

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# African and Asian Writings from Mozambique: Uncovering Indigenous Records in a Portuguese Colonial Archive

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## Abstract

In the course of seeking indigenous documentation in a European-centered colonial archival repository, we uncovered a collection of African sources that highlight the literary work of African and Asian literate agents. The research enabled us to identify numerous indigenous African and Asian writings within an archive originally intended to support the Portuguese colonial administration. This article presents an archival survey on African documentation from Mozambique held in the Overseas Historical Archive (*Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino*), in Lisbon, Portugal.

## Résumé

En recherchant de la documentation produite par des Africains et des Asiatiques dans un centre d'archives coloniales centrées sur l'Europe, nous avons découvert une série de sources africaines qui mettent en lumière le travail littéraire d'agents lettrés africains et asiatiques. Cette recherche nous a permis d'identifier de nombreux écrits africains et asiatiques dans des archives initialement destinées à soutenir l'administration coloniale portugaise. Cet article présente une enquête archivistique sur la documentation africaine du Mozambique conservée dans les Archives historiques d'outre-mer (*Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino*), à Lisbonne, au Portugal.

**Keywords:** colonial archive; indigenous documents; literacy; Portuguese colonialism; Mozambique

**Mots-clés:** Écrits africains et asiatiques du Mozambique : Découverte de documents dans les archives coloniales portugaises

## Introduction

The concept that colonial archives enhance Western colonial power by othering, excluding, occulting, or silencing indigenous voices has become critical to historians of Africa and colonialism in the last three decades. Colonial archives can be approached as repositories of historical sources crucial for history writing and as active political agents within Western power frameworks.<sup>1</sup> In this context, the question of how, or even if, traces of indigenous voices might be retrieved from colonial records has become an important topic. Some scholarship tends to see colonial archives as mere reflections of Western conceptions, to the point of suggesting the impossibility of indigenous voices taking hold in European colonial archives.<sup>2</sup> Yet, as historians and archive-minded anthropologists have shown, reading the archives against the grain can allow for retrieving indigenous agency and cultural conceptions from within colonial repositories. Thus, while the Euro-centred and political dimension of colonial records must be acknowledged, it is reductive to deny European colonial-era sources *a priori* the potential to access actions, voices, or concepts by indigenous Africans.<sup>3</sup> The latter can be recorded by European writers, more or less involuntarily. But colonial archives also can comprise other types of sources that record indigenous voices in a more direct way. We refer specifically to writings authored by literate indigenous persons, potentially bearing the mark of their political purposes, social interests, and cultural conceptions, without – or with minimal – European distortion or interference. Colonial archives are often characterized by Eurocentric classification procedures and systems introduced by the imperial state administration, which tend to fail to prioritize, or even make visible indigenous-authored records. Hence, the presence of written sources authored by agents other than the Europeans has to be laboriously retrieved, against the grain of archivist orderings, from a variety of colonial records made for distinct purposes. Yet, once these records are methodically shifted, selected, and reconfigured as a corpus of African sources, we hypothesize, they might enable historians to bypass archival Eurocentrism, paving the way for an engagement with Africa's colonial history through the lens of writings and texts authored by Africans as well as by Africa-based non-Europeans – such as the Asian Vaniya merchants considered here who settled, more or less permanently, in African settings during the period of European colonial rule. How such writings that live within former archival orderings are made visible or invisible in the colonial record,

<sup>1</sup> The main reference on this point is Ann L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008). But see also Caroline Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid, and Razia Saleh (eds.), *Refiguring the Archive* (Berlin: Springer, 2002); Achille Mbembe, "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive," *Africa Is a Country*, 2015. <https://wiser.wits.ac.za/sites/default/files/private/Achille%20Mbembe%20-%20Decolonizing%20Knowledge%20and%20the%20Question%20of%20the%20Archive.pdf> (accessed 15 July 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Most famously argued by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," *Die Philosophin* 14, no. 27 (1988): 42–58.

<sup>3</sup> On this argument and a comprehensive review of this debate we follow Ricardo Roque and Kim A. Wagner, "Introduction: Engaging Colonial Knowledge," in *Engaging Colonial Knowledge: Reading European Archives in World History*, ed. Ricardo Roque and Kim A. Wagner (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1–32.

how they can be rescued, reassessed, and made accessible, and how they might help to open new perspectives into historical research are challenges we would like to consider in this paper.

