

THE CREATION OF A PORTUGUESE DIOCESE IN THE KINGDOMS OF KONGO AND ANGOLA IN 1596: IMPERIAL STRATEGIES AND RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS*

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with a subject that has been largely overlooked by historiography: the relationship between the project of constructing a Christian community in the kingdoms of Kongo and Angola, and the process of structuring the Portuguese imperial policy in black Africa between the 15th and 16th centuries. The foundation of a diocese on this territory, during the period of union between the Iberian crowns, was a determining factor in that process, raising several questions that we hope to respond to in this analysis: 1) How did the creation of a Portuguese ecclesiastical circumscription come about in a kingdom that was not politically controlled by the Iberian monarchies? 2) What was its objective? 3) Why did it only take place more than a century after the Portuguese reached the territory? 4) What were the limits of the new ecclesiastical circumscription? Through an approach triggered by the most recent historiographical theories which advocate the polycentric understanding of the Portuguese imperial structure and attentive to the conceptual and methodological perspectives of connected history, we intend to examine the broader context of political and religious relations in the Portuguese Atlantic as well as to perceive not only how both parties influenced each other but also how the Kongo leadership, the Roman Curia, and the Iberian Crowns of Portugal and Spain, apparently united were not acting in the same direction, nor defending the same interests.

KEY WORDS: Africa; Kongo; Angola; Diocese; Portuguese Empire.

LA CREACIÓN DE UNA DIÓCESIS PORTUGUESA EN LOS REINOS DE KONGO Y ANGOLA EN 1596: ESTRATEGIAS IMPERIALES E IMPLICACIONES RELIGIOSAS

RESUMEN

Este artículo aborda un tema que ha sido ampliamente ignorado por la historiografía: la relación entre el proyecto de construcción de una comunidad cristiana en los reinos de Congo y Angola, y el proceso de estructuración de la política imperialista portuguesa en el África negra entre los siglos XV y XVI. La fundación de una diócesis en este territorio, durante el periodo de unión entre las coronas ibéricas, fue un factor determinante en ese proceso, planteando una serie de preguntas a las que esperamos responder en este análisis: 1) ¿Cómo se produjo la creación de una circunscripción eclesiástica portuguesa en un reino que no estaba controlado políticamente por las monarquías ibéricas? 2) ¿Cuál era el objetivo de la misma? 3) ¿Por qué solo se produjo más de un siglo después de la llegada de los portugueses al territorio? 4) ¿Cuáles fueron los límites de la nueva circunscripción eclesiástica? A través de un enfoque desencadenado por las más recientes teorías historiográficas que abogan por la comprensión policéntrica de la estructura imperial portuguesa y atento a las perspectivas conceptuales y metodológicas de la historia conectada, pretendemos examinar el contexto más amplio de las relaciones políticas y religiosas en el Atlántico portugués, así como percibir no sólo cómo ambas partes se influyeron mutuamente, sino también cómo los dirigentes del Congo, la Curia Romana y las coronas ibéricas de Portugal y España, aparentemente unidas, no actuaban en la misma dirección, ni defendían los mismos intereses.

PALABRAS CLAVE: África; Congo; Angola; diócesis; Imperio portugués

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1. INTRODUCTION

As Anne Hilton (1987) and John Thornton (1987, 1997, 2017a, 2017b) bluntly stated, there is no region in Africa better documented than the kingdom of Kongo. The narratives of chroniclers and travellers like those of Rui de Pina, García de Resende, João de Barros, Damião de Góis, Duarte Pacheco Pereira, Filippo Pigafetta and Duarte Lopes, Olfert Dapper, Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi da Montecúcolo and António Oliveira de Cadornega are now well known and sufficiently studied. It is also worth mentioning that the abundance of primary sources on central Africa has resulted in admirable collections of transcribed (and translated) documents (Manso 1877; Brásio 1952-1988, 1958-2004; Cuvelier and Jadin 1954; Bal 1963; Jadin and Dicorato 1974; Jadin 1975).

The history of Kongo has attracted the attention of many scholars. Since the 1970s, there has been a remarkable development in this field of studies. Some authors, based on original sources and often combining methods and approaches specific to history, anthropology and ethnography, opened up new possibilities for the study of West-Central Africa. Sophisticated theoretical reflections have emerged on Africa's place in world history, as well as on the historian's role in relating to sources of diverse nature and the methods for dealing with filters. However, in such a fruitful field, some subjects were more developed and consolidated than others. The Christianization of the kingdoms of Kongo and Angola by the secular clergy in the Early Modern period has not attracted much attention from historiographers, who instead have tended to be more concerned with political administrations, slavery and the presence and action of the religious orders. The question of whether it is possible to qualify the early modern Kongo as a Christian country has animated historiographic debates for a long time, but the foundation of a Portuguese diocese in that territory on 20th May 1596, one of the hallmarks of this process of Christianization, never played an important role in the debate. Even in the most general works on the Church in Africa, the subject appears only superficially (Hastings 1994, 81, 87-94).

Various popes, from Nicholas V (1447-1455) to Leo X (1513-1521), granted the kings of Portugal rights and prerogatives over the conquest of infidel kingdoms and principalities from the Maghreb to the East African coast. Some even promoted the dividing-up of the lands that had been discovered or were to be so between the Spanish and Portuguese monarchies, sanctioning the conventions established between those crowns as regards the limits of their conquests (Witte 1953-1958; Witte 1984-1985; Filesi 1965, 1968a; Padron 1979, 15-40). It was these pontifical diplomas that made possible the first Portuguese expeditions to Kongo under King John II (1477-1495), the first monarch to have an interest in the systematic exploration and evangelization of the Zaire coast (Barros 1778, 170-180; Brásio 1943). Prompted by commercial interests, given the economic hardship provoked by the tremendous costs of the overseas expansion, he ordered the first expeditions under the command of Diogo Cão, an experienced navigator.²

The financial fragility of the kingdom meant that incursions into the interior of Africa had to be approached with

prudence, with conquest by force relegated to last resort and with preference for the creation of pacts, treaties and alliances (Levi 2008; Strathern 2019a). The fact that the Kongoese monarchs desired friendly relations with their Portuguese counterparts and knew how to forge them was decisive for the establishment of a protectorate alliance, an intention that was already evident in their first embassy sent to Portugal where, in addition to the gifts sent, the king of Kongo communicated his intention to be governed by the laws of Portugal (Brásio 1952-1988, I: 56-68).

These relations, grounded on the African kings' conversion to Catholicism and the assumption of reciprocity, sought to maintain and even increase the power and realms of those sovereigns, while giving the Portuguese control over a lucrative and stable trade. In this framework of deep-rooted connections, which lasted for several centuries with only occasional interruptions, the creation of a new ecclesiastical circumscription played an important role, with the respective elevation of the church of St Salvador of Kongo to the status of a Cathedral.

Preceded by a decisive missionary action (Filesi 1967c; Saccardo 1982-1983), the foundation of a new diocese of St Salvador of Kongo and Angola at the time of the union of the Iberian Crowns was a determining factor in the evangelization of black Africa and in the structuring of the Portuguese imperialist policy, and contradicts the (still widespread) belief that the Portuguese exploration of Africa was restricted to coastal settlements. The persistence of this misconception is because there has been very little interest in the subject in either general works about the Portuguese empire or in studies specifically dedicated to the Kongo (Vansina 2010). The most in-depth studies in the field are those written by Chantal da Silva (2003, 2005, 2006).

This study seeks to fill some of these gaps by drawing on original sources. Starting from the hypothesis that it is not possible to understand a complex process as the construction of Kongoese Christianity without a profound analysis of a decisive landmark like the creation of the diocese of Kongo and Angola in 1596, it seeks to: 1) clarify how the process of creating a Portuguese diocese in a kingdom that was not politically controlled by the Iberian monarchies came out; 2) determine the objective of this unprecedented move; 3) establish why it only took place over a century after the Portuguese had discovered the territory; 4) define the limits of the new ecclesiastical circumscription.

