

Pre-Colonial Lusophone Kingship and Elite Migrations: A Case Study of the Warri Kingdom¹

Allegra Ayida²

Abstract

This paper examines how African kingship changed as a result of cross-cultural interaction due to the Portuguese presence in the Niger Delta on the Gulf of Guinea in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The early modern Warri Kingdom had connections to the wider Lusophone world and Europe through the diplomatic missions and migrations of its princes. The Warri Kingdom's dynasty is composed of twenty-one *olus* (kings) with the most recent *olu* being crowned in 2021. This paper examines the biographies of three successive *olus* who reigned between the late-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries and approaches the lives of these *olus* as a coeval prism through which to view and better understand the entanglements of religion, commerce, and elite migration.

Keywords

African kingship, Christianity, religious syncretism, Warri, Itsekiri

Resumo

Este artigo analisa como a realeza africana mudou como consequência de interações transculturais por causa da presença portuguesa nos séculos XVI e XVII na delta do Rio Níger no Golfo da Guiné. O reino de Warri, no início da Idade Moderna, tinha ligações com o mundo lusófono e a Europa através de missões diplomáticas e as migrações dos seus príncipes. A dinastia Warri é composta de vinte e um *olus* (reis), sendo que o mais recente foi coroado em 2021. Este artigo olha para as biografias de três *olus* sucessivos que reinaram entre o fim do século XVI e os meados do século XVII, e aborda as vidas destes *olus* por um prisma contemporâneo para melhor entender os entrelaçamentos de religião, comércio e migração de elites.

Palavras-chave

Realeza Africana, Cristianismo, sincretismo religioso, Warri, Itsekiri

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² Ph.D. student in History at Yale University. *E-Mail*: allegra.ayida@yale.edu

Introduction

The first encounter between the Itsekiri people and the Portuguese was at Ijala, located amongst the creeks of the Niger Delta. In the fifteenth century, Prince Ginuwa, the founder and first *olu* (king) of Warri, began what would be centuries-long encounters. The Portuguese were on a large sailing vessel carrying out a reconnaissance mission in the creeks. It would have been a shock for the Itsekiri, in their smaller fishing canoes, to see the much larger vessel. The arrival of the Portuguese caused a stir back at Ijala. In response, Ginuwa called upon the great doctor and medicine man Idibie to consult the oracle as to what sacrifice was necessary to appease the owners of the strange vessel (Moore 1970). The priest divined that a banana sacrifice was needed. The *olu* ordered bananas to be loaded into a canoe and sent to the sailing vessel. The canoes pulled alongside the vessel and the crew gave them a rope to fasten the bunches of bananas so that they could be loaded, bunch by bunch. They turned their canoes around to head back when the foreign crew signaled them to return and reloaded the Itsekiri canoes with provisions such as rum, garments, and tobacco in payment for the bananas (Moore 1970). After a few more exchanges of goods, the strangers wished to travel to Ijala to see the townspeople; they boarded the Itsekiri canoes and went to Ijala. They greeted Olu Ginuwa and brought with them several bags of *garri* (dried cassava grated into flakes), a gift for the trader and his people (Moore 1970). After this visit, the Portuguese vessel continued its voyage through the rivers and would not return until many years after the death of Ginuwa in 1510. By then, the migrants had finally settled at Ode-Itsekiri, which has remained the ancestral homeland of the Warri Kingdom until the present day.

This early encounter is illuminating in many ways. Firstly, it offers an insight into the Itsekiri perspective on this Atlantic encounter. From this perspective, the strangers in their large vessel were viewed as other-worldly beings who needed to be appeased. The consultation with the oracle is evidence of this thinking. Secondly, the reciprocal nature of these early exchanges is significant. The Itsekiri saw the offer of bananas as a sacrifice and did not expect anything physical as an offering in return. Their actions were similar to ritual exchanges that the Itsekiri carried out for local deities. However, when the strangers boarded the Itsekiri canoes, this gave the Itsekiri power over the visitors. These strangers were now within their territory and under their authority. The Portuguese gave them goods in return, reinforcing the beginnings of this connection through the gifting of *garri*.

