culmination," in *Early Islamic Art, 650-1100: Constructing the Study of Islamic Art*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005, pp. 277-87; Grabar, Oleg, "Imperial and Urban Art in Islam: The Subject-Matter of Fatimid Art," in *Early Islamic Art, 650-1100*, Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005, pp. 215-241; Bloom, Jonathan M., "The Origins of Fatimid Art," *Muqarnas*, v. 3, 1985, pp. 20–38.

imagery that the Portuguese patrons asked the Temne and Bullom artists to use as the basis for the carving of certain scenes and motifs belonged to a common courtly culture. As we have seen, similar images, derived from the same sources, appear on the Unicorn Tapestries made around the same time as the ivory horns. This international court style was also purposefully archaic and, like the imagery on the medieval oliphants, was intended to have metaphorical or even magical connotations. However, the heavy, densely beaded forms on the Madrid oliphant seem to recall elements of the style and forms of Romanesque art.

The possible and subtle suggestion of a generic Romanesque style on Luso-African oliphants aligns them in important ways with Manuel I's larger program of artistic patronage. Paulo Pereira has argued that the Manueline style in architecture incorporated prominent and pointed references to Romanesque art.<sup>831</sup> According to Pereira, the deliberate highlighting of Romanesque stylistic features was meant to foster a myth of origins and to locate Manuel I's reign within a new conception of the royal genealogy of Portugal. This program was most directly put into effect in architecture at the monastery of Santa Cruz, Coimbra where Manuel I rebuilt parts of the building and commissioned new tombs for the earliest kings of Portugal. He likewise commissioned new chronicles to celebrate the achievements of these kings. The ideological implications of these references to Romanesque style and forms were essential to Manuel's messianic program, for the Romanesque was intended to invoke the kings who established Portugal as a Christian kingdom independent of Spain and liberated from Muslim occupation. In

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<sup>831</sup> Pereira, 2001, pp. 151-167; Pereira, 1998, p. 152; Pereira, 1990, pp. 111, 202; Leite and Pereira, 1984, p. 53; Serrão, Vítor, *História da Arte em Portugal: O Renascimento e o Manierismo*, Lisbon: Editorial Presença, 2001, pp. 21-36; Pereira, Fernando Antonio Baptista, "O Manuelino ou as vantagens da designação," in *História de Portugal: dos tempos pré-históricos aos nossos dias*, edited by João Medina, Amadora, Portugal: Ediclube, 1995, v. 4, pp. 249-274.

effect, Manuel I was formulating a conception of kingship in Portugal as being founded on and defined by expansion and crusade. Portuguese royalty, Manuel I was at pains to emphasize, emerged from the Reconquest and was forged by valiant Christian knights, similar to Roland. As Italian princes looked back to Roman antiquity for their origin myths and used classicizing styles and themes to articulate their ruling ideologies, so Manuel I returned to the crusader kings who had founded Portugal and employed Romanesque style and motifs to allude to the values Manuel I believed they represented and to exalt expansion and crusade as royal imperatives he was destined to fulfill.<sup>832</sup>

Unique to the Luso-African oliphants, the Madrid oliphant displays only the royal coat of arms and the motto of a noble family. The absence of the armillary sphere and Cross of the Order of Christ is not easily explained. No documentary evidence survives to demonstrate that the Madrid oliphant was, in fact, given as a gift by Manuel I to a member of the Meneses family. However, the heraldic elements expertly carved on the prestigious ivory horn strongly suggest that it was a royal commission and that the Meneses were the intended recipients. Avinoam Shalen has demonstrated that the oliphant functioned as an *aide-mémoire* designed to evoke and preserve memories and mark special occasions or events. In this way, the Madrid oliphant would have served a similar purpose and conveyed similar messages to the chronicle of D. Pedro de Meneses composed by Zurara and to design of his tomb in Santarém. The elaborate ceremony granting D. Pedro de Meneses, the grandson of the first captain of Ceuta, the title of Marquis of Vila Real would have been an eminently appropriate occasion for the commissioning and presentation of the ivory horn. However, the ceremony occurred in 1489 and this seems perhaps too early a date for the carving of the horn by artists in

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<sup>832</sup> Leite and Pereira, 1984, pp. 55-57.



Sierra Leone. On the other hand, it might have been commissioned to be given to Meneses in 1498 when he was charged by the king with shared responsibility for governing the kingdom. It is likely that Manuel I had commissioned other oliphants at this time to take with him as gifts to the Spanish court. In addition, Meneses would have remained in Portugal to govern in the place of the absent king and this might account for the pairing on the horn of the royal coat of arms and the Meneses motto. In this scenario, the horn would have acted as an insignia of office or as a symbol of the royal authority the king had temporally invested in him. The carving of the armillary sphere and Cross of the Order of Christ would not have been necessary since Meneses was not assuming the king's personal identity, only his royal authority, and was not given control of the military order.

On other hand, D. Diogo da Silva da Meneses was granted a title of nobility a month before he accompanied the king on his sojourn to Spain. The Madrid oliphant would have confirmed his membership in the titled nobility and conspicuously enhanced his status and reputation at the Spanish court. Moreover, the religious and imperial imagery represented on the horn and the messianic crusading ideology they express might be related to the formative role D. Diogo da Silva had played in the shaping of them. Nevertheless, the Marian overtones of the ivory horn might have been designed for D. Fernando de Meneses, the king's companion, when he received Maria, Manuel I's second wife, in Spain and escorted her to the Portuguese court. Although speculative, these several proposals, it is hoped, contribute to an increased sensitivity to the imagery and potential meanings of the Luso-African oliphants and confirm the prominent and integral role of Luso-African ivories in European court culture.

## 11. Luso-African Oliphants and Courtly Hunting

The function of the oliphants as hunting horns and the hunting imagery carved on them emphasize the courtly aspects of the wind instrument.<sup>833</sup> As hunting horns oliphants were aristocratic or princely objects by definition. The ivory material and its impressive size were further ostentatious markers of royal status as was the amount of virtuoso carving and richness of decoration. The ivory came from elephants hunted in Africa, a practice strictly controlled by African rulers, and was then transformed through artistic manipulation into an instrument of the hunt in Europe. The virtuoso skill and superb craftsmanship of the artists were seen as necessary complements to the preciousness of the material on which the design was worked.

In the Medieval and Renaissance periods, the hunt was an aristocratic and courtly activity governed by strict protocol and ceremony.<sup>834</sup> Its performance reinforced the hierarchy and ideology of court society through its conspicuous consumption and visual magnificence and its ritual assertion of princely or aristocratic control and dominance over the forces of nature and society. The princely hunt was an ideal opportunity for the display of regal dignity and splendor and of knightly and martial prowess. Theodore of Antioch, the thirteenth-century philosopher and translator at the court of the avid

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<sup>833</sup> Ezio Bassani was the first to discuss Luso-African oliphants within the context of European hunting imagery and made the comparison to the Unicorn Tapestries. See, Bassani and Fagg, 1988, pp. 97-101.

<sup>834</sup> For the courtly and ceremonial aspects of the hunt, see Crane, Susan, "Ritual Aspects of the Hunt à Force," in *Engaging with nature: essays on the natural world in medieval and early modern Europe*, edited by Barbara Hanawalt and Lisa J. Kiser, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008, pp. 63-84; Cummins, John, *The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting*, London: Phoenix Press, 1988, pp. 1-11.

huntsman Emperor Frederick II of Sicily, summarized the enduring sentiment and widespread perception: “the only amusement appropriate to kings is hunting.”<sup>835</sup>

Nevertheless, the hunt provided artists, writers and theologians with a rich source of symbolism and allegory.<sup>836</sup> Indeed, artistic renditions of the hunt as an aristocratic sport and the beasts involved in it were commonly seen as Christian allegories and given symbolic meanings. Hunting imagery appears in the Bible and St. Eustace and St. Hubert, patron saint of hunters, provided the principal hunting miracles for artists to depict. During the Middle Ages, Christ was compared to a huntsman hunting after errant souls and was identified with the hart whose life and pursuit provided allegories for the Life and Passion of Christ.

In the Renaissance, the Augustinian thinker and preacher Egidio da Viterbo (1469-15-32) eloquently blended Platonic ideas on the hunt as a metaphor for the practice of philosophy with the classical hunting myths of Actaeon and Diana and conventional interpretations of the hunt as Christian allegories.<sup>837</sup> Inspired by Plato and possibly also by Ficino, Egidio wrote that the philosopher, aided by the hunting dogs of thought, hunted traces of the divine presence in the forest of matter just as hunters followed animal tracks in pursuit of their prey. In this spiritual hunt, the soul hunts down

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<sup>835</sup> Quoted in Cummins, 1988, p. 5. For the figure of Theodore of Antioch, see Kedar, Benjamin Z. and Etan Kohlberg, “The Intercultural Career of Theodore of Antioch,” *Mediterranean Historical Review*, v. 10, n. 1-2, 1995, pp. 164-176.

<sup>836</sup> For the various allegorical and metaphorical interpretations of the hunt, see Cummins, John, *The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting*, London: Phoenix Press, 1988; Kemp, Martin and Ann Massing, Nicola Christie, Karin Green, “Paolo Uccello’s ‘Hunt in the Forest’,” *The Burlington Magazine*, v. 133, n. 1056, 1991, pp. 164-178; Thiebaut, Marcelle, *The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974; Thiebaut, Marcelle, “The Medieval Chase,” *Speculum*, v. 42, n. 2, 1967, pp. 260-274.

<sup>837</sup> For discussion of Egidio da Viterbo’s writings on the hunt, see Rowland, Ingrid D., *Giordano Bruno: philosopher/heretic*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008, pp. 45-52; Rowland, Ingrid, “Giordano Bruno and Neapolitan Neoplatonism,” in *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher of the Renaissance*, edited by Hilary Gatti, Ashgate, 2002, pp. 97-119; Rowland, Ingrid D., “The Intellectual Background of the School of Athens: Tracking Divine Wisdom in the Rome of Julius II,” in *Raphael’s “School of Athens”*, edited by Marcia Hall New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 131-170.

knowledge of God and the search for God is compared to a hunting expedition. The captivating images and powerfully expressed ideas of Egidio da Viterbo were well-known to an admiring and appreciative Manuel I. In 1507 Egidio had preached a lengthy and highly learned oration on the Golden Age before Julius II in praise of Manuel I as the culmination of three days of festivities in Rome celebrating Portuguese overseas expansion.<sup>838</sup> This sermon, acknowledging the king's international prestige, was instrumental in shaping and refining Manuel I's imperial ideology and in strengthening his messianism. Paulo Pereira has argued persuasively that its contents played a major role in defining the iconographic program of the west façade of Tomar.<sup>839</sup>

These types of understandings of the hunt through metaphor were widespread at the courts of Renaissance Europe, including Portugal and France, when the Luso-African oliphants and some of the most famous series of tapestries were being commissioned. The Unicorn Tapestries at the Cloisters Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Lady and the Unicorn Tapestries at the Musée national du Moyen Âge at the Hôtel de Cluny have been interpreted in terms of symbol and allegory, some authors favoring a secular explanation and others preferring a sacred one.<sup>840</sup> (Fig. 4.57-58) Like the Luso-African oliphants, the tapestries are characterized by hunting scenes, heraldic devices, emblems and mottos, and fantastic or mythological beasts. Like the images carved on the ivory horns, the representations on the tapestries suggest a dream-like or

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<sup>838</sup> For the text of the oration, which was sent to Manuel I, see O'Malley, John W., "Fulfilment of the Christian Golden Age under Pope Julius II: Text of a Discourse of Giles of Viterbo, 1507," *Traditio*, v. 25, 1969, pp. 265-338. For the context of the oration and notions on the Golden Age it expressed, see Stinger, Charles L., *The Renaissance in Rome*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998, pp. 120-121, 296-99

<sup>839</sup> Pereira, Paulo, *De Aurea Aetate: O Coro do Convento de Cristo em Tomar e a Simbólica Manuelina*, Lisbon: Instituto Português do Património Arquitectónico, 2003.

