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The Saga of Lohodann Making Sense of an Annobonese Folktale Rooted in Carolingian Drama

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Abstract

The essay analyzes the saga of Lohodann in relation to the idiosyncratic cultural and religious history of the African Atlantic island of Annobón. It does so by placing the history of the island in the context of the Portuguese expansion in Africa during the early modern era, and studies the folktale in connection to the dissemination of Iberian cultural elements in the region. It pays special attention to the role of confraternities, in the context of which the population of Annobón reinvented and reimagined Iberian culture from an African perspective.

Keywords: Annobón, Catholicism, Charlemagne, Portugal, São Tomé & Príncipe

Every third year, the population of the small African island of Annobón gathers for three consecutive days during Holy Week to hear the saga of Lohodann, recited from memory in the local Luso-African creole language Fa d'Ambun. An intriguing characteristic of this tradition is that the initial storyline of Lohodann follows to a large extent the birth and youth of the Carolingian knight Roland, as it was first recorded in the fourteenth-century *Geste Francor*. This story reached the Iberian Peninsula in the early modern era via the *Reali di Francia*, from where it travelled to Africa. In fact, the hero's name Lohodann (or Lodã) corresponds to the local pronunciation of the Iberian Roldán/Roldão. Even more intriguing is the story's ending; rather than a heroic death on the battlefield of Roncesvalles, Lohodann's life ends after a mission to hell in pursuit of a witch, and the subsequent stabbing of all unworthy Christians at a church service. This curious ending indicates the degree to which the saga of Roland was adapted to local culture, which allowed this key figure in the Matter of France to become an African hero.

In this article, I will attempt to provide a better understanding of the saga of Lohodann in connection with the idiosyncratic cultural and religious history of Annobón. I will also relate

the case of Lohodann to similar cultural traditions deriving from Carolingian literature that thrive on the nearby islands of São Tomé and Príncipe. In order to explain the fascination for European medieval chivalric literature on these African Atlantic islands, I will analyze the religious culture of Annobón in parallel to that of other parts of Africa that experienced a strong Portuguese influence during the early modern era. I will do so by focusing on the importance of Afro-Catholic lay confraternities, in the context of which people reinvented and reimagined Iberian culture and religion from an African perspective.

1. *Annobón*

The name Annobón derives from the Portuguese *Ano Bom* (Good Year), a designation for the first of January, the day on which a Portuguese expedition, probably around 1480, first sighted this uninhabited island in the Gulf of Guinea. Since the Portuguese chose different islands in the region as their centers of operation, first São Tomé and later Príncipe, it took several decades before the exploitation of Annobón began. During that time, the authorities had come to realize that the small number of Portuguese settlers in São Tomé – mainly banished men and New Christians – would be unable to keep control over the quickly growing numbers of enslaved Africans who were taken there from the continent. They dealt with this challenge by establishing a hierarchy within the Black community that, in exceptional cases, could lead to freedom. Being Black in São Tomé was thus not tantamount to being enslaved. Ascending the hierarchy within the population of African descent went hand in hand with the display of acts of loyalty to Portugal, as well as the adoption of Portuguese identity markers, most notably the language and religion. On an island where there were virtually no European women, this system naturally privileged the offspring of Portuguese men and African women. According to an anonymous sixteenth-century source, such relationships were an accepted practice in São Tomé because ‘os habitantes negros são de grande inteligência e riqueza, criando as suas filhas ao nosso modo, tanto nos costumes como no trajos’ (in Caldeira 2000, 104).¹ Over time, this practice resulted in a slave society that, besides a Portuguese upper class, also included an increasingly numerous Black, predominantly Mulatto, elite (Henriques 2000, 64-92).

By the mid-sixteenth century, a small group of Portuguese and/or Luso-Africans began colonizing Annobón with enslaved African laborers. While some of the latter may have had roots in the region of Benin, the majority likely originated from the Kongo region. Considering that the creole language of Annobón is similar to that of São Tomé, it is assumed that these men and women had previously lived or were even born on São Tomé, which implies that they were subjected to Christianization before their arrival (Caldeira 2009).

The first inhabitants were accompanied by priests, who ensured that a church was erected in what was to become the island’s capital, Santo António da Praia, today known as Palé(a). In 1592, a Portuguese governor, a schoolmaster, and a (Black) priest were sent from São Tomé to Annobón. The latter did not stay permanently. Only five years later, the bishop of São Tomé promised the Pope that he would cater to the population of Annobón by sending a priest to the island annually to hear confessions and perform sacraments. The absence of a permanent priest indicates the lack of investment the Portuguese authorities were willing to make in Annobón, where the profits to be made from cultivating products for the European market remained low (De Wulf 2014, vol. I, 74-115).

¹ (the Negro population is both intelligent and rich, and they raise their daughters in our way of life, as regards both custom and dress). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the author.

While early modern Portuguese documents contain little information about daily life on the island, we learn more through Dutch sources. In 1598, the Dutch captain Sebald de Weert, on his way to Asia, tried to restock in Annobón but was attacked by ‘eenigehe Portugesen ende veel Swarten’ (Commelin 1969, vol. II, 12-15).² When his forces retaliated, the islanders resorted to guerilla tactics. Disgruntled by the continuous resistance, De Weert withdrew from the island. In 1602, the Dutch admiral Wybrandt van Waerwijck had a similar experience. He reported that ‘den gouverneur is een Portugees, niet boven 3 ofte 4 witten bij hem hebbende de reste sijn Mooren hem onderdanich ende de Roomsche Catholijcke religie toegedaen’ (6).³ In 1605, the Dutch admiral Cornelis Matelief received a different reception. He was welcomed by ‘40 oft 60 swarte mannen ende twee witte voor gouverneurs’.⁴ During his stay, Matelief held a church service and ‘oock eenighe swarten ende mulatten quamen die haer vertwonderden ... datse den naem Iesu Christi hoorden ... want sy meenden ... dat de onse Lutheranen waren die in de duyvel geloofden’.⁵ Matelief thereupon invited two Black men to his table for lunch, which displeased the governor because ‘op dit eiland zijn naer gissinge over de 200 soo swarten als swartinnen ende niet meer als alleenlijk twee Portugesen soo dat men met weinich moeyte dit eiland soude kunnen doen rebelleren’ (vol. III, 3-4).⁶ In the late seventeenth century, the Dutch merchant Willem Bosman visited Annobón and referred to the inhabitants as ‘halve Christenen, alhoewel zy de naem van heele dragen; want sose maer een Pater Noster en een Ave Maria konnen leesen / by de Paep te Biegten gaen / en eenige Offerhanden meede brengen / so gaense voor goede Christenen door’ (Bosman 1704, vol. II, 205).⁷ He also met with two Capuchins, who ‘noodigden ons / om hun Kerken, die twee in ’t getal waren / te koomen besien: ’t geen geschiedde; en wy vonden deselve proper en wel; oock groot genoeg / om viermael so veel Menschen, als op het Eiland waren / te bergen’ (207).⁸

Most of the information about what happened in later decades comes from Catholic missionaries, who either visited the island from São Tomé and Príncipe or served on ships that stopped in Annobón to restock. The Order of Friars Minor Capuchin, whose missionaries had been visiting the island since the mid-seventeenth century, attempted to establish a permanent mission between 1724 and 1753, but these efforts failed. From their reports, we learn that the local population identified as Catholic, but had developed its own variant of Catholicism by blending late-medieval Portuguese Catholic traditions with indigenous African beliefs and rituals. We also learn that, by the eighteenth century, there were no Portuguese left and that the local population had developed its own system of government, centered around the three key positions that had formerly been introduced onto the island: *capitão-mor* (governor or chief captain), *sacristão* (head sacristan), and *mestre escola* (schoolmaster), who, together, formed the *Vidjil Gandji* or Great Council. Portuguese attempts to send Catholic missions to the island

² (a few Portuguese and a lot of Black people).