The purpose of this article is to provide a case study of how African kingship changed as a result of cross-cultural interaction with Portuguese authorities in the sixteenth century,

which involved important elite migrations. One of the outcomes of these elite migrations was the political consolidation of the Warri Kingdom. Religious syncretism played a crucial role in the development of Itsekiri kingship and its impact upon Warri society. The Christian education of Itsekiri princes and the problems of establishing Christianity formed a key driver of this process. This case study is an important addition to the scholarship on elite migration between Europe and Africa in the early modern period (Lowe 2007). Finally, the importance of elite migrations, which saw future *olus* travel to Portugal and Portuguese-speaking territories on the West and Central African coast, will be examined.

This article first provides a general historical context which explains the foundation of the Warri kingdom and the development of Portuguese commerce on the coast, and which explores how this links to the Portuguese policy of encouraging religious conversion, particularly that of the elites. The article then looks at the emergence of Afro-Portuguese middlemen. Finally, the lives of three *olus* will be examined: Olu Sebastian (1597–1625), the first Christian *olu* of the Warri kingdom who was baptized as a child; his successor; Olu Atuwatse (Dom Domingos) (1625–1643), who completed a theological education in Portugal and married a Portuguese noblewoman; and lastly Olu Anthonio Domingos (1643–1653), who used the strength of Portuguese and other Lusophone connections to ensure he succeeded to the throne. This biographical approach uses the lives of these *olus* as a prism through which to view religion, commerce, and migration, while also considering the intercontinental connections that were formed between Christian Europe and Christian Africa (Lowe 2007). The Warri kingdom still exists, with the twenty-first *olu* of the Warri kingdom, His Majesty Ogame Atuwatse III, being crowned on 21 August 2021. Whereas the secondary literature on Portuguese-African cross-cultural interactions has examined other parts of West Africa, including the Senegambia and Guinea-Bissau regions (Havik 2004), this article focuses on the lesser-known example of the Warri Kingdom.

The historiography on the Warri Kingdom is limited. Notable is the *History of the Itsekiri* by William Moore, an Itsekiri political leader, published in 1936, which was the first written and published account of Itsekiri oral traditions and the early history of the kingdom. These oral traditions are foundational for understanding the early history of the Warri Kingdom as the written record for the early period is mainly from European sources. Most historiography on the Itsekiri was published between the years of 1956 and 1969. British anthropologists P. C. Lloyd and A. F. C. Ryder and professional Nigerian historians Kenneth Dike and Obaro Ikime published journal articles and books related to the Itsekiri (Dike 1956;

Ikime 1969 & 1995; Lloyd 1963; Ryder 1960). Obaro Ikime's work is based on oral history interviews done in and around Warri.

The Portuguese documentation on the Warri Kingdom centers on Dom Domingos during his studies in Portugal. Padre António Brásio collated and annotated a collection of documents related to Portuguese missionary activity in West Africa first published in 1954 by the Agência Geral do Ultramar, located in Lisbon. The collection has thirteen volumes on West Africa starting from 1471 through to 1699. Volume 5, which covers the years 1600–1610, contains information on Portuguese mission activity and the correspondence between the Kingdom of Portugal and the *olu* of the Warri kingdom. Using Brásio's records, Jorge Fonseca (2016) wrote an article focused on Dom Domingos's stay in Portugal and what this meant for relations between the two kingdoms. The Portuguese source material is valuable for understanding the Portuguese perspective. However, using European imperial sources to illuminate an African perspective has its own methodological constraints. This article relies heavily on oral traditions collected by Moore supplemented by oral history interviews carried out by the author during fieldwork in 2017.

Origins of the Warri Kingdom and the Portuguese Influence within the wider Atlantic Trading System

The Warri kingdom is located in the Niger Delta region of what is modern-day Nigeria. The origins of the Warri Kingdom began in the neighboring Kingdom of Benin. The first *olu* (king) of the Warri Kingdom was a prince from the Benin Kingdom. Prince Ginuwa was the son of the *oba* of Benin who, with a retinue of noblemen, left the hinterland, moving towards the coast and settled near the Forcados River (Omeunukarin 1932). The formation of the new kingdom was centered politically around the *olu* and his *ojoye* council of chiefs, which included the aristocracy of the Indigenous people whom the exiled retinue met on arrival at their chosen destination. According to oral tradition, Prince Ginuwa left the Benin Kingdom due to his life being in danger because of the controversy around his father's actions (Moore 1970: 16). The foundational years of the Warri Kingdom saw the *olu* aim to assert his independence from the neighboring Benin Kingdom. The Itsekiri acted as middlemen between those located in the interior of the Niger Delta, the Urhobo and Ijaw, and the Europeans on the coast (Moore 1970). Over the centuries, the Itsekiri traded with a succession of merchants from different European countries, as each in turn sought to dominate maritime trade on the West African coast. The Itsekiri-Portuguese relationship was

