Chapter 8

The renowned Island of Bussis, the character and organisation of its people, the richness of the land, and the royal state of its great king.

Although the greater part of this chapter will be about the celebrated King of Bussis, let us first discuss the land. As stated at the end of chapter 5, this beautiful island lies five leagues to the South East, facing the Little Isles. Its situation is delightful and very healthy, and the continual breezes from the sea and the refreshing aspect afforded by trees of different kinds, such as palms and cibes. Nor does the island lack an abundance of running waters from its springs.

In general the inhabitants are good-looking. They are employed in farming and fishing, like the other heathen. The more noble among them wear cotton cloths, either barafulas or others obtained in normal trade. They are great wine-tappers. The land abounds in milho, rice, beans, yams, and bananas, and no less in livestock, such as cows, goats, and hens. The poor wear goat-skins, and if they lack even these they make use of cibe leaves, from which they weave a small sort of mat, and with this they cover themselves, as stated near the end of chapter 5. The women are employed in the usual tasks, and they weed the fields in the appropriate seasons.

The king of Bussis is unique in that there is so much to be told about his household and royal state, as well as his person and all his possessions, for the whites have turned him into a lascarin. He is well acquainted with what comes from Spain, indeed he benefits more from these things here than many do there. Heathen as he is, those who know his lifestyle cannot but speak well of him. They say: "A good disciple of a good master!". So let us go on to make a careful examination of the savage. His person is so dainty and sleek as a result of a variety of delicacies and luxuries that he can readily be envied by those of this district most dedicated to epicureanism. As regards his manner of life, in order to dress well he cuts up silks and other expensive cloths, and does this more lavishly than do those Spaniards who make most use of these. As proof it is enough to refer to the quantity of silks and other textiles sent him by his admirers in this Guinea. He has many of these...

(a) The inhabitants of this land too are Papels.

(b) The king has large numbers of capons which are useful to him as gifts when he is giving these.
people, because he behaves with royal magnificence to those who gracefully fall down before him. In 1612 one of them sent him, in merchandise of this kind only, a quantity to the value of 40 black slaves. His bed is a paradise. No-one in Guinea except this tyrant possesses a bed of this style; and he can vary it as he wishes with such a variety of bedspreads and canopies that there would be no end to describing them. He is the richest king in all this (part of) Ethiopia. His jurisdiction is the most unhampered and absolute. Although the country is small, being only about six leagues long and four across, it is so important because of its king that it extends as far as the savage cares to spread the fame.

The result of this independence is that there is no law other than the king’s appetites. If he wished to be worshipped, and Divine Omnipotence did not intervene, he could completely achieve his wish. On the human plane he is treated with great respect by his people, wholly because he is very powerful and to be feared. /f.30/. Hence no vassal of his would dare to sell a slave, even if it belonged to the vassal’s domain, without seeking permission from him; nor may he sell a bullock or castrated goat without first informing the king. If he goes fishing and catches a large fish, he must bring it for the king to see, so that he can take any part he fancies. Anyone who fails to do this could lose his head, unless, to save it, he presents a slave and so is freed from the penalty. No-one may give his daughter to a man without first bringing her to the (royal) household, and if she pleases him the king may take her for himself. Anyone who arranges a marriage and disregards this law may lose his house and family — since nothing of import must happen in the land without the king being first informed. And in this respect they are all obedient and very punctilious in keeping the law, and are greatly encouraged to be so by the apparatus of spies and informers reporting on breaches of the law which is maintained by the king. At any time he wishes he can put in the field nearly 2,000 men armed with shields, spears, swords and knives. Hence he is feared by the neighbouring kings. And he can defend himself successfully from the inhabitants of the Bijagos Islands, 3-4 leagues out to sea to the South West, who live by mounting assaults either at sea, attacking Portuguese vessels in their canoes, or on the mainland, where they burn houses, villages and churches. This last they did in 1603 at Biguba, and in 1609 at Guinala, where they fired the House of Our Lady.

(c) If it happens that vessels are overwhelmed and the lookouts (on land) are to blame, he punishes them most severely, as he did with particular ones, ordering them to throw themselves overboard with a stone tied to their neck in that part of the sea where a ship and its crew had been lost.
But they cannot invade this renowned island, the king having ordered such vigilance to be kept all around it that a bird cannot appear out at sea or cross the land without it being generally known, by means of the bambafulus. The men who keep watch from the tops of trees are in charge of these bambafulus, so that if there is cause, they sound them in order to give the whole land warning of what is happening.