2. CONSTRUCTING A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN THE KONGO: FIRST STEPS

The Portuguese project of constructing a Christian territory in southern Africa was not easy to achieve nor was it immediately successful. It depended, above all, on the prior conversion of local elites through the exploitation of indigenous rivalries and the offer of protection to those natives that proved ready to collaborate (Fernández-Armesto 2004: 49-56; Green 2019; Levi 2008; Bethencourt 1998). Its implementation in the Kongo was propelled by similar attempts, previously made in the region of Mina, Gulf of Guinea (corresponding to the present-day states of Togo, Ghana, Benin and Nigeria).

² Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon, Angola, cx.5, doc. 90, 1-2.

The first official contact took place between 1481 and 1484 (Brásio 1943). The Portuguese found there the kingdoms of Kongo (on the north around the Kongo River) and Ndongo (along the Kwansa River), a vast and structured territory (Heywood and Thornton 2007, 198). Composed of various provinces or fiefdoms administered by members of the local nobility (the *Mani* — ‘lord of’), it had an established system of taxation and its own currency *zimbo*, a sea mollusc the size of a coffee bean (Heywood and Thornton 2015; Thornton 2018). It was overseen by the Kongo *Mani*, a true *primus inter pares* who occupied the top rung of a clan-based system (Brásio 1969; Batsíkama 2013, 37-57; Batsíkama and Batsíkama 2011).

The conversion of the *Mani* of Sonho, who was the uncle of the king of Kongo, was the starting point for the catechization of these territories (Brásio 1973, 178-208; Radulet 1992, 135-150). From the province of Sonho, the Portuguese priests left for Mbanza Kongo, the capital of the kingdom, where they were solemnly received by the king Nzinga-a-Nkuwu, whom they managed to baptize into the Catholic faith. The king and his wife Queen Ne Mbanda were baptized in an improvised wooden church (as he was about to leave for war) with the names John and Leonor, in homage to the Portuguese monarchs, while his eldest son, Mvemba-a-Nzinga or Mvemba-ne-Lumbu, took the name of the only heir to the Portuguese throne, Afonso. Other local noblemen also received the waters of baptism and took Portuguese names (Pigafetta 1591, 46-47).

For the Portuguese, the symbolic dimension of the act was clear: there now existed in ‘Ethiopia’ (as they called it) a Christian kingdom where reigned a king called John. This was not Prester John, the legendary Christian from the East, but another John with whom it was hoped they could fulfil the utopian dream of Christianizing the whole continent. This verticalized project of conversion, which had as its ultimate purpose the establishment of deep political and economic ties between the two kingdoms, was based on the assumption that in a monarchic system such as that found in the Kongo, the subjects would be compelled to follow the religion of the sovereign: hence, all efforts were focused on the royalty to eventually reach the dominant lineages and finally the remaining sectors of society. Agreeing with Boxer, Alencastro (2014, 73) described as ‘Constantinist’ this strategy of ‘Europeanization of Africa through the political and religious route’. The model of conversion as a contract, based on protection and vassal relations established between Europeans and African natives, was attempted in other African territories, but despite the expectation at its basis, a contractual alliance that would serve the interests of both parties, these efforts were generally unsuccessful.³

In exchange for his adherence to the Catholic faith, the Kongolesse king would receive protection from his Portuguese counterpart. Gift and counter-gift would produce obligations and subjections, leading to an alliance that could maintain, or even extend, the vast dominions of both

(Brásio 1969; Boxer 2013, 111). It is an argument mirrored in the words addressed by the Portuguese humanist João de Barros (1496-1570) to the king of Benin: ‘he asked the priests to make him powerful against his neighbours rather than out of a desire for baptism’ (1778, 179). Could the statement serve the king or the elites of the kingdom of Kongo? There is no doubt that the project to construct a Kongolesse Christianity, though auspicious, would encounter many vicissitudes, but it is necessary to take into account the different aspects involved in the African agency, that is, a set of factors, attitudes, negotiations, interactions, exchanges and mutual influences where the mixture between adhesion and resistance generated religious syncretism and hybridisms. The trend of historiography has been going in this direction. Hilton (1985) and MacGaffey (1994) explored how Christianity might have interacted with the original Kongo religion; Thornton (2013, 1984) created the concept of ‘open syncretism’ to explain the product of that interactions; and together with Heywood (2007) he paid attention to the ‘early African reaction to globalization’, that is, the reception and incorporation of European diplomacy, religion, and material culture. Other studies, although with some divergences, converged in the consideration of the multifaceted product of the relationship between Europeans and Kongolesse (MacGaffey 1986, 189-216; Sweet 2003, 104-115; Ferreira 2012).

During the reign of King Manuel I (1495-1521) the missionaries built churches and converted non-Christians, a decisive work that would be continued in the subsequent reign (Souza 2002; Thornton 1984, 2004; MacGaffey 1986). Mvemba-a-Nzinga succeeded his father, becoming King Afonso I of Kongo (c.1506/1509-c.1540/1543). This new king restored Catholicism to his kingdom, which had been interrupted during the final period of the previous reign, which earned him the support of Pope Paul III (1534-1549), which would later address him as ‘dearest son’ (Jordão 1868, 164). According to Thornton (2020, 43), Afonso’s claims to Christianity may well have been more strategic than religious, but there is no doubt that his efforts in spreading the faith had long-term effects.

The Kongolesse monarch sent an ambassador to Lisbon and some family members to study, including his son, D. Henrique, who was ordained priest and some years later was appointed titular bishop of Útica, a city located north-west of Carthage in present-day Tunisia, that was capital of the Roman province of Africa Proconsularis (Jacou 1816, U; Brásio 1958-2004, I: 281-290). King Manuel I’s proposal was sanctioned on 5th May 1518 by the brief *Vidimus quae super*, sent by Pope Leo X (1513-1521) (Jordão 1868, 120). Endowed with a diocese *in partibus infidelium*, which meant to be bishop only so in title, he became the first black prelate in this African territory (Souza 1825, I, BIS; Bontink 1979, 154-155; Amaral 1996, 123-124, 265; Ferreira 1996). According to Fiesi (1967a, 271) his pension would be 200 ducats paid by the bishop of Funchal under the authorization of which he could exercise his episcopal functions in that ecclesiastical circumscription.

This nomination reveals what a strategist King Manuel I was. Henry’s elevation to the episcopal dignity, at his proposal, represented deference granted to the Kongolesse royal family, intensifying their bonds of dependence, while at the

³ A good example could be the letter sent on 20th February 1560 by the bishop of St Tomé to King Sebastian (1557-1578), asking him for permission to negotiate under penalty of not being able to convert the natives of Angola: Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Lisbon [hereinafter ANTT], Corpo Cronológico [CC], I, mc. 104, 3. See also Heintze 2007, 1980.

same time he fell into the papacy's favour for his remarkable progress, now even more auspicious, in the evangelization of Africa. All this would allow him, as finally happened, the recognition and consolidation of his patronage rights, already achieved through the bull *Dum fidei constantiam* of 7th June 1514 (extended to his successors), and the brief *Dudum pro parte* of 31th March 1516. Although the monarch had already been invested as *Mestre* of the *Ordem de Cristo* since 1484, these papal documents recognized *de jure* the perpetual right of patronage of the kings of Portugal over all overseas dioceses already created and to be created, and the monarchs' practice of presenting the bishops in those dioceses (Paiva 2006, 38-44).