particularly strong, with close ties forged through a succession of *olus* due to religious and familial ties. A. F. C. Ryder (1960: 2) argued that “a state seeking to establish its independence of Benin might also be ready to embrace the new religion as a means of counteracting the supernatural powers attributed to the Oba back in Benin.” A connection with the Portuguese raised the Warri Kingdom’s standing within the local balance of power, establishing their regional reputation.

The development of Portuguese commerce on the coast of western Africa saw the emergence of the Atlantic trade system. Portuguese interest in West Africa was focused on locating the source of West African gold, which had been present in Christian Europe and the Muslim world since 1000 CE through long-distance trade (Green 2019). The chronological predecessors of the Warri Kingdom, the fifteenth-century Malian Empire, grew alongside the gold trade (Gomez 2018). Mansa Musa’s pilgrimage to Mecca in the early fourteenth century, via Cairo, is emblematic of cross-cultural exchange between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa (Green 2019). The first decades of exploration by the Portuguese were mainly raids for slaves and other booty, which gave the Portuguese a bad reputation on the coast (Elbl 1992). The Portuguese would face many casualties in skirmishes as they explored, and diminishing returns meant that they shifted to prioritizing trade rather than combat (Elbl 1992: 169). The linguistic diversity of the West African coast made establishing trade relations extremely difficult. When the Portuguese came across a language they were not familiar with, they would forcibly take local Africans back with them to Portugal to teach them Portuguese so that they could act as interpreters on their return to the coast (Green 2019). The Portuguese also established permanent Portuguese settlements including the Cabo Verde islands and São Tomé. These previously uninhabited archipelagos located off the coast of Africa became important hubs for trade following their discovery in 1460 and 1471 (Green 2012). The Portuguese also successfully established an outpost on the African mainland at São Jorge da Mina (Elmina) on the Gold Coast, which had Portuguese Crown representatives present (Elbl 1992).

The West African coast became part of this wider Atlantic world in the fifteenth century, and from the Itsekiri perspective, these new encounters broadened the horizons and ambitions of successive *olus*. The geographic proximity of São Tomé to the Warri Kingdom was important as the *olus* built a stronger connection with the Portuguese (Harriman-Ayida 2018). These ties led to the integration of the Warri Kingdom into a wider Luso-African world and enabled it to establish contact with other African kingdoms via Portuguese connections elsewhere such as the Kingdom of Kongo. It should be noted that internal long-

distance trade existed in the region before the arrival of European traders and the Warri Kingdom participated in this trade through salt-making (Omoneukarin 1932).

The Portuguese encouraged conversion to Christianity for both political and commercial purposes. These conversions focused mainly on elites who controlled trade. The best-known example of this Portuguese missionary activity is evangelization in the central African Kingdom of Kongo. There, the missionaries focused on the ruling elite believing that, if the rulers were converted, the rest of the society would follow (Hilton 1985). The King of Kongo converted to Christianity in 1491 and was baptized, taking the same name as the King of Portugal—João. Together with him, six other titleholders were also baptized and took the names of the Portuguese King's household. (Hilton 1980: 51). The conversion of the kings of Kongo is often seen in political terms as a way for rulers to increase their power through harnessing the spiritual powers of Catholicism. The result was the forging of syncretic religious practice: John Thornton (2013: 54) argues that “Kongo Christianity incorporated elements of Kongo's original cosmology as well as some Christian elements.” However, the relationship between Portugal and the Kingdom of Kongo deteriorated by the end of the sixteenth century due to the impact of the slave trade on the region (Thornton 2013).

Many elite Africans travelled to Europe or India in the precolonial period. By the late fifteenth century, African delegations both royal and diplomatic were arriving in southern Europe by way of Portuguese ships. In 1484, the first delegation from the Kingdom of Kongo arrived, and in 1486, the *oba* of Benin also sent an envoy to Portugal (Northrup 2013). Around 1490, the Kongoleses established an embassy in Lisbon at the Monastery of Saint Eloy, which eventually turned into a center of African studies in Europe. Some elite Africans came to secure an education, and in the sixteenth century there were always a number of youths from Kongo being educated in Lisbon, one of whom was made a bishop by Pope Leo X.