This king has a very large compound and within it are all his houses, which contain over 200 wives. In order to keep the wives at home, he has given the post of doorkeeper to one of his intimates, though some say that he uses eunuchs. Only to this man or these persons is given the right to open fire with arrows on any wife seen by night outside her/his house. When these women walk along any road such is their modesty that they do not raise their eyes from the ground, and anyone who meets them must turn aside. How this would upset /f.30r/ wives in our Spanish homeland! Wives who make no pretence of staying at home, and who do not cover their face or lower their gaze except in order to draw more attention to themselves! Many of his wives are slaves and have been bought for money. As well as the large number of houses (for wives) which the king maintains in this place, he has his own house (d) which is barred with iron all around. Within this house he keeps many trunks and boxes full of different articles of clothing, such as very elaborate smocks, doublets and breeches, (also) sheets, coverlets and canopies made of different pieces of silk, and items in gold and silver. These goods, apart from the ones left him by his uncle and predecessor, he has bought and continues to buy from the Portuguese who come there with their ships to obtain slaves (e), a commodity the tyrant's chains never fail to have available. For he has such cruel laws that only the person who is truly a slave (at heart) and does not know the value of life would be willing to live under this king's rule. The Portuguese come ashore in full security and they are received with all the signs of friendship, since this king is fond of saying that, without his permission, only the snakes in the forest can do anyone ill in his land. And this is the experience of the Portuguese even today, for if they cut down a hand of bananas his vassals will not accept money for it, on account of the respect for the whites which they know their king has, albeit only out of self-interest. On this point, the heathen deserves praise.

(d) This house is for treasure.

(e) Who are his responsibilities (2) such by his own will (3).
His bearing is solemn. More often than not he is seated on a chair lined with velvet, for he has several of these and makes most use of them when delivering judgements. The captains convey goods to him on his verbal request and he pays them well, although what he pays is usually related to how much an individual pleases him. He shows great respect to captains of vessels, but they are expected to give him handsome presents; and he consents to eat with them, though he never eats with other persons, a restriction arising from his sense of hauteur. He is in the habit of giving away some of his castrated animals as presents, and adding a slave. Yet all the heathen (give presents merely to obtain) a compensating advantage in return, a characteristic of the people of this Ethiopia, who whether they give little or much never do so other than in the hope of getting more back. They have a proverb – Give a hen, hope for a goat: give a goat, hope for a cow! Because these savages have no horses, they use oxen instead, after castrating them to make them fatter. The oxen become so tame and tractable that they insert a rope through their nostrils to act as reins so that they can ride them /f.31/, and they can travel on these oxen for a fair number of leagues. However the oxen tire easily because of their great size. To make them go more quickly they beat them with sticks shaped to the thickness of a palm, and give them such thwacks on the belly that they can be heard a good distance away. These oxen provide the mounts for the Papels and for the other heathen inhabiting these lands.

Now let us be more specific. In material power this savage is far above all the other kings and lords of this Ethiopia. As everyone concedes, he alone is king, and he behaves accordingly, requiring obedience appropriate to the royal dignity. He maintains an elevated royal state befitting his royal person; and this is more extreme than if his state were one due to Grace, although he has displayed outward signs of desiring this state of Grace. But he has such false instructors in the faith that, instead of providing him with a good reputation deriving from the fundamental virtue of the House of the Lord, they disparage this with their works of hell. For these people sell their own Christian slave-women to serve the appetite of the savage, as Jorge Fernandes Granjo and other captains have done, and another of those lancados about whom I have spoken.

(f) The land which does not know the plough and is still virgin always produces the finest fruits: so it is with religious conversion, in cases where the plough of bad example has not been at work.

(g) A nephew of António Nunes, by (name of ?) Luís Afonso, he sold the slaves whom he inherited from António Nunes in Guinea.
fortified the king's port with two cannon, a scheme in which Captain S.B. Fernandes has been very active. I am sure that their lordships, the ecclesiastical visitors of Cacheu, must know about these acts which are so contrary to the Christian faith and religion. Equally contrary are other acts practised on the Windward Coast, by the sale to the heathen of many kinds of prohibited goods. Prohibited goods are all goods which do not meet the test of being morally indifferent and applicable to various uses. For only goods meeting this test are licit, and those which are not licit which have a single use and that a diabolic one, in idolatry, for instance. Hence the sale of paper is not licit, nor the sale of animal horns and heads, since these are ingredients for their magic medicines. And it should be said: "So what! Someone else will sell these goods and they will continue to practise idolatry!" The people who obtain these goods for the heathen are accessories to their sin. I say the same thing when slaves procured unjustly are offered for sale. But if I don't buy them, their own people will kill them, because they are witches!" A poor argument, for as long as witches are vendible, they will be uncovered daily.