Decisive steps were taken to consolidate Catholicism during the reign of Afonso I, including measures to combat the worship of local idols and the construction of new churches (Amaral 1991; Thornton 1984). In the letter he sent to King Manuel I on 8th June 1517 (addressing him as 'most powerful brother' and 'highest prince and king'), he requested some religious objects for the royal chapel and years later, on 18th March 1526, now in the reign of John III (1521-1557), he asked for 50 priests to be sent to administer the sacraments to his vassals.⁴ Thus, it is not surprising that, in the maps of cosmographer Diogo Ribeiro, prepared in 1527 and 1529, the kingdom of Kongo was represented with the following note: 'here there are many Christians, each day they convert, and there are black bishops and abbots in the same land' (Santarém 1841, 16-17).

The Kongo kings constantly used Catholicism as a way of asserting themselves before other African sovereigns, and for this reason, kept requesting prerogatives usually granted to Catholic monarchs. When their claims were not satisfied, they did not hesitate to remind the Portuguese monarchs how much they profited in that territory, as we can see in a letter that Afonso I addressed on 4th December 1540 to the Portuguese King John III: 'By the books of expenses and revenues of your commerce, his Majesty will conclude that no one serves your interests as much as we do, opening markets, granting *almadias* (small boats), opening roads and *pumbus* (hinterland markets) where the *peças* (slaves) are bought' (Brásio 1952-1988, II: 100-102). It was absolutely crucial for Portugal that the Kongo was officially declared Christian, since, as historiography has shown, the solidarity created between groups of merchants who had the same religion was a decisive aspect in the beginning and maintenance of commercial relations as intense as those that would take place in Christian African kingdoms (Antunes, Trivellato and Halevi 2014). Moreover, these relations always took into consideration (at least on Portugal's part) that the idea of a monopoly would be viable considering that Christian slaves could only be sold to Christians (Brásio 1952-1988, III: 404).

Instigated by the Portuguese, this proximity soon acquired its own dynamic, enabling the system of European political relations to be transposed to the African context. During that process, bonds of lord and vassalage were created through an economy of favours, with the Portuguese king, from the outset, in a position of pre-eminence (Vansina 1966, 47; Gonçalves 2008, 17-45). From this arose

the attempt to adapt Kongo to the political-administrative structures of Portugal through a confederative model that represented the consolidation of the Portuguese interests in this African fleck (Birmingham 1966, 1999). Indeed, this was not a stable pact. It was permeable to various incidences, typical of a very complex power game, made up of concord and discord, which had its advances and setbacks, but which allowed the three vertexes of the pyramid (Portugal, Kongo and Holy See) to fence their respective interests.

The word 'confederation', which is of Latin origin (*Foedus inire*), supposes a contract of alliance and union with obligations of close fidelity (*Dicionário* 1990, 495). It was a model framed by law. The jurists of *ius commune* distinguished two forms of union between kingdoms, called, respectively, *aeque principaliter* and *accessória*. The kingdoms were united under the principle of *aeque principaliter*, that is, remaining separate, with each retaining its own nature, but ruled by the same law. The provinces had already joined up through an accessory union (*união acessória*), which meant that they became a single kingdom governed by the law of the kingdom to which they were united (García Pérez 2015).

Various documents from the period show this relationship of confederation and protectorate between Portugal and the Kongo (Brásio 1958-2004, I: 521-539; III: 362-364). The normative instructions (*Regimento*) that guided Simão da Silva's mission to the Kongo should be mentioned. According to this document (1512), it was the Kongolese monarch himself, through the ambassador in Lisbon D. Pedro, who requested the sending of the Portuguese regulations to be applied in his territories, saying specifically that 'he greatly desired the sending of a person to minister the things of justice according to Portuguese custom and also to superintend the things of war, adopting the Portuguese style'. In fact, the Portuguese king sent to the African kingdom a facsimile of the signature to use on all documents; a seal with a respective signet; a book with the names of the court officials; flags to be used in war; a coat of arms and the five books of the Ordinances. The operation included building a house for the king of the Kongo and convincing him to obey the Pope, with King Manuel I managing and paying for the embassy to Rome. Simão was also to arrange for the ships to return to Portugal carrying slaves, copper and ivory, but the essential part of his mission was to gather information about the greatness of the kingdom, the leaders of the trade, and the feasibility of Portugal trading there (Brásio 1944, 1947).⁵ This attempt to adapt the Kongolese kingdom to the Portuguese political-administrative and religious structures continued over time. King John III sent there in 1553 a document (*alvará*) empowering the local king to appoint a justice officer (*ouvidor*), and on 2nd October 1564, the decrees of the Council of Trent were sent by letter by Cardinal D. Henrique (Brásio 1952-1988, II: 321-322; 1958-2004, II: 524-525; 1973, 209-210).

Rui de Aguiar, vicar of St Tomé, said, in a letter to King Manuel I on 25th May 1516, that the local sovereign considered the Portuguese king to be the king of the Kongo, and then confirmed this in a letter to John III on 25th August 1526, in which he alleged that the kingdom of Kongo was 'so Portuguese and so loyal to the king of Portugal' (Brásio

⁴ ANTT, CC, I, mc. 22, 5; mc. 33, 121.

⁵ ANTT, Casa Real, Cartório da Nobreza, liv. 20, 7.

1958-2004, I: 361-362, 408-409; Disney 2009, 67). However, despite adhering to Catholicism, the kings of the Kongo never gave up their titles of lords of that immense territory. Thus, the Portuguese monarchs entitled themselves not as rulers of the Kongo but as lords of the 'conquest, navigation and trade of Ethiopia'.⁶

The confederation between Portugal and the kingdom of Kongo was a protectorate relationship, based on a spiritual alliance, which admitted the political independence of the kingdom of Kongo. Some authors consider this situation: 1) as an original colonial policy set in motion by Portugal which used the Church as the mediator of state interests; 2) something that has led to an intensification of the degree of political centralization; 3) a State capable of receiving cultural interference without structural change; 4) the reinvention of a Kingdom as an encounter that took place within spaces of correlation (Vansina 1966, 45-58; Thornton 1983; Hilton 1985; Fromont 2014, 2017). Many of the authors consider only the formal plane of reciprocity in the relationship between "brother" kingdoms. Filesi himself (1967b, 1968a, 1968b) argues that until the reign of Sebastian Portugal did not aim to dominate these African kingdoms, although in 1967a, 255, quoting Balandier, he seems to consider the opposite. Two reasons explain why historiography has not been able to discuss and reflect on these interpretations: it has not usually considered politics and religion as umbilical dimensions; when it has focused on the religious dimension, it has done so from a perspective that is too focused on the regular clergy, totally devaluing the secular clergy and their structures.

The spiritual alliance and the protectorate relationship had long given access to control over 'Ethiopian' trade, thus a form of domination. Therefore, the episode of the military aid provided by King Sebastian (1557-1578) to King Álvaro I of Kongo (1568-1587) did not inaugurate any great news, as Filesi (1967b, 453-457) claims. When helping the local king to reconquer the capital, invaded and destroyed by *Jaga* tribes,⁷ the Portuguese king sent a letter to Francisco de Gouveia Sotomaior, leader of the expedition, ordering him, before returning, to build a fort to defend the local king and the Portuguese, which would have 'people and garrison necessary for any attacks', all paid at the expense of the king of the Kongo 'with certain tribute'. According to Filesi (1967c, 467) a document written on 7th November 1576 mentions King Sebastian as 'lord of the king of the Kongo'. In fact, Portugal never intended to replace but only to exert influence on the local government, which was not always achieved due to the instability of the Kongo monarchy that in 100 years had 10 kings. For Thornton (2020, 78) this procedure was a 'humiliating submission' to Portugal, but everything leads to believe that Portugal only honored the confederative agreement, through which it had long exercised a surreptitious dominion, now reinforced. The epitaph of Gouveia Sotomaior (he died in 1577) is further proof of this, when it says that he reduced the kingdom of Kongo 'for

five years to the obedience of his Majesty, again with vassalage and tribute' (Filesi 1967b, 459).