<sup>840</sup> Cavallo, Adolfo Salvatore, *The Unicorn Tapestries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1998; Freeman, Margaret B. and Linda Sipress, "The Unicorn Tapestries," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, v. 32, n. 1, 1973-1974, pp. 177-224.

fictional world conjured entirely by the mentality of court culture. It is significant that the ivories and the tapestries are both luxury arts, for the luxury arts were formed from precious, prestigious and ostentatious materials and were courtly objects by definition.<sup>841</sup> The oliphant's status as a luxury art, due to its ivory material, combined with its function as a hunting horn, its hunting imagery, and African style and African decorative motifs, made it the ideal courtly and cosmopolitan object.

The hunt of the unicorn was widely seen both as a symbol of courtly love and as a metaphor of the Life and Passion of Christ.<sup>842</sup> In the fourth tapestry of the series at the Cloisters, the Unicorn Defends Himself, an imposing huntsman in the lower left is shown sounding his horn. (Fig. 4.59) He has been identified as the Archangel Gabriel appearing in the guise of a courtly hunter of souls. Drawing analogies with the Annunciation, the horn heralds the coming of Christ, while the scabbard he wears carries the Latin inscription, "AVE REGINA C[OELI]" (Hail, Queen of the Heavens). In this scene, Gabriel announces that "the Unicorn is Christ and that the animal's eventual submission to the virgin maid is an allegory of the Annunciation and Incarnation."<sup>843</sup> Perhaps the Madrid oliphant with its combination of hunting scenes and Marian religious iconography, as well as the Latin inscription "Ave Maria," was intended to be understood in similarly allegorical or symbolic ways to the tapestries.

The Unicorn Tapestries and a number of Luso-African oliphants, like the ones in Washington, DC and Madrid, share many formal and iconographic features. Adolfo Salvatore Cavallo convincingly compared the tapestries to illustrations from books of hours printed in Paris in the late fifteenth century. He determined that the tapestries were

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<sup>841</sup> Belozerskaya, Marina, *Luxury arts of the Renaissance*, Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005.

<sup>842</sup> Cavallo, 1998, pp. 10, 21-26; Freeman, 1973-1974, p. 184; Cummins, 1988, pp. 153-154, 157.

<sup>843</sup> Freeman, 1973-1974, p. 199.

based, in part, on the images printed in the borders of books of hours published by Thielman Kerver.<sup>844</sup> Further research has revealed additional similarities to the border images of books of hours printed in Paris by Philippe Pigouchet for the publisher Simon Vostre during the very same years. In fact, Timothy B. Husband believes that the same workshop that provided the designs for the illustrations of these books of hours by Pigouchet for Vostre also provided the cartoons for the Unicorn Tapestries.<sup>845</sup> Ezio Bassani and Jean Michel Massing have likewise scoured for visual sources for the hunting imagery on the Luso-African oliphants.<sup>846</sup> They have established that the European hunting images on the ivory horns is based on the same books of hours printed in Paris in numerous successive editions by Thielman Kerver and by Philippe Pigouchet for Simon Vostre. The fact that the iconography of the oliphants derives from devotional books, in which scenes of the hunt surround Christian prayers, confirms the connection between secular hunting scenes with Christian religious practice and thinking.

Based on the same visual sources, the Luso-African oliphants and both series of Unicorn tapestries share an international court style and depict similar themes of the hunt. Their shared, sophisticated treatment of these courtly themes derived from a common court mentality and expressed the most refined court taste in Europe around 1500. The oliphants, like the sets of Unicorn Tapestries, participate in function and in decoration in the world of romance and chivalry. These courtly, chivalric ideas, as expressed on the oliphants, are close to the mentality and motivation of many Portuguese nobles who favored and participated in expansion in Africa.

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<sup>844</sup> Cavallo, 1998, pp. 74-75.

<sup>845</sup> [http://www.metmuseum.org/Works\\_of\\_Art/recent\\_acquisitions/1999/co\\_rec\\_m\\_europe\\_2000.152.asp](http://www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/recent_acquisitions/1999/co_rec_m_europe_2000.152.asp)

<sup>846</sup> Massing, 2007, pp. 73-75; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, pp. 110-121; Bassani, 2000, pp. 290-291; Bassani, 2008, pp. 65-68.

A crossbow in the Wallace collection (A1032) from late fourteenth-century Germany exemplifies the courtly association of hunting, romance and chivalry and the imperative to represent such scenes on instruments of the hunt.<sup>847</sup> (Fig. 4.60) Luso-African oliphants were fashioned out of elephant ivory, which was obtained through the hunt. Likewise, the high status German hunting weapon was made from carved stag-horn, in imitation of ivory, and was then used to hunt the stag. The scenes carved on the stock of the lavish hunting crossbow depict knights, hunting scenes, mythological beasts, and scenes of courtly love, as well as the figures of Adam and Eve and St. George and the Dragon. The maker of this ostentatious hunting weapon, which likewise features prominent heraldic elements, seems to have incorporated in its decoration a wide representative range of the symbolic associations of the hunt current in courtly circles. However, the bow-stave of this seemingly pictorially archaic crossbow is fashioned, unusually, from the finest steel then available, attesting remarkably to its technologically advanced status.

As the imagery of the German crossbow confirms, the hunt itself provided analogies for courtly rituals like courtship and love. The ritual activity of the hunt furnished a grand social event for the entire court society and the combination of women and aristocratic blood sport seems to have proved irresistible to amorous courtiers.<sup>848</sup> In the English language, the word *venery* denotes both the practice of hunting beasts and the pursuit of sexual pleasure.<sup>849</sup> In a more sinister vein, the actions of hunters and their

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<sup>847</sup> Mann, Sir J. G., *Wallace Collection Catalogues: European Arms and Armour*, Volume II, London: The Trustees of the Wallace Collection, 1962; Norman, A. V. B., *Wallace Collection Catalogues: European Arms and Armour Supplement*, London: The Trustees of the Wallace Collection, 1986.

<sup>848</sup> Cummins, 1988, pp. 1, 8-9.

<sup>849</sup> “Venery” in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, 2010: <http://www.oed.com/>; Cummins, 1988, p. 81.

hounds were compared to the sexually predatory behavior of courtiers.<sup>850</sup> Hunting scenes, linked to amatory themes, were common on secular decorative paintings in Italy and were frequently painted on wedding chests (*cassoni*).<sup>851</sup> In imaginative literature, the ritualized procedures, formal rules of behavior and specialized vocabulary of the chase paralleled the highly refined code of courtly love and the chase became an elaborate metaphor for the pursuit of love, involving searches, disappointments, and various twists and turns in the quest for elusive prey.<sup>852</sup>

The mystical hunt of the unicorn had its secular parallel as an allegory of love. The Lady and the Unicorn tapestries at the Musée national du Moyen Âge and the Start of the Hunt and the Unicorn in Captivity tapestries, both with a millefleurs background, from the series in the Cloisters Collection represent the themes of courtship and marriage.<sup>853</sup> (Fig. 4.61-62) According to this interpretation of the imagery, the unicorn represents the lover, the hunters personify love and the maiden is the beloved. In the final tapestry in the sequence, the Unicorn in Captivity, the beloved has used a lavish collar and *chaine d'amour* to tether the lover, already constrained by a fence, to a fruit bearing pomegranate tree. The happy confinement symbolizes the lover's devotion to the beloved and his subjection to her will. The unicorn as lover has been transformed into the bridegroom. The ripe pomegranates and myriad other botanical delights overwhelmingly signify earthly love and its consummation, a fruitful marriage and fertility.

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<sup>850</sup> Cummins, 1988, p. 8.

<sup>851</sup> Kemp, 1991, pp. 164-178.

<sup>852</sup> Thiebaut, Marcelle, *The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974; Cummins, 1988, pp. 8, 78-81; Kemp, 1991, pp. 164-178.

<sup>853</sup> Cavallo, 1998; Freeman, 1973-1974; Cummins, 1988, pp. 153-157; Erlande-Brandenburg, Alain, *La Dame A La Licorne*, Paris: Michel Aveline Editeur, 1993; Reuss, Gabriela, "La Dame à la licorne": Tapisseries als Kunstform des aufstrebenden Bürgertums," *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, v. 33, 2006, pp. 59-89; Weigert, Laura, "Chambres d'amour: Tapestries of Love and the Texturing of Space," *Oxford Art Journal*, v. 31, n. 3, 2008, pp. 317-336.



Like the hunting scenes painted on *assoni* in Italy, the theme of the hunt, whether woven into sumptuous tapestries or carved on precious ivory hunting horns, was considered ideal for communicating ideas on love, marriage and procreation on the occasion of princely and aristocratic marriages. It has been rather persuasively proposed that both sets of tapestries at the Musée national du Moyen Âge and at the Cloisters Collection were made specifically for marriages, perhaps as wedding gifts. Although the evidence is not conclusive, Cavallo and Freeman have plausibly suggested that the Unicorn tapestries were made for the French royal marriage of Louis XII (1462-1515) and Anne of Brittany in 1499.<sup>854</sup>

At least one of the Luso-African oliphants might have been commissioned by Manuel I to commemorate a marriage as well. It seems certain that the spectacular oliphant, measuring 63 cm in length and now in the collection of the Armeria Reale di Torino, was given as a wedding present by Manuel I to his daughter the Infanta D. Beatriz on the occasion of her marriage to Charles III, Duke of Savoy, on 26 March 1521.<sup>855</sup> (Fig. 4.63) In effect, the principal diplomatic purpose of the marriage was to fortify relations between Manuel I and Francis I, for Savoy was an extremely close satellite of the French.<sup>856</sup> The horn features the typical heraldic devices and emblems, such as the armillary sphere and the Cross of the Order of Christ, indicating Manuel I as

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<sup>854</sup> Cavallo, 1998, p. 10; Freeman, 1973-1974, p. 199; Rorimer, James J., "The Unicorn Tapestries Were Made for Anne of Brittany," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, v. 1, n. 1, 1942, pp. 7-20. For Louis XII and Anne of Brittany, see Hochner, Nicole, *Louis XII: les dérèglements de l'image royale, 1498-1515*, Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2006.