In the historiography of colonial Africa, the development of critical approaches to European imperial perspectives, and the emphasis on Africans as active historical agents, has involved efforts to overcome the limitations of Western colonial writings. From the 1960s onwards, however, the consolidation of these approaches tended to portray African societies according to a binary between the oral and the written. Initial investigations in search of African experiences silenced by European colonialism were based on written documents; they prioritized European sources, relying on interpretations against the grain, between the lines, or focused on what was left unsaid.<sup>4</sup> The quest to uncover “African voices” silenced by European sources thus led to the collection of African oral traditions, which many regard as more reliable or authentic pathways to understanding African perspectives on the past.<sup>5</sup>

The growing distrust of European sources and a privilege granted to African orality also resulted in a deficit of attention to writings and sources developed in Africa and by Africans over several centuries, in various alphabets and languages. A tendency to describe African societies as purely oral or without written traditions led to a diminished focus on forms of literacy that existed before European occupation and/or evolved through contact with outsiders. However, this tendency has been shifting. In the 2000s, for instance, based on a wealth of documents produced and archived by the Ndembu authorities in Angola, Tavares and Santos demonstrated how African states “appropriated” European writing systems and Portuguese language to forge sophisticated state organizations and forms of political communication.<sup>6</sup> In addition, scholars demonstrated how colonial archives of African contexts are a repository of a wide variety of Swahili and Muslim ‘indigenous writings’. During the 1980s and 1990s, projects such as the Swahili Manuscripts Database of the SOAS, systematically identified Swahili documents in Arabic from East Africa.<sup>7</sup> Important examples of the consolidation of these approaches over the last two decades include Luffin’s works on nineteenth-century Swahili manuscripts from Congo

<sup>4</sup> For a review of this debate produced during the 1970s, see H. Djait, “Written Sources before the Fifteenth Century,” in *General History of Africa, I: Methodology and African Prehistory*, ed. Joseph Ki-Zerbo (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), 87–113, and J. Hrbek, “Written Sources from the Fifteenth Century Onward,” in Ki-Zerbo, *General History of Africa, I*, 114–141.

<sup>5</sup> One of the most important historians on this topic is Jan Vansina. In one of his most iconic articles, Vansina states, “Most precolonial African civilization were ‘oral civilizations.’” Jan Vansina, “Once Upon a Time: Oral Traditions as History in Africa,” *Daedalus. The Historian and the World of the Twentieth Century* 100, no. 2 (1971): 442–468.

<sup>6</sup> Ana Paula Tavares and Catarina M. Santos, *Africae Monumenta. A Apropriação da Escrita pelos Africanos* (Lisbon: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical, 2002). Catarina M. Santos, “Escrever o Poder: Os Autos de Vassalagem e a Vulgarização da Escrita entre as Elites Africanas Ndembu,” *Revista de História* 155 (2006): 81–95. See also Joseph C. Miller, *Poder Político e Parentesco: Os Antigos Estados Mbundu em Angola* (Luanda: Arquivo Histórico Nacional, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> See <https://digital.soas.ac.uk/swahili> (accessed 22 January 2025). A pioneer work about this topic can be found in James W. T. Allen, *The Swahili and Arabic Manuscripts and Tapes in the Library of the University College Dar-es-Salaam: A Catalogue* (Leiden: Brill, 1970).

stored in Belgian museums and archives; the work of Muhammad Haron about *ajami* manuscripts, involving the use of the Arabic alphabet for the written representation of various African languages, in South Africa; and the work of Liazzat Bonate and Chapane Mutiau with colonial archives and *ajami* writings in Mozambique contexts. More recently, scholars such as Ngom, and Mumin and Veersteegh, have further revealed the importance of the Islamic influence in constructing a rich body of written documents in *ajami* (or *ajamia*).<sup>8</sup>

