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Africans, Afro-Brazilians and Afro-Portuguese in the Iberian Inquisition in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

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The object of this article is to analyze aspects of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century African culture in the Lusophone Atlantic through new methodological approaches to Portuguese inquisitorial sources. The records of the Inquisition are beginning to serve the needs of historians beyond their original functions as religious documentation. The text examines the confessions of Africans prosecuted or denounced for practices of sorceries provide new insights about the evolution of Afro-Atlantic culture. In this paper, I demonstrate that Africans incorporated elements of the popular Catholicism to reinforce specific aspects of their native or non-Catholic cosmogonies.

Keywords: Africa; Afro-Atlantic religion; Bolsa da Madinga; Brazil; charms; Inquisition; Portuguese empire

1. New approaches to old sources: investigating African religions through Inquisition sources

João da Silva, an Afro-Brazilian slave of Angolan origins brought before the Inquisition, was born around 1724 in Luanda. While still in his native land, he learned the catechism, according to court documents. His testimony to Church authorities provides a window into the religious world of Africans in eighteenth-century Angola:

He said that doesn’t know who his parents or paternal or maternal grandparents were because he left his homeland very young and doesn’t have news of them nor knows with foundation anything more about them beyond that they were all blacks from the Coast of Angola.

And that he is a baptized Christian and it was done in the City of Luanda [Luanda] but he doesn’t know by whom nor in what Church and less who were his godparents. And that he is still not confirmed.

And in as much that he received the sacrament of the Baptism and they taught him Christian doctrine, he went to Churches and in them he heard Mass and preaching, made confessions and took communion and performed most Christian deeds.

And after he was ordered to make [. . .] some signs and to bless and to recite doctrine and know the prayers: Our Father, Ave Maria, Save our Queen creed, and the Commandments of the Law of God and to the Holy Mother Church and all of which he knew. (ANTT, Inquisition of Lisbon. Processos n. 502, Joao da Silva, p. 44)
Disembarking in Salvador around 1734 at the age of ten, João da Silva was taken to the Olho do Peixe plantation in the rural Bahian town of Santo Antonio de Jacobina. The plantation was owned by Manoel Corrêa do Lago. João’s anonymity in the grand history of Atlantic slavery ended when he was caught carrying a leather charm that contained a consecrated communal wafer. João recounted that one day in 1745, while on an errand for his master, he passed Manoel de Barros, supposedly a fugitive slave owned by Ana Antonia de Barros of Minas Gerais. João gave the fugitive slave lodging and food before continuing on his errand. In exchange for the favor, João insisted, a grateful Manoel gave him a small leather charm. Despite João’s claim that Manoel was a fugitive slave from Mina Gerais, six witnesses, who were queried in the process, testified that the slave, also known as Manuino, belonged to two priests from the rural areas around Jacobina: Luiz da Rocha and Manoel da Rocha.

After taking possession of the charm, João da Silva hid it in his house. He claimed to only carry it when he was afraid. One day while procuring flour, two months after receiving the charm from Manoel, João carried it with him on an errand. When he returned to the plantation, his owner, Manoel Corrêa do Lago, ordered him to take some chickens to the town of Jacobina. His master accompanied João on his errand. Manoel Corrêa directed João to the house of the vicar-general. It was a trap. Priest João Mendes waited in the vicar-general’s house, ready to confront João. The officials arrested him after discovering the charm. The priest opened the charm to show everyone its contents. The charm contained was a square stone, a clove of garlic, a lead grain, a paper with São Marcos’ prayer written on it. The consecrated communion wafer was wrapped with the paper of the prayer.

Although incarcerated for his crimes, after a short period, João broke free from his shackles and returned to his owner’s plantation. The priest ordered him arrested again. He managed to escape a second time, returning to his master’s plantation, before being arrested a second time. Soon afterwards, he was sent to Salvador in preparation for the journey to Portugal. In Lisbon, he insisted to the inquisitors that he had won the charm bundle from the aforementioned black, Manoel. The slave told him that the charm was ‘good relic’ and contained a ‘consecrated particle’. He also declared that he didn’t know that it was wrong to wear the charm.

João da Silva formed part of the vast numbers of Central Africans carried across the Atlantic to Brazil. His story illuminates the emerging transculturation, the mixing of traditional African religious elements with Catholicism. I use João’s history to point out that the depositions from the Inquisition, by the very nature of the information they preserve, are important sources for uncovering African history and the continent’s relationship with the Atlantic system. The inquisitorial documents also reveal the manner in which Africans and their descendents recreated or transformed their religious traditions in the New World.