My interpretation goes therefore in the opposite direction to those who did not want to grasp the true intentions of domination hidden in the frills of diplomatic rhetoric that referred to parity between kingdoms. How was it possible for the kings of Portugal to smoothly establish and defend their right of patronage over these African territories? Why did they prevent the Kongo's direct contact with the Roman Curia for nearly 100 years? Why did they interfere in succession elections, supporting the candidates to the throne who suited them best? Why did they have a monopoly on trade but never fully satisfy the demands of the Kongoese kings? How did the creation of a Portuguese ecclesiastical circumscription come about in a kingdom that was not politically controlled by the Iberian monarchies?

Although the official discourse did not contemplate any interference by the Portuguese in the administration, government and justice of the territory, the confederation constituted a relation of power between kingdoms, eminently used as a strategy of domination that was transformed into a form of conquest (Marques 2018). Indeed, that is the sense of the declaration issued on 11th October 1577 by Pope Gregory XIII (1572-1585), when consulted about the right of the kings of Portugal in the East and West Indies. In it, he alleged that the name East Indies extended to all regions and islands to do with Portugal extending in a southerly and easterly direction beyond Morocco, 'whether by right of dominion, or conquest, or commerce and navigation'. It also clarified that by apostolic authority, the kingdom of Kongo, 'never subjugated by the Portuguese', was granted to the power and conquest of the kings of Portugal, noting that it was not only the kingdoms, provinces and islands occupied by the Portuguese that were placed under the title of conquest, but also the empires, kingdoms and lands 'discovered' by them. It ended by alleging that the empires and kingdoms only "discovered" by the Portuguese but never ruled by them were designated by the Popes not only as conquests (*conquestae*), but also under the power (*dicionis*) of the kings of Portugal (*Bullarum* 1707, 181-183). This, then, goes in the opposite direction of the argument of Chantal da Silva (2005) who claims that 'Portugal had no right of conquest over the Kingdom of Kongo'. Although not controlled by the Portuguese kings, it was considered a 'territory of conquest' for having been 'discovered' and evangelized by them, and consequently, under its power (*Bullarum* 1707, 181-183).

This reality appears clearly represented in one of the images in the *Livro Universal das Navegações do Mundo*, composed by the cosmographer João Teixeira Albernaz in 1643. While Angola and Benguela are represented with fortified structures where the flag of the Portuguese kingdom is raised (symbols of the territorial domain), the Kongo is only depicted with a vigorous cross in front of which is a Christian native, knees, in reverence.

The confederation will have prevailed in time, because it appears again mentioned on 25th February 1588 in a letter from the apostolic nuncio in Madrid Cesare Speciano to Cardinal Montalto, secretary of state to Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590), referring to the arrival of an ambassador 'sent to this Majesty by the king of the Kongo, in Ethiopia, with whom he is confederated as successor to the kingdom of Portugal' (Brásio 1952-1988, III: 362-364, Filesi 1968c).

⁶ ANTT, CC, I, mc. 3, 65.

⁷ There is no unanimity among scholars about the date of the invasion and the identity of the *Jaga*. Unlike Thornton, Miller and Bontinck consider them not foreign invaders but rather rebels from Mbata province supporting a Mukongo royal pretender. See Miller 1973, 1978; Thornton 1978; Bontinck 1980.

FIGURE 1
Detail of one of the sea charts listed in the book *Livro Universal das Navegações do Mundo* (1643)



Source: ANTT, Coleção Cartográfica, n.º 210, 3.

No formal agreement is known, but there is much documentary evidence of the validity of the confederative pact, showing that the Portuguese and Kongolese rights were tacit. Otherwise, it would not have been possible to create a Portuguese diocese on this territory, as took place on 20th May 1596, without having provoked a counter-reaction (unless extemporaneous) on the part of the Kongolese leadership. In fact, the creation of this important ecclesiastical structure was a decisive milestone in the process of extending Portuguese domination over the religious policies of that territory. Because it does not fit the opposing and dominant argument in historiography that the Kongo was never concretely subordinated to Portugal, it has remained, to this day, unstudied.

3. *JURIS ET DE JURE*: THE FOUNDATION OF THE DIOCESE OF ST SALVADOR OF KONGO AND ANGOLA

It was during the reign of King Afonso I of Kongo (c.1506/1509-c.1540/1543) that the creation of an ecclesi-

astical circumscription within the limits of his kingdom was first considered. Apparently, it was the King of Portugal who first suggested it. From the set of instructions (regiment) that King Manuel I gave to Simão da Silva in 1512, he asked him to convince the king of Kongo to formally render vassalage to the Pope, promising him not only to pay for the respective embassy to Rome, but also 'to beg the Supreme Pontiff to make his son Henrique the bishop of his kingdoms', to be 'the first of all those who would exist there' (Brásio 1944).

The idea must have caught on, because not long afterwards King Afonso I of Kongo began to insist on it. As well as making repeated requests for priests to be sent out, he had wanted his son, D. Henrique, now bishop of Útica, to be made bishop of Kongo. The first known request dates from 25th August 1525. In another letter to King John III on 25th August 1526, he showed himself to be concerned with the maintenance of Catholicism in his kingdom, suggesting that his nephew D. Afonso, who was educated in the college of the convent of St Domingos in Lisbon, be ordained and

should get ready to one day succeed D. Henrique. With a diocese governed by a black bishop and other members of his family, Afonso I wanted to expand the faith and exercise control over it. None of his suggestions were accepted, but the fact that he made them reveals that he knew it was the kings of Portugal who held the power of patronage in these African kingdoms (Amaral 1997).

Jealous of their rights, the Portuguese monarchs were always prudent in the management of the confederation between kingdoms, to the point of sometimes obstructing direct contact between the local kings and Rome (Filesi 1967b, 417-423; 1968d). In fact, this was so much the case that, when on 3rd November 1534 the *diocesis Sancti Thomae in Insula* was created, with jurisdiction over a vast territory which included the kingdom of Kongo, D. Henrique was not made bishop of it.⁸ On 17th March 1535 Pope Paul III informed King Afonso I about the creation of this ecclesiastical circumscription that included his kingdoms (Brásio 1952-1988, II: 41-43).

In a fragment of a letter that King Pedro of Kongo (c.1540-c.1544) wrote to the Portuguese king in 1543, there was a new request, that two of his nephews, who were in Rome, were appointed bishops. Two reasons were given: firstly, a single prelate was not enough for the spiritual needs of the territory, so a new diocese should be created in the Kongo; secondly, as the two men were both from the kingdom and related by blood, they would be well received and respected as bishops, and would be able to build a native clergy. The creation of an ecclesiastical circumscription, governed by a native prelate, would free the kingdom, in spiritual terms, from Portuguese authority, bringing it closer to Rome and allowing the local king to regain control over religion, lost since the kingdom had adhered to the Christian faith.⁹

Despite the failure of these attempts to create a diocese in the kingdom of Kongo, allegedly because Portuguese monarchs were not interested and the kings of the Kongo did not have the power to single-handedly achieve it, there are indications that St Salvador already occupied a position of some importance in the administrative framework of the diocese of St Tomé. From a letter sent by the bishop of the Algarve to King John III, hinting that one of his chaplains might serve as vicar-general in the Kongo, we might presume that the Kongolese parish of St Salvador already was, or aspired to be, the seat of the vicar-general (Brásio 1958-2004, II: 118). Indeed, there is documentary evidence that the priest Francisco Barbuda lived in the Kongo from 1556 till at least 1578 as vicar-general (Heywood and Thornton 2007, 208) and documents of 1552, 1558 and 1589 prove that there existed a provisor in those kingdoms with authority to visit and supervise matters of faith.¹⁰ This is especially evident in the document that in 1592 appointed João da Costa as the administrator of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Angola, entrusting him with the offices of visitor, provisor and vicar-general with a salary of 50,000

réis.¹¹ Finally, in 1596, in the bull that founded the diocese of Kongo and Angola, the Pope claims to have dispensed the newly dismembered territory from 'all jurisdiction, authority, right of correction and visitation, landholding and power' of the bishops of St Tomé and of their 'representatives and vicars' — possibly alluding to the existence of a vicariate in St Salvador (Jordão 1868, 36-270).