<sup>855</sup> Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 56; Bassani, 1991, p. 185-187; Bassani, 2000, p. 166. The sources for the marriage are Resende, 1994, pp. 491-506 and Góis, Damião de, *Chronica do Felicissimo Rei Dom Emanuel composta per Damiam de Goes diuidida em quatro partes....*, Lisbon: Francisco Correa, 1566-1567, Book IV, Chapters LXX, LXXI. (Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, <http://purl.pt/14704>). See also, Costa, João Paulo Oliveira e, *D. Manuel I, 1469-1521: Um Príncipe do Renascimento*, Lisbon: Circulo de Leitores, 2005, pp. 252, 255.

<sup>856</sup> Costa, 2005, p. 252.

the patron responsible for its creation. However, uniquely among the oliphants, the royal coat of arms is uncrowned. This might refer to the exclusion of the Infanta D. Beatriz from the line of succession to the Portuguese crown. Nevertheless, the royal coat of arms, though uncrowned, hangs from an extraordinarily leafy tree, perhaps recalling a family tree and affirming her royal genealogy.

Indeed, the royal coat of arms is flanked by two unicorns, who, standing upright, support it with their forelegs. According to the secular interpretations of the unicorn in the terms of courtly love discussed above, the unicorns would symbolize the chaste lover and bridegroom Charles III, who adores, shields and supports his beloved, here personified by the Infanta D. Beatriz's coat of arms. The lavish nature of the ostentatious ivory horn has been enhanced by precious stones that have been inlaid in the form of a bridle around the head of the beast, which functions as the mouthpiece. The image of the coat of arms suspended from the branch of a tree and flanked by a pair of unicorns *regardant* seems to be based fairly faithfully on the printer's mark of Thielman Kerver.<sup>857</sup>

The bejeweled aspect of the large ivory horn and the depiction of the two unicorns supporting the royal coat of arms contribute to the sense that the oliphant's hunting imagery and function as a hunting instrument should be interpreted as an allegory of love. This is supported by the three animals carved nearly in the round on the concave side of the tusk; all three face the direction of the mouthpiece. The crocodile and serpent, African motifs familiar from the saltcellars, appear in front and behind the middle figure of the three. This should be identified as a wyvern.<sup>858</sup> (Fig. 4.64) In the Middle Ages, the wyvern was a popular fantastic beast, most commonly represented in heraldry. It was a

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<sup>857</sup> Bassani and Fagg, 1988, pp. 114, 222; Bassani, 1991, p. 185-187; Bassani, 1994, p. 44; Bassani, 2000, p. 291; Bassani, 2008, p. 67; Massing, 2007, p. 73.

<sup>858</sup> Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 95.

winged dragon with a serpent's tail, which was typically "nowed" (shown twisted or curled in a loop). As a type of medieval dragon, the wyvern signified strength and valor. Its remarkable vision, impenetrable reptilian mail and incredibly ferocious powers made the wyvern a most valiant defender of treasure. The symbolism of the wyvern as an aggressive protector and guardian of something precious and dear would seem to confirm the association of serpents and crocodiles in Sierra Leone with riches, power and protection. The combination of the serpent, crocodile and wyvern is appropriate because they are all reptiles or, in the case of the wyvern, reptilian in appearance and anatomy. The purposeful pairing of a creature of European heraldry with two animals associated with important real and symbolic values and functions in Sierra Leone suggests that the Portuguese were aware of these connotations and made appropriate use of them.

The Turin oliphant likewise features representations of a lion and an elephant. The depiction of the elephant seems to resemble an Asian rather than an African elephant because of the relatively small size of its ears.<sup>859</sup> However, it is impossible to determine whether the West African artist deliberately represented an Asian elephant or whether the small size of the ears should be attributed to artistic license. Nevertheless, the ivory hunting horn features both a representation of a hunting horn performing its function as a wind instrument, signaling a phase of the chase, and a depiction of an elephant, the source of the material from which the horn was carved. The presence of the lion reinforces the royal nature of the prestigious object.

Portuguese sources reveal that Manuel I had carefully considered the proposed marriage of his daughter the Infanta D. Beatriz to the Duke of Savoy, whom he secretly

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<sup>859</sup> Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 102.

investigated.<sup>860</sup> According to Góis, it was initially widely believed at court that the Duke of Savoy (1486-1553) was not worthy of marrying the daughter of the king of Portugal.<sup>861</sup> However, after studying the potential diplomatic and strategic significances of the Duchy of Savoy, and reflecting on the fact that the sister of Charles III was the mother of François Ier, Manuel I decided to proceed with marriage negotiations. D. Fernando de Meneses, the second Marquis of Vila Real, was appointed to oversee the affair. Manuel I had determined to use the occasion of the marriage of his daughter to the Duke of Savoy as a grand opportunity to showcase his royal power and wealth and to broadcast the distinctive identity of the Portuguese court shaped by overseas expansion.<sup>862</sup>

After the marriage by proxy in Lisbon, Manuel I began preparations for the Infanta's departure from court for Savoy. The Infanta D. Beatriz and her recently formed court finally sailed from Lisbon on 10 August 1521. Manuel I proudly outfitted one of the most impressive armadas he had ever assembled to convey them to Italy. The Portuguese king was making a clear and forceful statement to his new allies and fashioning a memorable sight that he expected would be disseminated in Italy and France. The armada itself consisted of eighteen of the finest ships sailing under Portuguese authority. They were the largest ships in the royal fleet and of the most recent construction. The extraordinary ship carrying the Infanta had been constructed in India, and embodied the image of himself that Manuel I wished to project. The message it was intended to communicate was that the wealth amassed by Manuel I derived principally from overseas

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<sup>860</sup> Góis, Book IV, Chapters LXX, LXXI.

<sup>861</sup> Costa, 2005, pp. 252, 255.

<sup>862</sup> Ibid.

expansion and commerce, which depended on expertise in the science of navigation and in the design and building of ships.

In addition to their size, advanced design features and quality of construction, the sources emphasize two other aspects of the outfitting of the ships. A surprising amount of space is devoted to praise and description of the artillery on the ships. Resende, full of pride, enumerates the exact name and precise number of the canons, bombards and various other types of artillery Manuel I furnished from the royal arsenal for the protection of the Infanta D. Beatriz and her princely treasure. Resende exhibits an equal amount of pleasure and expends an even greater number of words detailing materials, designs and colors of the luxury textiles and fabrics that adorned the exteriors and embellished the interiors of the ships. Prominence is placed on the heraldic colors of the flags, banners and sails as well as on the personal devices featured on them. The overwhelming display of artillery on the ships, and the extended account of it, testifies to the military and naval power of the Portuguese and confirms the dependence of overseas expansion and peaceful commerce on the force of arms. The indulgent descriptions of luxury textiles, such as tapestries, and the lingering especially on the cloth of gold, brocade and velvet served to heighten the opulence, majesty and dignity of the Infanta and her armada as representative of the Portuguese court.

The Portuguese sources on the Infanta D. Beatriz and the courtly entourage accompanying her to Savoy focus on personal ornament, such as jewelry and sumptuous clothing and accoutrements, and highlight the role of the luxury arts in creating an atmosphere of princely opulence and splendor. The Turin oliphant would have contributed to the material and visual magnificence of the Portuguese contingent headed

to the court of Savoy. The precious ivory material from West Africa and the refined artistic skill of Temne and Bullom artists would have embodied and increased the imperial pretensions Manuel I was broadcasting at Savoy. The ivory attested to the wealth and riches obtained through overseas expansion in sub-Saharan Africa and the patronage of artists in Sierra Leone expanded on a global scale the range of the king's largesse and the sophistication of his cultural programs. On the Turin oliphant Manuel I used his exclusive access to the ivory and artistic talent of West Africa to fashion a luxury object, which knowingly manipulated the intellectual and visual conventions surrounding courtly love and the hunt. In some ways, then, the Turin oliphant participated in, and was readily comprehensible within, the cosmopolitan court culture of Renaissance Europe. As with the armillary sphere salt cellar, the Turin Oliphant, too, expressed Manuel I's imperial claims of suzerainty over Africa and all it offered through co-opting African luxury materials, artistic traditions, skills and talent in the proliferation of African motifs and Portuguese symbols and devices.

## 12. Luso-African Oliphants as Royal Gifts

Three magnificent Luso-African oliphants and a fragment of a fourth feature the arms and devices of Manuel I as well as those of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon.<sup>863</sup> (Fig. 4.65) Unusually, the Portuguese royal coat of arms on two of the horns displays tassels and this would seem to indicate that they are the arms of a crown

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<sup>863</sup> These four oliphants are in the following collections: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (NGA 79.2148.A), the National Museum of African Art (2005-6-9), Washington, DC; the Museo de Pontevedra, Pontevedra, Spain; Instituto Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid (4.873). The ivory in Madrid, which belonged to Charles V, is a fragment and was made into a powder flask.

prince.<sup>864</sup> The presence of such precise heraldry dates the horns to a restricted period of time, a seven year span, between the years 1497 and 1504.<sup>865</sup> The similarity between some of the hunting imagery carved on the oliphants and marginal illustrations in books of hours printed in 1498 reinforces the visual evidence of the heraldry.<sup>866</sup> Additional historical evidence suggests that these horns were commissioned by Manuel I to be presented as gifts to Isabella and Ferdinand in Toledo in April 1498.<sup>867</sup> The oliphants were commissioned to commemorate the formal ceremonies making Manuel I and his wife Isabella, Infanta of Castile and Queen of Portugal, the heirs to the combined crowns of Spain.<sup>868</sup>

In 1497, around the time of Manuel I's wedding to Isabella, the only male heir to the Spanish crowns died. With no direct male descendent in the line of succession, Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon promptly named Manuel I and Isabella, their eldest daughter, the heirs to the combined crowns of Castile, León and Aragon. By 10 December 1497 Manuel I was signing official royal documents as "El Rei e Príncipe,"

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<sup>864</sup> The horns with tassels carved on the coat of arms might have been commissioned for the Infante D. Miguel da Paz, who, during his brief life, was heir to the crowns of Portugal, Castile and León, and Aragon that were represented on the oliphants. For Miguel da Paz, see PMA, v. 2, 1993, pp. 388-392; Góis, Book I, Chapter XXXIII; Costa, 2005, pp. 28, 91-94.

<sup>865</sup> The study of the arms, devices, emblems and motto of the Catholic Monarchs confirm the dating of the oliphants. Although the pomegranate was commonly used as an emblem at princely courts, it was officially incorporated into the royal coat of arms of the Catholic Monarchs after their conquest of Nasrid Granada in 1492. Isabella of Castile died in 1504 and in the same year Manuel I began to use two armillary spheres as his personal device. Manuel I married Isabella, the eldest daughter of the Catholic Monarchs in 1497, and the married their third daughter, Maria, in 1500. For Manuel's use of two armillary spheres, see Alves, Ana Maria, *Iconologia do Poder Real no Período Manuelino*, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 1985; Alves, Ana Maria, "A Esfera Armilar: Génese e Evolução de um Símbolo," *Prelo*, v. 1, 1983, pp. 51-62.