³ (the governor is a Portuguese with not more than 3 or 4 white people on his side, the rest are Moors, who are subject to him and are Roman Catholics).

⁴ (40 to 60 black men and two white governors).

⁵ (some black and mulatto people also attended who were surprised ... to hear the name of Jesus Christ ... because they thought that we, Lutherans, worship the devil).

⁶ (on this island live some 200 male and female black people and only two Portuguese, so it would be easy for them to rebel).

⁷ (half Christians, although they bear the name of full ones; because if only they can say a Pater Noster and an Ave Maria, confess to the popish priest, and bring some offerings with them, they pass for good Christians).

⁸ (invited us to come and see their two churches, which we did, and found them clean and in good state, large enough for four times the number of inhabitants of the island).

to regain control failed. While these missionaries were generally welcomed, they experienced hostility as soon as they tried to question local traditions. Even the 1770 mission led by two African priests from São Tomé, who could communicate in the local language, ended in failure (Matos 1916, 63-88; Caldeira 2007 and 2008; De Wulf 2014, vol. I, 135-136 and vol. II, 23-28; De Wulf 2019).

In 1778, Portugal sealed a deal with Spain over disputed borderlands of its Brazilian colony, in exchange for which the islands of Fernando Po (today's Bioko) and Annobón were handed over to the Spanish. During these negotiations, Portugal had remained silent over the fact that it had no control over the population of Annobón, a fact which hampered the imposition of Spanish rule (Matos 1916, 88-91; De Wulf 2014, vol. I, 254-282). The population refused to accept the new reality and when the first Spanish delegation arrived, the local women expressed their discontent by staging a 'procesión con crucifijos, Santos, calaveras y otros huesos humanos' (Cencillo 1948, 106).⁹ It was not until 1843 that Spain effectively took possession of the island. When its first governor arrived in 1858, Besabé de la Puente expressed surprise about 'la constancia con que aquellas infelices gente han permanecido fieles a los principios de la Religión Católica ... si bien mezclados con algunas formas ridículas y supersticiosas'.¹⁰ He also reported that they had chosen their own priest and that 'los días, meses y años los apuntan con unos palos y tabletas por medio de rayas hechos con cuchillos' (in De Wulf 1998, 41-42).¹¹

After the establishment of a Jesuit mission in the 1860s had failed, a large Claretian mission arrived in 1885. The latter were initially excited about the population's attachment to Catholic traditions. However, as soon as they attempted to impose Catholic orthodoxy, the mood changed. The Claretians tried to break the resistance by burning down local chapels, the main church, and eventually the entire historical village of Palé in the expectation that people would relocate to a new space under their control. The population refused and found an ally in Governor Puente, who had the most radical Claretians removed from the island. The Claretian mission remained in Annobón, yet softened its tactics by switching to education as a strategy to achieve the desired transformation (De Wulf 1997). They only partially succeeded. The population of Annobón has maintained several of its idiosyncratic cultural and religious traditions to this day. One of these is the reciting of the saga of Lohodann during Holy Week.

2. *Lohodann*

The early history of the tale of Lohodann is shrouded in obscurity. There were no written records of it until the Catalan scholar Jacint Creus published the version presented to him by the Annobonese informant Orlando Briones in 1989. Before that, the story had been recited from memory and was passed on among the male members of one particular family, the Cisneros; nobody knows since when.¹² The only background information Creus obtained from Briones

⁹ (procession, carrying crucifixes, images of saints, skulls, and other human bones).

¹⁰ (the constancy with which these unhappy people have remained loyal to the principles of the Catholic Religion ... albeit mixed with some ridiculous and superstitious elements).

¹¹ (They mark the days, months and years with sticks and tablets using lines made with knives).

¹² This tradition is currently in crisis. There were two sons in line to take over the tradition, but both of them died. It has not yet been decided if the only remaining member of the family, a daughter, will be allowed to recite the story in the future or if this tradition will pass on to a male cousin. The author would like to thank Valérie de Wulf and Nánây-Menemôl Lédjam for this information.

was that ‘todo lo que vas a oír ha sucedido de verdad’ (1989, 62).¹³ Creus published two versions of his Spanish translation of the Fa d’Ambun original: a literal one that reproduces Briones’ direct speech (1997) and a narrative version in the form of a tale (1990). A short version of the saga, with some minor alterations, was presented by the Portuguese historian Arlindo Manuel Caldeira (2010), while his French counterpart Valérie de Wulf published a summary of the plot in French translation in her *Histoire de l’île d’Annobón* NO (2014, vol. II, 155). Below is an English summary of the saga, based on Creus’ 1990 version.

Once upon a time, a king called Hala Manyi lived in a palace in the village [of Palé]. He had a daughter, Beedji, whom he kept under close supervision. Several men asked the king for the hand of his daughter but they were all rejected with the argument that only a man with real soldiers would be allowed to marry her. He did not know that Beedji had fallen in love with an old, poor fisherman, who used to pass by the palace. She would give the guards so much alcohol to drink that they fell asleep and smuggle the fisherman into her room. This continued until she got pregnant. Concerned about Hala Manyi’s reaction, the couple fled and ended up living in a cave, where they survived by begging in the surrounding areas. One day, there was heavy rainfall that threatened to flood the cave. Beedji and the fisherman left and, when trying to cross a river, the latter fell and drowned. Beedji then returned to the cave, where she gave birth to a male child whom she called Lohodann. The boy did not cry but, instead, rolled about in the placenta on the ground. In this way, he was able to see everything that happened before he was born and what was going to happen in the future. Already at a young age, Lohodann revealed great strength. One day, he took his father’s cane and rosary and told his mother that he wanted to go to her original house. He passed the river where his father had died, followed the coastline along the beach, and then encountered a group of children. He established himself as their captain and formed a small army with the most courageous ones. Thereafter, he entered Hala Manyi’s palace and took a plate of food from under the king’s nose, which he brought back to the cave. When his mother heard the story, she became scared and refused to eat. Lohodann returned to the palace, where the same scene repeated itself. After his third visit, Hala Manyi’s soldiers followed him and discovered the cave. Lohodann and his mother were brought to the palace, where the former identified himself as the king’s grandson. This was followed by a celebration.

