

Robert Piętek

Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities

Christianity and the formation of the ideology of power in Soyo in the 17th century

Abstract

The aim of the article is to present the role of the Christian elements in the formation of the ideology of power in Soyo in the mid of the 17th century. Thanks to its location, the province of Soyo played an important role in Kongo's relations with Europe. Its location also meant that European influences in this province were stronger than in the rest of the Kingdom of Kongo. A permanent mission of the Capuchin order in Soyo was established as early as 1645. The province became virtually independent from Kongo in the 1640s. By that time, the political elite had formed an ideology of power largely based on the traditional elements of the Kongo culture. While it contained references to Christianity, the emphasis was put on the separateness and uniqueness of Soyo gained in victorious military conflicts with Kongo. The use of the Christian elements in rituals caused occasional conflicts between the secular authorities and the Capuchins.

Keywords: Soyo, Kongo, Christianity, ideology of power

1. Introduction

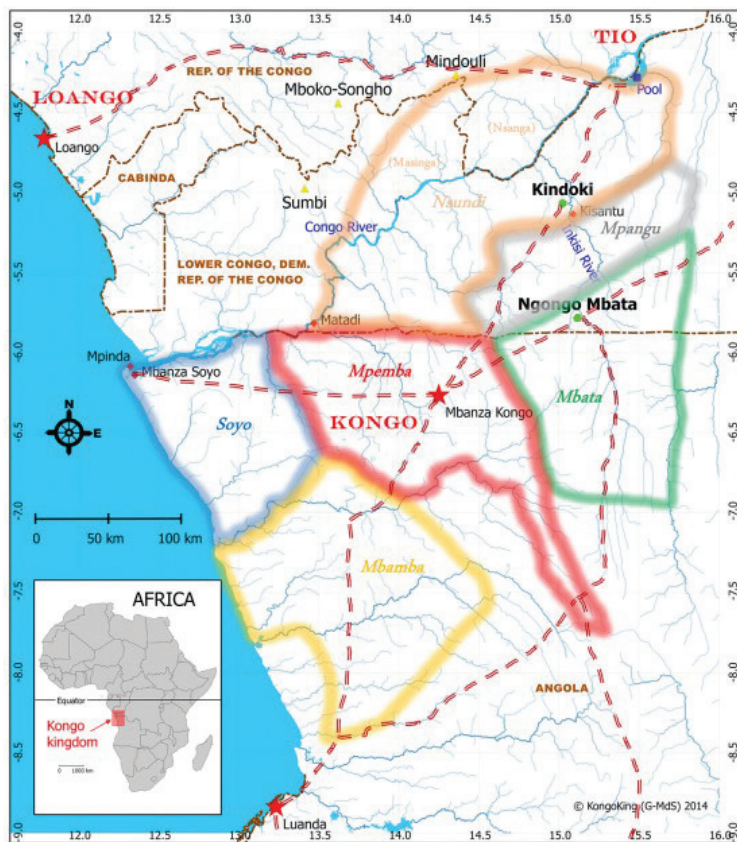
During the early modern period, Kongo constituted a fascinating example of an African state whose ruler and a considerable amount of political elites were interested in maintaining close relations with Europe, from the very first contacts established with the Portuguese toward the end of the 15th century. It resulted in

the adoption of Christianity by the political elites of the country, as well as in the introduction of a number of European institutions and standards. The custom of using Christian names was expanded among Kongoleses (Dapper 1686: 350, Heywood & Thornton 2007: 208-209). However, this did not signify that the previous institutions, beliefs and customs disappeared completely. Nevertheless, gradually Christianity became an important element of the ideology of power in Kongo. In 1639, king of Kongo Alvaro VI (1636-1641) addressed a letter to the *Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith* (Latin: *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*) asking for priests to be sent to Kongo. The Congregation reached the decision to dispatch the Capuchins (Cuvelier & Jadin 1954: 503, Cavazzi 1965: II, § 120, 247). The group of the Italian Capuchins enlarged by an addition of seven Spanish Capuchins arrived in Kongo's province Soyo on 25th May 1645, which had just gained independence. The Capuchins founded their post at first in Soyo. Afterwards the posts were also established in the capital of Kongo and other places throughout the kingdom (Bontinck 1964: 26-29, Jadin 1975: 658-696).

2. Tensions between the Capuchins and Dom Daniel

In 1649, in Soyo a conflict arose between the Italian Capuchin missionary Bonaventura da Corella and Dom Daniel de Silva, the ruler of Soyo. Dom Daniel accused the missionary of conspiring against him. He suspected that Bonaventura da Corella, on the instructions of King Garcia II of Kongo (1641-1660), intended to cast a spell on him. For this reason, he repeatedly refused to grant the friar an audience (Saccardo 1982: I, 403). The Soyo's ruler hostility towards the missionary who had arrived from São Salvador (capital of Kongo), according to Capuchins was a result of the intrigues spun by his advisors, who feared that the Capuchins, who had established their post in Soyo, would win the favour of the ruler to their detriment (Cavazzi 1965: IV, §59, 182).