<sup>866</sup> Massing, 2007, pp. 73-75; Bassani and Fagg, 1988, pp. 110-121; Bassani, 2000, pp. 290-291; Bassani, 2008, pp. 65-68.

<sup>867</sup> Moreira, 1998, p.484.

<sup>868</sup> The main primary sources for this event are Resende, 1994, pp. 467-488; Góis, Book I, Chapters XXIII-XXII; Zurita, Jerónimo, *Historia del Rey Don Hernando el Católico: de las Empresas y Ligas de Italia*, edited by Angel Canellas López, Saragossa: Diputación General de Aragón; Departamento de Cultura y Educación, 1989, Book III, Chapters XX-XXI, XXX, Book IV, Chapters XIII. See also, Costa, 2005, pp. 24-28, 88-94.

meaning King of Portugal and Prince of Castile.<sup>869</sup> Due to the political situation within Spain, Manuel I and Isabella were beseeched by the Catholic Monarchs to travel to Toledo forthwith to be formally proclaimed, first, prince and princess of the kingdoms of Castile and León and, then, in a separate ceremony to take place in Zaragoza, prince and princess of Aragon.

On 29 March 1498, the king and queen of Portugal departed on their magnificent ceremonial procession from Lisbon through Spain to Toledo. This celebrated procession featured unprecedented splendor, pageantry and the most refined touches of courtesy and courtliness. Escorting Manuel I and Isabella at all moments and places, the grandee Duke of Medina Sidonia was to see to their every need and fancy. The Duke of Medina Sidonia was soon joined by the other great magnate of Spain, the Duke of Alba, who was first cousin of Ferdinand of Aragon. They were then accompanied by the Count of Feria, who had previously effectively served diplomatic roles between the two kingdoms. The Duke of Medina Sidonia alone brought along some 38 falcons and falconers to catch the finest fresh meat to be served on their gold and silver plate. Befitting their exalted status and dignity, the Portuguese monarchs and heirs to the Spanish crowns continuously traveled under a canopy of gold brocade.

The size and opulence of the planned ceremonial entrance into and procession through Toledo were unprecedented. It took the Portuguese cortège, encamped outside the city, three days to prepare for the event. The participants, Portuguese and Spanish alike, observed with amazement as Ferdinand of Aragon showered every possible honor, favor and courtly precedent on his future heir from Portugal.<sup>870</sup> In all matters of courtly

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<sup>869</sup> Costa, 2005, p. 87.

<sup>870</sup> Resende, 1994, 472-475; Góis, Book I, Chapter XXVIII, Zurita.



protocol, Ferdinand, it was reported, consistently and gracefully conceded precedent to Manuel I, addressing him always as “el rei e príncipe.”<sup>871</sup> However, from the moment the ceremonies formally declaring Manuel I his legitimate heir were concluded, he steadfastly regarded Manuel I as a son and thereafter insisted on maintaining his superiority in all courtly manifestations.

Manuel I and Isabella remained in Toledo for eighteen days. The lavish oath-taking ceremonies, which lasted four days, had been dually presided over by Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, the Archbishop of Toledo, and by Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, the Archbishop of Seville. While in Toledo, the Portuguese monarchs had stayed in the residence of Garcilaso de la Vega, the Spanish ambassador to Rome from 1496 to 1499, father of the famous poet of the same name and patron of the infamous forger Annius of Viterbo.<sup>872</sup> According to Bassani, there is an old tradition that associates the Kongolese horn now in the collection of the Museo de Infanteria in Toledo (n. 1003) with the Peruvian writer Garcilaso de la Vega.<sup>873</sup> However, it is possible that there has been some confusion over the years. It seems more likely that the oliphant ascribed to the collection of Garcilaso de la Vega might have been given to the family of the Spanish ambassador to Rome of that name by Manuel I as a gift during his extended residence at their family palace in Toledo from April to May 1498.

After Manuel I and Isabella had been blissfully declared heirs to the crown of Castile and León, they had to proceed to Zaragoza to be accepted as heirs to the crown of Aragon. There they met with the intractable resistance of the *Cortes* and an enraged

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<sup>871</sup> Costa, 2005, p. 91; Resende, 1994, pp. 474-475; Góis, Book I, Chapter XVIII.

<sup>872</sup> Resende, 1994, p. 474; Chinchilla, Rosa Helena, “Garcilaso de la Vega Senior, Patron of Humanists in Rome: Classical Myths and the New Nation,” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, v. 73, n. 4, 1996, pp. 379-393.

<sup>873</sup> Bassani and Fagg, 1988, p. 198, 248; Bassani in *Circa 1492: art in the age of exploration*, edited by Jay A. Levenson, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991, p. 191.

Isabella of Castile was reported, unusually, to have threatened the use of force to quash the insolence.<sup>874</sup> The Aragonese, insisting on continuity through the male line only, preferred to wait for the pregnant queen of Portugal to give birth to a son, which promptly occurred. Tragically, Isabella died in childbirth. With her death, Manuel I lost both his wife and his claims to the Spanish crowns. His first-born son was named fittingly, D. Miguel da Paz, and, with the passing of his mother, he became the heir simultaneously to the crowns of Portugal, Castile and León, and Aragon. Frustratingly, the details of the negotiations conducted and the arrangements made at this time between Manuel I and the Catholic Monarchs remain obscure. Nevertheless, the newborn prince D. Miguel da Paz was to remain in Spain in the care of his grandparents, the Catholic Monarchs. He was soon to die in Granada on 20 July 1500, only a month before Manuel I married Maria, the third daughter of the Catholic Monarchs.

Like a typical commission on the occasion of a marriage or union, the four oliphants under discussion feature the coats of arms and emblems of both royal houses, in this case those of Manuel I and those of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon. Indeed, the Portuguese and Spanish chroniclers recount how the royal canopy of gold brocade, countless flags and banners, and much else besides, proudly displayed both royal coats of arms and how they were prominently paraded at all times during their passage through Spain. The Portuguese royal coat of arms and Manuel's more personal devices of the Cross of the Order of Christ and armillary sphere are carved conspicuously on the hunting horns, as is the inscription "Ave Maria." Opposite these heraldic markers are the coat of arms of the Catholic Monarchs, accompanied by their emblems, devices

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<sup>874</sup> Stuart, Nancy Rubin, *Isabella of Castile: The First Renaissance Queen*, New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1992, pp. 365-366.

and motto, “Tanto monta.” Through their daughter Catherine of Aragon, Queen of England, the motto of the Catholic Monarchs entered the English language as “tantamount” in its political meaning of “equivalent.”

The accuracy and high artistic quality of the carving of the arms and devices of the Catholic Monarchs on the Luso-African oliphants is remarkable.<sup>875</sup> (Fig. 4.66) Carved by artists from Sierra Leone, the heraldry on the oliphants is the equal of better known examples on monumental architecture, such as San Juan del los Reyes in Toledo, and on objects of the luxury arts, such as the lavishly illustrated Book of Hours in the Cleveland Museum of Art and an illuminated hunting manuscript in the Morgan Library.<sup>876</sup> (Fig. 4.67-68) When Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon combined their separate crowns through marriage, they merged their individual coats of arms and the heraldic crown surmounting them was shown closed in the imperial style. Playing on the first letters of their names, the yoke (*yugo*) was the device of Ysabel and the bundle of arrows (*flechas*) was the device of Ferdinand. Isabella contributed her emblem of the eagle of St. John supporting the royal escutcheon, while Ferdinand had already been associated with the Gordian knot and motto, “Tanto monta, monta tanto.”<sup>877</sup> Whatever its previous connotations, after their marriage, the ubiquitous motto “Tanto monta” came to

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<sup>875</sup> Pidal, Faustino Menéndez, “‘Tanto monta’: El escudo de los Reyes Católicos,” in *Isabel la Católica vista desde la Academia*, edited by Luis Suárez Fernández, Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2005, pp. 99-138; Iglesias, Juna Antonio González, “El Humanista y los príncipes: Antonio de Nebrija, inventor de las empresas heráldicas de los Reyes Católicos,” in *Antonio de Nebrija: Edad Media y Renacimiento*, edited by Carmen Codoñer Merino and Juan Antonio González Iglesias, Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1994, pp. pp. 59-76; Soria, José Manuel Nieto, ed., *Orígenes de la monarquía hispánica: Propaganda y legitimación (ca. 1400-1520)*, Madrid: Librería-Editorial Dykinson, 1999.

<sup>876</sup> De Winter, Patrick M., “A Book of Hours of Queen Isabel la Católica,” *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, v. 68, n. 10, 1981, pp. 342-427.

<sup>877</sup> For the symbolism of the eagle, see Lehfeldt, Elizabeth A., “Ruling Sexuality: The Political Legitimacy of Isabel of Castile,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, v. 53, n. 1, 2000, pp. 31-56

symbolize their partnership of joint rule, the equality and mutual rights shared between the two sovereigns.<sup>878</sup>

### 13. Imperial Themes in Ivory: The Luso-African Oliphants and the Ivories of al-Andalus

The particular political messages and objectives that these four Luso-African oliphants were designed to achieve at the ceremonies held in Toledo in 1498, and the visual means by which they were expected to realize them, connect the ivory horns to the royal traditions of ivory carving of Muslim Spain.<sup>879</sup>

The heyday of *al-Andalus* or Islamic Spain occurred during the Umayyad caliphate (929–1031).<sup>880</sup> It reached its cultural zenith during the reigns of the caliph ʿAbd al-Rahman III (r. 912–61) and his son al-Hakam II (r. 961–76) and its artistic glory continued into the regency of al-Mansur (978–1002).<sup>881</sup> The two main centers of artistic

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<sup>878</sup> Pidal, 2005; Iglesias, 1994; Rubin, 1992.