The earliest—albeit not the happiest—example of an embassy occurred in the 1480s. Jelen, the *bumi* of Jolof in the Senegambia region, was a trading partner of the Portuguese horse merchants. He found himself in dire political straits and, after being deposed in 1488, sought refuge in the Portuguese outpost of Arguim (Elbl 1992). The deposed ruler travelled to Portugal with an entourage to seek an audience with the Portuguese King João II (Elbl 1992). He was well received and treated like any European prince and was promised the requisite military assistance so he could claim back his territory (Bethencourt 2011). The Wolof ruler was a Muslim, so it was decided that he should convert to Christianity along with

his followers. Following his conversion, he was sent back with Portuguese ships and troops as well as building material for a church and fort. This expedition was ultimately unsuccessful with a disagreement between the Portuguese captain and Jelen resulting in the latter's murder (Bethencourt 2011).

The conversion policy was continued into the seventeenth century. In Angola, the Portuguese used conversion as a diplomatic tool with mixed success. After years of warfare, the Portuguese secured the conversion of Queen Nzinga as part of negotiations on behalf of her brother, the King of Ndongo, in what is present-day Angola (Heywood 2017). This strategic baptism was a diplomatic boon and meant that Nzinga could secure a temporary peace treaty with the Portuguese (Heywood 2017). Despite this conversion, when Nzinga acceded to the throne after her brother, she had his remains kept in a *misete* (reliquary) so that he was preserved as an ancestor she could later consult (Heywood 2017). At best, this is an example of Christianity existing alongside traditional religious beliefs and practices. In Eastern Africa, after the murder of the Jesuit Gonçalo da Silveira in 1561 had marked the failure of the first attempt at elite conversion, the Dominicans secured the formal baptism of the Monomotapa in 1629 and sent members of his family to Goa to be educated (Borges 2000: 115). A similar policy was followed, with disastrous results, in Mombasa, where the heir to the throne was educated in India and married to a Christian wife but returned to lead a major insurrection against the Portuguese. The same policy pursued by the Jesuits in Ethiopia, after initial success, led also to an uprising and the expulsion of the Portuguese missionaries in 1636.

Christianity was introduced to the Warri Kingdom by Augustinian friars who were sent by King Phillip II of Spain between 1571–1574, these dates coinciding with the time that the Augustinian Gaspar Cão was the bishop in residence at São Tomé (Fonseca 2016). The bishop sent a company of Augustinian friars to Warri, who founded a Christian settlement that they called Santo Agostinho in Ode-Itsekiri (Ryder 1960). Naming the settlement may indicate the elite's acceptance of the Christian faith, but it is not clear whether the conversion was completely accepted amongst the wider population or whether the presence of Christians was merely tolerated. Santo Agostinho could now be marked on the maps as the location of “civilization” and Christianity. A similar event had occurred earlier with the capital of the Kingdom of Kongo being renamed São Salvador by Portuguese missionaries (Ryder 1960).

Father Francisco a Mater Dei, one of the Augustinian friars in this first mission to Warri, had an even more important role to play in the installation of Christianity in the

kingdom, which followed a similar pattern to that of the Kingdom of Kongo—conversion beginning with the elites. Father Francisco looked for ways to be respected and held in high regard by the Itsekiri people and gained a prestigious position by destroying a tree that was ritually and symbolically important to them (Moore 1970). According to the oral tradition, he did this without being punished by their Indigenous gods, which the Itsekiri people interpreted as evidence of the power of Father Francisco's deity (Moore 1970). A result of this dramatic event was that Father Francisco was able to baptize the fifth *olu*'s son, with his father's approval, giving him the Christian name Sebastian, which in Latin means "venerable; revered." It is during the reign of Olu Sebastian that we see the beginnings of Christianity in the Warri kingdom.