When dealing with sources produced by the Inquisition, Carlo Ginzburg (1999, p. 208) points out that it is important to never lose sight of the fact that the documents are far from neutral. As judgments against defendants, these texts are dialogic and polyphonic, full of contradictory voices. The texts are contaminated by European religious frames of reference – spread by preachers, theologians, and jurists – about witches and demons. In general, ‘the defendants’ answers were not more than echoes of the inquisitors’ questions’. Ginzburg urges historians to adopt anthropological methods in order to read the accused depositions as an entry door
that allows the researcher to understand the universe and the social relations of the defendants. In short, the historian’s task is to read beneath the inquisitor’s stereotyped discourse to uncover the faith, values, and habits of the accused. Recent studies that examine blacks and indigenous of Portuguese America imprisoned by the Inquisition utilize the methodological approach suggested by Ginzburg (Calainho 2000; Marcussi 2006; Mott 1986, 1993, 1994; Souza 2002; Vainfas 1989, 1995, 1997).

There is additional research that uses the depositions generated by the Inquisition to reveal the dynamic relations between Africans and Europeans as well as black religious beliefs between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Bethencourt and Havik 2004, pp. 21–27; Havik 1996, 2004a, 2004b; Pantoja 2004, 2006).

Besides anthropology, Ginzburg borrows from European literary theory to affirm the necessity of going beyond the idea of causality as a means for historical interpretation. History, in Ginzburg’s view, should be able to recount the reverse of what is documented. In other words, historians should read between the lines of official history – excavating its silences to extract its other histories and histories of others. Following Ginzburg’s lead, I am using the testimony on charms found in inquisitorial archives to identify magical practices while illuminating the boundaries between African knowledge and Catholic knowledge.

What do the new methodological approaches to the Lusophone Inquisition reveal? The process illuminates religious and cultural practices of blacks in the Atlantic complex through a close reading of ecclesiastical records from the eighteenth century (Souza 2002, pp. 65–73). The records involving magical practices allow historians to understand the tense relations between different layers of society. It becomes possible to see how the rural population practiced popular forms of Catholicism in the face of shortages of priests and a lack of churches. The records across the Afro-Lusophone space demonstrate blacks were combining African practices with Catholicism.

In the studies, for example, of sorcery and magical practices among Afro-Brazilians, there is a tendency to explore denunciations for motivation of the suspected crime against the church (Nogueira 2004; Silva 2002, 2004; Sweet 2004). Researchers usually identify the intention to harm their masters or their master’s economic interests. Some slaves used their charms to protect themselves from their masters or the risks of their occupation. The slaves used African religious practices to seek security and relief in the slave context. However, the use of magic extended beyond the master–slave relationship. Magic was also used as a resource in cases of personal disputes between slaves as well as a tool to resolve disputes. Free blacks used charms for similar reasons. There are many cases of Africans in Brazil using the charm for self-protection and not as a means to harm anybody.

Slave societies of the Black Atlantic were marked by cultural heterogeneity and by demographic and cultural creolization. Africans borrowed the religious practices of their masters and agents of the Catholic Church. Blacks redefined the Christian objects such as crosses and communal wafers in light of their own African cosmologies. The charm became a means of protecting themselves from the supernatural world and a tool for solving problems of this world.

Before the influence of the Marxist school, historical interpretations created an image of the passive slave, culturally constrained by the white world, and obedient to the commands and ill treatment of their masters. Recent studies, utilizing new
sources and new methodological approaches to social history, paint a more complex picture of slavery that goes beyond the thematic focus on accommodation. Slaves did not simply accommodate slavery. New interpretative theories suggest analyzing slavery through the prism of the negotiation. The adaptation of the African to slavery included using Christianity as a platform for dialogue is an important fact. Through the practice of Catholicism, Africans and Creoles incorporated new practices, redefined within their own cultural codes, into their existing religious rites.

2. Catholicism and the Other: the construction of new identities

*Bolsas de mandiga* (charms) have confused a number of scholars who advance claims that the name of the charm also reflects the group that created it. Daniela Calainho, for example, studied the use of charms by blacks in Portugal. She reinforces the hypothesis of the existence of a relationship between charms and ‘ethnic-cultural identity’ of black slaves in Portugal. She argues in her work that the Mandingas, ‘Guinean people included in the group called Yoruba-Nago’, were the most frequent users of charms (Calainho 2000, p. 165). The author claims the ethnic origin of most of the Atlantic Diaspora fetishists originated from Guinea. Calainho argues that the *bolsas de mandiga* represent the outcome from an earlier encounter between African traditional religions and Islam in West Africa, especially Mali. According to the author, after the penetration of Islam in Black Africa, synthetic ‘Islamic-fetishist’ practices emerged. The amulet was further spread by the expansion of the Mandingos across western Africa, including in the areas that Portugal established political and commercial relations (Calainho 2000, p. 165).