<sup>879</sup> The literature on the ivories of *al-Andalus* is expanding rapidly, see, most recently, Blair, Sheila S., “What the Inscriptions Tell Us: Text and Message on the Ivories from al-Andalus,” *The Ivories of Muslim Spain: The Journal of the David Collection*, edited by Kjeld von Folsach and Joachim Mayer, v. 2, n. 1, 2005, pp. 75-99; Dodds, Jerrilynn D., “The Arts of Al-Andalus,” in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, edited by Salma Khadra Jayyusi, New York: E.J. Brill, 1992., p. 599-620; Grabar, Oleg, “Two Paradoxes in the Islamic Art of the Spanish Peninsula,” in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, 1992, pp. 583-91; Holod, Renata, “Luxury Arts of the Caliphal Period,” in *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain*, edited by Jerrilynn D. Dodds, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; H.N. Abrams, 1992, pp. 41-47; Prado-Vilar, Francisco, “Enclosed in Ivory: The Miseducation of al-Mughira,” *The Ivories of Muslim Spain*, 2005, pp. 139-163; Prado-Vilar, Francisco, “Circular Visions of Fertility and Punishment: Caliphal Ivory Caskets from al-Andalus,” *Muqarnas*, v. 14, 1997, pp. 19-41; Robinson, Cynthia, *In praise of song: the making of courtly culture in Al-Andalus and Provence, 1005-1134 A.D.*, 2002, Boston: Brill, 2002; Robinson, Cynthia, “Love in the time of Fitna: ‘Courtliness’ and the Pamplona casket,” in *Revisiting al-Andalus: perspectives on the material culture of Islamic Iberia and beyond*, edited by Glaire D. Anderson and Mariam Rosser-Owen, Boston: Brill, 2007, pp.; Rosser-Owen, Mariam, “A Cordoban Ivory Pyxis Lid in the Ashmolean Museum,” *Muqarnas*, v. 16, 1999, pp. 16-31; Shalem, Avinoam, “From Royal Caskets to Relic Containers: Two Ivory Caskets from Burgos and Madrid,” *Muqarnas*, v. 12, 1995, pp. 24-38.

<sup>880</sup> For the history of the caliphate, see Kennedy, Hugh, *Muslim Spain and Portugal: a political history of al-Andalus*, New York: Longman, 1996; Fletcher, Richard A., *Moorish Spain*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993; Guichard, Pierre, *Al-Andalus, 711-1492*, Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2000.

<sup>881</sup> For important surveys of the cultural achievements of al-Andalus, see Rosser-Owen, Mariam, *Islamic Arts from Spain*, London: V&A Publishing, 2010; Dodds, Jerrilynn D., ed., *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; H.N. Abrams, 1992; Jayyusi, Salma Khadra, ed., *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, New York: E.J. Brill, 1992. The ideas found in these museum publications are succinctly summarized on their respective websites. For the Victoria & Albert Museum, see, “Islamic

production in Umayyad Spain were the capital city of Córdoba and the suburban palace city at Madinat al-Zahra'.<sup>882</sup> Since the Umayyad caliphs of Spain rejected the political authority of the ʿAbbasid dynasty then dominating the wider Islamic world, they attempted to forge an independent artistic and cultural identity. These caliphs of Spain saw the patronage of art and architecture as necessary to the image of kingship and as essential to the expression of authority. To fashion their own distinctive image of rule, they dedicated themselves to creating an atmosphere of opulence and invested heavily in the patronage of the luxury arts, such as textiles and ivory carving. With political intent, they promoted an archaic style that emulated the early style of the great Umayyad caliphate of Damascus (661–750), the first Islamic dynasty. This archaic style, knowingly associated with the Umayyad dynasty of Syria, served to legitimize the caliphs of Spain and to proclaim their glory through art. It was also an intentionally courtly and cosmopolitan style.

Several characteristics of the extraordinary ivory carvings of Muslim Spain make them unique in the traditions of Islamic art as well as the artistic traditions of Iberia. (Fig.

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Spain," [http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/periods\\_styles/medieval/new\\_med\\_ren\\_galleries/features/europe\\_islamic\\_mediterranean/islamic\\_spain/index.html](http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/periods_styles/medieval/new_med_ren_galleries/features/europe_islamic_mediterranean/islamic_spain/index.html). For the Metropolitan Museum of Art, see, "The Art of the Umayyad Period in Spain (711–1031)," [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/sumay/hd\\_sumay.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/sumay/hd_sumay.htm).

<sup>882</sup> Santa-Cruz, Noelia Silva, "Marfiles," in *El arte hispanomusulmán*, edited by Antonio E. Momplet Míguez, Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro, 2004, pp. 244-73 (especially pp. 256-261, 266); Santa-Cruz, Noelia Silva, "Nuevos datos para el estudio de dos piezas de eboraria califal: arquetas de la iglesia parroquial de Fitero y del Instituto Valencia de Don Juan," *Anales de Historia de Arte*, 1999, v. 9, pp. 27-33; Holod, Renata, "Luxury Arts of the Caliphal Period," in *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain*, edited by Jerrilynn D. Dodds, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; H.N. Abrams, 1992, pp. 41-47; Prado-Vilar, Francisco, "Circular Visions of Fertility and Punishment: Caliphal Ivory Caskets from al-Andalus," *Muqarnas*, v. 14, 1997, pp. 19-41; Rosser-Owen, Mariam, "A Cordoban Ivory Pyxis Lid in the Ashmolean Museum," *Muqarnas*, v. 16, 1999, pp. 16-31; Shalem, Avinoam, "From Royal Caskets to Relic Containers: Two Ivory Caskets from Burgos and Madrid," *Muqarnas*, v. 12, 1995, pp. 24-38; Hillenbrand, Robert, "Umayyad: 2. Spanish branch," *Oxford Art Online*, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com:80/subscriber/article/grove/art/T087028>; Pinder-Wilson, Ralph, "Islamic art, §VIII: Other arts: 7. Ivory: (ii) Spain," *Oxford Art Online*, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com:80/subscriber/article/grove/art/T041771pg38>.

4.69) The ivories of *al-Andalus* were coded as royal and imperial objects by several different aspects of their creation and ornamentation. These precious objects, exemplified by the pyxis of al-Mughira in the Louvre, seem to have been produced exclusively for the secular context of the caliphal court. Indeed, most of the ivories were commissioned by the caliph al- Hakam II or the regent al-Mansur and were carved at the royal workshops in Córdoba and at Madinat al-Zahra'.<sup>883</sup> As attributes of power or accoutrements of rule, they were designed to be given as gifts to an extremely restricted and highly learned audience, consisting for the most part of persons connected to the line of succession. The ivories are frequently inscribed with a date and the names of the artist, the patron and the intended recipient of the piece. It seems certain that these objects were designed and fashioned for a specific identifiable person and typically for a specific occasion and, thus, were intended to carry a specific message.

The ivories of Muslim Spain presented an intellectual challenge to their recipients and the elite courtly audiences of Córdoba and Madinat al-Zahra'. Their precious material, small-scale, archaic and cosmopolitan style, delicate carving technique, and intricate imagery demanded close inspection and prolonged study and required thoughtful reflection upon their sophisticated meanings. The iconography of the ivories consists of royal or courtly scenes and expresses a refined court mentality. Many of the pieces, however, feature hunting scenes and images of warriors, such as on the Pamplona Casket. (Fig. 4.70) The aggressive predatory animals and weaker prey animals, as well as numerous fantastic creatures, populating the ivories of Muslim Spain recall the later hunt imagery carved on the medieval oliphants and the Luso-African oliphants. This familiar

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<sup>883</sup> Santa-Cruz, Noelia Silva, 2004, pp. 244-273; Santa-Cruz, Noelia Silva, 1999, pp. 27-33; Holod, 1992, pp. 41-47; Prado-Villar, 1997, pp. 19-41; Rosser-Owen, 1999, pp. 16-31; Shalem, 1995, pp. 24-38; Hillenbrand, 2010; Pinder-Wilson, 2010.

repertoire of emblematic images on the ivories of *al-Andalus* likewise conveyed similar ideas of courage, strength, victory and dominance. Again like the images of beasts on the Luso-African ivories, it has been suggested that the beasts on the ivories of Muslim Spain function as guardian figures. However, these standard images and themes were astutely manipulated by the patron and his artists to communicate specific meanings on particular objects in precise contexts for select audiences.

The royal commissioning and restricted distribution at court of these complex and showy objects as gifts enhanced their power to forge friendships and allegiances and to cement bonds of alliance and obligation. The ability to commission objects from the luxury material of ivory and the control of the artistic skill necessary to produce such beautiful and refined pieces testified to the wealth and power of the caliphs who were responsible for their creation. Through the ivories the caliph and the regent of *al-Andalus* produced an image of rule that was aligned with the original Umayyad dynasty from Syria and that rivaled in opulence the patronage of their political adversaries, the <sup>c</sup>Abbasid dynasty. In addition to being conspicuous examples of luxury art, the ivories of Muslim Spain were objects of political propaganda that circulated as gifts to fortify relationships or to serve as encouragement to the recipients.

Avinoam Shalem has examined the broader cultural meanings, symbolism and ceremonial uses of carved ivory objects within an Islamic context, including the ivories of *al-Andalus* and the medieval oliphants carved in a style reminiscent of Fatimid art.<sup>884</sup> He confirms that ostentatious ivory objects were consistently made to commemorate specific events or for use in specific ceremonies. Although ivory had always been a favorite form of tribute offered to royalty, these medieval oliphants seem to have been

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<sup>884</sup> Shalem, Avinoam, *The Oliphant: Islamic Objects in Historical Context*, Boston: Brill, 2004.

given to rulers to commemorate alliances, friendships and obligations. The idea of presenting an oliphant, as a precious and exotic object, to a ruler as a symbol of an oath of allegiance or homage is best illustrated in European art in the Adoration of the Magi in the Arena Chapel by Giotto. (Fig. 4.71) The four oliphants Manuel I brought to Toledo as gifts displaying the royal coats of arms of Portugal and Spain, as well as the personal devices, emblems and mottos of the monarchs, can be interpreted as fulfilling this role of commemorating a political alliance or union between Manuel I and Isabella and Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile. The association of the giving of oliphants as a symbol of an oath of allegiance was entirely apposite for this occasion when Manuel I had to swear an oath to become the heir to the combined crowns of Castile and León and Aragon. In addition, Shalem states that oliphants were presented to the amir during investiture ceremonies in Mamluk Egypt.<sup>885</sup> This association with the assumption of power would likewise be appropriate in 1498 when Manuel I became Prince of Castile and León, the title by which Ferdinand continued to address him until his death.

These four Luso-African oliphants, functioning as *aide-mémoires*, became attributes of power, signifying Manuel I's position as king of Portugal and his claim to the thrones of Spain through his relationship to the Catholic Monarchs. The heraldic emblems and devices functioned in the same way as did the inscriptions on the ivories of *al-Andalus*, identifying the giver and the receiver and articulating the relationship between them. Like the ivories of Muslim Spain, these objects of luxury art, made to commemorate a specific occasion, circulated within a restricted and refined court context between identifiable members of the royal family and directly addressed issues of royal

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<sup>885</sup> Shalem, 2004, pp. 55-56; Atil, Esin, ed., *Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981.



succession. The hunting imagery and themes on the Luso-African oliphants recalled those of the ivories of *al-Andalus* and expressed analogous concepts and metaphors.

As gifts to the Catholic monarchs, the ivory horns commemorated their new allegiance and the investiture of Manuel I with the title of prince, his inclusion in the line of succession to the crowns of Spain. The Catholic monarchs were already the mother- and father-in-laws of the Portuguese king. As Ferdinand's treatment of Manuel I indicated, and as the court chroniclers perceptively noted, after Manuel I had become prince and heir of the Catholic Monarchs, he assumed the status of a son.