The situation deteriorated even further after the forces led by the governor of Quiova, a sub-province of Soyo, defeated the Kongo troops. The severed heads of three important Kongo dignitaries killed in the battle were sent to the capital of Soyo. The ruler of Soyo intended to recreate the skirmish in which the dignitaries had died on the square located next to the Capuchin church. Their heads were to be placed at the foot of the cross that stood in the square. Following the ceremony, they were to be forwarded to a "pagan" tribe living on the other side



- | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| TIO | kingdom | ● | fieldwork site |
| <i>Soyo</i> | main province of the Kongo kingdom | ▲ | production centre (of copper, resp. pots) |
| <i>(Loango)</i> | northern sub-province (in Nsundi) | ■ | bodies of water and rivers |
| ★ | capital city (of the kingdoms of the Kongo, resp. Loango, and the Portuguese colony of Angola) | --- | trade route |
| ● | place name | ANGOLA | modern-day nation-state or province |
| | | --- | modern-day border |

[Source for the Kongo kingdom's 16th-17th century main provinces: Randles (1968: 22). Sources for the main 16th-17th century trade routes in the region: Hilton (1985: 76) and Vansina (1994: 264). Note that this map, which depicts just six so-called 'main provinces' following Pigafetta (1591), is a simplification. The number of provinces and sub-provinces as well as their sizes varied greatly with time. For a more detailed perspective, the reader is referred to the map in Thornton (1983: 40) for the year 1641, as well as the discussion in Thornton (2001).]

Fig. 1. Map of the Kingdom of Kongo

Source: Clist et al. 2015, available at: <http://antiquity.ac.uk/projgall/clist347>
 [Accessed 19 August 2019]

of the Zaire River. The tribe was suspected of cannibalism¹. According to the Capuchins, the idea was to humiliate the defeated enemy even more. The friars were indignant about the plan, especially considering that the killed men were Christians (Cavazzi 1965: IV, §59, 182, Saccardo 1982: I, 403). Probably a similar ritual was also to be held on the other side of the river by the Soyo's allies, but this time presumably without any elements related to Christianity.

Bonaventura da Corella decided to intervene. He took away the heads and secretly buried them in the church. The ruler of Soyo demanded their return. The Capuchin refused despite the repeated demands and threats made by the ruler. Eventually, Dom Daniel sent armed men whose task was to intimidate the friar into surrendering the remains. Still, the missionary did not succumb to threats and repeated his refusal. He proclaimed that his fear of God was stronger than the fear of death. He rebuked the assailants and the provincial ruler for violating the sanctity of the church, invoking divine wrath and threatening them with the church penances. As recounted by G.A. Cavazzi, on hearing his words, the assailants retreated in confusion and fear. On the following day, Bonaventura da Corella, after celebrating Mass, once again admonished the assailants and their master for their heavy-handed incursion into the church, adding that Heaven would not leave their deed unpunished. These words were passed on to Dom Daniel, who again sent his guards to recover the remains. This time, they succeeded. They exhumed the heads and laid them under the cross in the square, where subsequently the battle scene was re-enacted. Other acts "unworthy of the place" reportedly occurred, too, but regrettably Cavazzi chose not to describe them.

On the next day, Bonaventura da Corella, after celebrating Mass in the presence of numerous inhabitants, excommunicated Dom Daniel and those who had recommended him to remove the remains from the church or had taken part in the sacrilege. He also warned them of the retribution excommunicated persons can face if they do not publicly admit their mistakes and repent. As a reaction, Dom Daniel forbade the inhabitants of Soyo to visit the Capuchin church. Fearing the wrath of the provincial ruler, people stopped visiting the church and the

¹ The intention to hand over the heads of the killed dignitaries indicates that the Soyo warriors acted in an alliance with the "pagan" communities (presumably from Ngoyo), who saw the heads of defeated enemies not only as a valuable trophy but also as objects having magical power. In its turn, the fact that "pagan" tribes took part in the battle on Soyo's side means that conflicts between Soyo and Kongo involved their neighbours, motivated by the possibility of capturing prisoners who could be subsequently sold to European slave-merchants. In this period Soyo formed an alliance with Ngoyo (Dapper 1686: 340).

church hospice. In addition, the Capuchins were denied provisions² (Thornton 1984: 160-161).

The account evidently exaggerates the scale of the “persecutions”. Supplies could not have been cut off completely, since the friars would not have been able to survive without help from the locals. Despite all the reported difficulties, they continued to hold services and ring the bells at the beginning of the canonical hours. The author of the account probably wanted to emphasise their determination by stressing that, despite the pressure exerted by the provincial ruler, the lack of food, and other difficulties, they continued to live by the monastic rule and dutifully celebrated Masses. Church services and bell-ringing at the beginning of the canonical hours were effectively the acts of defiance of the excommunicated ruler, the more so because he was barred from entering the church.