In this vein, this article gives further credence to the hypothesis of African agents and societies having developed autonomous, sustained, and manifold engagements with literacy and writing in their dealings with Europeans, and even beyond them. To this purpose, we outline here the first results of a research aimed at transforming a body of defined colonial records into a corpus of indigenous-origin manuscripts. We will attend especially to the results obtained on Mozambique, a former colony of Portugal, from a survey on indigenous documentation originating from the Portuguese former colonies of Goa, Timor, Angola and Mozambique, and held in the Overseas Historical Archive (*Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino*, hereafter AHU), in Lisbon, Portugal.<sup>9</sup> The survey did not cover the gigantic amount of documentation in this archive. We focused specifically on the vast and rich *Overseas Council Records* (1640–1833) (*Fundo do Conselho Ultramarino*, hereafter FCU), a large collection of thousands of records originating in the Portuguese Asian, American, and African territories between the 1600s and the 1800s, and yet incompletely cataloged. The article provides an overview of ongoing work on this documentation and identifies the challenges encountered during the survey. It is divided into three sections. First, we briefly outline the premises of the wider research project on Asian and African writing and archiving practices in Portuguese colonial settings – entitled *Indigenous Colonial Archives: Micro-histories and Comparisons* (acronym INDICO) – within which the survey was conducted. We here consider how we operationalized the category of “indigenous documents” as a discovery tool for unearthing and making visible African and Asian documents previously partially or totally undetected. Next, we describe the survey implemented at the AHU. We analysed the archival organization and classification employed by the AHU and, countering the conventional system used, we focused on documents whose production or authorship could be attributed to African and Asian groups or individuals. This brought to light a multitude of indigenous writings, a literate African world, we believe, that had hitherto been largely invisible or submerged under the institutional praxis of document cataloging.

Finally, we present possible lines of reflection and analysis based on a selection of documentation gathered specifically in the Mozambique documents within FCU. We suggest two lines of inquiry. The first concerns the history of different social groups living along the coast of East Africa, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, who drew substantially on writing and archiving practices to develop

<sup>8</sup> Fallou Ngom, “Ajami Literacies of West Africa,” in *Tracing Language Movement in Africa*, ed. Ericka Albaugh and Kathryn Luna (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 143–164; Meikal Mumin and Kees Versteegh (eds.), *The Arabic Script in Africa: Studies in the Use of a Writing System* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Open access to the searchable catalog of our survey is provided at <https://indico.ics.ulisboa.pt/database/> (accessed 22 January 2025).

economic and political exchanges with the Portuguese colonial administration. Over recent years, there has been an increasing number of research projects devoted to the analysis of literacy practices in Afro-Islamic communities in Northern Mozambique.<sup>10</sup> However, the period between 1750 and 1850, a time marked by the increasing expansion of Portuguese colonial administration, has not received the same attention. In contrast, the documents revealed by our survey provide new perspectives and enable a closer examination of Afro-Islamic communities within this temporal framework. We offer revealing examples of the potential of such writings to shed light on distinct forms of indigenous agency, including resistance to the Portuguese colonial presence in the area that now corresponds to northern Mozambique. The second line of inquiry concerns the classificatory practices of archival storage. How archival institutions currently store, organize, and classify documentation inherited from former colonial administrations significantly impacts the development of new historical knowledge about Africa. In this regard, our concern is to reflect on the limitations of these archiving procedures for historians of Africa and of colonialism interested in rescuing African perspectives. We call attention to how the AHU procedures could identify, or fail to identify, the presence of indigenous-authored documentation. Of course, when we refer to such documents hidden, or in the shadow of cataloging procedures, we are not by any means attributing “the AHU” or its personnel, as it were, the intent of hiding documents produced by Africans. Instead, we are calling attention to a structural, often unintentional, fact of the archiving trajectories of these colonial records that produce – almost systemically – forms of marginalization, occlusion, invisibility, or even suppression of written traces of African and Asian authorship in the colonial archival record.<sup>11</sup> Hence, we reflect on how archival record-keeping and cataloging might lead to forms of invisibility of African documents; we attend also to the consequences in these gaps in the historical study of the Portuguese presence in East Africa and the relationship that African populations established with the colonial administration.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, the Swahili Digital Collection project, the result of the project “Swahili Stories and Cultures of Northern Mozambique: Experiences of Social Inclusion through Teaching History and Digital Media (Brazil-Mozambique),” developed at PUC-Rio by Regiane Mattos, which can be seen at <http://www.acervodigitalsuaili.com.br/> (accessed 9 November 2022); Chapane Mutiua, “Ajami Literacy, Class and Portuguese Colonial Administration in Northern Mozambique” (unpublished Master’s dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2014); Liazzat Bonate, “Islam and Literacy in Northern Mozambique: Historical Records on the Secular Uses of Arabic Script,” *Islamic Africa* 7 (2016): 60–80; Liazzat Bonate and Joel das Neves Tembe, *Documentos Escritos em Caracteres Árabes no Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique* (Maputo: Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, 2021); Clarissa Vierke and Chapane Mutiua, “The Poem about the Prophet’s Death in Mozambique – Swahili as a Transregional Language of Islamic Poetry,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 38, no. 2 (2020): 44–74; and Chapane Mutiua, “Swahili Manuscripts from Northern Mozambique: Some Notes on Ajami Correspondence Letters,” *Manuscript Culture* 17 (2021): 29–52.