Calainho contends the *bolsas de mandiga* further spread with the emergence of the Black Atlantic. In her interpretation, Mandingas, also called Mandingos, spread their charms and creolized forms of Islamic fetishism to African ethnic groups as they disembarked in Portugal and in other parts of the Empire. She argues that ‘from its Islamic origin, *bolsas de mandiga* spread to groups of Bantu origin, other groups of Africans, and advanced outside of Africa, already marking its presence in Portugal and in colonial Brazil, and in Salvador of 1835 [date of an uprising by Afro-Brazilian Muslims in the city]’ (Calainho 2000, p. 173). Contrary to Calainho’s classification, the Mandinga don’t belong to the Yoruba-Nago linguistic group, but are considered Mande from Upper Guinea region of West Africa. In contrast, the people of Mina Coast (Lower Guinea), constituting the group most denounced in Portugal, belonged to the linguistic subgroup Yoruba-Nago. The Iorubás people make up part of the group Kwa of Low Guinea (Silva 1992, p. 40). Additionally, the slaves involved in the Muslim Revolt of 1835 in Salvador, although they carried amulets with Arabic inscriptions, were not from Upper Guinea.

An analysis of the Inquisition inquiries involving blacks accused of sorcery shows that solidarity among slaves did not depend on the origins of the slaves. The data show close relationships existed among freedmen and slaves as well as Africans and creoles. I argue Christianity became a privileged platform that Africans utilized to establish new identities and create solidarity in the world of slavery. The charm was a material sign produced from encounters between several different cultural groups. Although the charm was pan-African, its contents varied, depending on who carried it and who produced it. The prayers inserted in the charms were written in agreement with the expected objective of the bearer.
The Christian missions that existed among the natives of Guinea were superficial; they lasted less than half a century. Therefore, the Africans shipped to Brazil, originating in the West African ports of Cacheu, Joala, Cape Verde, between the end of the seventeenth century and beginning of the eighteenth century, didn’t come marked by the experience with the Christianity. They were not baptized during the Middle Passage either. These groups did have previous contact with Islam and other traditional faiths. Africans were not abandoning traditional practices, but were mixing old practices with new ones. If we think of culture as something dynamic, constructed through contact with other cultures, and not as a code of pure and static behaviors, comportments, and habits, we will understand that the Africans and their descendants gave old meanings to new practices.

The charm is the result of cultural miscegenation that occurred in the Atlantic world. The first denunciations appeared in Lisbon, where Guineans carried to Portugal ‘animists’ and Muslims who used amulets mixed their previous creolized practices with elements of Catholicism. In Brazil, these creolized forms underwent further transformation when mixed with Bantu perspectives on the power of the spirit world and the mobilization of spiritual power in material objects.

The mandinga charm is a product of the Atlantic world of slavery and colonization. It was the material result from contact between different cultures in a situation of oppression and misfortune as well as an environment where non-Catholic practices were viewed as demonic. The word Mandinga, from the fifteenth century until the present, retains the same meaning that missionaries and European travelers, especially those published by the Mission of Guinea (that corresponds to the coast of Cacheu, Sierra Leone and its interior), where they were surprised to see people everywhere carrying amulets. In this initial area of Portuguese contacts, the languages belong to the ‘West-Atlantic’ subgroup: fula, serere, jalofo, noon, diola, balante, tent, beafada, pajade, banhum, nalu, bijagos and other. It is important to emphasize the absence of indications of the existence of these people in Portuguese America (Santos, 2008, pp. 91–98, 110).

The evidence demonstrates therefore, that there is no direct relationship among the amulets used by the blacks in Lisbon (classified as bolsas de mandinga by the inquisitors) and the Mandinga ethnic group. None of the accused belonged to the sub-group Mandé or West African Atlantic. In the eighteenth century, the term stopped having an ethnic connotation in the Portuguese Empire. It had developed other, non-ethnic, meanings: Mandinga started to signify divination and Mandinguero as African sorcerer.

3. Africans in the Lusophone Inquisition

The inspector-general of the Inquisition, Gaspar Vogado (a rich, mestizo merchant from Cape Verde), traveled to Guinean coast in 1661. While visiting Vila Quente, where most of the Christianized Africans lived, he received a group of accusations against Crispina Peres, Francisca Monteira, Isabel Lopes, Vilac, Sebastião Fernandes, and Henrique Marques (Havik 2002, p. 171). Crispina Peres was accused of sorcery, superstitious faiths and adoration of the fetishes. According to the witnesses, besides Cristina having a fetish in her house, she fed one of the local fetishes, located on the periphery of the settlement, leading rituals with palm wine and blood of chickens. The witness claimed that she directed other pagan blacks,
mainly black women, to pour chicken blood and palm wine on the fetish. A resident of Cacheu declared that Nã Crispina (Afro-Portuguese Creole for Senhora or Mrs Crispina) sent money to the villages of Bugundo and Sara to pay for the jambacosses or healers to favor her marriage with her future husband, captain Jorge Gonçalves Francês. She had also organized pagan ceremonies to bless one of the sea voyages of her husband by throwing cow’s blood on the base of the mast to guarantee the success of his trip. And when her daughter fell ill, she called a healer to divine who was responsible for her daughter’s illness as well as to determine how to treat and cure the disease (Havik 2004b, pp. 99–116).