The friars could be seen as a completely independent force that refused to succumb to pressure and could curb the authority of the leader. On the one hand, the clergy were treated as an important reinforcing element of the ideology of power, but on the other hand, they were perceived as a threat because of their independent stance and were suspected of conspiring with the King of Kongo. The suspicion was only deepened by the fact that Bonaventura da Corella, who had arrived from the capital of Kongo, opposed the ceremony involving the heads of the defeated Kongo warriors. It is worth noting that the spectacular ritual, which was meant to confirm Soyo’s independence from Kongo, was to be performed in close proximity to a Christian place of worship.

In Soyo, as in other parts of the Kingdom of Kongo, Christianity was an important element of public life even before the arrival of the Capuchins. However, the establishment of a permanent Capuchin mission in 1645 introduced some major changes. Having arrived directly from Europe, the friars were not fully aware of the local realities; correspondingly, they acted in ways they had learned and become accustomed to back at home. From the perspective of the ruler of Soyo, a permanent mission was a novelty which he did not quite know how to tackle. Until that time, control over the religious cult had been held by representatives of the local political elite (Brinkman 2016: 255-276, Thornton 2013: 53-77, Jadin 1966: 215-220).

² The Capuchins subsisted on gifts from local inhabitants. However, the bulk of provisions was given by the ruler of Soyo. Only with the passage of time did the monks receive or purchase slaves who would keep up the hospice, so that the missionaries would no longer be totally dependent on the charity of the locals.

A continuous presence of clergymen, while desirable for a number of reasons, set a limit on the power exercised by the local political elite. Now, it was the missionaries who made public pronouncements on what was consistent with the teachings of the Church and what was a misdeed. Besides the native elements, the local rituals associated with the exercise of power contained a number of references to Christianity. In some cases, the missionaries considered such references sacrilegious and barbaric and, correspondingly, publicly condemned their use. Irrespective of the missionaries' intention, the condemnation was perceived by the ruling elite as an attempt to publicly undermine their authority.

Objectively speaking, the Capuchins' expostulations did indeed pose a threat to the authority of the provincial ruler, especially as their admonitions were made in public. Moreover, excommunication prevented the ruler from attending Mass and other religious ceremonies, during which he was able to demonstrate his special status. When attending the Mass, he wore a robe of the Order of Christ and a golden cross, and held a staff in his hand as a sign of power. He was carried to the church in a hammock, surrounded by courtiers who carried a chair, a kneeler, a carpet, and a pillow. The procession was preceded by musicians playing trumpets, double bells, and other instruments. At Mass, a candle was handed to him during the Gospel; after the reading was finished, he was given the missal to kiss. After the Mass, he approached the altar for the priest's blessing (Dapper 1686: 357, Gray 1999: 44). The exceptional position of the provincial ruler during the Mass was modeled on the Kongo royal court (Bontinck 1964: 125-127). Like in Kongo, the ruler of Soyo was considered as an intermediary between his subjects and the priest. The priest, a representative of the Christian God, bestowed special favours on the ruler and his people.

Being banned from attending the Mass, the ruler of Soyo could no longer perform his role as an intermediary. Even worse, this was a clear demonstration to his subjects that the missionaries could limit his authority and deprive him of divine protection. Like other monarchs in pre-colonial Africa, the governor of Soyo, who aspired to become an independent ruler, was deemed personally responsible for the well-being of his subjects. This, in fact, was one of the cornerstones of his authority. By the same token, an African ruler was believed to be responsible for any misfortunes of his people and could be removed from power (Dapper 1686: 355, Tymowski 2009: 61-64).

It is probably for these reasons and on advice of his relatives that Dom Daniel requested that his excommunication be removed. However, it was not Bonaventura da Corella who reunited him with the Church but another Capuchin monk, Giovanni Maria da Pavia. In order not to exasperate the ruler any further,

Bonaventura da Corella had left the capital of Soyo. After the excommunication was lifted, the ruler of Soyo confessed his sins in the presence of his subjects (Cavazzi 1965: IV, § 60-66, 382-385).

Shortly afterwards, Dom Daniel fell gravely ill. Although friends and relatives asked him to confess, he refused because he did not want to part with his numerous concubines. Besides that, he gave heed to one of the local "wizards", who promised to cure him. Dom Daniel died without confession. The people of Soyo pleaded with the missionaries for him to be buried in the cemetery next to St. Michael's Church, like the previous Catholic chiefs. The friars disagreed but, despite their opposition, the deceased was buried in the church cemetery, albeit without the participation of clergy and without any Christian symbols. Apparently, the compromise was reached thanks to some dignitaries from Soyo who understood the reasons of the Capuchins (Cavazzi 1965: IV, § 66, 385).