Like the ivories of Muslim Spain, the four Luso-African oliphants were designed to carry political messages and to serve as propaganda at the courts of Portugal and Spain. As the archaic Umayyad style on the ivories of *al-Andalus* performed political purposes, so the archaic style of the Luso-African ivory horns evoked the foundation of royal power in Portugal and shaped a particular myth of martial origins associated with the Reconquest. The commissioning of prestigious ivory objects to be circulated as gifts and the creation of them at the royal workshops directly connected to the caliphal court contributed to the image of kingship of the Umayyads of Spain. Likewise, Manuel I used his exclusive access to ivory and his patronage of African artists to fashion his image of kingship in Renaissance Europe. The Luso-African oliphants advertised the fact that the Portuguese had discovered a new and highly lucrative source of ivory in West Africa. Before the second half of the fifteenth century, when the Portuguese commenced commercial ventures in sub-Saharan Africa, ivory reached Europe through Muslim trading networks and was mostly obtained from elephants in East Africa.<sup>886</sup> The ivory horns celebrated and embodied the success of Portuguese overseas expansion in Africa as

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<sup>886</sup> Shalem, 2004, pp. 18-37.

well as their monopolistic control of the wealth it created. Like the royal ivory carving workshops of *al-Andalus*, Manuel I saw his patronage of artists in Sierra Leone as enhancing his image. The Portuguese king was figured in the ivories on several levels: through ivory obtained in West Africa; his patronage of Temne and Bullom artists; his personal heraldic devices, emblems and mottos; and the deliberate association of decorative motifs with Manueline architecture. These elements were marshaled to express Manuel I's imperial ideology and claims to universal empire.<sup>887</sup>

Manuel's awareness of the perception of patronage of ivory carving as an essential attribute of royal power in *al-Andalus* probably derived from the practice during the Reconquest of collecting these ivories as highly prized trophies of war.<sup>888</sup> For the leaders of the Reconquest, the ivories of Muslim Spain, more than other objects of luxury art, represented both the immense political power and opulent cultural sophistication of the Umayyad caliphate. Through the commissioning of ivory objects from the artists of Sierra Leone as a means to fashion an image of imperial rule, Manuel I was emulating the Umayyad caliphs of Spain. In this Manuel I was following hallowed precedent in Iberia. Fernando el Magno (1035-1065), the great Spanish monarch of the Reconquest with pretensions to empire, had directly rivaled the caliphs he had struggled mightily to supplant.<sup>889</sup> Fernando el Magno probably patronized the court artists of Córdoba and Madinat al-Zahra', who had been displaced by the dissolution of Umayyad rule. In any

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<sup>887</sup> Moreira, 1998, pp. 484-486.

<sup>888</sup> Shalem, Avinoam, *Islam Christianized: Islamic portable objects in the medieval church treasuries of the Latin West*, New York: Peter Lang, 1996; Shalem, Avinoam, "From Royal Caskets to Relic Containers: Two Ivory Caskets from Burgos and Madrid," *Muqarnas*, v. 12, 1995, pp. 24-38.

<sup>889</sup> Viñayo González, Antonio, *Fernando I, el Magno (1035-1065)*, Burgos: La Olmeda, 1999; Candeira, Alfonso Sánchez, *Castilla y León en el siglo XI: estudio del reinado de Fernando I*, ed. by Rosa María Montero Tejada, 1999; Bishko, Charles Julian, "Liturgical Intercession at Cluny for the King-Emperors of Leon," in *Spanish and Portuguese Monastic History 600-1300*, 1984; Bishko, Charles Julian, "The Liturgical Context of Fernando I's Last Days," in *Studies in Medieval Spanish Frontier History*, 1980.

case, he attempted to establish an ivory carving workshop and commissioned lavish ivory objects, such as the ivory cross in the Museo Arqueológico in Madrid, in obvious emulation of and aggressively direct competition with his Muslim rivals.<sup>890</sup> (Fig. 4.72) Significantly for Manuel I's own imperial ideology, Fernando el Magno was the first Spanish monarch of the Reconquest to assume the title of emperor. He also conquered Coimbra from the Muslims in 1064. Coimbra figured prominently in Manuel I's programmatic attempts to redefine Portuguese kingship, for he rebuilt the tombs of Portugal's founders at the monastery of Santa Cruz in Coimbra.

Manuel I's patronage of Luso-African ivories, then, should be understood in terms of this imperial mudéjar and Romanesque tradition in Iberia. The mudéjar and Romanesque elements have likewise been seen as central features of Manueline architecture, to which the ivories are related.<sup>891</sup> In his patronage of ivory carving as a means to create an image of imperial rule, Manuel I emulated both the caliphs of Umayyad Spain and the first emperor of Christian Spain, Fernando el Magno. The medieval oliphants, inspired by Roland and the cosmopolitan Fatimid style, similarly recalled Islamic artistic traditions and were associated with crusade. Indeed, the word in Spanish and Portuguese for ivory, *marfil* and *marfim*, respectively, derives from the

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<sup>890</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art, *The Art of Medieval Spain, A.D. 500-1200*, 1993; Park, Marlene, "The Crucifix of Fernando and Sancha and Its Relationship to North French Manuscripts," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, v. 36, 1973, pp. 77-91; Williams, John, "León: The Iconography of the Capital," in *Cultures of Power*, edited by Thomas N. Bisson, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995, pp. 231-258; Williams, John, "Cluny and Spain," *Gesta*, v. 27, n. 1-2, 1988, pp. 93-101; Williamson, Paul, *Medieval Ivory Carvings*, London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1982; Yarza, Joaquín, *Arte y Arquitectura en España, 500-1250*, Madrid: Cátedra, D.L.: 1979.

<sup>891</sup> For the Romanesque elements, see Pereira, 2001, pp. 151-167; Pereira, 1998, p. 152; Pereira, 1990, pp. 111, 202; Leite and Pereira, 1984, p. 53. Pereira, 2001, pp. 151-167; Pereira, 1998, p. 152; Pereira, 1990, pp. 111, 202; Leite and Pereira, 1984, p. 53. For the mudéjar elements, see Pereira, 2003, pp. 45, 53; Pereira, 1998, pp. 159-160; Pereira, 1990, pp. 55, 59, 74-80, 203. See also, Serrão, Vítor, *História da Arte em Portugal: O Renascimento e o Manierismo*, Lisbon: Editorial Presença, 2001, pp. 21-36; Pereira, Fernando Antonio Baptista, "O Manuelino ou as vantagens da designação," in *História de Portugal: dos tempos pré-históricos aos nossos dias*, edited by João Medina, Amadora, Portugal: Ediclube, 1995, v. 4, pp. 249-274.

medieval Arabic word *nāb al-fīl*.<sup>892</sup> These Medieval and Islamic traditions might account for Manuel I's intellectual understanding of the mechanisms and purposes of the patronage of ivory carving. However, the Portuguese king reconfigured these traditions, for he collected and circulated objects of sub-Saharan African art.

#### 14. Conclusion

Luso-African ivories from Sierra Leone contributed in complex ways to the sophisticated culture of the Portuguese court. A select few of the Luso-African ivories were commissioned directly by the Portuguese king, Manuel I, probably during a span of about three decades beginning in the 1490s. The Berlin saltcellar, for instance, fashioned the ideal image of the king that he personally fostered and actively promoted. This personal mythology centered on messianic interpretations of his device of the armillary sphere. These deployed ingenious readings of the function of the armillary sphere as a scientific instrument and the multiple connotations of the shape of the sphere, as well as a clever play on the word for sphere in Portuguese. A number of the Luso-African oliphants were likewise the product of royal patronage. Four of them seem to have been commissioned in order to be displayed and circulated at the Spanish court assembled in Toledo in 1498 when the king became heir to the Catholic Monarchs. Thus, these ivory horns were designed to convey the distinctive image of Portuguese kingship to other European courts. They were meant to signify Manuel's imperial ideology and ambitions, while also embodying his new relationship to Spain, his privileged status in the line of succession to the Spanish crowns. Other Luso-African oliphants, such as the one in Madrid, seem to have been royal gifts to members of great noble families, like the

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<sup>892</sup> Shalem, 2004, p. 17.

descendants of D. Pedro de Meneses, Captain of Ceuta. Continuing cosmopolitan traditions of ivory carving from the Medieval Mediterranean world, this oliphant celebrates the heroic ideals of the Iberian Reconquest and symbolizes the values of chivalry and Christian knighthood that were fashionable at the Portuguese court. By doing so, these oliphants reinforced Manuel I's conception of Portuguese kingship in general and of his reign in particular as being founded on crusade. Whereas these Luso-African oliphants employed hunting imagery as metaphors for martial qualities such as courage, strength and domination, the imagery on other oliphants, like the one in Turin, suggest the hunt was also viewed as an allegory of love. As a royal wedding present for a Portuguese princess, the Turin oliphant with its unicorn and hunting imagery, thus participated in refined literary traditions surrounding courtly love and was in harmony with visual traditions that associated the hunt with notions of marriage and fertility.

The prominent patronage of ivory carving and the purposeful circulation of it at court as a form of gift exchange had precedents at the caliphal court of *al-Andalus*. Manuel I's use of ivory carvings as an elite vehicle of royal propaganda and the central role these objects of luxury art played in forging an image of kingship and in promoting an imperial ideology were likewise modeled on the examples of Umayyad Spain as well as the patronage of Fernando el Magno. Even the types of objects that were produced, the themes of their decoration and the kinds of metaphorical interpretations applied to them seem to have been patterned to some extent on these illustrious medieval traditions. In Manuel I's attempt to shape a new myth of origins for the kingdom of Portugal he purposely returned in architecture to the Romanesque and some of the Luso-African oliphants were intended to evoke similar ideas. The deliberate association with Islamic

artistic traditions to fashion a distinctive identity of the Portuguese court and one that signified imperial ideas had roots in the reign of Afonso V and had been encouraged by the architectural patronage of Manuel I's father, the Infante D. Fernando. Manuel I continued this trend in the *mudéjar* elements that characterize his architectural style known as Manueline, while certain Luso-African ivories, rivaling those of the caliphs of *al-Andalus*, should be seen as contributing to this appropriation and emulation of Islamic artistic traditions and the notions of cultural sophistication and opulence they signified.

Paulo Pereira has argued that the *mudéjar* components of the Manueline style, in tandem with the vogue at court for Islamic textiles and objects of luxury art, were designed to create an image of the Portuguese court that was easily identifiable and decidedly distinct from other European courts. Pereira and others have suggested that the patronage of sub-Saharan African artists and the circulation of objects of African art facilitated this taste for non-European art and revealed the potential of non-European luxury art to enhance the status and reputation of the Portuguese court in Europe.

Not only did Luso-African oliphants reconfigure these medieval and Islamic traditions of ivory carving, but they also participated in a shared court culture emanating out of France in the late 1490s and early 1500s. It is possible that this cultural alignment with the court of France might have been related in some way to the necessity of maintaining and flaunting diplomatic ties to France to counterbalance the power of Spain in the Iberian peninsular. Nevertheless, the connection to the court culture of France contributed in part to the fashionable and cosmopolitan quality of the ivories and signaled the type of courtly mentality that was required to approach them and appreciate their meanings and messages.

