Chapter 4

The domestic institutions of the heathen, their lifestyle and customs

Their towns and villages are normally established far from the sea. Apart from these larger settlements, they have small ones called chicals. These they make use of during the farming season and they correspond to our farmhouses, although they lack all the fine points of ours. Their houses are square. The roofs rise roughly in the shape of a pyramid so that their villages resemble the tents of an encamped army. All of the houses are covered with thatch or poche, (taken from a tree) from which wine is drawn and which provides the thinnest and finest nachul used for tofos and various small personal ornaments. The houses are decorated by being plastered with common clay. The more particular among the heathen have an odd kind of bench running round the house, to make it stronger, and they whiten the house with oystershell. Apart from the ordinary apartments in which they sleep, almost all the houses have an area like a little yard or a gossip's corner: these are called cabres, and are within the house and are shut off by the same door. They are used by lords as court-rooms and places of audience in relation to matters of minor importance.

As for the furnishings, (being mainly mats) like the female sex they all give a man an opportunity to sin. They have tagaryas to eat from, four ( ? kinds of ) mats, colegas, colmas to sleep on, some cotton (cloths), a bow and quiver, and some spears. And to sustain life, they always keep a little rice and some oil, those who can manage it. The colegas, which are made from the tara (raffia) from palmtrees which is also used for godonhos (baskets), are employed as trunks by all those natives who as yet are not up to anything better. Kings and lords have larger dwellings and rooms for guests. What they hang on the walls of these houses is only a seepto, that is, a spike or black sword with a hook at the end on which they hang their bow, etc. Their binte or execution blade - they call this weapon their staff-of-arms - acts as a safe-conduct throughout the lands of a king for any person to whom he gives it. Their carpets are skins of various animals, such as goats, antelope, etc. On these skins they seat their closest and oldest friends when they come to visit them, but mats and colmas are good enough for ordinary people. Kings and lords welcome guests very generously in their fashion, but (the guest's) purse has to pay for the feast is offered wholly out of self-interest. They bow to good white money: "Come over here!" : and this is how things generally go on here. Self interest makes its appearance in all sorts of colours.

After birth, children are brought up with all the indulgence the land permits. They consider those children the finest and most devoted who are
the worst behaved and who the most ready to apply themselves to sensual vice. They have no understanding of the need to punish such children. They would deprive themselves than restrain their children, hence these children are the most intractable and least disciplined. If the children are to receive the Faith, God permitting, in many cases these stems need to be uprooted from their natural base. In idolatry they need no lessons from their parents or superiors, because they make such good progress in it (unconsciously) that instructors are not necessary. In fact they are all wicked because of excessive indulgence, and because of lack of sound instruction and good upbringing. All of them are liars, cheats and sly concealers of truth. This is the fruit of la vita dolce. When they are children they wear a narrow length of white cotton cloth over their private parts, and even when they grow up and wear breeches they retain this piece of cloth. The women dress decently, wearing cloths of different kinds, some of which they have had woven (locally), and others they have obtained from the Portuguese.

This is how families are ruled. Their basic subsistence comes from the products of the land. Sons and daughters support themselves when they have their own house. But since their resources are limited and they have many children, and sometimes some of them are illegitimate, they suffer great hardships. Men accept as their children those born to their wives after they have given them to other men, as I will explain later. Hence at the end of March or April the poor children wander off through the villages, leaving their fathers and other relatives who care nothing for them, and seeking their mothers and brothers and sisters, with the result that until they find their own home they do badly for dinners and suppers. No one here buys them clothes, they have only the black dress nature gave them, which they tear when they climb palms trees, clear the forest or do other tasks.