Olu Sebastian (1597–1625)

This prince would become the first Christian *olu* of Warri, Olu Sebastian, harnessing the spiritual authority of Christianity to strengthen the ritual power of the *olu*. In this way, religion became an important thread in Portuguese-Itsekiri relations and in establishing the spiritual and political authority of the *olu*. It was the insistence of Sebastian's father, Olu Esigie, and the work of the first Catholic mission that led to Sebastian's baptism (Harriman-Ayida 2018). Olu Esigie made a significant choice in allowing this baptism of his son. It is not clear from the historical record exactly how old the prince was when he was baptized or whether he had any choice. Nevertheless, his baptism had far-reaching symbolic meaning. Prince Sebastian was the most likely contender to be the next *olu*, so Olu Esigie was forward thinking in the way he wished to deepen ties with the Portuguese. The need to establish independence from Benin may have been another and perhaps more important factor for Olu Esigie. The baptism was symbolic as it suggested a closer tie between the Portuguese and the Itsekiri through this religious link, and the fact that Prince Sebastian was converted at a young age meant that he would have a different relationship with the Christian faith.

Despite this strong beginning for Christianity, with the baptism of the prince, those first Augustinian friars were soon withdrawn from Warri, most likely due to lack of funding from Portugal. There would not be any further missionary activity for several decades until a new Bishop of São Tomé arrived in 1593. The bishop sent some Franciscan friars from São Tomé to Warri. Despite this renewed effort, most of the priests who were sent there were dead by 1597, most likely succumbing to tropical diseases in the mangrove swamps of the area. The Warri Kingdom was once again without a resident missionary (Ryder 1960).

Pope Sixtus V had ruled that all bishops visiting Rome had to report on the state of their dioceses. A report of the visit made by Francisco de Villanova, Bishop of São Tomé, in 1597 was subsequently sent to the Vatican (Ryder 1960). Villanova said that, as for the priests, their very lives would be exposed to certain danger because of the great unhealthiness of the climate (Newitt 2010). It was for this reason that it proved difficult to convince any priests to take up a long-term residency in Warri. The Bishop of São Tomé's report covered an undivided diocese that went from Elmina to the Cape of Good Hope, and his report offers an overview of how he believed the conversion to Christianity had been progressing throughout the different Portuguese enterprises (Newitt 2010). In particular he discussed the Kingdom of Kongo, the Kingdom of Angola, which at that time had been in the process of being converted by force, and the Kingdom of "Oeri" (Newitt 2010). The description of the Warri kingdom is telling; the bishop reported the fact that "there is no parish church, although the king and a great part of his people are Christian" (Newitt 2010: 173). Bishop Villanova described the spiritual poverty of the kingdom as a result of a lack of physical buildings in which to worship. This Christian *olu*, who had been baptized as a prince and thereby had a strong attachment to Christianity, would have many difficult years ahead of him in trying to bolster the Christian faith amongst his people when there was no priest to administer the sacraments.

This raises questions about just how Christian Warri was if there were no churches and no priests. The nature of Christianity in Warri in this period is that it was embodied in the *olu*, who single handedly maintained the religion. Because the *olu* was so central to the political and cultural identity of the Warri Kingdom, the *olu* embracing a foreign religion had considerable importance for diplomatic relations. However, it can be argued that, despite the adherence to Christianity by the most powerful figure in the kingdom, the influence of Christianity in Warri was limited. The Bishop of São Tomé was aware of Olu Sebastian's plight, and wrote a letter suggesting to His Catholic Majesty, King Philip of Spain, that ships passing through São Tomé on their way to the main coastline of West Africa should take a priest on board so that he could perform the sacraments in the Warri Kingdom. This letter clearly resonated with the king who gave orders that the ships that went to trade with Warri should have a priest with them. Normally such trips there and back would take a couple months (Ryder 1960).

During the reign of Olu Sebastian, his eldest son was baptized and given the name Domingos. As the complication of the lack of priests in the kingdom persisted, the Bishop of São Tomé, Villanova, made a case to the Olu Sebastian to send his son, Domingos, to

Portugal so that “he might be instructed in theology and the rites of the Church.” Thus, he could return to the kingdom and continue with the goal of spreading Christianity (Ryder 1960: 5). So, Olu Sebastian wrote a letter to King Philip III requesting that his son be educated in European ways, so that, he could help his father with the conversion of the Itsekiri to Christianity as well as with governing of the kingdom (Ryder 1960).

Olu Sebastian’s reign is important for demonstrating how difficult it was to establish Christianity in the kingdom despite the king’s conversion. However, the importance of Catholicism to Olu Sebastian is shown in this moment when he reached out to the King of Spain for aid. This created a link between the two monarchies separated by thousands of miles and would cement the importance of this relationship for decades to come.