I have already mentioned the king's gold, silver, etc. He keeps his table like a great lord, with nothing lacking in the way of the most exotic and variegated delicacies, with wines to match and even spirits. Throughout the year he has as much as he needs of the best (food and drink), brought from the Canaries. As for the local wine, each day between dawn and nine or ten o'clock a large number of bolis are brought to him by the wine-tappers. They are placed under a tree and he goes out to inspect them and allocate them to sections of his household. In sum

(h) Goods of no moral import can be sold to the heathen, but not those goods which only serve them for the practice of their false religion, such as paper, etc.

(i) With silver tableware and a silver water jug additionally gilded.

The table linen very rich and varied, like the rest of the table setting.

(j) Many preserves, of the finest quality.
whether for treating his outer person or his interior, all the best things
coming from Spain are, as it were, addressed to him, since all fall into
his hands, and this on account of the barbarian's reputation for liberality
- furniture, trinkets, fine objects in gold and silver. He has no cause to
envy those who fare most sumptuously in Europe, for he possesses tapestries,
decorations in leather, carpets, a fine wardrobe. As for weapons, apart
from the cannon given him by his admirer, he has muskets, swords, and
daggers, in brief, a complete armoury, and he has no shortage of gunpowder.
There is no end to what might be told concerning this disciple and precious
friend of the enemy of the spiritual edifice of the church militant, this
intimate friend of the French scum, whose favour in return nourished him.

Does he lack perfumes and scented waters? The houses of God may lack
them, but not the house of the sensuous King of Bussis. Does he lack a
vessel to trade by sea? He has his own, and, in this vessel there travels,
in (the name of his) benefactor, the king's jagarefe; a very dignified
officer and the second in the kingdom after the king, named D. André. This
man visits the whites in Cacheo, together with some of his sons who are
also Christians and who go in their own boats. The jagarefe is such a
distinguished Christian that, to fulfil his obligations to the church, he
goes to Our Lady of Victory in the king's launch; and he is so good-natured
and so much our friend that his great charity has earned him the name among
the whites of 'Father', and so they now all call him 'Father André'. It is
this gentleman who rules the household and family of the king; and he does
so in consultation with the elders. A white man travels in the vessel with
him. However D. André is not as attached to the King of Bussis as he is to
the King of Glory, for he would very much like to find himself liberated
from the evil tyrant in order to have more freedom to undertake the service
of the Lord and to pursue the true interests of his soul.

The king has his own house, in which he sleeps, and this is a very
large one, like the best-situated ones in Cacheu. /f.32/ The house with
bars (around it) corresponds to a combate, and acts as one, for in it he
keeps all his treasure. The house by the gate is for the cannon. The keys
are held by his three eunuchs, who serve the king at table, and who occupy
the same house as he does when he retires. They alone have the privilege
of speaking to his wives, hence everything runs smoothly in his household.
As instructed to behave by the king's faithful friends, his major-domo, a
man named M.P. Oliveira, decided to improve on his standing with the king,
by presenting him with an object which the savage had no previous knowledge
of, an object he had admired at Lisbon and for which he had offered 18,000
reis. This object was an exotic writing-desk from China. He would have
conveyed it here if he had got it for that price. But since the owner refused and asked for much more, he left it, buying instead a tomb or (rather a) coffin, beautifully prepared, in which the savage could be buried. This was obtained in Lisbon for 5,000 reis, the price including many other goods, both fineries and trinkets. But the benefit of it all came to French pirates and to the Falupo heathen. For the ship was seized and despoiled of the better part of its cargo by these sea-robbers in the Falupos' bay, and the natives kept many goods which the French could not carry off, as well as the ship and the persons of the captain, the pilot and the others aboard, among whom was the King of Bussis' devoted acquaintance. The latter lost his coffin which otherwise he might have made good use of for his own burial, since among these savages his life was so much at stake that he repeatedly endured torments, those true torments earned by persons who out of self-interest are excessively attached to anyone who makes a show of loving them, solely out of the same self-interest.