Meanwhile, a man witnessed the landing of foreign warriors on the island. Upon hearing this, Lohodann assembled his twelve boys, who, with their swords, approached the enemy and defeated them. They then saw something that looked like a whale. Upon coming closer, they realized that it was a giant, whom Lohodann defeated after a long battle. This giant happened to be the son of devils. When she heard about her son’s death, the giant’s mother came out of hell and, at midnight, entered the house where Lohodann resided and killed one of the boys. The next day, she killed a second one. When the devil approached the house for a third time, Lohodann stabbed her with his sword. She fled down a ladder back into hell but was pursued by Lohodann, who killed her and then took a tunnel to the beach of Pala Padjil. From there, he walked to the village [of Palé], only to discover that people didn’t remember who he was. Since it was a Sunday, most people were in church. Entering the church, Lohodann took his sword and stabbed everyone, except those who succeeded in proclaiming their faith in God, such as the women Fiip and Filipie. When he reached the high altar, Lohodann put down his sword, knelt down, and sighed ‘Oh, my God!’ He

¹³ (everything you are about to hear has happened in real life).

then requested something to drink from his mother Beedji and she brought a mug of water. While he was drinking the water, Lohodann's body began to fall backwards. As he drank the final sip, his head touched the ground and he died.

3. *From Roland to Lohodann*

The first part of the saga can be characterized as an Annobonese variant of the story about the birth and youth of Charlemagne's paladin Roland, the origins of which can be traced back to the fourteenth-century Franco-Italian *Geste Francor* (Morgan 2009, vol. I, 193-203). In the original version, Charlemagne's half-sister Berta begins a secret relationship with the knight Milon and becomes pregnant. Terrified by the possible consequences, the couple flees to Italy, where Roland is born. There, they live in great poverty in the forest. When Charlemagne visits Italy, he decides to offer food to the poor. Roland goes to the royal palace to get some. Impressed by the boy's courage, Charlemagne allows him to eat as much as he wants and to even take some food home. When his mother realizes the origin of all that food, she tries to prevent Roland from returning to the palace, in vain. During Roland's second visit, Charlemagne's counselor, Duke Naimés, suspects the boy to be of noble extraction. Upon the boy's third visit, he follows Roland into the forest and recognizes his parents. They are subsequently reunited with Charlemagne, who forgives Roland's parents.

The story reappeared, with several alterations, in the late fourteenth-century Italian *Reali di Francia*, which later inspired Iberian authors, including Antonio de Eslava with *Los amores de Milón de Anglante con Berta y el nacimiento de Roldán y sus niñerías* (1604). The latter introduced some new elements, such as Milon's tragic death when crossing a river, which were further developed in the first known Portuguese variant of the story by Jerónimo Moreira de Carvalho in the *História do Imperador Carlos Magno e dos doze Pares da França* (1728).¹⁴

The first part of the Lohodann saga, as recorded by Creus in 1989, largely follows Carvalho's version of the plot, albeit in a different geographical setting and with Berta being Charlemagne's daughter and the knight Milon a fisherman. The second part begins with familiar scenes from the Matter of France that were first disseminated on the Iberian Peninsula in Nicolás de Piamonte's *Hystoria del emperador Carlomagno y de los doce pares de Francia* (1521) and later reappeared in Carvalho's *História*. In fact, Lohodann's battles against foreign invaders and a giant clearly parallel Roland's fight against the giant Ferragús and Olivier's heroic battle against the Saracen giant Fierabras. Moreover, the names Fiip and Fililipie, the two women Lohodann spared during his rampage in church, recall Floripas, Fierabras' sister, who converted to Christianity after falling in love with the paladin Gui de Bourgogne. Following Lohodann's killing of the giant, however, the saga moves away from the traditional storyline with scenes involving a descent to hell and a rampage in church that do not find any parallels in Carolingian literature.

The saga's allusion to the battle between Olivier and Fierabras also points to a parallel with the nearby island of Príncipe. There, a two hour-long enactment of this battle is the highlight of the annual performance of the *Auto de Floripes*. In a similar way to what can be observed on

¹⁴ While no copies of Eslava's play have survived, its plot can be retrieved from chapter 8 of his *Noches de Invierno* (1609). Carvalho's 1728 book is traditionally believed to be a translation of Nicolás de Piamonte's *Hystoria del emperador Carlomagno* (1521). However, the latter does not refer to Roland's birth and youth, whereas Carvalho devotes an entire section to it (Book V of Part 1). Since no original copies of Carvalho's 1728 edition have survived, it is impossible to know whether that section already existed in the original version or was added to the book in a later edition, either by Carvalho himself or by a different author.

Annobón, the dialogues of the protagonists in this play are passed on from father to son and thus remain in the same family. São Tomé, too, has a performance tradition that developed out of Carolingian literature: the tragedy of the Marquis of Mantua and (Roland's cousin) Baldwin. Locally known as the *tchiloli*, this story derives from Baltazar Dias' sixteenth-century Portuguese *Trágedia do Marquês de Mântua e do Imperador Carlos Magno* (Mitras 2004; Seibert 2004).

One could also make a connection to another former Portuguese colony, Brazil, where the performance of Carolingian drama has a long tradition and where, to this day, plays based on the tale of Floripas are staged on specific Catholic holidays. In some places, only the battle scenes between Moors and Christians are performed. These are known as *cheganças* or, if on horses, as *cavalhadas*. They are typically, though not exclusively, associated with the nation's Black population and performed by *congadas*, Catholic lay confraternities that are led by an elected king and named after the region from which the majority of Brazil's African-descendant population originated: Kongo (Cascudo 1979, 242-245; Meyer 1995, 17-60).

This overview raises numerous questions, two of which I will further explore in this essay: how are we to understand the remarkable ending of the saga of Lohodann and how can we explain why African and African-descended people became so fascinated by European chivalric literature? Building on António Ambrósio's theory that an explanation for most cultural expressions on African Atlantic islands with a Portuguese colonial history can be found in the Catholic religion, I will analyze these questions in connection to Portugal's religious influence in Africa during the early modern era (1985, 61). However, I will do so in the awareness that, in spite of its European roots, the saga has become an African tale. This requires a rephrasing of Ambrósio's theory: the key to understanding this remarkable cultural expression is not to be found in the Catholic religion as such, but rather in the idiosyncratic variant(s) of Catholicism that developed on these islands. For this reason, my focus will not be on the Portuguese missionary goals in the region but on the way in which Africans appropriated and reinvented Catholic traditions in strategic and creative ways.