On 15th October 1577 Gregory XIII (1572-1585) sent the brief *Cunctorum Christifidelium*, which recognised the ineffectualness of certain Catholic precepts 'in parts so remote and far from the episcopal seat' (Brásio 1952-1988, 159-161). It thus allowed for the norm to be adapted to the reality on the ground, granting a dispensation to the inhabitants of Kongo from impediments regarding marriages contracted clandestinely or concerning consanguinity or affinity and spirituality (Jordão 1868, 249; Sousa 1744, III: 223-224; Donoso 1858, 163-165). The search for flexible solutions that could be adapted to the idiosyncrasies of the black African populations also implied acknowledgment of the need to endow all that space with a government that would be closer to the people, and which could exercise mediation (Brásio 1958-2004, II: 3-5, 325; 1952-1988, III: 490-491, 518-519).

The long-felt need for priests became increasingly pressing, and requests were intensified in the years before the founding of the diocese. Requests for permanent religious support, sent to the court of Madrid by correspondence or through ambassadors, would arrive at the Roman curia (Brásio 1958-2004, I: 459-464, III: 358-361; Vainfas and Souza 1998; Jadin 1964, 185-190). As had happened in the case of St Tomé, the creation of a diocese in the Kongo could impel the creation of a seminary which would in turn produce a secular clergy, preferably native and qualified, who would be close to the population and knowledgeable about the local reality (Boxer 2013, 16-19). It should be noted that the Jesuit mission in the Kongo had tried to create a seminary for native clergy with legal training, but King Diogo I (1546-1561) aborted the intention, perhaps because he realized that it was an institution he would not control (Brásio 1952-1988, II: 311-320; Filesi 1967b, 417-423).

The existence of a bishop in the territory would also help discipline the local people and clergy. For a long time, news had been reaching Lisbon of the bad behaviour found in the kingdom. The local kings themselves requested provisions to punish wrongdoers, although in many cases they themselves were the root of the problem. One example of this was the missive sent to the King of Kongo on 13th August 1566, which exhorted him to set a good example through his behaviour and right a series of injustices towards the Portuguese, on pain of suspension of 'navigation and commerce' with his kingdom. King Bernardo I (1561-1566) was already informed that Diogo Afonso, supreme judge of the king and deputy of the Inquisition, had been sent to his domains to set up parishes on the estates, punish the guilty and, in the absence of the St Tomé bishop, take any measures necessary in spiritual matters.¹² More than the content, the imposing tone of this correspondence reinforces two essential points already exposed in the previous chapter: 1) at least

⁸ ANTT, CC, I, mç. 32, 99; II, mç. 217, n.º 62; Brásio 1958-2004, I: 272-273, 483-484, II: 70-72, 100-102.

⁹ ANTT, Fragmentos, cx. 1, mç. 2, 1; Brásio 1958-2004, IV: 141.

¹⁰ ANTT, Coleção de Cartas, Núcleo Antigo, 881, 314, 1-2; CC, I, mç. 103, 11; CC, II, mç. 242, 122; Chancelaria da Ordem de Cristo [COC], liv. 10, 10; Tribunal do Santo Ofício, Inquisição de Lisboa, proc. 10945, 2v.

¹¹ ANTT, COC, liv.8, 43v; Brásio 1952-1988, III: 435-436.

¹² ANTT, CC, I, mç. 82, 38; Brásio 1958-2004, II: 155-156, 327-330, 559-561; Almeida 1971, II: 271-272.

as regards religious matters Portugal exercised effective dominion over the Kongo territory; 2) by the confederative pact the Kongolese monarchs were subject to a code of conduct under Catholic precepts whose non-compliance could lead to commercial sanctions.

According to the Italian explorer Filippo Pigafetta (1533-1604), based on information from Duarte Lopes, the ambassador of the King of Kongo, the Portuguese king Sebastian had also charged the Castilian bishop Antonio Gliova to visit Kongo, which he did, staying there eight months (1591, 62). For his part, Pedro António (1710, I: 549; II: 509), mentions Gliova as bishop of St Tomé in the Kongo, while in Paiva's study of bishops in Portugal and the Empire (2006, 596), there is no reference to this Spaniard, though the author does not name any bishop for the period 16th February 1575 to 29th January 1578. Finally, another version says that the Portuguese king expelled the Spanish bishop from Kongo for having given catechism without permission (*Diário* 1827, 427). On the command of the Portuguese king or in the absence of one, Gliova's hypothetical passage through the Kongo is unequivocal proof that, in requesting a closer government, the needs of Kongolese Christianity exceeded the capacities of the St Tomé prelate. This was a clear sign of the need to dismember the diocese, creating another ecclesiastical circumscription in these territories.

We should also consider the interests of the Holy See, which was favourable to the expansion of the Catholic faith at a time marked by the spread of Lutheran ideas (Paiva 2019). The spiritual conquest of the African interior served the pontiff's plans of consolidating his presence wherever the Portuguese held some kind of control, thereby wounding the Islamic power in the flank and relieving the threats to Christianity (Close 2018). Moreover, there were also economic dividends, as happened, for example, during the reign of Álvaro I, when the Holy See received ten leagues of land and the respective mines (Brásio 1958-2004, III: 238-239).

This complex web of relations was dominated by economic interests. This can be seen in the missives that Diogo Lopes, ambassador to the Kongo, sent to Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590) in 1588 (Filesi 1968c). In them, he insisted that, between that kingdom of 'Lower Ethiopia' and that of 'Prester John of the Indies' lived people who wished to be part of the Catholic faith, which would be useful for the service to God and 'a great asset, for whoever joins such desirable trade'. According to him, on a par with the 'mines of the soul', there also existed 'mines of metals and minerals' in lands that were worth more than a hundred thousand ducats annually, and which could be attained in exchange for 'good miners' who would consolidate Christianity in those places (Brásio 1958-2004, III: 358-361).

The pertinence of these arguments was reinforced with the arrival of the Dutch in the Kongo in the last decade of the 16th century to establish a trade in cloth and ivory instead of slaves, a proposal that was well received (Green 2019, 3). The growth in this trade could threaten the Portuguese commercial domination and open doors to the introduction of a new Christian faith in a territory that till then had been subjugated to Catholicism. In fact, concerns about the escalation of heresies in these territories were echoed by several sources, such as the inquisitorial letter written on 27th July 1595, which recognized the need to appoint a local

visitor because it was very expensive to send one from the kingdom. Certainly, the threat of Lutheranism favoured the decision to create a diocese in Kongo and Angola through the implied reinforcement of the commitment between the local king and the Catholic faith (Brásio 1952-1988, III: 488-489).

The founding of St Paul of the Assumption of Luanda in 1576 was another factor that needs to be taken into account. One of the intentions was to re-establish the region into a privileged area for the capture and commerce of slaves, on which the trading post of St Tomé was increasingly dependent.¹³ It was estimated that control of the island of Luanda could be extended to other parts of Angola, a desirable prospect as the kingdom was considered 'the greatest treasure in Ethiopia for fishing *zimbo*', to the exploitation of precious metals, to the trade of slaves and to ensure the safety and pacification of those lands (Brásio 1958-2004, III: 227-228, IV: 536-545). The control of this treasure could remove the power of the local king, discouraging whites who would submit to his control, becoming enemies of the Portuguese.