Many women condemned for the practice of sorcery were sent into exile in São Tome, Brazil or Angola (Pantoja 2004). Crispina Peres, however, did not receive this punishment. After being arrested, she was taken to Lisbon. She waited in Portugal for four years before receiving a hearing. She proclaimed her innocence, unable to conceive of her actions as sins. Local church officials, she claimed, had given her permission for the ceremonies that she conducted. She also alleged that all the residents of Cacheu utilized the jambacosses and healers as well as worshipped local spirits and carried gris-gris (amulets): ‘Inside of Villa of Cacheu, almost all the Christians carry them, principally the men that are going to war and the women that give light [provide divination]’ (Hakik 2004b, p. 109). Crispina’s husband sent letters to the inquisitors defending her. He justified his wife’s actions by arguing that her practices reflected the rudimentary religious instruction that she had received. His letters to the inquisitors also warned that his wife’s imprisonment could trigger a revolt of the local population against the Portuguese, especially since the local Papel king intended to order 12,000 armed warriors to the trading post of Cacheu. He further informed the authorities that his wife was the victim of her enemies, rival commercial traders. Finally, he claimed that these popular religious practices were not sins in their territory; even the visiting inspector, Gaspar Vogado, who initiated the prosecution of his wife, also used local healers to treat his diseases. As a result of these negotiations, Crispina Perez received a light punishment: after a public renunciation of her religious practices as part of her auto da fé in Lisbon, she was ordered to return to Cacheu to complete her penances and receive proper religious instruction (Havik 2004b, p. 110).

Nã Crispina’s case was a rare occurrence on the Guinean coast. Only four denunciations were made against blacks in the Guinean region. Besides Nã Crispina, there were the cases of Andreza Fernandes, Bento Rodrigues and Antonia Dias. At the end of the seventeenth century, Captains Luis Pina de Araújo, Diogo Coelho de Sá, Jorge Carvalho Moutinho, and Francisco Vaz Horta made accusations against Antônia Dias, free black of Mandingan ethnicity, who resided in central plaza of Farim, another Afro-Portuguese trading center. She was accused of practicing sorcery, making a pact with the devil, invoking the devil, killing children, and mystically making a dog appear out of thin air (Silva 2002, p. 210). Despite the charges, she was not prosecuted. Accusations against blacks were more common in other areas of the Black Atlantic, places like Angola, Brazil, and Portugal.

In Angola, Vicente de Morais was denounced to the Inquisition of Lisbon in 1715 for carrying a ‘Mandingo charm’ (bolsa da mandinga). He was a mulatto soldier who served in the ‘black warriors’ unit, a battalion comprising natives who were considered vassals of the king and forced to serve the crown. Morais served at Muxima fort, defending the boundary between the Angolan interior and the colonial
trading posts along the coast. The fort was located next to an important religious pilgrimage site, home of Nossa Senhora de Muxima (Our Lady of Muxima, a local adaptation of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception), and church. Vicente de Morais was accused of carrying a small saint that was stolen from the altar of the Muxima church as well as making charms that contained Christian prayers. There are other Inquisition trial records, involving Angolans and Congolese, which have not yet been analyzed by historians.

The charm was referred to by several names: Paulista, Sallamanca, Cape Verde and Mandinga. The defendant admitted that he received a protective charm of sewn calico when he was serving at the fortress of Massangano; he always carried the charm close to his body. During his fights with white soldiers, Morais recounted, he had received several jabs, but he was not wounded. He attributed his survival to the powers of the charm bundle. Another white soldier from the Muxima fort had given him a charm for protection against attacks. Although he had not used it, he lent it to another black man, Domingos, who never returned it. This detail indicates that in Angola, as in Brazil and in Lisbon, charms were widely used by whites and blacks. Morais’s Mandingo charm became well known throughout the fortress, including the chaplain. After several attempts, he was caught carrying the charm around his waist. The confiscated charm contained prayers and a small stone of altar of the church. Morais was exiled to Portugal where he was condemned to forced labor for unorthodox religious practices.