Dom Daniel considered Bonaventura da Corella's refusal to surrender the heads of slain Kongo dignitaries as an act in favour of the Kongo royal house rather than an act following from objection to the desecration of dead bodies and to the fact that the fallen warriors were being denied a Christian burial. The popular majority saw the ruler's excommunication not as an ecclesiastic punishment potentially leading to damnation but as an act directed against their well-being that could bring misfortune in the form of natural disasters.

Also in later years, this understanding of excommunication was the source of conflicts between the monks and the rulers of Soyo. In 1673, it even resulted in the temporary banishment of the missionaries from the province. In some cases, excommunicated rulers were subsequently overthrown. One such example is Dom Pedro de Castro, who was dethroned after the Capuchins had been brutally expelled from Soyo on his order (Cuvelier 1953: 151, Jadin 1966: 296, 304, 318, 336).

In the case described by Cavazzi, excommunication was probably also seen as an act that would bring misfortune to Soyo, thus weakening its ability to oppose the King of Kongo. The submission of the ruler of Soyo to the Church, which was the necessary prerequisite to the removal of excommunication, was due to the fear of natural disasters rather than the fear of damnation. This is why some of the Soyo dignitaries were putting pressure on the ruler to reconcile with the Capuchins. As follows from Cavazzi's account, the ruler of Soyo refused to confess. One has to realise, however, that the author must have left some details out, thereby distorting the actual course of events. Going to confession is a necessary condition for excommunication to be removed. This means that Dom Daniel must

have confessed his sins and shown repentance in public. The refusal to receive the sacrament of confession must have happened at a later point, after he had fallen ill. One of the purported reasons for this behaviour is his unwillingness to part with his concubines. It is unlikely that, until that time, the missionaries had been unaware of the “depravity” of his ways. Yet, there is no evidence they had voiced their condemnation in particularly strong terms. On the other hand, it is known that Catholic rulers of Soyo directed or supervised trials by ordeal, which was in contravention of the teachings of the Church (Cavazzi 1965: I, § 205, 210, 102-103, Jadin 1975: 1159-1160). Devotion to Christianity did not make them abandon the old customs and healing rituals. Presumably, Dom Daniel turned to witch doctors for help, thinking that the Capuchins were unwilling or unable to heal him through their prayers. In fact, the ruler of Soyo could even suspect that the missionaries might want to do him harm, considering the previous excommunication. His refusal to confess when he was on his deathbed was likely due to these fears.

In one of the previous passages in Cavazzi’s account the Capuchins, in order not to exacerbate the conflict, decided that the ruler’s excommunication should be removed by a missionary other than the one who pronounced it. This is an indication that, in certain situations, the Capuchins accommodated themselves to local conditions and were not overzealous about the strict observance by the locals of the principles of the Christian faith and morality. It is not improbable that other incidents of this kind may have been omitted in the accounts written by the friars, since one of the goals of the authors was to highlight the successful nature of the mission. Besides, the conflict between Dom Daniel and Bonaventura da Corella could be seen as an interpersonal conflict. Had Bonaventura da Corella himself removed the excommunication, this would have been treated as a sign of the ruler’s submission to the missionary and recognition of his supreme authority. In order not to create such an impression, Bonaventura da Corella left the capital city of Soyo, and the ruler’s excommunication was removed by another Capuchin.

3. Ideology of power in Soyo

The events are described from the perspective of the Capuchins, who did not fully understand how they were perceived by the local community and what role was ascribed to them. This lack of understanding influenced their actions and reactions. The fact that some people in the Kongo (including Soyo) ruling elite spoke and even wrote Portuguese led the missionaries to treat them as if they

had been Europeans, which was not always appropriate. The members of the first Capuchin mission were favourably impressed by the friendly and ceremonial welcome they received from the ruler of Soyo and local inhabitants and by the signs of piety they showed (Bontinck 1964: 22-29, Jadin 1975: 658-685, 688-696). For this reason, the missionaries were initially convinced that Christianity had been well established in Soyo. However, along with the elements of Christianity, many old beliefs and customs were still cultivated there, including those related to the ideology of power.

The same problem applied to the whole of Kongo. Apparently, early Christian missionaries tolerated some elements of the native tradition. A good example is provided by the description of the coronation of Pedro II in 1622 by the canon André Cordeiro, in which the new ruler is depicted as a pious Christian. The canon was not bothered by the fact that one of the royal insignias was a drum covered with leopard skin and decorated with silk fabric and golden threads, to which the teeth of killed enemies were attached. During the enthronement ceremony, the drum was placed near the Christian altar (Jadin 1968: 379). The use of body parts of defeated enemies, often alongside objects related to Christianity, was an element of the native culture that had not been openly condemned by the clergy. For Dom Daniel, the placing of the heads of slain enemies under the cross was a regular ritual, so he was greatly surprised by the negative reaction on the part of Bonaventura da Corella and became suspicious of the missionaries' intentions.