Some attempts were made to encourage the Angolan kingdom to adhere to the Catholic Church, in the hope that this would stimulate trade with the lands bordering southern Kongo. The Portuguese first attempted to use the strategy that they had employed in the Kongo, of reconstructing a kingdom in the image of Portugal after the conversion of the *Ngola*, but when this failed, they advanced with military conquest of the territory, finally installing there a government. The King of Kongo who, like his predecessor, claimed ownership of this territory, ended up donating it to the king of Portugal in exchange for help against his enemies (Amaral 1996, 54, 79-88, 173-212; Pedro 1970, 32-34).

The creation of the new religious circumscription occurred a short time after the institution of a government-general in the Portuguese-conquered part of the Angolan territory, which happened in 1589. The introduction of a strong permanent spiritual power in the territory through the presence of the episcopal figure could both reinforce the Portuguese temporal power in Angola and replace it (Silva 2005). What is more, the existence of a bishop in the territory, subordinated to Iberian monarchs, could better serve the Portuguese interests, particularly considering that the episcopal dignitary, representing the divine power, could better orient conduct and influence decisions.

The conquest of Luanda and repression of *Ngola* reinforced the influence and power of the Iberian crowns in the region while at the same time circumscribing once again a force adverse to the Kongo *Mani*. This was, therefore, a propitious moment for concerted efforts to be made in creating a diocese in the Kongo subordinated to the Portuguese *Padroado*, without colliding with the local king. Although the king was not keen on the idea of absolute external control, he would not feel plundered by his confederate. Indeed, it is important to stress that the control of Kongolese Christianity by the Iberian crowns implied by the creation of a Portuguese diocese went in the opposite direction to the dominant trend in the decades preceding this event. Various decisions taken by the king of Kongo in the years that

¹³ ANTT, CC, I, mç. 35, 21; mç. 36, 114; Green 2012, 177-325.

preceded the creation of a diocese in his dominions showed a clear attempt at seizing religious control, as Thornton (2020, 43-48) argues happened, especially during the reign of Afonso I. The point is that the sources are full of contrary facts, and the clearest example is the creation of the diocese which represented the recognition and consolidation by the Roman Curia and the Kongoese monarchy of the patronage rights of the kings of Portugal. In any case, the increasing pressure from the Kongoese monarchs to guarantee religious control in their territories would lead the Iberian crowns to take a decision that would go against their intentions (Brásio 1958-2004, III: 90, 344-345). On the one hand, these patronage rights would be decisive. On the other hand, a past of harsh conflicts between the Kongoese monarchs, the secular clergy, the religious orders, and the head of the administration and government of the diocese of St Tomé, especially with the vicar general João Batista, bishop of Utica who, having visited the diocese, was sent back before ending his mission (Brásio 1952-1988, II: 151-156, 226-227, 231-237, 242-245). A letter sent by Monsignor Muzio Bongiovanni, the pontifical collector in Lisbon, on 15th March 1587 reveals how the king of Kongo's authority in religious matters was respected and even stimulated by the papacy. In it, he exhorts the African king to report to the Supreme Pontiff on the state of religion and divine worship in the territories under his control through correspondence or the dispatch of an ambassador (Brásio 1958-2004, III: 342-343). In a document from January 1608 we know that in 1595, an ambassador from the Kongo, D. António Vieira, was in Lisbon intending to get to Rome, where he would negotiate the erection of a new cathedral; this only did not take place because he died before arriving at his destination (Brásio 1958-2004, V: 415-416).

It was certainly the presence of the Kongo ambassador in Lisbon that motivated King Phillip I to request the *Mesa da Consciência e Ordens* on 21st November 1594, for an opinion on the creation of a new ecclesiastical circumscription. The pronouncement was known on 27th January 1595. Based on the idea that there was a considerable number of Christians in Kongo, a territory where a Catholic king reigned, and considering that the existence of a bishop was important to reform Christianity, the advisory body was in favour of the idea of a new bishopric.¹⁴

The process of choosing and appointing the first bishop, Michael Rangel (1596-1602) took place in the course of 1595, although it only had practical effects in the following year after the formal creation of the diocese (Brásio 1952-1988, III: 496-499, 517-519, 527-529). It was during the same year that the final steps were taken to create the diocese. The answers to the detailed questionnaire sent by the collector Fabio Biondi to both the Kongoese ambassador and the bishop of St Tomé would form the basis for the formal request for the creation of the diocese (Brásio 1952-1988, III: 500-514).

We do not know if the Iberian crowns' initiative in being part of the process was a reaction to this growing proximity between the Kongo and Rome or if it was a positioning that derived from the increasingly stronger pressure for the

creation of a new diocese in African territory. Neither do we know if the advantage was taken of the ambassador's death to conduct the process alone and benefit from it. The truth is that the foundational bull recognised that the creation of a new ecclesiastical circumscription in *black Africa* came from the courts of King Phillip I of Portugal (1581-1598) and King Álvaro II of Kongo (1587-1613), who conceived and requested it, though the perpetual 'right of patronage and presentation' in the new diocese was granted exclusively to the kings of Portugal and the Algarves (Jordão 1868, 256-258; Brásio 1952-1988, III: 530-531).

Clement VIII (1592-1605) received the request, and after some consideration, responded. On 20th May 1596, not in 1597 as we can read in Castelnau-L'Estoile (2018),¹⁵ during the fifth year of his pontificate, Ippolito Aldobrandini dispatched the bull *Super specula militantis Ecclesiae*, which created the new diocese with its seat in St Salvador of Kongo, the first in sub-Saharan continental Africa.¹⁶ Less than a month later, on 18th July 1596, he issued the brief *Carissime in Christo*, where he rejoiced at the creation of the new diocese and summoned King Álvaro II to pay him filial obedience, something again suggested in the letter sent to the same monarch by the pontifical collector on 20th September (Jordão 1868, 256-258; Brásio 1952-1988, III: 532-543).¹⁷

When the diocese was created, Catholicism had already been known for over a century and there was also a past of political and economic relations between the Portuguese and the Kongoese, despite occasional interruptions. For Portugal, the creation meant reinforcing the Confederation and the consolidation of its position in the exploration of the African coast. For the local kings, it meant military protection in a territory where sedition was a constant (Amaral 1996, 28-29, 77-79, 120-121; Bontink 1980; Miller 1973; Thornton 1978; Matonda 2020).

The foundation of dioceses in places under the control of native kings was not common in the Portuguese empire. One of the rare cases was the diocese of Funai, in Japan, created before the Kongo one on 19th February 1588, in a territory entirely outside Portuguese control (Costa 1998, 1: 257-277), with a similar situation occurring in Cochín (1558),¹⁸ Malaca (1575)¹⁹ and Macau (1575).²⁰ By the foundational bull, the creation of a new circumscription in Kon-

¹⁵ Perhaps the mistake of this and other authors comes from Manso 1877, 142-146.

¹⁶ The bull has the following date: 'XIII kal. Junii', which literally means 13th of the June 'kalendas' 1596. The counting of 'Kalendas', an old Latin calendar system, always affects the previous month, corresponding to the period between the 14th of the month and the 1st of the following month. The XIII day of the June 'kalendas' corresponds to the 20th of May.

¹⁷ Certainly making confusion Heywood and Thornton understood this to be the document of the creation of the diocese (2007, 203-204).