The Guinean and Angolan coasts were important areas of cultural contact between the Portugal and Africa. Catholicism emerged as the sanctioned Afro-Atlantic religious practice. It was promoted and defended by the Catholic Church, the Portuguese Crown, and the local African elites economically tied to the developing Portuguese empire. Despite the widespread support for orthodox Catholicism, creolized religious rituals that reflected both societies and religious traditions were widely practiced by whites and blacks. The charm symbolized the persistence of local beliefs. The charmed represented a corruption of orthodox religious practice; therefore, it became a target of the Inquisition. Ña Crispina and Vicente de Morais were both baptized Africans, but were arrested by the Inquisition authorities for openly using charms. In Portugal and Brazil, a similar process of creolization was occurring, tied into the Atlantic circuits that led back to West and Central Africa. Brazil and Portugal became important arenas for defending Catholic orthodoxy against the challenges represented by Afro-Catholic practices and beliefs. Afro-Brazilians and Afro-Portuguese were also denounced and persecuted for using charms.

Manuel da Piedade, a native of Bahia, was renowned among blacks in Porto, Portugal, where he lived, for carrying a prayer of ‘Just Judgment’ as well as an amulet to protect himself. Manuel also sold the elements required to make charms (bolsa da mandinga). His customers denounced him to Inquisition authorities: two enslaved blacks provided testimony against Manuel da Piedade in the course of providing confessions about their own activities with Afro-Catholic practices (Calainho 2002, pp. 167–169). One of his clients and denouncers was Luiz da Lima, a slave of the canon Luiz de Carvalho Povoas. Luiz da Lima, a native of Ouidah (Mina area of the West African coast) and resident of Porto. Lima told the inquisitor in 1722 that prior to being brought to Portugal he resided in Pernambuco, Brazil. It was there that he had acquired a Mandingo charm from another slave named Francisco. He opened it
to discover its contents; later, he would make charms with similar contents. Once he resettled in Portugal, he made and sold the charms to the residents of Porto. His fame spread quickly because he received the ingredients to make charms directly from suppliers in Pernambuco, Brazil. He sold many charms in Porto. Among their customers were Afro-Portuguese of Porto and Afro-Brazilian slaves brought to Porto by their Brazilian masters. Luis da Lima, once denounced, implicated other ‘sorcerers’ he had known. All the people he denounced were natives of Brazil like Manuel da Piedade (ANTT, Inquisition of Coimbra, 1722, Processos n.1630).

One of the more provocative proceedings, in the context of considering the circulation of Africans and the appropriation of European cultural elements in the Atlantic system, is José Francisco Pereira’s case. He was born in the first years of the eighteenth century along the Mina coast. After being captured in his native land, José crossed the Atlantic, bound for Brazil. He disembarked at the major city of Pernambuco, Recife. He was baptized as a Catholic there. His initial buyer carried him to Rio de Janeiro. Later, he was sold again and taken to another region in central Brazil, Minas Gerais. He then returned across the Atlantic with his new master to Portugal. After arriving in Lisbon, José was arrested in 1730 at the age of 30 for the practice of sorcery. He confessed to the Inquisition authorities that he learned to fabricate charms in Brazil. He bought his first amulets in Rio de Janeiro. He deconstructed his purchases in order to learn how to make them. Once he learned what ingredients were required, he began reproducing them.

Because José lacked literacy, he asked other people to write the prayers that were inserted in the charms. When José lived in Recife, he hired a student, the son of a pharmacist. In Lisbon, he employed Antonio Guedes, a 20-year-old male servant in the Monastery of Salzedas, to serve as his mystical scribe. The charm bundles contained prayers blessed on the church’s altar. It is important to note that the slaves of priests were important actors in Afro-Atlantic charm production and distribution. A similar pattern of activity was also observed in Brazil.

José Francisco Pereira gave the job of ‘charging’ the charms by secretly placing them on the church altar to José Francisco Pedroso, an assistant in the local church. The two men were connected through their masters; their owners were brothers. Pedroso was already facilitating the blessing of charms prayers prior to performing this service for Pereira. Following his arrest, Pedroso recounted details of his baptism in Rio de Janeiro as well as his involvement with the fabrication of charms in Brazil. After relocating to Portugal, he gained fame as a maker of powerful charms. Local blacks sought him out to purchase his amulets. Questioned about his clients, Pedroso provided a long list of colonial blacks circulating along the circuits of the Atlantic. The list included José, a slave from Rio de Janeiro working on the ships transporting goods between Bahia and Maranhão; Antonio, owned by Priest from Alcântara; Miguel, servant of a priest from São Paulo who later sold him in Bahia; Ventura, owned by a businessman from Rio de Janeiro. Pedroso also implicated blacks from the poor quarter of Lisbon, Alfâma, whose names he had forgotten. His fellow enslaved partner, José Francisco Pereira, further confessed to outsourcing his work when he was too busy to meet his customer’s demands. He allowed his friend from Angola, Simão, to make protection charms for his clients. This revelation marked Simão as a sorcerer (mandingueiro) too.