Although the ruler of Soyo died without confession, he was buried at the place where other Catholic rulers had been laid to rest. Christian religious symbols were undoubtedly present at the place of burial, including the graves. Prior to the arrival of the Capuchin mission, Soyo had occasionally been visited by clergymen in the first half of the 17th century (Bontinck 1964: 34, Jadin 1975: 658-674, 688-696, Piętek 2009: 27-33). At the time of the events described above, there was already an influential group of Soyo locals who thought the presence of clergy to be important. For this reason, they pushed Dom Daniel into asking for his excommunication to be lifted, and later negotiated a compromise with the missionaries as to the place of the ruler's burial. This group of people must have had the support of at least some other locals. The cult of deceased rulers and chiefs was an important element of the ideology of power in Kongo. After the adoption of Christianity, churches or crosses were erected on many of the burial sites. The sanctuaries were visited in emergency situations, especially during a war, to ask the deceased rulers for support (Jadin 1975: 1158, Thornton 1981: 62, Hilton 1985: 101-102, Hilton 1987: 291-295, Gray 1999: 140). The grave

of a deceased Soyo ruler who had defeated Kongo troops would conceivably become a place of worship, to which Christian elements would impart additional power. At any burial ground, the old native tradition was rivalled by the new Christian one, which sometimes led to conflicts between the ecclesiastical and secular authorities. The cemetery where Dom Daniel was buried was probably of a pre-Christian origin, as was usual in Kongo (Bontinck 1972: 112-115, Gray 1999: 140). The disagreement over the place of burial of the Soyo ruler was simultaneously a conflict over the control of the cemetery. The Capuchins saw it as a churchyard over which they were entitled to exercise exclusive control. This was met with resistance from the locals, for whom it was a place of ancestor worship. Ultimately, the Capuchins could refuse to attend the funeral of Dom Daniel but were unable to prevent his burial.

Battle reconstruction, apart from being an important ritual aimed at acknowledging the strength of the chief, was also a means of conveying factual information about the victory achieved. During this ceremony, the heroic deeds of the rulers and their ancestors were recounted. This was a way to reaffirm their competence and their right to exercise authority. Throughout Kongo, the oral tradition was accompanied by a dance called *sangamento*. The dance was essentially a demonstration of strength. It could be performed before a military operation or indeed as an act of declaration of war. *Sangamento* was also performed as part of celebrations such as the enthronement of a new ruler or the welcoming of envoys. The dance is also known to have been performed during church ceremonies (Cavazzi 1965: I § 314, 151-153, Fromont 2014: 21-23). In effect, it was an attempt by the ruler of Soyo to present his latest military success during a re-enactment of the victorious battle that met with opposition from Bonaventura da Corella.

4. Soyo's position in the Kongo politics

The province of Soyo occupied a special position within the Kingdom of Kongo. The Portuguese made their first contact with the king of Kongo through the provincial ruler of Soyo. In 1491, the ruler of Soyo received baptism and took the Christian name of Manuel – even before the king himself was baptised. According to Thornton, Soyo already had a unique status at that time. The province was presumably ruled by the members of Kongo's ruling dynasty. Thornton even suggests that the position of the provincial ruler was hereditary, unlike in the other provinces of Kongo, where the provincial governors were appointed by the monarch and could be dismissed by him, with the exception of Mbata during the rule of Afonso I (1509-42). Thornton also points out that the sources dating back

to the first half of the 16th century contain little information about Soyo. He takes this as an indication of a special status enjoyed by the province, namely, that it lay outside the strict control of Kongo (Thornton 2018: 104-107). This issue is of particular interest, since Soyo played an important role in Kongo's relations with Portugal. Envoys of the kings of Kongo had to pass through Soyo when travelling to Portugal. Portuguese ships arrived at a port located on the coast of Soyo until at least the year 1576, when the Portuguese colony in Luanda was founded. The lack of more precise information does not necessarily point to a weaker control of the central government over Soyo. From the perspective of the kings of Kongo, control over Soyo was crucial for political as well as economic reasons. One can surmise, therefore, that the lack of detailed information about Soyo does not necessarily indicate a weaker control over the province.

Detailed information about Soyo reappears in sources that date back to the end of the 16th century. The sources emphasise the prominent role played by the provincial rulers of Soyo in the adoption of Christianity in Kongo. They also relate the victory of Afonso I over his pagan brother. Thornton ascribes the increase in number of references to Soyo to its growing role in Kongo's domestic politics, especially in crisis situations related to the succession to the throne. The prominent role of Soyo is reflected in the official version of the history of Kongo as recounted in the sources from that period. He also suggests that the ruler of Soyo was involved in the power struggle following the death in 1587 of Álvaro I (1568-1587) (Thornton 2018: 107-110, 114).