¹⁸ Archivio Apostolico Vaticano (hereinafter AAV), Congregazione Concilio, Relationes Dioecesium, vol. 237, 53-74 (*ad Sacra limina* 1756). Translated from the original by António Guimarães Pinto, the document is accessible at: <https://www.uc.pt/fluc/religionAJE/fontes/cochim>

¹⁹ AAV, Congregazione Concilio, Relationes Dioecesium, vol. 481, 14-14v (*ad Sacra limina* 1624). Translated from the original by António Guimarães Pinto, the document is accessible at: <https://www.uc.pt/fluc/religionAJE/fontes/malaca>

²⁰ AAV, Congregazione Concilio, Relationes Dioecesium, vol. 474, 17-19v (*ad Sacra limina* 1765). Translated from the original by António

¹⁴ ANTT, Mesa da Consciência e Ordens [MCO], Consultas, liv.1, 42v-43.

go was destined to satisfy 'pressing behests of the Catholic kings' for 'the need to save souls' and sought 'the growth of the peoples of the Church Militant'. With the new diocese, the aim was to 'expand, raise and cause to more vigorously prosper the state of the Christian religion and the Catholic faith', and to 'dignify humble regions with illustrious titles'. It also hoped that 'its inhabitants and locals, supported by the presence, teachings and direction of bishops would continue to make progress in the faith, so that they would not lack in the spiritual domain what they had achieved in the temporal'. Finally, the pontifical document presented other reasons, frequently invoked in other partitions: the size of its territories, which contained around thirty thousand towns and villages; the time taken to circulate within its limits and the scarcity of priests, all of which made it impossible for the bishop of St Tomé to properly tend to his flock (Jordão 1868, 36-270).

The church of St Salvador was established as the seat of the diocese and remained affiliated to the ecclesiastical province of Lisbon until 1677, when it became a suffragan of the archdiocese of Bahia, created by the bull *Inter Pastoralis officii*, the previous year. On 7th November 1716, the Royal Chapel was raised to the status of a patriarchal basilica, and the archbishopric of Lisbon was divided into two parts, Western Lisbon (linked to the patriarchate) and Eastern Lisbon, each with jurisdiction over a series of dioceses. Kongo and Angola became a suffragan diocese of the latter and remained so until 13th December 1740, when the bull *Salvatoris Nostri mater* promulgated the union of East Lisbon to the patriarchate (Paiva 2000).

The chapter would be endowed with five hundred *crúzados* per year from the King of Portugal and the Algarves, and would consist of three dignitaries (the dean, chanter and archdeacon), each of whom would have a hundred and twelve *crúzados*, and nine canons with prebends of a hundred *crúzados* each (Jordão 1868, 36-270; Brásio 1942, 1952-1988, III: 515-516). The bull is silent as regards the bishop's income. It is only known that on 27th January 1595, the king's advisory council recommended an equal payment to that of the bishop of St Tomé to dissuade the bishops from any temptation about illicit and unworthy activities of episcopal dignity.²¹ According to Boxer, what the Iberian crowns spent on the Kongoese cathedral was taken from their profits in the slave trade (Boxer 2013, 41). However, during the reign of Álvaro II significant changes began to be introduced. The presentation of dignitaries and canons of the cathedral, except for the dean and schoolmaster, and the collection of tithes, now became the responsibility of the local monarch, who then had to sustain the bishop and the chapter.²²

This policy started from the episcopate of Antonio de Santo Estêvão (1604-1608). In practice, he had to support dignities and structures that he had neither chosen nor created and over which, therefore, he did not exercise the influence he wished, clear evidence of the dominance exercised there by the Portuguese monarchs in matters of religion.

It is true that this could even be a way to ensure control over the clergy provided at the cathedral but, in practice, at least until 1640, this did not happen. During that period all bishops were 'creatures' of the Iberian monarchs in the exercise of their patronage rights as kings of Portugal and the Algarves. When for example in 1621 the Pope wrote to King Phillip III (1621-1640) suggesting the confessor of the Kongoese sovereign as bishop of the diocese, the monarch replied diplomatically that perhaps in the future this could happen, because his predecessor had already chosen a Franciscan before he died (Paiva 2006, 48-49), referring to Simão de Mascarenhas who would become the fourth bishop of the diocese (1621-1624).²³

The new circumscription, with its seat in the parish of St Salvador, now elevated to city status, would be implanted throughout 'the whole vast and broad kingdom of Kongo and Angola'. These territories had been first under the jurisdiction of the Order of Christ (*nullius* of Tomar), from there they passed into the administration of the diocese of Funchal, were later integrated into the dioceses of Cape Verde and finally St Tomé (Jordão 1868, 153-157; and Brásio 1958-2004, I: 272-273; II: 41-45).

4. THE TERRITORY OF THE NEW DIOCESE

The foundational bull granted Cardinal Alberto of Austria and his successors, in their capacity as papal legates, vice-legates or nuncios, the power to divide up the clergy and populations around the diocese. According to the same document, this new ecclesiastical circumscription corresponded to the limits of the Kingdom of Kongo and Angola 'with each and all of its settlements, towns, villages and municipalities, and clergy, laymen, churches, monasteries, priorates, stewardships and other pious places and ecclesiastical benefices, with or without a priest, secular and regular of any orders, to provide pastoral care for souls' (Jordão 1868, 36-270). Thus, stretching from the regions of Sonho and Dande on the Atlantic coast, to the river Cuango, the new diocese corresponded to the Kingdoms of Kongo and Angola, stretching for around eighty-five thousand square kilometres. St Salvador, the city chosen to host the bishopric was already an important urban cluster, with 10,000 houses, 6 churches, several private oratories, 6 brotherhoods, but only 20 priests working in the territory (Brásio 1952-1988, III: 500-504).

This 'vast kingdom of Kongo and Angola in Black Africa', as it was called in the Clementine bull, overlaps with parts of the present-day Republic of Kongo, Democratic Republic of Kongo, and Angola. It was surrounded by several other kingdoms, little known to Europeans, made up of warrior armies that disputed amongst themselves for dominion of the broader territories, such as the Matamba, Ocanga, Ambundo, Bokke-Meale, Anzicos, Pangelungos, Cazonji or Casangi, Imbangalas or Cimbangali or Muzimbos (called Jagas by the Portuguese), among others (Jordão 1868, 36-270; Pigafetta 1591, 24-25).

Guimarães Pinto, the document is accessible at: <https://www.uc.pt/fluc/religionAJE/fontes/macau>

²¹ ANTT, MCO, Consultas, liv. 1, 42v-43; Brásio 1952-1988, III: 480-81.

²² ANTT, CC, I, mç. 116, 27.

²³ Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, vol. 40, doc. IV (*ad Sacra limina* 1631). Translated from the original by António Guimarães Pinto, the document is accessible at: https://www.uc.pt/fluc/religionAJE/fontes/congo_angola

The new diocese was therefore located in a space that at the time was called 'Lower' or 'Inner' Ethiopia, running from Zaire to the Cuanza, from the Atlantic coast to the edge of Okanga. It bordered the kingdoms of Jalofo, Monomotapa, Abyssinia and Cafraria, and covered territories north of the river Kongo (Zaire), the southern region of present-day Democratic Republic of Kongo and part of present-day Angola (Brásio 1958-2004, III: 358-361; 1952-1988, III: 500-514).

Superimposed onto the kingdom of Kongo and Angola, it corresponded to its six provinces, namely Bamba, Sonho, Sunde, Pango, Bata and Pemba, each of them subdivided into various fiefdoms. In the extremities of this, it also covered Angola (the Portuguese name for *Ndongo*, which derives from *ngola*, the title of the local governor) and its seventeen provinces (Cadornega 1972, I: 32; Cavazzi 1687, 9-21).

Ndongo was the second biggest kingdom in central Africa, with an area of around a third of that of Kongo, covering the present provinces of North Cuanza, South Cuanza, Malange and Bengo. The Kingdom of Angola was delimited in the west and north by the Kongolese province of Bamba and by the territory of the Ambundos, and to the east by the Kisama of Aquilunda, a region not subject to the kings of either Kongo or Angola (Amaral 1996, 179; Fonseca 2012, 23-32). Bathed in the west by the Atlantic, it stretched southward from the frontier with the Kongo on the river Bengo. The northern border went eastward from the Ocean, crossing the region of the Dembos and the territories which bordered the southern provinces of Kongo to the River Lucala. The southern border followed the river Cuanza for around two hundred and seventy kilometres into the interior, with lands of both banks as far as the rocky formation of Pungo Ndongo. The eastern limit began some kilometres after Pungo Ndongo and stretched to the river Cutato. To the east, it continued in a northeast direction following the river Lucala to the border with Kongo (Heywood 2017).