In addition, the commissioning and circulating of objects of African art, specifically from the area of Sierra Leone, solidified the connection of Manuel I to the Infante D. Henrique. This helped to legitimize Manuel I as king and to differentiate his reign from that of his predecessor, João II. Through the Infante D. Henrique, Manuel I inherited governorship of the Order of Christ, a military order which was intimately involved in overseas expansion and which received enormous profits from it. After the Templars had been dissolved, they were reborn as the Order of Christ and this direct connection to the Templars was exploited by Manuel I in his quest to conquer the Holy Land. Yet Manuel I likewise inherited possession of the Atlantic islands of the Açores, Madeira and Cape Verde Islands from D. Henrique and this provided him with intimate familiarity with sub-Saharan Africa. The Infante D. Henrique had initiated the practice of collecting African objects at the Portuguese court and of circulating them as gifts at the Burgundian court. These African objects demonstrated the success of the Portuguese enterprise in Africa and celebrated their achievements.

Manuel I was able to weave these traditions into a seamless whole and, like the syncretic manner of his architectural style, created something exceptional and distinctive in the process. Through his patronage of select objects, Manuel I tried to have these Luso-African ivories identified with him and expressed his imperial ideology. In this way, African art created by African artists became integral to the image of the king.

Nevertheless, documentary evidence and the testimony of Valentim Fernandes indicate that ivory carvings from Sierra Leone were familiar to the Portuguese court and were collected by elite courtiers. Duarte Pacheco Pereira and Valentim Fernandes were close to the king and circulated in the highest echelons of court society. They possessed

relatively deep knowledge about the customs and traditions of the Temne and Bullom societies and admired the thriving artistic traditions that were being practiced there. Although Manuel I used his patronage of these artists from Sierra Leone for explicit ideological purposes, and dictated certain aspects of the imagery they carved, this did not exhaust the appeal of the art of Sierra Leone at the Portuguese court. It is noteworthy that no European artist practiced ivory carving at the Portuguese court despite the ready abundance of ivory at the court, which implies that the ivory carvings from Sierra Leone fulfilled this demand and were appreciated as objects of art or, that the craft and material went together in the minds of Portuguese collectors. There are many ivory saltcellars that exhibit very little European influence, but seem overwhelmingly to derive from the same artistic traditions of Sierra Leone that had once produced the stone sculptures known today as *nomoli*, *pomdo*, and *mahai-yafei*. Curnow, Blier and Mark might be correct to suggest that these types of ivory saltcellars, obvious objects of luxury art, should be associated in some capacity with the presence of *lançados* and *tangos mãos* in Sierra Leone and with the trading connections of the area to the Cape Verde Islands. The breathtaking openwork saltcellar in the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, features a fleur-de-lis on its base, indicating the possibility that it might be connected to the French court. (Fig. 4.34) However, the style, conception of the design, technique of carving and dynamic imagery, consisting of geometric patterns, parrots and crocodiles, belong to the artistic traditions of Sierra Leone. (Fig. 4.35) This and the similar piece in Modena, crowned by an elephant, were surely viewed favorably through the prism of Renaissance aesthetics by contemporaries like Valentim Fernandes, who valued them as works of art, admirable for their refined beauty, harmonious design and superb technical achievement.





Fig. 1.1  
Elephant tusk measuring 12 feet in length, Photograph from 1908.



Fig. 2.1  
Map showing area of the Kingdom of Kongo.



Fig. 2.2  
Oliphant, Kongo, Musée national de la Renaissance, Ecoen, inv. no. E.CL.428



Fig. 2.3  
Raffia pile cloth, Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen



Fig. 2.4  
Oliphant, Kongo, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. no. 2



Fig. 2.5  
Oliphant, Kongo, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. no. 3 .



Fig. 2.6  
Oliphant (Detail), Kongo, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. no. 3.





Fig. 2.7  
Wove raffia hat (*mpu*), Kongo, Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen





Fig. 3.1  
Coat of Arms of Bemoin

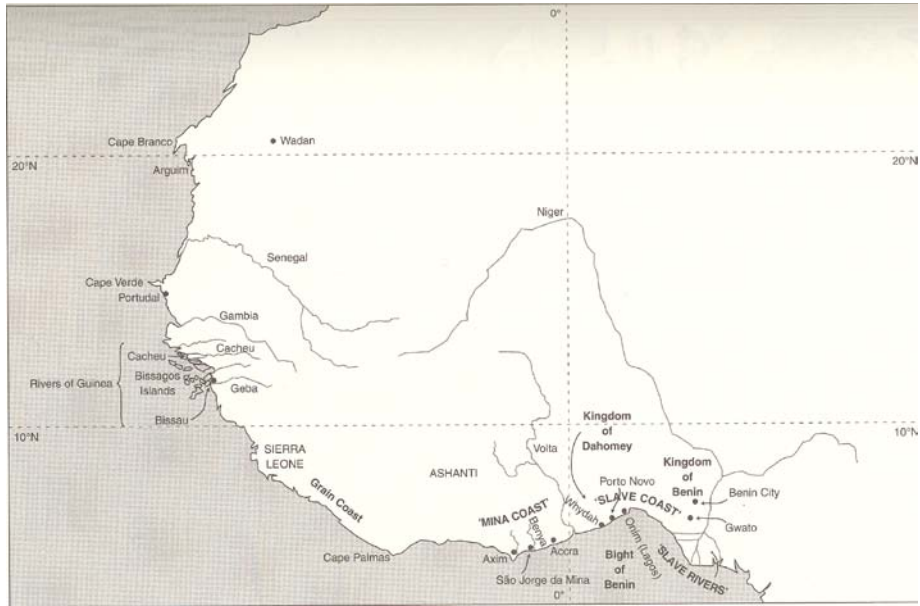


Fig. 4.1  
Map showing area of Sierra Leone



Fig. 4.2  
Saltcellar, Sierra Leone, The British Museum, Af1867,0325.1.a-b.  
© The Trustees of the British Museum



4.3

Saltcellar, Sierra Leone, Museo Preistorico e Etnografico, Rome  
Reproduced in Bassani 1988, pl. 135.



Fig. 4.4  
Saltcellar, Sierra Leone, The British Museum, Af1981,35.1.a-b  
© The Trustees of the British Museum



Fig. 4.5  
*The Conquest of Arzila in 1471 (Detail), Museo de Tapices de la Colegiata, Pastrana, Spain.*



Fig. 4.6  
Attributed to Nuno Gonçalves (active 1450-before 1491), *Painéis de São Vicente*, 1470-80  
Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, inv. 1363, 1366, 1361, 1364, 1365, 1362 Pint



Fig. 4.7  
Ermida de São Brás, Évora





Fig. 4.8  
Convento da Conceição, Beja

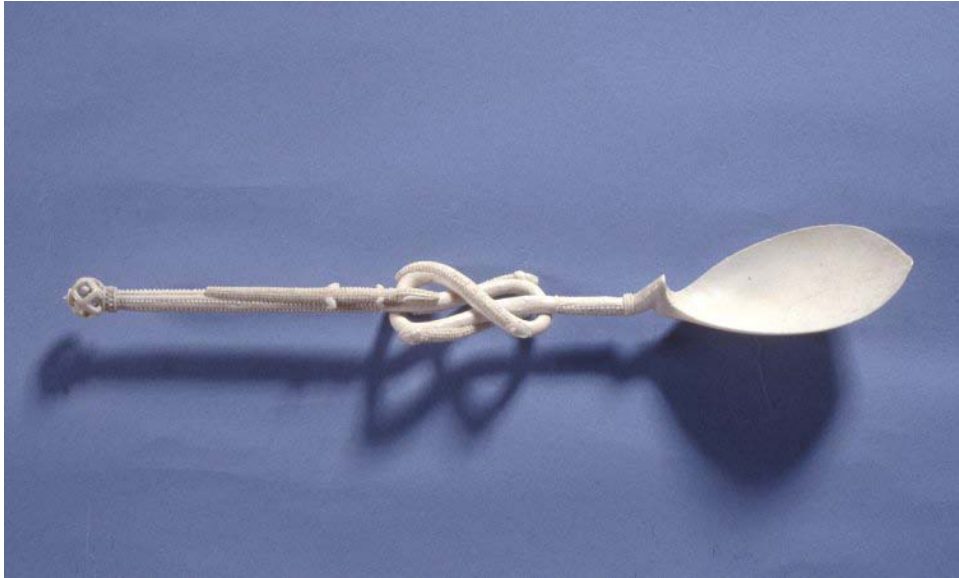


Fig. 4.9  
Spoon, Sierra Leone, The British Museum, Af1856.0623.163.  
© The Trustees of the British Museum



Fig. 4.10  
Feather headdress, Mexico, c. 1520, Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna,  
Inv. No. VO\_10402.

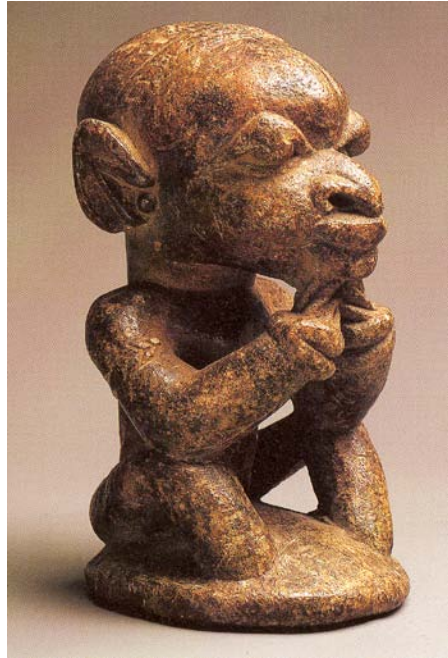


Fig. 4.11  
Seated figure (*nomol*), Sierra Leone, Francesco Pellizzi Collection



Fig. 4.12  
Figure (*pomdo*), Sierra Leone, Carlo Monzino Collection



Fig. 4.13  
Head (*mahai-yafe*), Sierra Leone, Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
Acc. 1978.412.375.