At the beginning of the 17th century, Soyo's independence was limited. In 1612 or 1613, the province was ruled by Ferdinando, appointed by King Álvaro II of Kongo (1587-1614), which would indicate that the Kingdom of Kongo had regained closer control over Soyo. Daniel Da Silva, son of the former ruler Miguel, took refuge in the province of Mbamba, ruled by his relative António Da Silva. At that time, Mbamba supposedly enjoyed a degree of independence, just like Soyo did before. After King Álvaro II died in 1614, António Da Silva had enough influence to decide the succession to the throne of Álvaro III (1615-1622), one of the sons of the deceased king (Thornton 2018: 112-114, 120).

Information about the person of the ruler of Soyo does not reappear in the sources until 1622. According to the sources, António Manuel, a half-brother of Álvaro III, ruled the province until 1620. His rule, however, did not mean that Kongo had regained full control over Soyo. Although nominated by King Álvaro III, the new provincial ruler was not entirely loyal to the monarch. Unfortunately, the reasons behind the tensions between the ruler of Soyo and the King of Kongo remain unknown.

After the death of António Da Silva, the ruler of Mbamba, control over the province was assumed by his son. But king Álvaro III invaded this province, killed the new governor and appointed Pedro Afonso, who was not a member of the Da Silva family, as the governor of Mbamba. Following the death of Álvaro III in 1622 Pedro Afonso was elected king and ruled as Pedro II (1622-1624) (Thornton 2018: 114-115). Under his reign, power over Soyo was entrusted to Paulo, one of King's brothers, who held the position until 1636. After Pedro II died unexpectedly in 1624, his son Garcia I (1624-1626) ascended the throne. However, in 1626, he was overthrown and fled to Soyo, where he died the same year (Thornton 2018: 116-117).

The new King of Kongo, Ambrósio I (1626-1631), appointed members of the Da Silva family to important posts. Among them was Daniel Da Silva, who became the governor of Mbamba. A few years later, Ambrósio I was also overthrown and replaced by Álvaro IV (1631-1636), son of Álvaro III. In 1636, in an attempt to gain more control over the juvenile king, Daniel Da Silva marched on the capital. King Álvaro IV fled to Soyo, where a battle was held. Daniel Da Silva was killed in battle by Garcia Afonso. Álvaro IV died shortly afterwards, presumably of poison. He was succeeded by his half-brother, Álvaro V (1636). The new king wanted to remove Álvaro Afonso, brother of Garcia Afonso, from the position of the governor of Mbamba. However, he was defeated and beheaded, and the throne passed to Álvaro Afonso, who ruled as Álvaro VI (1636-1641). He appointed his brother Garcia Afonso as the governor of Mbamba. After Álvaro VI died in 1641, it was Garcia who succeeded him (Thornton 2018: 118-120).

Around the same time, Paulo, the ruler of Soyo, also died. Daniel Da Silva, son of Miguel Da Silva, the former ruler of Soyo, took advantage of the situation and seized power in the province (Thornton 2018: 120). King Garcia II (1641-1660) sought to replace Daniel Da Silva and waged a number of military campaigns toward this end. However, he failed to subjugate the rebellious province.

The reconstruction of the events by Thornton proves that, in the first half of the 17th century, the central government of Kongo did not have full control over its territory. In crisis situations, the kings could not always count on the support of their provincial governors. Quite the reverse, the latter often raised revolts against the central authorities. On the other hand, the position of provincial governors was also far from stable. There were cases where governors were removed from power even in those provinces where they had an established position. One example is the province of Soyo, which at the end of the reign of Álvaro II was ruled by Ferdinando. The King appointed the ruler from outside the Da Silva

family, which, if one accepts Thornton's hypothesis, was contrary to the custom that required governors of Soyo to be members of that family. The Da Silva family was also forcibly removed from power in the province of Mbamba by Álvaro III, although António Da Silva had helped him to ascend to the throne.

It is not known to what extent the provinces of Kongo developed separate identities, nor is it known if they managed to create power structures that were independent of São Salvador. However, in the case of Soyo, more frequent contacts with Europeans could have resulted in stronger centrifugal tendencies. Furthermore, the province had a port that was an important commercial centre, which increased its economic independence and the ability to maintain the mechanism of government. As pointed out by Thornton, Soyo also occupied a special position at the Kongo royal court at least from the end of the 16th century.