4. Early Modern Portuguese Religious Influences in Africa

In her history of Annobón, De Wulf explained how power structures on the island traditionally centered around the *Vidjil Gandji*, a council composed of a governor, sacristan, and schoolmaster, and concluded that this form of government was completely different from that of the Portuguese (2014, vol. II, 23). Although De Wulf is correct in this assumption, it is important to add that similar structures existed among Luso-African communities established by Portuguese settlers and/or their racially mixed offspring in territories that were claimed by Portugal yet in practice remained without effective control.

This was, for instance, the case with the smaller islands of the Cape Verde archipelago. Several of these islands still did not have a priest in residence in the mid-seventeenth century. Conscious that they were able to make an annual visit at best, priests operating from the main island of Santiago typically selected a number of male teenagers on the smaller islands of the archipelago, whom they introduced to the basics of Catholic doctrine and trained in essential rituals, such as prayer sessions, hymns, funeral customs, and processions. Once their training was completed, these lay catechists, known as *sacristãos* (sacristans) and *mestres-escola* (schoolmasters), enjoyed great moral authority in the community. While the former performed sacraments in accordance with (their understanding of) Catholic doctrine, the latter ensured that people said the right prayers and prepared on time for the upcoming holidays. As an example, we could mention the case of Seis Cento Lobos, a Black man whom the Dutch merchant Hendrik Hae-

cxs met in 1646 on the Cape Verdean island of Maio, and who ‘bediende bij gebreck aen een paep het priesterampt, die ooc bij den Gouverneur geestimeert wiert’ (L’Honoré Naber 1925, 167).¹⁵ It is possible, as George Brooks has suggested, that these sacristans and masters thrived in Cape Verde because the late-medieval form of Portuguese Catholicism they adopted had much in common with indigenous African religions, which encouraged ‘mutual accommodation, acceptance, and syncretism of religious beliefs and practices’ (1984, 2).

Parallels can also be drawn to creole communities established by *lançados*, *tangomaos*, or *pombeiros*, Portuguese and/or Luso-African adventurers, who developed clandestine trading networks on the African continent, where they started relationships with local women and acquired enslaved workers. Although Portuguese control over these Luso-African communities was virtually nil, their leaders presented themselves as subjects of the King of Portugal and took pride in identifying themselves as Catholics. Significantly, they were known in Upper Guinea by the name Kristons. Not unlike African converts to Islam, these Luso-Africans tended to live segregated from pagan Africans, and some acquired literacy (Mark 1999; Carreira 2000, 56-78). In the 1680s, the French explorer Michel Jajolet de la Courbe characterized them as people who ‘parlent encore un certain jargon qui n’a que tres peu de ressemblance a la langue portugaise’ (La Courbe 1913, 192),¹⁶ ‘ont toujours un grand chapelet pendu au col et se nomment du nom d’un saint ... un chapeau, une chemise et une culotte comme les Européens’ (192-193)¹⁷ and ‘quoyqu’ils soient noirs, ils assurent neantmoins qu’ils sont blancs, voulant signifier par là qu’ils sont chrestiens comme les blancs’ (193).¹⁸

Occasionally, a Portuguese or Luso-African priest would, typically during Lent, visit these communities, baptize the newborn, hear confessions, bless marriages, and depart. Since people would often not see a priest for several years, they took the execution of sacraments into their own hands. In 1764, for instance, the French Abbé Demanet visited Kristons in the Gambia and noted that ‘il y avoit plus de vingt ans qu’ils n’avoient vu de Prêtres’¹⁹ and, for this reason, ‘ils tâchoient de remplir les devoirs de la Religion [et] baptisoient tous les enfans qui naissoient’ (1767, vol. I, 122-123).²⁰ Similarly to what was observed with regard to Annobón, these communities had a type of calendar that enabled them to know when Catholic holidays were to be celebrated. Significantly, English explorers in Sierra Leone referred in 1607 to a Luso-African community that had ‘a chapell, wherein are written in a table, suche dayes as they are to observe holy’ (Hair 1978, 29).

The role of sacristans and schoolmasters was typically complemented by that of the *irmandades* or *confrarias*, lay Catholic brotherhoods or (con)fraternities. These mutual aid and burial societies had originally developed in Portugal in response to growing urbanization in the twelfth century by serving as a replacement for the family connections people had left behind in their village of origin. Thus, it was not by accident that confraternity members addressed each other as ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’. New members had to pledge allegiance to the brotherhood’s *compromissos* or statutes. The latter stipulated the election procedure for the *cabido* (board) that promoted a variety of initiatives centering on saint devotion (in particular

¹⁵ (due to the absence of a pope served as priest, in which function he was also respected by the local governor).

¹⁶ (a jargon that only vaguely resembles Portuguese).

¹⁷ (bear the names of saints, have a large chaplet around their neck ... a hat, a shirt, and breeches like the Europeans).

¹⁸ (although they are black, they nevertheless claim to be white, by which they mean that they are Christians, just like white people).

¹⁹ (they had not seen any priests in over twenty years).

²⁰ (they tried to fulfill all the duties of the religion [and] baptized all the children that were born).

that of its *padroeiro/a*, patron saint), the honoring of the dead, the celebration of liturgical feasts, and charity work. Members frequently gathered for prayer sessions known as *ladainhas* (hour-long recitations in a call-and-response form), the singing of *loas* (veneration songs), and the preparation of the annual procession on the patron saint's holiday (Oliveira Marques 1971, 244-276; Beirante 1990, 2-29).

The importance of such rituals needs to be understood in relation to *ex-votos*, the Catholic tradition of expressing gratitude by fulfilling a vow. This practice of vowing is essentially a contractual relationship with a saint in the conviction that prayers alone are insufficient to obtain a saint's grace and that the latter requires the fulfillment of a promise. While this could involve a virtually endless range of activities, a common form of 'payment' was to take part in organizing and staging the saint's feast, which typically involved some type of performance. There was a firm belief that not honoring one's vows or only doing so halfheartedly could have disastrous consequences, not just for oneself but also for one's relatives, friends, or community.

Membership of a confraternity also represented a form of 'death insurance', in the sense that the dutiful payment of fees guaranteed a decent funeral, burial space, and coffin, as well as spiritual attention after one's passing. This dedication to the souls of the deceased coincided with the dissemination of the doctrine of purgatory as an intermediate place between hell and heaven for those who died in God's grace but were insufficiently pure to achieve eternal salvation. People believed that Christians would only in exceptional cases go straight to hell or heaven and that the living could influence the redemption of souls in purgatory through manifestations of devotion, penance, and charity. By assuming these tasks, brotherhoods functioned as intermediaries between the living and the dead.

People feared that passing away without confession and viaticum resulted in a tormented soul, and so great efforts were made to receive the last rites from a priest. Once a person had passed away, the brotherhood ensured that a coffin was provided, *círios* (wax candles) were lit, and that all the necessary rituals were honored, such as keeping vigil over the corpse and observing seven or eight days of mourning, during which time friends and relatives joined family members in prayers to commend the deceased's soul to God. Another task was the completion of vows that had remained unfulfilled in the event of a sudden death. It was believed that for as long as such vows remained unfulfilled, the soul remained in pain and kept haunting the living (Espírito Santo 1981, 181-196; Vilar 1995, 180-191; Beirante 2011, 27-76).