The inquisitorial proceedings of Antonio Mascarenhas also reveal the Atlantic connections of Africans that circulated in the Portuguese empire, connected by their
Mascarenhas was a young boy when he was captured in Angola and dispatched in a slaver for Funchal on the island of Madeira. He traveled to many other important outposts of the empire: Rio de Janeiro, São Miguel, Lisbon, and Mazagão. It was his passage to Brazil in 1734 where the defendant became acquainted with the Mandingo charm. In Lisbon, Ventura assisted José Francisco Pereira in the production of Mandingo charms. Several people in Lisbon denounced Ventura in 1743. He described during his testimony the characteristics of the charm: ‘A piece of paper painted red with several illustrations depicting the images of a crucified Jesus Christ, a gargoyle with a human face, and many other images in the form of tridents among others’ (ANTT, Inquisition of Lisbon, Processos n. 254, Antonio Mascarenhas; Souza, 2002, p. 219). He claimed that the charm provided protection against injurious wounds, fights, and disputes.

The black histories preserved in the archives of the Inquisition highlight the diverse origins of the persecuted. They also demonstrate the high degree of movement across the Atlantic system. The persecuted originated from various parts of Africa and the African Diaspora: Angola, Guinea, Mina, Brazil, and Portugal. Often, their denunciation happened in a place different from their birthplace. Although of diverse origins, Afro-Atlantic religious practices built on a foundation of Catholicism and indigenous African religious systems connected the persecuted blacks. Charms (mandinga da bolsa) became the material manifestation of Afro-Atlantic religious practice as well as the evidence of religious heresy.

The thesis goes beyond the creolization and African survivals debate initiated by Franklin Frazier and Melville Herskovits in the 1940s. Europe and Africa as well as African and European cultures were reshaped by the dialogic encounter that Fernando Ortiz called transculturation. The launch of the Portuguese trading empire in the 1440s opened up more intense contact between the Iberian Peninsula and Africa. The growing engagement produced unintended cultural transformations in both places. These new cultural products circulated throughout the whole system with the sailors, crown agents, traders, slaves, priests, exiles, and soldiers that manned the circuits.

The historical documentation suggests that the denomination ‘mandinga’ as in bolsa da mandinga didn’t exclusively refer to the Mandingo ethnic group and its particular religious practices. Instead, the term was a widely used term to represent religious ideas and symbols not considered part of the orthodox Catholicism. The records reveal that the practice of using protection amulets was not limited to Africans, Afro-Brazilians, or Afro-Portuguese. Records from the Inquisition illuminate the use of Afro-Atlantic healing and religious articles and ceremonies among whites in Africa, Brazil, and Portugal. Moreover, the charms reflected a mixing of Catholic and indigenous African elements. They were not survivals of a distant past, but new products reflecting a dialogic encounter of various peoples across the Atlantic system and beyond.

4. The Inquisition in the Lusophone Empire
The Portuguese Inquisition developed slowly in the first half of the sixteenth century. The Portuguese crown first requested a tribunal from the Holy Office in 1518. A subordinate tribunal, dependent on Rome, operated from 1531 until a Portuguese
controlled tribunal finally emerged 1536. Tribunals were set up in Lisbon, Evora, and Coimbra (Saunders 1982, p. 158). The Inquisition arrived even later in the areas under Portuguese influence. Two factors prevented the Inquisition from developing in the empire simultaneously with tribunals in Portugal. One factor was the tenuous and diverse political authority Portugal maintained over its trading posts and emerging colonies in Africa, Asia, and Brazil. The Portuguese empire depended on alliances and trading agreements rather than full-scale colonization. Even within the same geographic arena (e.g. India), the Portuguese empire faced diverse political circumstances as the relationships and alliances varied from location to location. Even when the Portuguese exercised significant political control, the shortage of religious personnel and ecclesiastical institutions also hampered its rapid expansion beyond Portugal.

The Tribunal of Goa was the only Portuguese tribunal created outside of the metropole. Religious authorities created it in 1560, 30 years after moving the political and administrative capital to Goa. The tribunal served the entire State of India, a large territory comprising Portuguese outposts in the East from Macau off the coast of China to East Africa. If compared to other imperial enclaves, the Portuguese Inquisition was more aggressive in Goa, where some 14,000 people were accused. The creation of the tribunal followed two decades of increasingly aggressive actions directed against Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, including the destruction of Hindu temples. The initial target of the tribunal was New Christians. Later, in the second half of the seventeenth century, the Inquisition turned its attention to persecuting local converts accused of continued devotion to Hinduism (Bethencourt and Havik 2004, p. 22).