It was this tradition that Dom Daniel referred to in his 1648 letter to the Pope. Asking for the papal blessing and requesting that more priests and devotional articles be sent to Soyo, he stressed the fact that Kongo had adopted Christianity through Soyo (Jadin 1975: 975-976). By 1649, Soyo already had the custom of electing its ruler and, at least according to Bonaventura da Corella, a board of four electors had been established (Jadin 1975: 1160). The ruler of Soyo sought to create a political structure that would be independent of Kongo and where the ruler would be selected without outside interference. Simultaneously, through contacts with the Holy See and the expansion of the church organisation, he wanted to lay an ideological foundation for his authority.

5. Summary

Christianity constituted an important legitimising factor for the independence of Soyo. Local political elite and, quite probably, a significant portion of the general population saw the fact that Soyo was the first Kongo province to adopt Christianity as a confirmation of its exceptionality. Soyo's unique role in the spread of Christianity was emphasised in the local tradition recorded at the end of the 17th century (Jadin 1970: 452-453, Fromont 2014: 35-37).

After coming to power in Soyo and successfully repelling the attacks of the Kongo forces, Dom Daniel sought to strengthen his position also in terms of ideology, in which Christian elements were to play an important role. With this end in view, he even tried to discourage the Capuchins from going to the capital of Kongo in order for Soyo to have "the exclusive rights" to the mission. This would have increased the importance of Soyo relative to Kongo (Jadin 1975: 658-674).

In the case of Soyo, despite the special status of the province, its independence was not fully established, nor could the ruling Da Silva dynasty be sure of its position. Dom Daniel seized power after the province had been ruled for a number of years by a governor who came from a different family. The authority of the Da Silvas in Soyo had to be reaffirmed, also in the sphere of ideology. Thanks to the consolidation of the ideology of power that put a strong emphasis on the distinctiveness of Soyo an important element of independence was created. The inclusion of elements related to the victory over Kongo forces emphasised Soyo's independence from Kongo even stronger. The ceremony held under the cross in the church square followed the Kongo tradition. It referred to the victory of Afonso I (1506-1543) over his pagan brother, which, according to tradition, was achieved thanks to a miraculous intervention by St. James. The victory resulted in the consolidation of Christianity in Kongo. During the reign of King Afonso I, a number of European models were adopted in the country. For the province of Soyo, references to that battle – held on St. James' Day – were of particular relevance, since Soyo defeated the Kongo troops on July 25th 1646, that is, also on St. James Day (Bontinck 1964: 54-55, Cavazzi 1965: III, § 32, 283-284, III, § 79 vol. I, 313). Opposition from Bonaventura da Corella made it very difficult for the ruler of Soyo to give final shape to his ideology of power. Similarly, the refusal of the Capuchins to give Dom Daniel a Catholic burial hampered the shaping of a cult of the dead rulers that would have strengthened Soyo's independence and the position of the Da Silva family. Elements of Christianity were already so deeply rooted that they were used to strengthen the position of the ruler. By the time the Capuchin mission arrived to Soyo, Christianity had already become an important part of the local culture. Some members of the local political elite had acquired elements of European education, spoke Portuguese and sometimes even Latin. These persons were employed for diplomatic contacts, also by the rulers of Soyo. They taught prayer and the catechism and conducted church services in the absence of priests (Brinkman 2016: 255-276, Thornton 2013: 53-77, Jadin 1966: 215-220).

With the arrival of the Capuchins and the establishment of their permanent presence in Soyo, control over religious worship was taken over by the missionaries, which inevitably led to conflicts between them and the secular authorities, especially whenever the clergymen tried to eradicate the customs they considered barbaric. This behaviour was seen by the local elites as undermining the authority of the provincial ruler. The conflict between Bonaventura da Corella and Dom Daniel was one of the first cases of tensions of precisely this kind. Similar conflicts would later occur both in Soyo and in Kongo. An important source of these

conflicts was the significance of Christian elements for the ideology of power and for Kongo culture in general. In the 17th century, Kongo rulers could no longer fully control Christianity in their country due to the presence of European missionaries. Paradoxically, however, their presence was needed to strengthen the Christian elements in the ideology of power.