Concerns about the souls of the deceased were particularly strong during Lent, as is reflected in the *encomendação das almas*. This 'entrustment of the souls' was a Portuguese custom that typically started on the Eve of Ash Wednesday, with penitents organizing nightly processions that increased in intensity during Holy Week and culminated on Holy Saturday. Participants walked for several miles behind someone carrying a large cross, and said prayers to the saints, which were occasionally interrupted by calls for prayers for souls in purgatory. According to popular belief, these nightly processions attracted tormented souls, most notably at crossroads and cemeteries, which made them a dangerous endeavor and required a complex set of rituals to ensure protection (Braga 1885, vol. I, 173-174 and vol. II, 196; Chaves 1945, 176-188; Dias and Dias 1953, 5-71). Holy Week celebrations in Portugal during the early modern age were also characterized by torch parades on the Eve of Maundy Thursday, in the context of which people masked as penitents or as Roman soldiers, and, as Rodney Gallop phrased it, 'exercised the traditional privilege of shouting aloud the secret sins of the inhabitants. No calumny was too vile or scurrilous, no charge too false or too true, to be proclaimed in this manner to all and sundry' (1936, 107). People typically also reenacted scenes from the Passion of Christ that culminated on Holy Saturday with the *Queima de Judas*, the burning of an effigy symbolizing Judas (Chaves 1932, 54; Oliveira 1984, 75-76).

As Francisco Bethencourt has demonstrated, the formation of confraternities was one of the principal processes of transferring such late-medieval Portuguese customs to other parts of the world (1998, vol. I, 385-386). As early as 1495, the Cape Verdean island of Santiago had a church for the Black confraternity, dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary. The same occurred in 1526 in São Tomé. Since these mutual aid and burial societies played a key role in the conversion of newly arrived Africans and the dissemination of Portuguese customs, those in leading positions acquired great prestige within the Black community (Farinha 1942, vol. I, 91; Costa 2014, 199). In São Tomé, the Crown went as far as to authorize the 'king' of the confraternity of Our Lady of the Rosary to purchase the freedom of any enslaved person who had proven to be a loyal member, even if this was against the will of the owner (Brásio 1952-1988, vol. I, 472-474).

Equally important is that, in the context of confraternities, the Black elites reinterpreted Portuguese identity markers and customs from an African perspective, which induced a process of creolization. This can be illustrated with reference to language in São Tomé, where confraternities – locally known as *lumandadgis* – played a key role in the dissemination of the Portuguese language. Since the (free) Luso-Africans in charge of these confraternities used Portuguese to distinguish themselves from enslaved Africans who still spoke indigenous languages, they referred to their language as *forro*, the 'language of the free'. Indicative, however, of the Africanization that had occurred in the context of these brotherhoods is that *forro* was not Standard Portuguese but a Portuguese-based creole language with clear African features. This Africanization should caution us not to reduce brotherhoods to mere instruments of colonialism.

In fact, brotherhoods not only thrived in a colonial context but also among autonomously operating Luso-African communities. Among the Kristons in Upper Guinea, for instance, confraternities – known as *manjuandadis* – were highly prestigious organizations, known for their celebration of Catholic holidays in accordance with a Portuguese model, yet with African music and dance (Barreto 1938, 155; Brooks 2003, 216; Havik 2004, 133-134).

Parallels can also be drawn with the region of Kongo, where the *manikongo* (king) Mvemba a Nzinga, who had adopted the Portuguese name Afonso after his baptism in 1491, established a large-scale educational program. This allowed him to gradually replace Portuguese teachers with Kongolese ones and to send his own *mestres* to teach in the different provinces of his kingdom (Góis 1954, vol. I, 180-181; Brásio 1952-1988, vol. I, 294-323, 335-338, 361-363, 373-375). This policy was continued by later rulers, so that, upon his arrival in the Kongolese province of Soyo in 1608, the Dutch merchant Pieter van den Broecke identified 'twee of drie scholen, daer de kinderen (als in Portugael) van Papen onderwezen werden' (Van den Broecke 1634, 14).²¹ The number of *mestres* in Kongo must have been numerous. In 1760 the Capuchin Rosario dal Parco estimated that there were about six thousand Kongolese nobles and that almost all of them had several *mestres* (dal Parco 1963, 371).

Successive Kongolese kings also fostered the establishment of confraternities. Membership was initially the privilege of the kingdom's elite and therefore conferred great prestige. Those admitted to a confraternity enjoyed royal protection and could in theory not be sold into slavery (Cuvelier and Jadin 1954, 187; Thornton 1984; Fromont 2014, 202-216). A 1595 letter from the Kongolese ambassador in Lisbon reveals that by the late sixteenth century, no fewer than six confraternities existed in the nation's capital Mbanza Kongo, also known as São Salvador: those of Our Lady of the Rosary, the Holy Sacrament, Saint Mary, the Immaculate Conception, the Holy Spirit, and Saint Anthony, whose members gathered daily to celebrate Masses for the souls of the dead (Brásio 1952-1988, vol. III, 500-504).

²¹ (two or three schools, where the children (as in Portugal) are taught by Popes).

This concern with the souls of the deceased in Kongo is also reflected in the fact that, as early as in 1548, we find a reference to an *encomendação das almas* (Polanco 1894-1898, vol. I, 335). Sources also indicate that it was a customary practice in Kongo to pay *mestres* alms with the request to hold services for the souls of the deceased (Bontinck 1970, 52; Guattini and Carli 2006, 237). Similar traditions thrived in the context of confraternities on the African Atlantic islands. Since they mixed late-medieval Portuguese with indigenous African elements, these customs frequently clashed with the post-Tridentine European understanding of Catholicism that later missionaries brought to the islands (Farinha 1942, vol. I, 151; Matos 1963, 148). Nevertheless, many of these traditions persisted, in particular during Lent. As late as the mid twentieth century, Fernando Reis was still able to observe how local brotherhoods on São Tomé would gather at night during Holy Week, ‘rezando e cantando em latim, acompanhados em coro’ (1969, 20)²² and marching as a ‘ruidoso grupo de dançarinos, vestidos dum modo extravagante, alguns com trajes de mulher, coloridos, com enormes chapéus’ (21).²³ They sang ‘cantigas improvisadas, repletas de subentendidos maliciosos, de remoqueos brejeiros’ (*ibid.*).²⁴ According to Reis, these parades related to the crucifixion narrative in the sense that the singing and dancing symbolized ‘a alegria dos inimigos de Jesus Cristo pela Sua morte’ (*ibid.*).²⁵ Other parallels can be found in the *Stlevas*, as derived from the Portuguese *Trevas* (Latin *Tenebrae*), when, on the Eve of Maundy Thursday, groups parade while singing songs to publicly shame ‘sinners’ (Morales 1901, 29-30). In addition, people in São Tomé used to carry around *mamiangus Zuda* (straw effigies of Judas) on Good Friday that were insulted and later violently destroyed by a crowd shouting: ‘bamu dumú Zuda’ (Pereira 2002, 285-286).²⁶