Unlike in Portuguese Asia, tribunals in Portugal handled the cases and evidence from West Africa and Brazil. The Inquisition in Brazil largely focused on New Christians. Religious authorities also monitored sodomy, heresy, and ‘concubinato’ (illegal marriage) (Vainfas 1989). The first and second Brazilian visitations by the Holy Office to Brazil occurred in 1591 and in 1623, respectively. More than a thousand natives and residents of Brazil were denounced. The majority of cases were against new Christians, while a smaller number of blacks and Indians were denounced. In Portuguese America, blacks constitute a small class of individuals processed by the Inquisition. The majority of complaints leveled by the clergy and white population against blacks fell into the category of demonic or magical practices.

In the Lusophone Atlantic, Brazil followed Lisbon with the largest number of Africans denounced to the Inquisition. The majority of the cases against Afro-Brazilians involved sorcery suspicions. The diverse ethnic origins of Brazilian charm users show the historical emergence of that ritual practice as a pan-African religious instrument. The ethnic diversity of those involved reveals a shared cosmology among Africans and African descendants. Of a total of 119 Brazilians accused by the Inquisition for the crime of sorcery between 1590 and 1780, Mello e Souza discovered 17 people denounced for possessing charms (Souza 2002, pp. 210–226). Among the accused, a majority of those denounced for using charms were blacks born in the region of Bahia, followed by creoles from Pernambuco, indigenous of Pará, blacks from Minas Gerais and, lastly, Africans, residing in Brazil, from Angola and West Africa.
Across the Atlantic in Africa, the Holy Office Tribunal operated around the river zones of Guinea and Angola during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. The tribunal performed diverse judicial services: validating royal licenses, granting permission to leave the Portuguese kingdom, organizing inquisitorial and pastoral visits, processing denunciations, and passing judgments against the accused. In Guinea, there were 1800 accusations sent to Lisbon; the inquisitors only classified 1503 as crimes within the jurisdiction of the Inquisition. Of this total one, the tribunal pursued cases against 29 people. Eventually, 18 people received sentences, including three black natives of Guinea. In Angola, an inquisitorial visit resulted in fewer than 100 people denounced. Most of the denunciations involved New Christians and Old Christians. A single denunciation was lodged against an Angola black, but religious authorities refused to persecute him.

The action of the Inquisition was limited on the African side because the authorities largely operated along the African coast. The interior was not under their direct control and the officials found it difficult to impose their imperatives beyond the coastal enclaves. Besides, the Inquisition could not pursue the 'gentios' (heathens), limiting its jurisdiction to baptized Africans and settlers from Europe and other parts of the empire. An analysis of statements from the denounced and witnesses, as well as of the crimes for which were sentenced, allows us to infer that the Inquisition in the Guinean coast as well as the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe was concerned mainly with the presence of New Christians. Filipa Ribeiro da Silva argues the articulation of the Inquisition in Africa was a means of intimidating the population of the coastal enclaves, reinforcing the local powers of some white groups. Therefore, the practices that didn’t alter the effective political and economical order were ignored (Silva 2002, p. 267).

In Portugal, by contrast, the norms championed by the Council of Trent (1545–1563) were more effectively translated into formal and informal regulations that shaped social, moral, and religious behaviors. The experience on the coast of West and Central Africa was very different. In the areas of Guinea, where the Inquisition operated, the power of the Catholic Church was weak and the level of instruction inconsistent. The Europeans and Luso-Africans (lancados) did not receive daily spiritual guidance given the absence of secular and regular clergymen. The evangelizing missions that occurred between 1604 and 1617 to convert Africans were largely unsuccessful, mainly because the Africans tended to combine aspects of their native cultural practices with elements of the Christianity. This contradicted the goal of the Inquisition’s efforts to homogenize Catholic practice. The Church and Crown’s hegemonic intentions were thwarted by resident whites who also adopted African religious beliefs and practices.

The performance of the Inquisition in Angola has been rarely studied. José da Silva Horta conducted the most recent and significant research on the Angolan Inquisition (Horta 1988, 1997). Horta’s research examines the first round of inquisitorial inquiries between 1596 and 1598. The most reliable contemporary data from the period can be found in the papers of Pero Rodrigues, a Jesuit priest who served as inspector-general of spiritual and temporary matters in Angola. During his service in the region, he requested the creation of a survey capable of cataloging crimes of interest to the Inquisition. Denounced crimes included: Judaism, Protestantism, propositions against the church, heresy, blasphemy, crimes of a sexual nature, and religious negligence.
Another priest, Jorge Pereira, Superior of the mission, aggressively sought out Christians who ignored or disrespected Church dogma. A total of 46 witnesses came forward to accuse 96 others of spiritual crimes. Most of those denounced and informers were resident of Luanda, the main imperial outpost in the region. The inquiry was held in the town of São Paulo of ‘Kingdom of Angola’. The accusations were similar to crimes recorded in the other parts of the empire – Luanda, Lisbon, Brazil, and São Tome. Merchants involved in slave trafficking, the New Christians and Old Christians from the empire represented the groups most represented among those denounced. The witnesses were respected members of the Old Christian communities of Angola and Congo, because they previously exercised judicial functions for the imperial authorities. Acting in community solidarity, they largely denounced to the authorities New Christians, who also represented threats to their commercial activities.