It is significant and symbolic that Olu Sebastian chose to send his son abroad to Portugal. The succession of *olus* functioned under a primogeniture system, though not as strict as that of the neighboring Benin Kingdom, as sometimes an uncle would take the throne over a son. (Omouneukarin 1942). As a result, the first son of the current *olu*, Prince Domingos, already held an important position within the kingdom, court and royal household. Sending him away for these studies would have meant that he would be away from the kingdom for a significant period of time and would only be reachable by letters that would take many months to be received, let alone replied to. However, Olu Sebastian saw that the benefits of such a decision outweighed the costs and that there were many advantages to sending his son to Europe to be educated, notably the prestige of sending him abroad at a time when a Portuguese connection was viewed in a positive light. From an educational and strategic standpoint, the prince would increase his knowledge of the Portuguese, which would be helpful in navigating trade relations. By this time, trade relations had been firmly established, with the Portuguese having trading stations at Warri and Ugborodo (another Itsekiri town further downstream) (Moore 1970: 88). The commodities traded were principally slaves as well as spices and pepper.

The Warri Kingdom had entered the Atlantic trade network through this Portuguese connection, which supplemented inland trading with the Urhobo and the Benin kingdom (Moore 1970). Demonstrating their close ties with the Portuguese would amount to a show of strength vis à vis the Benin Kingdom. As Olu Sebastian was a Christian, seeing his son advance his religious knowledge must have offered an additional incentive.

Olu Dom Domingos (1625–1643)

Olu Dom Domingos was the second Christian *olu* of the Warri Kingdom. The Warri Kingdom's relationship with the Portuguese had been firmly established during the reign of his father Olu Sebastian, and Dom Domingos's studies had been sponsored and facilitated by the King of Spain. By the time Prince Domingos ascended the throne as Olu Atuwatse I in 1625, he was a graduate of the University of Coimbra. As a prince, he received a theological education in Portugal and returned to the Warri Kingdom with a Portuguese noblewoman, Maria Pereira, as his wife. He also brought with him two silver crowns gifted by the King of Spain (Ryder 1960). This aid included letters of recommendation and monetary support in the form of a yearly stipend. His time in Portugal is revealing when thinking more generally about the presence of elite Africans in Europe.

Domingos's ecclesiastical education began in Coimbra. King Philip and his viceroy decided that Prince Domingos should study at the Hieronymite Institute for Secular and Religious Studies, the Colégio de São Jerónimo, which was within walking distance from the Royal Palace in Coimbra and was a part of the University of Coimbra (Ryder 1960). It took a few months to finalize his board and schooling, but he was accepted for admission to the college with a pension approved by the college authorities (Brásio 1952). Given that the college was run by Hieronymite priests, Catholic instruction was a significant aspect of his studies. Despite this focus on religion, Prince Dom Domingos excelled in many aspects of his studies. After two years at Coimbra, he petitioned King Philip II in July 1604 to continue his studies in Latin at an Augustinian college in Lisbon (Ryder 1960). Overall, his studies lasted eight years.

The presence of Africans in Europe had been growing steadily since before Dom Domingos left the Warri Kingdom for Portugal. In 1600, after setting off from the West African coast with a stopover at São Tomé, Domingos spent many months aboard a Portuguese trading vessel travelling up the coast of Africa before he finally arrived in Lisbon (Ryder 1960). Despite his Catholic education, however, he could not be ordained according to the original plan of the bishop of São Tome as he had married a Portuguese noblewoman. He did, however, undertake a pilgrimage to the shrine of Santiago de Compostela and received the habit of the Order of Christ, together with his father and one of his brothers, before he finally returned home to the Warri Kingdom (Brásio 1952).

Prince Domingos's marriage created a direct kinship tie to the Portuguese and showed, from a Portuguese perspective, that Dom Domingos had accepted some European

ways, while from an Itsekiri perspective, it demonstrated that there were strategic benefits in terms of access to other trade partners and that the kingdom was now known to the wider world. Dom Domingos's story is indicative of how many Africans saw the adoption of European culture in a positive fashion. However, European acculturation was not always so straightforward for other Africans who came into contact with the Portuguese. Dom Domingos's marriage was exceptional in that it was officiated in Europe and thus acquired legitimacy in European eyes. The marriages and relationships between traders and African women were usually "local" in nature, in that they followed African custom, which was not applicable in Europe. Thus, these marriages normally only lasted as long as the European trader was stationed on the coast (Ipsen 2015). However, these unions, whether legitimate or illegitimate in the eyes of the Catholic Church, resulted in offspring that would become important intermediaries owing to their dual cultural heritage (Brooks 2003).