5. Chivalric Elements

The Portuguese caravels that originally brought these customs to Africa featured the emblem of the Military Order of Christ on their sails. This symbol illustrates the Portuguese perception of its overseas expansion as a continuation of the *reconquista*, marked by the ambition to find new resources and allies in an ongoing struggle against Islamic forces. The ‘reconquest’ also had an important impact on the way Carolingian mythology evolved in the Iberian Peninsula, most notably in the context of the twelfth-century Turpin Chronicle and the connection it had established between Charlemagne, Saint James the Greater/the Apostle, the latter’s shrine in Santiago de Compostela, and the fight against the Moorish enemy. Equally important was the interpretation of Roland as a Christ-like figure, whose death in Roncesvalles was understood as a necessary sacrifice for the successful ‘liberation’ of the peninsula and the subsequent expansion of this ‘new crusade’ to other continents (Correia 1994, vol. I, 116-123).

A reflection of this can be found in the foundation story of the new Kongolese regime after Afonso had, with Portuguese support, defeated his half-brother in the battle of Mbanza Kongo in 1506. Inspired by his Portuguese counsellors, the new ruler related his victory to a miraculous intervention by Saint James the Greater. In the account he sent to Portugal describing the battle, Afonso explained that Saint James, wearing a scarlet cape and riding a white horse,

²² (praying and singing in Latin, accompanied by a choir).

²³ (boisterous group of dancers, dressed in extravagant ways, some wearing women’s clothes, colorful, with enormous hats).

²⁴ (improvised songs, full of malicious allusions and lascivious jeers).

²⁵ (the joy of Jesus Christ’s enemies over His death).

²⁶ (we will destroy Judas).

had appeared in the sky leading an army of knights under a white Constantine cross. Afonso's vision paralleled the purported intervention of Saint James in the mythical battle of Clavijo in 844 that supposedly resulted in a crucial victory over the Moors in the struggle for control over the Iberian Peninsula. One may even suspect that missionaries had established a connection to Saint James on the day of his baptism. By baptizing him with the name Afonso, they connected this Kongolese prince to Afonso Henriques, Portugal's first king, who defeated the Moors in the battle of Ourique in 1139 thanks to an alleged intervention by Saint James (Góis 1954, vol. III, 149-153; Brásio 1952-1988, vol. I, 141-147, 256-259, 266-269; Pigafetta 1969, 70-89).

Following Afonso's victory, Saint James came to be adopted as the patron saint of Kongo. His symbol, the sea scallop, and the swords of his angelic knights featured on the kingdom's coat of arms, and his feast on July 25 became the kingdom's official holiday. These deliberate parallels to the crusades and the *reconquista* were further strengthened by the introduction of chivalric symbols in the African kingdom, including the use of noble titles (count, duke, etc.), coats of arms, thrones, crowns, and swords. The latter played a key role in the Kongo king's knighting of loyal supporters in the Order of Christ, a practice that continued in the Kongo region for several centuries (Brásio 1952-1988, vol. I, 247-253, 256-259, 521-539, vol V, 280-293, 310-315, vol. VI, 230-233, 375-384; Thornton 2007; Fromont 2014, 47-59, 71, 130).

Some of the characteristics of the confraternities were also influenced by Iberian chivalric culture. Significantly, members were often given noble titles (king, duke, marquis, etc.), used swords for specific rituals, and frequently staged semi-military parades with sword fights and other mock-war performances (Chaves 1945, 41-42, 136-138; Oliveira Marques 1971, 224; Oliveira 1984, 149-150; Beirante 1990, 15-16, 43).

6. *Kongo Dances*

Kongo, too, had a tradition of mock-war performances. The latter were known in Portuguese sources as *sangamentos*, as derived from the Kikongo verb *ku-sanga* that evokes the spectacular leaps, contortions, and gyrations of the performers. These movements were related to a war technique which, in 1594, the Portuguese Jesuit Pêro Rodrigues called *sanguar* and described as 'dar saltos de huma parte pera outra com mil tregeitos, e tanta ligeireza que possam escapar da frecha e pilouro' (Brásio 1952-1988, vol. IV, 563).²⁷ To the sound of drums, marimbas, and ivory horns, armed men would show their agility in an imaginary war scene.

Sangamentos were particularly important at the coronation of a new king, when the latter's victories in past battles were reenacted, as well as on Saint James' Day, when nobles from all the provinces were expected to come to the capital to pay tribute and taxes to the king. Over time, European musical instruments, weapons, and regalia were added to this war dance. The Capuchin Giovanni Francesco da Roma observed in the mid-seventeenth century that the Kongolese played several musical instruments during *sangamentos*, including 'tamburi del paese, & anco di quei d'Europa' (Romano 1648, 201).²⁸ His counterpart Andrea da Pavia observed that when questioned about the origin of the *sangamento* at the feast of Saint James, locals told him that the Portuguese had taught and advocated the celebration of this saint in Kongo (da Pavia 1970, 451-452).

In the Iberian Peninsula, Saint James was the patron saint of the soldiers under the name *Santiago Matamoros/São Tiago Matamouros* (Saint James the Moor-Slayer). As such, he

²⁷ (to leap from one side to another with a thousand twists and such agility that they can dodge arrows and spears).

²⁸ (indigenous drums and European drums).

was typically celebrated with a mock war performance known as *Moros y Cristianos/Mouros e Cristãos* (Moors and Christians). In this mock war play, Moorish forces initially seem to obtain victory but are eventually defeated and forced to bow down in order to be baptized as Christians. This mock war performance also gave rise to a dance that employed contredanse figures as well as line and circle configurations depicting a battle. For this, the dancers used swords or sticks, while occasionally adding clownesque or devilish characters (Chaves 1942, 15; Ruiz 2012, 38-39, 110, 197-209, 212-218, 255-256; Massip 2019, 36-41; Cáceres Valderrama 2021, 20-22).

The influence of this Iberian tradition is noticeable in Girolamo Merolla da Sorrento's late-seventeenth-century description of a *sangamento* in the Kongolese province of Soyo, where the prince performed two acts of war; a first one 'all'vso del paese, portando su'l capo vn fascio di vaghissime piume, composte a guisa di corona, adopra arco, e saette',²⁹ and a second one in which he wore a 'croce d'oro [e] vn cappottino di scarlato, tutto trenato d'oro, aperto da ambi i lati'³⁰, which permitted 'seruesi dell'archibugio'³¹ (Merolla da Sorrento and Piccardo 1692, 157). Both the cross and the red cape can be understood as allusions to Saint James and recall the foundation story of the kingdom.