Now let us discuss their lifestyle and customs. Since they all lack Christian moral principles, it is hardly surprising that they also lack the highest principles of human behaviour. However they do not lack natural morality. When they get up, they greet God in their own fashion, and they ask him for the good things of the temporal life, such as health. But as regards their soul, they have so little concern for it that it is as if they had none. When addressing kings they employ various courtesies, as I shall shortly explain. Among themselves they use the expression atua, meaning "Bear up I". More important people they address a /f.61v/ different way. They put their elbow on the ground, and they use the same expression atua, or else lonta, meaning "Your Majesty". They do this
when addressing kings and chiefs, and certain Portuguese whom they
consider worthy of public respect. As they carry out this courtesy, they
normally touch the ground with their elbow, or else they strike the palm
of the right hand on the chest, in which case they merely make a gesture
with the elbow, pointing it towards the ground but not actually touching
it. When they employ the greeting atuao, the right arm is held out and
the fist is clenched. When they meet a person of higher standing on the
road, they step aside and let him pass. Those who wear string caps made
of nacome and certain other fibres, take them off when greeting a person.
When a chief or a notable or some other person of standing visits a king
to whom he is subject and subordinate, and if he has been delayed and has
not seen him for some days, he appears before him and strips off his shirt,
then he throws himself on the ground, chest downwards, and his arms
extended, and he turns on to his back in the same position. This is done
as a sign of acknowledgment of vassalage, in order to dispel all suspicions
of rebellion, such actions indicating that he is a slave (to his superior).
However those who are kings or independent great lords themselves, when
they visit their superiors, remove their shirts and greet them with lonta,
but do go squatting. Their superiors give them the polite greeting that
is their due, and seat them near themselves on animal-skins or on mats.
Other visitors are given a different place, further away; if they are
chiefs or governors, on a mat, but those who are not rulers, on the ground,
like the common people. Before the guest says his "Bear up!", he sits
down, then makes his greeting. Women make their greeting seated. These
heathen consider women to be privileged, and they say that women own/bed me

I have spoken of their household furnishings. The men have swords and
shields: some of the latter are like large wheels and are made of natampa.
For use at table, the richer sort possess basins, and Flemish tankards for
drinking from. The most important kings have more polished manners and use
plates. Beds are of straw. They use furnishings made from straw as
mattresses: such are their colmas, which are like long narrow mats and are
made of a certain soft reed, resembling our boinho but thinner. Other mats
are made of bamboo drawn from shoots of tara, and godenhos (baskets) are
made from this. They also use the buchos I have described. A fire general
serves instead of a blanket, since they never sleep without one, not only
for the heat but because it keeps off snakes, which commonly share the house.
For their dress, they prefer Moorish shirts, as already stated, worn
with breeches with many pleats, resembling (our) men's drawers. To travel
in, they have shoes like sandals. They wear their hair braided.

These people make little use of finery, except with the children, when
they hang strings of glass beads around their hips, and crystal and coral,
etc., around their necks and arms. Men and women wear geogaws made of
these natural materials. All of them usually carry metal rings, of Moorish brass or tin, on their fingers. Their trunk, face and limbs are marked with a thousand pictures of snakes, lizards, monkeys, birds and so on. When they present gifts, these gifts turn out to be a miserable cock, or a mat, or a bucket of rice or salt; and with these for bait, they deal with us as first-class usurers would. If it were not like this everything would be ruined. They say that a cock is the most suitable present, and they use these in their sacrifices. As well as braiding their hair, they shape it into a thousand elegant patterns, shaving it with knives and leaving portions to form various shapes, some oval, others like half an orange. Some of them look like monks. In sum, the sight of their heads provokes laughter. Their teeth they always keep very clean. They draw out their eyelashes and say they do this in order to see better. They eat any kind of food, but it seems that they prefer those with a strong smell, for they never salt anything, not even meat, even when all of it has been smoked. They use these (? smoked meats) in their ciga, a dish like a salada, cooked in oil. They are exceptionally greedy when it comes to eating meat of all kinds, and for pork they would sell themselves. They behave most kindly to those who are sick. They do not employ blood-letting, saying that it is bad to lose what is vital to life; however those educated in our ways do this. But they use scarifying, and various medicines in the form of herbs and health-giving plants, which they boil in wine or water and either drink or wash the body with; and they have powders which are used as ointments.

To bring this chapter to an end we shall discuss their abominable custom of cabondos, women of a nefarious kind. Someone goes to one of their villages to deal in cola, rice, etc. He selects his host, who parades in front of the trader his whole household of women/wives and tells him to chose one. If he says that he does not want a woman, no more happens and this puts a stop to the thing. But what man does, and shall we praise him if he does? If he wants a woman, he is given one, for all purposes; and they are content to accept this, out of self-interest. For apart from the normal expenses, as long as the trade goes on with the woman's parents and relatives, and until he leaves, the poor 'son-in-law' pays up - because he clothes the 'father-in-law' and pays very steeply for these devilish arrangements. If it happens that after saying he does not want a woman the guest takes one from a neighbour, they attack and rob him. And if after taking one he goes off with another of those he was shown, his own woman reports him. All the children that wives of these panders have by those men to whom their husbands give them are accepted by the husbands as their own, without any fuss. Since profit is made by being a pander, men prize the role, to the extent that they will go long journeys and endure great hardships (? to offer their wives). Such fathers do girls here have, etc.