Dom Domingos used his Western education to forge closer ties with the Portuguese. This was evident not only in his marriage but also in the material objects he brought from Portugal. From an educational and strategic standpoint, the prince's increased knowledge of the Portuguese and their ways was helpful in navigating trade relations. His marriage is emblematic of gendered forms of authority both in Portugal and back home in the Warri Kingdom. The silver crowns are significant as an aspect of religious syncretism due to their Portuguese origin, and they became symbols of the *olu*'s authority. The origin of the crowns is common knowledge amongst members of the royal family and the elite in present-day Warri. Oral tradition states that Maria never wore the female crown, despite the set of crowns being made for a royal couple. This is because the *olu*, not the *olu*'s wife, was seen as the traditional source of authority in the patrilineal society of the Warri kingdom. The Portuguese crowns acted as symbols of authority for a male and female ruler, but in the Itsekiri case it took on a specific masculine form of authority.

In this case, Maria probably did not exercise authority in the traditional sense as power was concentrated in the masculine office of *olu*, and his all male *ojoye* (council of chiefs). With regard to the broader role of other Portuguese women in Afro-Atlantic trade relations, very few participated in the voyages of expansion and colonialism (Boxer 1975; Sarmiento 2008). The case of an African man marrying a European woman was rare at this time in Africa. Maria died of a tropical disease, most likely malaria, a few years after their return to Warri. There is no record of Domingos having other wives; according to the missionary records, following Maria's death, Domingos's relationship with the Portuguese deteriorated (Brásio 1952). Overall, the biography of Dom Domingos throws light on important aspects

of African elite migration to Europe, as well as gender and racial relations between Africans and Europeans.

Olu Anthonio Domingos (1643–1653)

The final *olu* to be examined is Olu Anthonio Domingos, who succeeded Olu Atuwatse. His lineage raised important questions of succession and legitimacy, as he had to compete for the throne against two other claimants. Anthonio was of mixed heritage with a Portuguese mother and a Itsekiri father. In his youth, Anthonio joined a Portuguese vessel in the Benin River and went to the Portuguese colony of Angola to pursue an education, learning to read, write, and speak Portuguese fluently (Moore 1970). Being fluent in Portuguese was significant as this would have facilitated communication with Portuguese traders while also strengthening his position with them if he were to become the *olu*.

The connections between the Portuguese and various coastal African societies had differing results, but one effect was the creation of creolized societies and communities along the coast. The Cabo Verde islands and São Tomé were previously uninhabited archipelagos both located off the coast of Africa and became important hubs of trade for the Portuguese when they were discovered in 1460 and 1471, respectively. They are an example of the new creolized societies that were formed from encounters and interactions between Europeans and Africans in the Portuguese Atlantic world (Brooks 2013). The Cabo Verde islands became the hub of Portugal's North Atlantic networks linking the westernmost coast of Africa, down to present-day Liberia, to the Iberian Peninsula and the trade in slaves to Spanish America (Green 2012). São Tomé and Príncipe had a similar relationship with the Bight of Benin (where the Warri Kingdom was located), Kongo, and Angola. This particular trade route became part of the "triangular, transatlantic slave and commodity trade, that linked continental forts and settlements such as Elmina and Cacheu and their hinterland to Atlantic outlets" (Green 2012: 2). The geographic proximity of São Tomé to the Warri Kingdom was important as it enabled the *olus* to build a stronger connection with the Portuguese in the gulf region.

