Chapter 9

The state of the Province before the Conquest

What has been said above makes clear the position regarding the moral and judicial practices of the heathen. Now let us say something about the contrôlores (the officially-licensed Portuguese traders) of the Province, who form the particular subject of this chapter. They used to deal in the common goods which the country provides, as can be seen from what was said in chapter 2. They had houses here which they used as their trading-stations (a) and numerous praseiros; and they directed their shipping at sea. The ships provided the trading-stations with goods for exchange, such as bracelets of bronze, which today are discovered in large quantities under the ground, where the natives used to hide them or bury them with their dead, and (also) bracelets of copper, tin and alloy and all other kinds of prohibited apparel. And with these goods (as imports), they not only carried off most of the products of the country, but they obtained a great quantity of iron from the country of the Logos where it was smelted.

In order to carry on the trade with greater security, it is said that they built the tower (b) which stands on the road to this kingdom (of the Logos), whose ruins we find today in this place. Others tell a different story, believing that this style of fortress or castle was built to protect the lives of a particular captain and his soldiers who were once shipwrecked in these parts by a great storm. But the truth is that no-one, not even the oldest among (the inhabitants), can give the true history. They used to carry off slaves, which were sold at that time for small cotton cloths worth between one and two cruzados. The procedure was this. They took two sticks and brought them together so that one of these cloths fitted between them, then they placed (the sticks) /f.74v/ against a slave and piled up (cloths) until they reached his head, on which they put a better cloth. And thus they obtained the slave.

(a) Deals with a trading-station. The oldest was Magarabomba. Afterwards came Mitombo, the best in this Province.

(b) As a trading-post.
It was a time of peace. Such wars as occurred were solely the fault of those who dwelt there, and were on account of adulteries, murders and witchcraft. The weapons of war were large spears with long shafts, and fire-hardened pointed sticks. They had no knowledge of archery or poisoned weapons. They used shields of buffalo hide. In general, while this people lived in independence, they prized their agriculture and commerce, although they never held markets. If the Portuguese had commercial associations with them, so too had the pirates, evil associations, since they took enormous plunder on this coast from the ships which the trading-stations sent out laden with large quantities of very rich goods.

So that it may be seen how things were, and how much wealth there was in those times, more even than in the age of gold, I will now describe the rich life of a captain called João Afonso, who had his home at Mapanche, a very pleasant town located in Mabengoma or Casses. This man lived in such prosperity, so well-provided with everything, that there was little or nothing of prosperous life in Europe which he envied. How different things are here today! How strikingly has the former state of happiness and sufficiency passed away! This man not only used to send many ships to sea in the course of his business, putting his heart and soul aboard them, for heart and soul are to be found in the objects one loves, as the saint said, but he also possessed much property on land, including a large quantity of gold stored in pots. Whereas I formerly instanced him as an example of the richness of the land, what I am going to say about him can be taken as a warning that one should scorn all material things, one should neither yearn for them, nor possess them with excessive passion, since they cannot preserve any man from total ruin. João Afonso, at the height of his prosperity, but like the rich man in the Gospel who was raised up only to fall, because of his (false)

(c) "He that trusteth in his riches will fall" (Proverbs, 11,28)
(d) The rich man has no name: "There was a certain rich man..."(Luke, 15,1). The poor man has a name, "Lazarus". The rich man without mercy: hell; the rich man with mercy: the Kingdom of Heaven through charity; Heaven, because from its influence he receives the earth: "without form and void" (Genesis, 1,2).
confidence in impermanent things, gave a banquet to his captains. Since this wretched man prided himself on being an Epicurean and peradventure was one of those referred to in Scripture, "the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play" (Exodus 32, 6), and in these countries an Epicurean reputation is always cultivated, temperance had no place at his table and the food was too much even for gluttony. How many delicacies did wickedness put on show! Dishes of pride and vanity appeared, and with these things the guests inflated the vainglory of João Afonso. They praised his magnificence, his liberality, his splendor, how different from the banquets of so-and-so where only /f75r/ the meats of avarice were served, and so on. And how could the dish of sensuality fail to be provided by João Afonso, there in Guinca where turpitude cooks the meals and serves at table? They praised him for his neat service and the charm of the servants. So different is your Grace's (they would say) from the service at such and such a captain's, where his guests sit at table never knowing when they will have to abandon it to escape the grimaces, shrieks and ill-humour which persist the whole meal through, and at his table dishes of wrath are more often served than the foodstuffs of the country. What surpasses the delicacies and meats of the devil is the backbiting which surrounds them, the commonest dish and the least boring, the plague of Guinca: this is the sweet at the meal.\(^e\) Whatever the number of delicacies, there is none more tasty, none so savoury, as this vice, which is so unworthy of a Christian.

All these dishes appeared at João Afonso’s table as well as the more common ones. What graces then could be found in the banquet?\(^f\)

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\(^e\) Pliny. The vipers of Arabia are not poisonous: they bite and do not kill; they breed in the shade of the balsam tree, and are content. But we, though brought up in the doctrine of Heaven, are more wicked.

\(^f\) The rich man of the waterwheel, with eyes covered draws water from riches, not for himself but for others, and they suffer hunger. See St. Bernard.
who lack a sense of grace cannot convey one. Disaster came on all. João Afonso had the worst fall, as could be expected of a madman. He wished to be considered God on earth, he who had traded the true God for a god of gold. I myself do not doubt that this insanity was much encouraged by liquor—that liquor which was the cause of the most disobedient of Noah's sons seeing his offspring so greatly cast down, and which the sage said would make a man deny and lose his faith. João Afonso asked his captains this question: 'Gentlemen, what do you think of my good fortune, and of the gold and other riches I possess?'