On 24 April 1693, almost a century after the inquiry discussed above, Governor Gonçalo da Costa de Menezes requested another inquisitorial inquiry in Central Africa. The Governor sent the King of Portugal a long letter, describing how the residents had returned to the old superstitions. He requested the return of the Inquisition to rigorously reprimand the guilty parties. The Governor of Angola’s letter did not refer to native blacks, but to the Portuguese residents, including Jews and New Christians (Brásio 1965, Vol. XVI, pp. 296–297). Once again, evidence of the Inquisition in Africa focuses on colonial agents, traders, and residents.

5. New roads of research on the Iberian Inquisition

The study of African use of amulets for Africans is not limited to the Lusophone Atlantic. In the colonies of Spain, there were Africans using Catholic ingredients to make their ‘paquets kongo’ (Vanhee 2002, p. 253). The ways in which blacks understood Christianity is a key point of the analysis to be undertaken. Blacks interpreted Christianity in light of African cosmology. The communal wafer, representing the Christ body, was a sacred relic in which blacks sought to protect their own bodies. The prayers didn’t have an orthodox Christian connotation, entering in contact with god, but a means of building a unique discourse of protection. The other Catholic symbols – altar stones, candles, crosses, etc. – were powerful elements that could be used on a daily basis by blacks in the Atlantic world.

In the Central African cosmology, Christian objects were associated with minkisi (ingiques) of the Congolese tradition. This form of joining different things recalls the Congolese slave Makandal in Haiti. In 1750, he provoked fear in the white population by distributing charms to blacks. The charms were supposed to make Afro-Haitians immortal and capable of poisoning whites. He was persecuted, imprisoned, and later, hanged. The authorities found him with Catholic elements that were used in the Voudou ceremonies in the eighteenth century: ‘[…] grave earth, preferably from graves of baptized children, nails, and herbs, bound together and envelopes in a piece of cloth, roots of the fig and the banana tree, and holy water, holy wax, holy bread, and holy incense, […]’ (Vanhee 2002, pp. 258–259). Everything was tied up in a big piece of fabric to form a type of fardel that would be dipped in holy water. The action of wrapping and tying everything together with cloth and string was essential to activate the effectiveness of the object.
Similar to the ‘paquetes kongo’ possessed by Makandal, Dompele carried with the same type of charm with him when he was arrested. The arrested mulatto left a detailed description of the content of the charm bundle that he carried: ‘several packets made of red, white, or blue cloth, all firmly tied with tied with a few feathers sticking out, besides pieces of wood, white wax, glass, and the like’ (Vanhee 2002, pp. 252–253). In Mexico and Colombia, the agents of the tribunal of the Inquisition examined several cases of Africans who were mixing Catholic and African elements in their magic and revelations, in addition to using amulets (Lewis, 2003; Thornton 2004, pp. 348–349).

This research is important because it intends to fill the gaps in the studies about the Inquisition in Africa and the Diaspora. The study abandons the persecution’s point of view. Instead, the new approaches through inquisitorial sources permit novel cultural inter-penetration of cultural production in the Black Atlantic. I intend to further analyze inquisitorial sources from Angola and Brazil to illuminate how European and African traditions were combined and redefined by the subjects that circulated at Atlantic. I am especially interested in investigating the charm bundle and sorcery accusations in the Lusophone Atlantic.

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Notes
1. Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (ANTT). Inquisição de Lisboa. Processo n. 502 – Escravo João da Silva, Native of Angola. João da Silva also shows up in the records under the other names he was known by: João Curto, João Congo (Congo João), and João Preto (Black João). When he was imprisoned in 1754 he declared that he was around 30 years old.
2. Carreira (1961) explains the basic meaning of the term: ‘In a generic way, all of the individuals that exercise any function, wide or reduced, that it involves the accomplishment of magic rites, they take the Creole designation of Jambacosse or Djambaco [the men]’ (Grifos do autor).
3. Andreza Fernandes, free, native and resident in the Island of the Prince, denounced in 1771. Her crime went to put a cross in the ground of the church during mass and to jump on the same three times. Bento Rodrigues or of Jesus, black man, native of Santiago and resident of the same island, sentenced in 1647, because he ‘faked’ having had a revelation of the Virgin Mary. Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais/Torre do Tombo. Inquisição de Lisboa, proceeding n. 8867.
4. I am now beginning on a historical research project on the theme ‘Africans in the Luso-Atlantic Inquisition: The Inquisition in Angola’, supported by the Seminar on the History Atlantic World, Harvard University.

References