Prince Anthonio was of mixed Itsekiri-Portuguese heritage. He was known as the "prince with the golden-skin" (Moore 1970). Oral tradition states that he was the son of an Itsekiri princess, Magheghoeye, and Mingo, a Portuguese trader (Moore 1970). If this is true, it would make him the only *olu* to accede to the throne who descended through the matrilineal line. However, there is no information on the nature of the relationship between

Mingo and Princess Magheghoeye and whether they were married in accordance with Christian tradition, although this fits into the narrative explored earlier of European traders having intimate relations with local women. However, if he had been the son of Olu Dom Domingos and his wife Maria of noble birth (Moore 1970), this would have given him a stronger claim to the throne, being the son of the former *olu*. A different interpretation, which challenges the oral tradition, is that what aided Anthonio in his rise to the throne was the connection to Portugal which he cultivated in his youth.

After the demise of the former Olu Atuwatse, the Itsekiri throne had three possible successors, two were sons, Atuwatse and Omoluyere, and the third was a grandson Anthonio. The Itsekiri National Council, who oversaw the process of choosing the new *olu*, ordered the three candidates to return to their mother's home to obtain that which was necessary to rule. By this they were expected to provide a feast for the Itsekiri people to show that they could provide for them (Moore 1970). The two sons returned to Benin City and Ugborodo; Atuwatse brought yams and palm oil from Benin city, and Omoluyere arrived with fish and shrimp. At this point in time, Omoluyere was the favorite, however Benighere's (Anthonio's) return would prove triumphant. He returned to Warri in a Portuguese vessel laden with goods including "pure rum from the cask, tobacco, provisions, pipes, and various other fancy goods" (Moore 1970: 26). The luxury of these items won over the Itsekiri people. Olu Anthonio Domingos's authority became intimately linked to his connection with the Portuguese as he emerged victorious in the struggle for succession. This episode reveals how other factors besides cultural heritage became increasingly important. Such public displays of wealth illustrate to what extent the individual wealth of an *olu*, or of a claimant to the throne, had become a key indicator of their ability to rule. The Itsekiri Prince Anthonio was more successful since his accession to power was with the full blessing of the majority of the Itsekiri people who were impressed with the wealth he displayed, rather than having to wage a violent battle against another faction.

For the three *olus* discussed above, the traditional religion coexisted with Christianity. The Portuguese connection was symbolically important for asserting authority and for the Itsekiri people by their acceptance of the new religion and extensive, open interaction with the Portuguese. Nevertheless, Christianity did not completely penetrate the kingdom and remained a court religion in this early period (Ryder 1960), and despite these influences, the *olus*, custodians of the national culture, held on to their traditional beliefs, walking a fine line between Christianity and traditional religion while they sought to exert authority through these mutual exchanges.

From their early contact with the European traders as middlemen to the people in the hinterland, many Itsekiri words used today are derived from Portuguese. Lexical evidence suggests that the introduction of maize into the Nigerian geographical area was northern in origin (McCann 2005). The one exception is the Itsekiri language where the word for maize, *imiyo*, is a derivative of a Portuguese word *milho*. (McCann 2005). Hence, the kingdom had become part of local, regional, and global networks during the early modern period from 1450 to 1850.

Conclusion

Overall, this article has shown how relations between the Portuguese and the Warri Kingdom developed during the seventeenth century. This relationship began in the fifteenth century with an early encounter between Portuguese trading vessels and the Itsekiri. This early connection with the Portuguese helped solidify the newly formed Warri Kingdom and allowed the kingdom to differentiate itself from its much larger neighbor, the Benin Kingdom. The early modern Warri Kingdom established connections with the wider Lusophone world and Europe through the migrations of its princes. Over time, it developed into a full diplomatic relationship with commercial exchange moving beyond the trade in commodities to encompass the mobility of people in both directions. The extent of conversion to Christianity influenced how the Warri Kingdom interacted with its neighbors, while the elite migrations of Itsekiri princes abroad affected the succession to the throne. In the case of the Warri Kingdom, pre-colonial Lusophone kingship was characterized by religious syncretism even though Christianity did not extend to the general population.

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Bionote/Nota Biográfica

ALLEGRA AYIDA is a Ph.D. student in History at Yale University. She holds an MPhil in African Studies from Cambridge University, an MA in World History from King’s College London and a BA in History from Wesleyan University. Her research focuses on the Warri kingdom located in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

ALLEGRA AYIDA é estudante de doutoramento em História na Universidade de Yale. Possui um MPhil em Estudos Africanos da Universidade de Cambridge, um MA em História Mundial de King’s College London e um BA em História da Universidade de Wesleyan. A sua pesquisa focaliza no reino Warri, localizado na delta do Rio Níger, na Nigéria.