Although consisting of territories dismembered from the diocese of St Tomé, which had been of gigantic proportion, this new circumscription also covered quite an extensive area, with clearly defined limits in the north, south and west, where it bordered the Atlantic, but relatively imprecise on its eastern flank. This immense space, through which ran many rivers, included various kingdoms and provinces that were quite extensive and unequal in size.

5. CONCLUSION

As had happened in other overseas territories, the dominion of *Black Africa* was subject to the imperialist policies of the Portuguese crown, within which the Kingdom of Kongo and Angola was a unique project in which religion assumed an active and decisive role.²⁴ The plan, which had been tried out unsuccessfully in some of the territories of the coast of Mina, consisted of carrying out prior actions of reconnaissance and evangelization to propose that the

local royalty adheres to Catholicism in exchange for trade and protection. Without recourse to sudden and effective territorial occupation, which required means and resources that the kingdom did not have, the spiritual conquest gave the Portuguese king power over the African kingdom.

The strategy seemed tailor-made for a kingdom such as this, slotted into a series of others with which it often got into tussles; enormous, and therefore carved up into a series of provinces which often gave rise to sedition; and lorded over by kings that were greedy for power, and whose ambition of maintaining his dominions and subjugating new territories, could be furthered by the establishment of an alliance with a power considered to be stronger, or submission to its governance.

The success of the project had substantial implications. The assimilation of the Portuguese religion and part of its political and social system through a series of favours and initial prerogatives, carefully dilated at the request of the Kongolese kings, did not bring the configuration of this African kingdom closer to the European model only because the holders of the Iberian crowns considered that this would collide with their own interests. We could say, therefore, without questioning the proselytism of the 'Church Militant' in the Kongo that contrary to what suggested Lopes (1994) this assimilation did not result from a process of imposition, persuasion or catechesis. Rather, it was due to an initial process of negotiation, raised to a confederative pact or agreement after the almost spontaneous adherence of the local king to Catholicism, extended to his subjects, which could be summed up in the Latin expression *Cujus regio, ejus religio*, a legal principle with roots in Roman law, enshrining the right of a king to impose his faith upon his dominions (Lindsay 2013, 395-399).

Kongo's receptivity to Europe contrasts sharply with that of other African kingdoms (Heywood and Thornton 2007, 224). However, it is necessary to take into account the importance of the instrumentalization of religion, within which were forged friendly relations at the origin of political pacts. The dense and sometimes complex web of relations established between the Iberian monarchies and Kongo royalty was due to the religious unity or spiritual alliance between them under which a confederation was born. In no other part of that continent was such progress made without recourse to military conquest and occupation.

In assuming the vertical exercise of power relations, which materialised in a fragmented and discontinuous territory by other powers, the confederation that regulated relations between the kingdoms of Portugal and Kongo and Angola seems to corroborate the most recent historiographical theories which advocate the polycentric understanding of the Portuguese imperial structure (Cardim et al. 2012). In addition, we can conclude that in terms of overseas policy, both the Portuguese monarchs and the holders of the Iberian crown exercised in the kingdom of Kongo a form of control that combined two models: direct and indirect, territorial and maritime, coastal and interior. The first of these, the 'Atlantic type', was made possible by a confederative pact based on religion and political unity. It was manifested through protectorate actions and above all in the spiritual conquest with the respective territorialisation of the Church, resulting in the constitution of a Kongolese Chris-

²⁴ Using global and comparative approaches, Alan Strathern has produced similar arguments regarding the importance of religion in the construction, maintenance or reinforcement of imperial projects. See Strathern 2016, 2019a, 107-154, 2019b.

tian community which unleashed the process of creation of a diocese. The second, 'Asian type', was manifested in an economy of mercantile circulation and involvement between the two kingdoms, which permitted the Portuguese to monopolize trade in the ports and fairs, decisive for their affirmation on the world market (Alencastro 2014, 70-76).

Portuguese imperialism thus spilled over the maritime domain and acquired a territorial dimension. The spiritual 'conquest' opened the door to indirect rule, which allowed the Portuguese to secure a trade monopoly in Kongo and Angola, or, to use a concept from Fynn-Paul, allowed them to establish "slaving zones" there (Fynn-Paul 2009, 3-40; Thornton 2017b) often with demographic repercussions (Matonda 2016). Though this space was never formally ruled by the Portuguese, it had been 'discovered' by them and as such was considered a 'conquest' by the Vatican, under the 'power' of the Portuguese monarchs, as also happened in other latitudes of the empire. And it was on this assumption that a Portuguese diocese was created in sub-Saharan Africa with its borders calqued on those of a kingdom that would remain politically autonomous.

The creation of a new ecclesiastical circumscription with a seat in this territory, longed claimed, reinforced the Catholic matrix of a kingdom that aimed to be free to reinforce and develop policies of indoctrination that were more in keeping with the spiritual needs of the territory, through structures of government and agents nearer the populations. Contrary to what some authors have argued, the local kings tried unsuccessfully to exert effective control over the clergy, aspiring to powers identical to those held by the Iberian monarchs through the right of patronage (*Padroado*). It was precisely when they found this within their grasp that the Iberian monarchs meddled in a process which, till then, had been protagonised by the Kongo kings alone.

The relations between the confederates had changed, as had the interests of the Iberian crowns. When those relations became unstable, at a time when the viability of the Americas depended increasingly on the monopoly over slaves, there was a need to intensify control over land through the conquest of the Angolan kingdom. The introduction into Kongo and Angola of the long-desired episcopal power and the raising to the status of a cathedral of a church that already held some primacy in the St Tomé diocesan administration made every sense in this new project of territorial affirmation. In practice, the presence of a bishop in the territory, chosen by the holder of the Iberian crowns, confirmed by the Pope and supported by the King of the Kongo, would only bring more complexity to the Kongolesse Church. A certain jurisdictional confusion between the various powers would ensue, with accusations on both sides that would lead bishop Simão de Mascarenhas (1621-1624) and all his successors to take up official residence in Luanda, leaving in St Salvador Mbanza Kongo only a few clerics from that kingdom, a situation that provoked no opposition from Portugal or Rome despite constant complaints from the kings of the Kongo. Bishop Mascarenhas' action is also explained by the fact that he accumulated the government of the diocese with the appointment as governor of the captaincy of Angola (1623-1624), which makes clear why Portugal always wanted to have control of the religious policies in the Kongo. It is therefore not surprising that on the occasion of the

arrival of the Dutch the Kongolesse monarch interceded for the invaders and Bishop Francisco de Soveral (1627-1642) took refuge not in Salvador but in Massangano, plunging the diocese, after his death, into a long vacancy. This spiral of events, which forces us to combine microanalysis with a more global approach, shows us a three-dimensional circuit of relations in which the Kongo leadership, the Roman Curia, and the Iberian Crowns of Portugal and Spain, apparently united were not acting in the same direction, nor defending the same interests.

The creation of the diocese of Kongo and Angola on 20th May 1596 was therefore a long-drawn-out process, complex and peculiar that can be synthesized in four main ideas: 1) it did not keep up with the pace of conquest and evangelization, as most of the others did; 2) it was requested in a joint action between two kings, Phillip I of Portugal and Álvaro II of Kongo (Mpangu Nimi-a-Lukeni lua Mvemba); 3) it was established in a territory that was not absolutely subjugated to the Iberian crowns in political terms; 4) despite the period of union of the Iberian crowns, Portugal's historical rights were respected, as the pope made it clear in the foundational bull that it was in his capacity as King of Portugal that King Phillip would receive the *jus patronatus* of the Kongolesse diocese.

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