References

- Bontinck, F. (ed.). 1964. *Breve relation de la fondation de la mission des frères mineurs capucins du séraphique père Saint François au royaume de Congo, et des particularités, coutumes et façons de vivre des habitants de ce royaume écrite et dédiée aux éminentissimes seigneurs cardinaux de la Sacrée Congrégation de la Propagation de la foi par le père Jean-François de Rome (1648)*. Louvain, Paris: Éditions Nauwelaerts.
- Bontinck, F. (ed.). 1972. "Histoire du royaume du Congo (c.1624). Traduction annotée du Ms. 8080 de la Bibliothèque nationale de Lisbonne par François Bontinck, c.i.c.m. en collaboration avec J. Castro Segovia". *Etudes d'histoire africaine* 4. 5-145.
- Brinkman, I. 2016. "Kongo Interpreters, Travelling Priests, and Political Leaders in the Kongo Kingdom (15th – 19th Century)". *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 49(2). 255-276.
- Cavazzi de Montecúcolo, J.A. 1965. *Descrição histórica dos três reinos do Congo, Matamba e Angola*. Tradução, notas e induces pelo P. Graciano Maria de Leguzano, Lisboa: O.M. Cap.
- Clist, B. & E. Cranshof, P. de Maret, G.-M. de Schryver, M. Kaumba, I. Matonda, N. Nikis, K. Bostoen. 2015. "Archaeological research on the Kongo kingdom in the Lower Congo region of Central Africa". *Antiquity Project Gallery* 89/347. Available at: <http://antiquity.ac.uk/projgall/clist347> [Accessed 19 August 2019].
- Cuvelier, J. (ed.). 1953. *Relation sur le Congo du Père Laurent de Lucques (1700-1717)*. Bruxelles: Institut Royal Colonial Belge.
- Cuvelier, J. & L. Jadin (eds.). 1954. *L'ancien Congo d'après les archives romaines (1518-1640)*. Bruxelles: Académie Royale des Sciences Coloniales.
- Dapper, O. 1686. *Description de l'Afrique*. Amsterdam: Wolfgang, Waesberge, Boom & van Someren.
- Fromont, C. 2014. *The Art of Conversion. Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Gray, R. 1983. "'Come Vero Principe Catolico': The Capuchins and the Rulers of Soyo in the Late Seventeenth Century". *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 53(3). 39-54.
- Gray, R. 1999. "A Kongo Princess, the Kongo Ambassadors and the Papacy". *Journal of Religion in Africa* 19(2). 39-54.

- Heywood, L.M., J.K. Thornton. 2007. *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hilton, A. 1985. *Kongo Kingdom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hilton, A. 1987. "European Sources for the Study of Religious Change in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Kongo". *Paideuma* 33. 289-312.
- Jadin, L. 1966. „Rivalités luso-néerlandais au Sohio, Congo, 1600-1675. Tentatives missionnaires des récoltes flamands et tribulations des capucins italiens 1670-1675". *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* XXXVII. 137-359.
- Jadin, L. 1968. „Relation sur le Congo et l'Angola tirées des archives de la Compagnie de Jésus, 1621-1631". *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* XXXIX. 333-440.
- Jadin, L. (ed.). 1970. „Andrea da Pavia au Congo, à Lisbonne, à Madère. Journal d'un missionnaire capucin, 1685-1702". *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* XLI. 375-592.
- Jadin, L. 1975. *L'ancien Congo et l'Angola 1639-1655. (D'après les archives romaines, portugaises, néerlandaises et espagnoles)*. Bruxelles, Rome: Institut Historique Belge de Rome.
- Piętek, R. 2009. *Garcia II władca Konga a Kościół katolicki*. Warszawa.
- Pigafetta, F. 1591. *Relatione del reame di Congo et delle circonvicine contrade tratta della scritti e ragionamenti di Odoardo Lopez, portoghese*. Roma: B. Grassi. (French translation: Bal, W. (ed.). 1963. *Description du royaume de Congo et des contrées environnantes par Filippo Pigafetta et Duarte Lopez (1591)*. Louvain, Paris: Éditions Nauwelaerts).
- Randles W.G.L. 1968. *L'ancien royaume du Congo des origines à la fin du XIXe siècle*. Paris: Mouton.
- Saccardo, G. 1982. *Congo e Angola con la storia dell'antica missione dei cappuccini*. Venezia, Mestre: Curia Provinciale dei Cappuccini.
- Thornton, J.K. 1981. "Early Kongo – Portuguese Relations: A New Interpretation". *History in Africa* 8. 183-204.
- Thornton J.K. 1983. *The Kingdom of Kongo. Civil War and Transition 1641-1718*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Thornton, J.K. 1984. "The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1491-1750". *Journal of African History* 24. 160-161.
- Thornton, J.K. 2001. „The origins and early history of the Kingdom of Kongo, c. 1350-1550". *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 34. 89-120.
- Thornton, J.K. 2013. „Afro-Christian Syncretism in the Kingdom of Kongo". *Journal of African History* 54. 53-77.

- Thornton, J.K. 2018. "Soyo and Kongo: The Undoing of the Kingdom's Centralization". *The Kingdom of Kongo. The Origins, Dynamics and Cosmopolitan Culture of an African Polity*, ed. by K. Bostoen, I. Brinkman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 103-122.
- Tymowski, M. 2009. *The Origins and Structures of Political Institutions in Pre-colonial Black Africa: Dynastic Monarchy, Taxes and Tributes, War and Slavery, Kinship and Territory*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Vansina, J. 1994. "Raffia cloth in West Central Africa, 1500-1800". *Textiles: Production, Trade, and Demand*, ed. by M.F. Mazzaoui. London, New York: Routledge. 263-281.