Apart from his vessel, the king has a number of very fine war canoes, for defence against his Bijago enemies and to alarm them. In fact the Bijagos dare not touch his island, because the king has promulgated a law to the effect that any of his subjects who yield ground in battle will be sold, and hence out of fear they fight with total determination. And the careful operation of the system of look-outs, using bambalous, goes a long way to ensuring that there are no battles on land. Moreover the king's house has its own drummers who play all night, so that the same harmonious sound celebrating the king's praises and proclaiming his goodness can, in the event of an attack, bring to arms all those who sleep less soundly. It is not possible for the land to be invaded from any direction without it being immediately known, since it has people everywhere, living in their villages. Now enough /f.32v/ has been said about this king of ours and about the other points concerning this renowned island. As for the idolatry practised there, it is the sort which is general among the other Papel heathen.

To draw this chapter to a conclusion, let it end with the ceremonial used in their burials, etc. First, the burials of leading persons, these being celebrated with great pageantry. In readiness for the day of life's final farewell, the heathen puts aside the best things he has, his
treasured possessions. But let us describe how the king is already preparing and furnishing himself in order to thoroughly dismay that Lady here in the eyes of men (?). The king does not lack persons to instruct him as to how lords in Portugal proceed in this matter, by devoting themselves to building very elaborate tombs. Being depicted on the tombs with joyful and delighted faces, while still alive they can gain pleasure from looking at them and can gradually acquire a feeling of composure which enables them to depart with greater ease of mind and fewer pangs, since even their dry and shrivelled bones will perpetuate, and be of profit by perpetuating, some of the splendid vigour which the bones enjoyed while they supported a living human body, as their craving (for remembrance?) seeks from them. The King of Bussis, enlightened by his devoted acquaintances, is proceeding in this direction. He ordered from Portugal, and has had sent, a coffin lined with velvet in which to lay this dry wood destined for eternal flames; for the greatest honours these people pay are reserved for the dead. And as I said, on this occasion they squander all their treasure and their most precious possessions, including cloths and other fineries of all kinds, as well as whatever they own in valuable commodities such as gold and silver.

Great is the tyranny here which ordains that another chattel, but a rational one, should perish with the king or any leading person. The savage even today sets aside for this abominable practice a number of young women who serve him and whom he keeps, his intention being that, when he dies, they should be all killed and buried with him. There are some thirty or forty of these, including some free women who are his wives. They are killed this way. As soon as the death of the king is known, they

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(k) They consider these idolaters their masters, and from these people the idolaters receive news of what goes on in Portugal. Who else could have told them that we purchase graves for burial? Who else could have revealed to them all our secrets, who else other than these malicious enemies of heaven?

(1) And a number of young men; and if they have any Christian women they keep them for this ceremony, as happens at the present time, when one or two are in this king's power, for instance Guiomar Gramaja, etc. The encouragement of the Jabacouces is enough for the Sousos to kill many people for this reason.
seize them and straightway give them certain potions which reduce their feelings at the cruel outcome. Then they bring them to the grave of the dead man and strike them on the back of the head with clubs they have brought with them. When the women are dead they are laid in the grave; each in her own place. The grave is a very large vault, of a size relative to the importance of the dead man. The women are laid out this way: some are placed /f.33/ at the head, others at the sides or at the foot, and they make some stand up or be seated, while others are on their knees, (all) with their household tools in their hands. Each woman holds whatever signifies the task she was occupied with in life, so that in the next world the dead man will not lack this particular service in his exalted state. Then they completely cover the grave with the best of the East-Indies cloths they possess, cloths called pintados, and with various other cloths. Also they adorn the dead with whatever he owned in the way of gold and silver, etc, and sometimes a silver vase. When the burial is over, the wake follows, the lamentations being accompanied by the sound of musical instruments, side-drums, hambalous and ivory trumpets. Under cover of this they kill 50-60 cows, or even 100 if the wake is that of a king of Bussis. As for goats and hens, one can count the number, for these mourning occasions are turned into the greatest feastings in life for those who feast only for Epicurean joys. Most truly, the feastings here are more extravagant than anywhere else in our Ethiopia. The lamentations of wives, sons and brothers continues after the funereal rites are finished. When a new king is instituted, he has several oxen killed and the meat displayed in a public place, so that anyone of the women of the previous king who wishes to become his can go and take some. But any woman who does not do this has permission to go wherever it suits her and to take a countryman as husband just as she wishes, even if she is the dead king's sister or niece or any other relative. Now let us discuss the Ilhas dos Bijagos (Bissagos Islands) which lie to the West of this island.