Fig. 4.14  
Male figure (*nomoli*), Sierra Leone, National Museum of African Art, 85-1-3



Fig. 4.15  
Seated figure (*nomoli*), Sierra Leone, Mangió Collection





Fig. 4.16  
Male figure (*nomoli*), Sierra Leone, National Museum of African Art, 85-1-2



Fig. 4.17

Head (*mahai-yafei*), Sierra Leone, National Museum of African Art, 2005-6-56



Fig. 4.18  
Saltcellar, Sierra Leone, Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna, Inv. no. 118.609



Fig. 4.19  
Seated Figure (Saltcellar lid), Sierra Leone, formerly Peter Schnell Collection, Zurich



Fig. 4.20  
Saltcellar, Sierra Leone, The British Museum, Af1867,0325.1.a-b.  
© The Trustees of the British Museum



Fig. 4.21  
Dagger hilt, Sierra Leone, Seattle Art Museum, Inv. no. 68.28



Fig. 4.22  
Dagger hilt, Sierra Leone, The British Museum, Af.9037  
© The Trustees of the British Museum



Fig. 4.23  
Saltcellar (fragment), Sierra Leone, Museum für Völkerkunde, Munich,  
Inv. no. 5380





Fig. 4.24  
Saltcellar Lid, Sierra Leone, Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen, Inv. no. EDc66



Fig. 4.25  
Saltcellar (fragment), Sierra Leone, The British Museum, Af.7398.a-b.  
© The Trustees of the British Museum



Fig. 4.26  
Wood figure, Sierra Leone, Baltimore Museum of Art



Fig. 4.27  
Male figure (*nomoli*), Sierra Leone, National Museum of African Art, 85-1-3



Fig. 4.28  
Head (*nomoli*), Sierra Leone, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996.12.70



Fig. 4.29  
Saltcellar, Sierra Leone, Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin



Fig. 4.30  
Saltcellar, Sierra Leone, Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin



Fig. 4.31  
Gil Vicente (active 1503-1517), *Custódia de Belém*, 1506  
Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon, inv. 740 Our.





Fig. 4.32  
Valentim Fernandes, Printer's Mark, 1496 .



Fig. 4.33  
 Álvaro Pires, *Leitura Nova: Estremadura*, 1516.



Fig. 4.34  
Saltcellar, Sierra Leone, Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, inv. no. 1884.68.73



Fig. 4.35  
Saltcellar, Sierra Leone, Galleria e Museo Estense, Modena



Fig.4.36-37  
Rogier van der Weyden (1399/1400–1464), *Francesco d'Este*, c. 1460  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. 32.100.43.



Fig. 4.38-39  
Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), *Ginevra de' Benci*, c. 1474/1478  
National Gallery of Art, 1967.6.1.a-b.





Fig. 4.40  
Giorgione (1477/1478-1510), *Giovanni Borgherini and His Tutor*  
National Gallery of Art, 1974.87.1.



Fig. 4.41  
Wesst façade, Convento de Cristo, Tomar, Portugal





Fig. 4.42  
Cloister, Jerónimos Abbey of Santa Maria, Belém, Lisbon

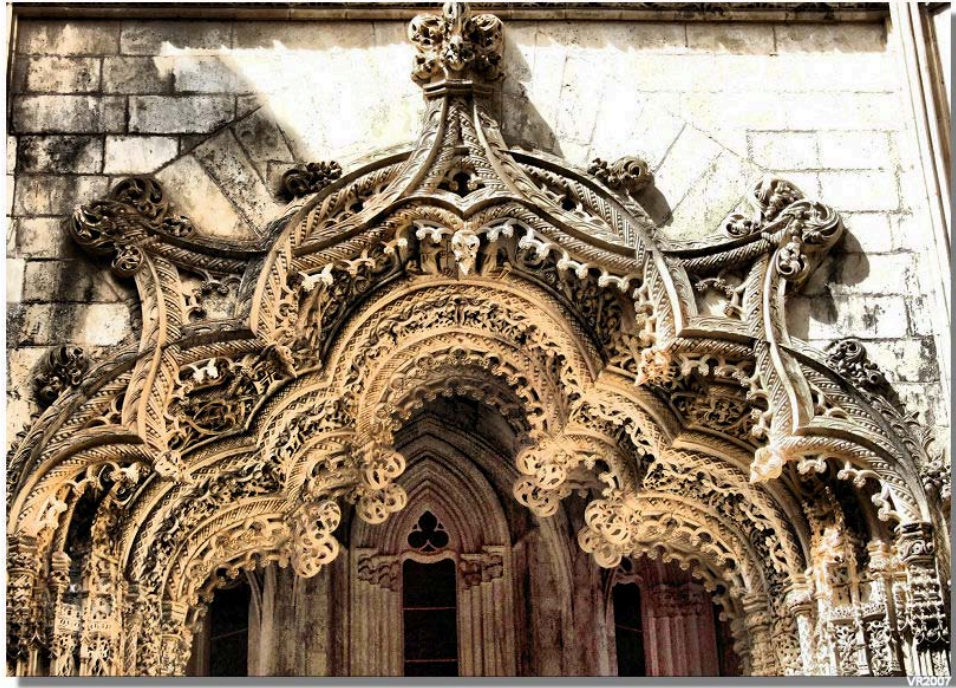


Fig. 4.43  
Cappellas Imperfeitas, Batalha

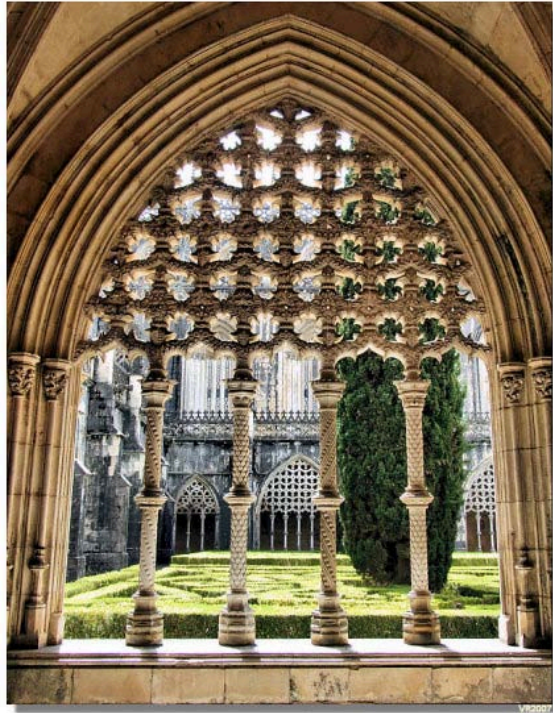


Fig. 4.44  
Claustro Real, Batalha



Fig. 4.45  
Window, West façade, Convento de Cristo, Tomar, Portugal

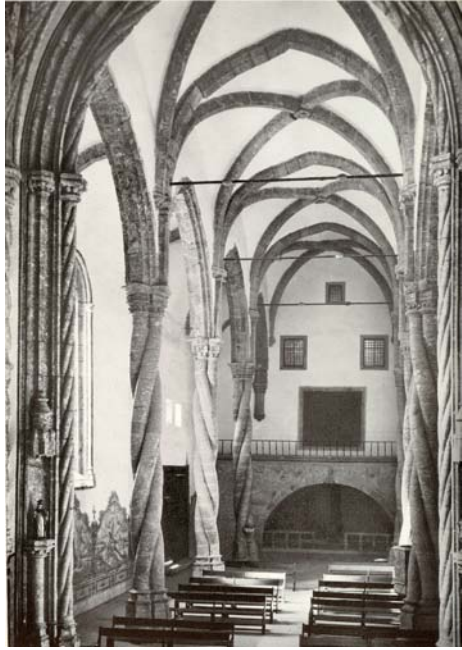


Fig. 4.46  
Igreja de Jesus, Setúbal





Fig. 4.47  
Pyx (fragment), Sierra Leone, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MD



Fig. 4.48  
Saltcellar, Sierra Leone, formerly Private Collection, Lisbon



Fig. 4.49  
Oliphant, Sierra Leone, Musée du quai Branly, Paris





Fig. 4.50  
Saltcellar, Sierra Leone, Seattle Art Museum, Acc. 81.17.189.



Fig. 4.51  
Oliphant, Sierra Leone, National Museum of African Art, 2005-6-9.



Fig. 4.52  
Oliphant, 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century, Metropolitan Museum of Art



Fig. 4.53  
Oliphant, 11-12<sup>th</sup> century, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence,  
Inv. no. Bg. M 7.



Fig. 4.54  
Oliphant, Sierra Leone, Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, Madrid, Inv. no. 21.348.



Fig. 4.55  
Tomb of D. Pedro de Meneses, Santa Maria da Graça, Santarém, Portugal.



Fig. 4.56  
Oliphant (Detail), Sierra Leone, Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, Madrid, Inv. no. 21.348.



Fig. 4.57  
*The Unicorn is Killed and Brought to the Castle*, South Netherlandish, 1495–1505  
The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 37.80.5





Fig. 4.58  
*The Lady and the Unicorn: "To My Only Desire,"* Paris and the Netherlands, 1484-1500  
Musée national du Moyen Âge, Hôtel de Cluny, CL 10831-10834.



Fig. 4.59  
*The Unicorn Defends Himself*, South Netherlandish, 1495–1505  
The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 37.80.4.



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Fig. 4.60  
Crossbow, The Wallace Collection, London, Inv. no. A1032.  
© The Wallace Collection



Fig. 4.61  
*The Hunters Enter the Woods*, South Netherlandish, 1495–1505  
The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 37.80.1.

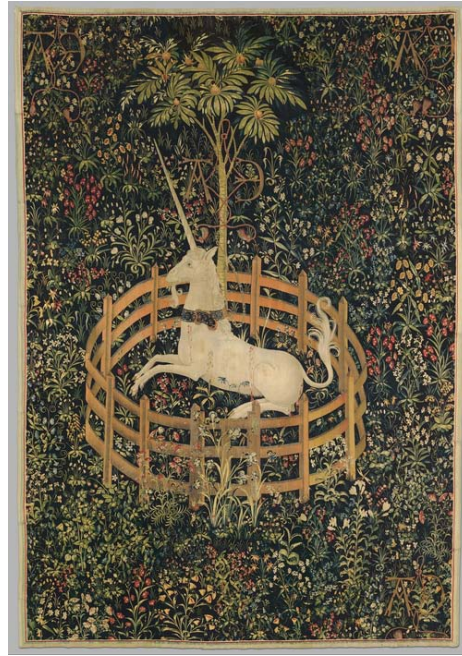


Fig. 4.62  
*The Unicorn in Captivity*, South Netherlandish, 1495–1505  
The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 37.80.6.



Fig. 4.63  
Oliphant, Sierra Leone, Armeria Reale, Turin.



Fig. 4.64  
Oliphant (Detail of Wyvern), Sierra Leone, Armeria Reale, Turin.



Fig. 4.65  
Oliphant, Sierra Leone, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, NGA 79.2148.A.





Fig. 4.66  
Oliphant (Detail), Sierra Leone, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, NGA 79.2148.A.



Fig. 4.67  
San Juan de los Reyes, Toledo



Fig. 4.68  
"Heraldry of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile," in *Le Livre de la Chasse*  
The Morgan Library, New York, MS M.1044 fol. 1v.  
© Morgan Library, New York



Fig. 4.69  
*Pyxis of al-Mughira*, 968, Musée du Louvre, Inv. 4068.



Fig. 4.70

*Pamplona Casket*, 1004-1005, Museo de Navarra, Pamplona, Spain  
© 2006, SCALA, Florence / ART RESOURCE, N.Y.



Fig. 4.71  
Giotto, *Adoration of the Magi*, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua.



Fig. 4.72  
*Cross of Ferdinand I and Sancha*, C. 1063, Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid, inv. 52.340.  
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