Another example of how Kongolese and Iberian traditions merged in public performances is the anonymous description of the 1620 celebrations in Luanda, the Portuguese settlement at the southern border to Kongo, following the canonization of the Jesuit Francis Xavier. These included a procession featuring 'três gigantes'³² and the 'as confrarias desta cidade',³³ dances by 'crioulos de samtome ... com elles hia o seu rej',³⁴ a 'dansa de espadas tam boa como as milhores de Portugal',³⁵ 'outro theatro, no qual tambem se hia receber o sancto o reino do Congo',³⁶ and the performance of the 'passo de vida do B. P^e fran^{co} de xavier, quando estando pregando em Malaca prophetizou a vitoria que os portuguezes alcançarão dos Achens. Foy obra de grande aparato de guerra' (Felner 1933, 531-543).³⁷

Since a large percentage of the Africans to be taken to the Portuguese-controlled Atlantic islands originated from the Kongo region, it may not be a coincidence that we find references in São Tomé and Príncipe to a *dança congo* (Kongo dance) that is characterized by a frenetic, almost violent form of dancing, with frequent jumps and spinning maneuvers that recall *sangamentos*. The earliest extensive description of such a Kongo dance can be found in the context of a nineteenth-century play in honor of Our Lady of Peñafrancia, with dialogues in Forro narrating how Captain Kongo and his soldiers, with the help of angels, defeated a dragon. In accordance with Iberian tradition, stilt walkers ask the audience for donations during the play, while cross-dressed buffoons keep people animated with their antics. Participation at Kongo dances used to be considered a form of ex-voto to a saint, locally known as *paga devê* (to pay back what you owe) in the Catholic tradition of expressing gratitude for the fulfillment of a vow (Negreiros 1895, 167, 173; Ambrósio 1992).

²⁹ (according to the style of the country [with] an arch and arrows [and wearing] on top of his head a sheaf of very wide feathers).

³⁰ (cross of gold [and] a small scarlet overcoat, embroidered with gold thread, open from both sides).

³¹ (the use of the arquebus).

³² (three giants).

³³ (confraternities of the city).

³⁴ (creoles from São Tomé ... in the company of their king).

³⁵ (swordfight that was as well performed as the best one can see in Portugal).

³⁶ (another theatre play whereby the King of Kongo welcomed the saint).

³⁷ (scene from the life of St. Francisco Xavier about the time when he was preaching in Malacca and prophesized that the Portuguese would obtain a victory against those from Aceh, which involved a great spectacle of war).

As Françoise Gründ has demonstrated, the Carolingian plays that developed in São Tomé and Príncipe were strongly influenced by these Kongo dances (2006, 48). A similar connection to Carolingian drama was made by Gerhard Seibert, who pointed out that the Kongo dances in São Tomé recall ‘performances dedicated to the King of Congo in Brazil, Colombia, and Panama. Such performances, called *congós* or *congadas*, constitute an integral part of the festivals of religious brotherhoods’ (Seibert 2004, 685).

As Judith Bettelheim confirms, Panamanian *congadas* adhere to ‘a form of Christianity, particular to areas of West-Central Africa [that] arrived in the Americas along with the slave trade’ (2004, 288). During Lent, they stage a performance that concludes with a fierce battle between the soldiers of *Capitán Congo*, assisted by angels, and pagan enemies dressed like devils. Once they are defeated, the latter choose a godparent and are baptized by a *padre Congo* (Lipski 1989, 67-114; Smith 1994). It is in the context of these *congada* fraternities that Brazilians of African descent continue, to this day, to perform Carolingian dramas and passionately reenact the battles of Olivier, Roland, and other paladins against their Moorish enemies. They do so, however, with dancing moves that recall Kongoese *sangamentos* and dialogues that used to include Kimbundu and/or Kikongo terms (Dewulf 2021). This prompted Arthur Ramos to argue that the rituals of Moors and Christians, as performed by *congadas*, ‘nada mais eram do que sobrevivência da coroação de monarcas africanos’ (1954, 38).³⁸ In some Brazilian towns, the role of Charlemagne in these plays is even taken over by the (Catholic) King of Kongo himself, who, with the help of his paladins, wages war against a ‘Moorish’ king of Bamba or some other African pagan enemy (Macedo 2008; Fromont 2013).

Equally important is the religious dimension of these performances and its connection to brotherhood traditions. Alexandra Dumas’ comparative analysis of the Carolingian drama that is performed on the island of Príncipe with that of the Brazilian town of Prado led her to conclude that people do not just take part in these plays for fun or out of tradition but consider participation a duty since a vow was made. She also noted a connection with the souls of the deceased by pointing out that it is common practice for participants at the *Auto de Floripes* to visit the cemetery in the early morning, where they offer reverence to departed souls. This ritual involves the saying of Catholic prayers and the sprinkling of alcohol on the tombs. To ward off the potential hazards of interacting with the souls of the deceased, participants use a special ointment called *murta* and wear sunglasses for protection (Dumas 2011, 147-285, 290-326).

Such practices are indicative of the syncretic process whereby the African adoption and reinterpretation of cultural elements rooted in Carolingian literature was influenced by late-medieval Portuguese and indigenous African religious traditions. It is precisely this mixture of cultural and religious elements that allows us to make sense of the concluding scene of the Lohodann saga.

7. Celebrating Lent in Annobón

Confraternities are of particular importance to the population of Annobón. Not unlike the *manjuandadis* of Kriston communities in Upper Guinea, the island has a tradition whereby people of the same age group form their own confraternity, known as *dadyi*. Other Annobonese confraternities are explicitly religious in nature and have a patron saint and chapel. A third form of confraternity, that of the *beatas*, is reserved for the island’s widows (Zamora Lobo 1962, 34; Parente Augel 1998, 40; De Wulf 2014, vol. II, 67, 108, 163-169).

³⁸ (are clearly a survival of indigenous coronation [rituals] of African monarchs).

According to ancient confraternity tradition, these societies not only provide mutual aid to the living members but also to the deceased. That this was a matter of great importance to the Annobonese population is reflected in Father Barrena's observation that the worst possible insult on the island was: 'demonio ma alma vo' (Barrena 1965, 14).³⁹ It is also important to mention the role of *soñadoras* (dreamers), mostly widows, who in their dreams receive messages from the deceased (Zamora Lobocho 1962, 29; Ávila Laurel 2004; De Wulf 2014, vol. II, 114, 126, 195). The concern with spiritual afterlife in Annobón was such that, besides the *Fesa Tudo Santu* (All Saints) and *Frofesã Yifuntu* (All Souls) on November 1 and 2, also July 4, the Day of *Santa Zébèl Lãyã Palagatolia* (St. Isabel, Queen of Purgatory), and September 9, the Day of the *Santa Zalma* (Holy Souls), were reserved for paying tribute to the souls of the deceased. Moreover, following a person's death, eight days of rituals were required to ensure that the deceased's soul departed in peace and did not haunt the living. During these nightly vigils, brotherhoods would chant the required prayers and narrate stories and legends (Zamora Lobocho 1962, 43, 52-57; Barrena 1965, 27-37; Caldeira 2007, 105-108; Caldeira 2008, 11-12). In the capital Palé, the latter typically occurred in the same place where, during Lent, the saga of Lohodann is narrated (De Wulf 2014, vol. II, 200).