It is difficult to kick against the pricks. The guests of João Afonso were well acquainted with his folly and extravagance. They did not defer to him as he expected, since God did not permit it. They replied pertinently, because they knew that he excluded God from his affairs and that only a fool would ask this question.

(g) D. Bernard. To possess gold: burden, to love it; filth, to leave it; it distresses and torments (D. Bernard, Serm.1 Amn. Sanctorum). They cannot hide from him the name of trade. "And knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor and blind and naked" (Revelation,3.17; see also in Luke 12). Thus he died in the hospital of Santiago Island. Gold. All precious things, like gold, silver, gems, pearls, etc, these for God. On the road to Hell and nearer to it than Heaven he hides these things like a sweeper (?). He only leaves Heaven in sight of man. And the heavens only try to supply what God hides from him, which is: "their tongue walketh through the earth" (Psalm 73,9),"whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure" (Psalm 17,14). Like dogs searching for a bone in the dust. Thus João Afonso. I am not surprised because they always go about together, like Saints Cosmas and Damian, Mouro and ouro (Moors and money). The sun creates it in darkness, shapes it there, just as you seek out dark places for badly made things. He hints strongly about riches, speaks ill of them, but everyone covets them. See Matthew 6, 24 and 28 and the commentaries: "No man can serve two masters...And why take ye thought for your raiment?"
The reply did not please him greatly. As if imitating the weather at Mapanche, he vomited his venom. Here is João Afonso on earth and God in his heaven: nothingness making itself lord of even less, cosmographer of the Most High, taking as its patrimony what is God's alone: and in God's kingdom the nothingness of João Afonso was less than negation, since he was a son of wrath. Then divine justice, which is slow but sure, began to take vengeance on our rich (fool, who became) rich only in misery, both at sea where he lost all his ships, and on land with the arrival of the Manes. This is the present situation. /f.75v/ The heathen offended the divine bounty, the whites were 'whitened sepulchres', a description which they deserved because of the ruin of the Church. Some of them cared for our religion so little that they needed a label on them reading 'Christian', just as in olden days painters (put labels on figures) because their pictures were so obscure and gave little indication of their subject. The whites who least fear God are so boorish in swallowing the heathen spirit of evil when they get here, that one is less shocked by pagans than by this scum of the earth. These genuine outlaws appear to chose these deserts, like a modern Cain, not in order to repent from their sins but in order to gain full licence and freedom to offend Eternal God, by every possible foul behaviour and irregularity of life, being truly slaves to sin, with as many masters as there are vices. (h)

What shall I say of the woes, of the pains and the travails of these people? What they suffer is difficult to believe. The days they spend in Guinea are like a preparation for the day of eternal (suffering). If they have one good meal, they have three hundred bad ones. Continually in need, they exist under barbarians who are so cruel that they dine off human flesh. Of their spiritual position one might say what was said in another case:

(h) "Having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy, 4,2). So licentious and free that they already bear the mark and seal of Satan, fodder for his cattle. They pay for it. "And ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast" (Revelation, 16,2). Thus God punishes them, drowning some, etc. Who will preach to these?
'How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!' (Luke, 15,17). To speak of their souls, these are so much neglected that they seem like men without them, for they live with the thought of salvation deep buried and forgotten. (i) They pay the price when they die in the forests. Nothing else can be expected of Christians who spend their lives like a vine in the midst of a great moor, deprived of all tending, and exposed on all sides to the depredations of animals. Soul without the hedge and circling wall afforded by the Cross, how can you hope for the Lord's mercy at the end, when you live in disregard of it, not responding to it with the sweet fruit: (of good living) but with fruit entirely bitter, (anticipating) hell fire eternal? How poorly these wretches understand what the Saint said about our spell of life, that we have no purpose in living other than to live for eternity. When they die these unhappy ones truly experience what St. Cyprian declared: "He who lives as if he will never die does not deserve to be comforted at his death by the recollection of Divine Mercy, whose aid he has refused during life". They will remember to their discomfort what the Prophet said, *that the insolent one who pronounces the name of Jesus as he dies is barking like a mad dog, so that he angers Divine Justice /f.76r/ rather than appeasing it.* And what says Job, chapter 7: "You who live in sin, will God hear you?". This then was the state of things before the Conquest. These were the rewards of the devil, his pensions, and the interest he paid. Thus we can say with reason that it was less to punish the loose living of the heathen than to punish the faithless living of these false monks that the Lord sent to this Province the harsh rule of the Manes. (j)

(i) All are disdainful and ungovernable. "And makest men as the fish of the sea" (Habakkuk,1,14). Worse than lions and tigers of Hircania. The fish alone is untamable, it can never be domesticated. So they finish up in the sea of guilt in which we live. How far beyond this are all those to whom the words of the prophet can be applied: "And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp and ... on the cockatrice' den" (Isaiah,11,8). Purity, the mortification of vices, does not appear well-favoured to him: this is to put a hand into "an asp's hole and the cockatrice' den", to take delight in labours for the sake of Christ Our Lord, and they do not live in these deserts for this reason.

(j) The complaint in the Apocalypse referred to all: "Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead" (Revelation,3,1). They lived such heathen lives that they were Christian only in name.