Of particular importance to the understanding of this saga is that there are numerous other traces in Annobonese culture of ancient Portuguese Lent traditions dealing with the souls of the deceased. According to the Claretian Tomas Pujadas, people in Annobón celebrated Holy Week intensely 'para sacar las almas del purgatorio'⁴⁰ and were eager 'para tener agua bendita contra los malos espíritus' (1968, 428).⁴¹ To this day, the sacristans organize nightly processions for the souls of the deceased during Lent, during which they beat an ax against a cross and are followed by members of yet another confraternity, known as the *Jandumat*. At these processions, its members dress like demons, chant obscene songs, and are blessed by a character representing Pontius Pilate (De Wulf 2014, vol. II, 147-151, 219-221).

Such references reveal how people in Annobón, not unlike in Príncipe and São Tomé, adopted certain pre-Tridentine Portuguese rituals of protection against evil spiritual forces and subsequently reinvented them from an African perspective. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the saga of Lohodann includes a battle scene in hell and that the beach where Lohodann subsequently ends up happens to be located next to the island's main cemetery. Equally important is the observation by one of Caldeira's informants that, during his youth, stories circulated about the Annobonese fighting 'nã môlu' (2010, 106).⁴² When interpreting Lohodann from this perspective, the final scene with its visit to hell, subsequent stabbing of all those who fail to identify as truthful Christians, and the hero's tragic death upon completing his mission can be identified as Annobonese reinterpretations of ancient Portuguese Lent rituals to protect one's community from evil. Considering the key role of confraternities in the reinterpretation of these traditions, it is only natural that the saga places heavy emphasis on the conversion of unbelievers and that, as part of the Holy Week solemnities, Lohodann's death in the company of his mother builds a parallel to Christ's crucifixion. In fact, the story ends with a dramatic allusion to the eternal battle between good and evil forces, which stands at the heart of all Carolingian literature.

Unlike in the original story, however, the hero's sacrifice does not occur on the battlefield of Roncesvalles but in the old church of Palé, the *guezã nganyi*. This raises questions about the identity of the 'false Christians' who are slaughtered by Lohodann. There are several possible

³⁹ (may demons take your soul).

⁴⁰ (in order to take the souls out of purgatory).

⁴¹ (to have Holy Water to protect against evil spirits).

⁴² (the Moors).

answers. One is that the scene reflects memories of the only recorded foreign invasion of the island, that of Dutch (Protestant) forces, and the armed resistance of the local population, which finds correspondence in Armando Zamora's observation that 'Esta leyenda es considerada por la mayoría de los annoboneses como una historia que tuvo lugar, o de verdad sucedió, en un momento de la historia del pueblo annobonés' (in Caldeira 2010, 114).⁴³ This theory suggests a parallel with Brazil, where in certain variants of *Moors and Christians* the King of Kongo does not fight (Islamic) Moorish forces, but (Protestant) Dutch soldiers (Barreto 1996, 169). It is, in this respect, also worth recalling that the seventeenth-century (Catholic) Kongolese elite fiercely resisted Dutch attempts to introduce Protestantism in the region, which culminated with King Garcia II publicly burning a pile of Calvinist books, in spite of his military alliance with the Dutch (De Rome 1964, 112).

Another possibility is that the scene reflects an internal debate about those on the island who identify as Catholic yet keep making use of *ofi* (witchcraft). That such suspicions could have deadly consequences can be illustrated with reference to eighteenth-century documents from Annobón referring to the killing of presumed witches by lapidation or, in later decades, by their forced expulsion from the island on a raft (Matos 1916, 88-90; Zamora Lobocho 1962, 61; Barrena 1965, 14; Caldeira 2007, 108-109; Caldeira 2008, 13-14; De Wulf 2014, vol. II, 188-211).

Caldeira offers yet another interpretation with reference to the Claretian efforts to purify the island's Catholicism, which made him characterize Lohodann as a 'campeón de la ortodoxia contra ... quien ... estuviera convencido de que la ... religión de los antepasados, era la verdaderamente cristiana (Caldeira 2010, 113).⁴⁴

However, when taking into consideration that the final scene alludes to the church that was destroyed by Claretian missionaries in 1887, one could also interpret the saga's conclusion as a call for resistance against the Eurocentric form of Christianity that these Spanish missionaries attempted to impose. In contrast to what one might expect when interpreting the saga from such a postcolonial perspective, this resistance did not come as a call for a return to a pre-colonial form of African indigeneity that rejects all European/Christian elements as signs of oppression. Rather, it came in the shape of a different form of Christianity, a syncretic one that built on the pre-Tridentine Catholic traditions the Portuguese once introduced in the region and that, in the context of local brotherhoods, went through a process of Africanization. From that perspective, Lohodann could be classified as a syncretic tale of anti-colonial resistance that, in itself, builds on two colonial legacies, one embedded in Portuguese religiosity, the other in Carolingian literature. The latter is all the more remarkable considering that the population of Annobón was illiterate. In fact, the strategic reinterpretation of European literature in the saga of Lohodann occurred entirely on the basis of memorization and thereby followed a pattern that corresponds to the way the Annobonese appropriated the Catholic prayers originally introduced by missionaries. As Governor Puente noted in 1895, they 'rezan las letanías a su modo'⁴⁵ and recite 'de memoria algunas oraciones mutiladas'⁴⁶ because 'entre ellos nadie sabe leer, ni aún el que se llama el maestro' (in De Wulf 1998, 42).⁴⁷

⁴³ (the majority of the Annobonese believe that this legend refers to something that really happened at a certain moment in the history of the Annobonese people).

⁴⁴ (a champion of orthodoxy ... against those who still believed that ... the religion of the ancestors was the real Christianity).

⁴⁵ (pray litanies in their own way).

⁴⁶ (from memory some mutilated prayers).

⁴⁷ (nobody among them can read, not even the one who calls himself master).

This complex form of ‘syncretic resistance’ finds a parallel in the island’s *muzúia*, a tradition that developed in the immediate aftermath of the destruction of the island’s main church in 1887. In the absence of an alternative, people in Annobón started to get married in the new church, built by the Claretians. Yet, once that ceremony is finished, they typically march in a festive parade organized by their *dadyi* (confraternity) to the sacred site where the old church used to be. There, the bride makes a genuflection in front of the same imaginary altar where Lohodann concluded his mission. In that position, she slowly turns her body from right to left and thereby makes the sign of a cross (Zamora Lobocho 1962, 48; De Wulf 2014, vol. II, 180).

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