<sup>11</sup> A similar perspective is pointed out by Oliveira’s research about the process of silencing the authorship of images produced by Africans on Portuguese colonial archives. Marcus Vinicius Oliveira, “Imagens no trânsito da História: colonialismo português e os circuitos sociais da fotografia sobre as Áfricas no século XX” (unpublished PhD thesis, Universidade Federal Fluminense, 2024).

## African and Asian “indigenous documents” in a Mozambican colonial collection

The INDICO project aimed to open new research avenues into indigenous African and Asian practices of archiving and writing in the territories of the former Portuguese colonial empire, a long-lasting imperial formation that took off to an early start in the fifteenth century to endure for almost four hundred years, until its late demise in 1974–75. We sought to understand how and why certain African and Asian communities recorded, stored, and circulated manuscripts in the context of their interactions with the Portuguese, drawing on a set of exploratory case studies within the regions of Goa, Timor, Angola, and Mozambique. In parallel, the project envisaged an extensive survey aimed to identify traces of African and Asian writing cultures within the colonial collections of records held in the main archival institutions in Portugal’s former imperial capital, Lisbon.<sup>12</sup>

The research conducted by the project team at FCU/AHU employed the heuristic notion of the “indigenous document” to address the challenge of identifying and selecting documents from a vast and highly diverse collection of texts, authors, locations, and time periods. Under this notion, we considered manuscripts that, in some way, bore the signature and/or authorial mark of indigenous African and Asian individuals or collectives. Of course, the application of this notion, even as a loose heuristic tool, is not without limitations and potential failures. We acknowledge the manifold historical, sociological, and anthropological complexities and fluidities of the notions of indigenous/*indígena* and native/*nativo* in the Portuguese world and beyond it, including the tensional colonial and postcolonial political connotations that these terms came to acquire, especially since the nineteenth century. By the late 1800s, for instance, the Portuguese-language term *indígena* became a markedly colonialist and racist essentializing term (the equivalent to the term *native* in Anglophone colonial discourse), the connotations of which we of course reject and seek to avoid.<sup>13</sup> Prior to that period, particularly during the early modern era, a broader linguistic plethora of ambiguous identity concepts and terminologies related to self-perceptions of “indigeneity” emerged in the context of Portuguese expansion. Terms such as *natural do país* (natural of the country) or *filho da terra* (land-born, or son of the land) were all of them potentially indicative of a complex sense of rooting in and/or belonging to extra-European societies – a complexity that the later term “indígena” or “native” alone might fail to capture.<sup>14</sup> The term

<sup>12</sup> The archival work presented herein was carried out between 2019 and 2022. There were numerous obstacles caused by the COVID-19 pandemic that swept the world in the early months of 2020. In-person research at the AHU was not possible during the first semester of 2020, and the archive was closed to researchers at different times throughout the rest of 2020 and 2021. The case studies were not completed but we were nevertheless able to complete the survey in 2023. For further information on the INDICO project see: <https://indico.ics.ulisboa.pt/> (accessed 2 January 2025).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Mário Moutinho, *O Indígena No Pensamento Colonial Português – 1895–1961* (Lisbon: Edições Universitárias Lusófonas, 2000); Lorenzo Macagno, *A invenção do assimilado. Paradoxos do colonialismo em Moçambique* (Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> On the difficult problem of “native” identity-making and ambivalence in the context of Portuguese expansion, see, among many: Angela Xavier and Inês G. Zupanov, “Ser Brâmane na Goa da Época

“indigenous” is thus a complex and slippery notion that demands greater conceptual nuance and critical caution, considering its different historical contexts and conflicting meanings. Nonetheless, we believe heuristic benefits superseded these difficulties. For, as a result of applying this exploratory concept we were able to detect an otherwise largely invisible group of written sources that effectively reveal and make available for future research a multiplicity of African and Asian voices and agents who were at the centre of the production of written documentation circulating from Angola, Mozambique, Goa, and Timor to Portugal’s imperial capital in Lisbon.

It is thus important to clarify that the category of “indigenous document” was adopted as a heuristic research tool, rather than an essentializing property of the document or a definite marker of the ethnic identity of its authors. We adopted it as a discovery tool that prompted the unearthing of archived manuscripts that circulated from Africa and Asia to Portugal, and that in some way bore the authorial mark of African and Asian individuals or groups who, in the context of the document under analysis, were perceived or perceived themselves as “indigenous”. In considering and interpreting documents under this (necessarily provisional) category we paid close attention to contextual historical specificities. We became especially attentive to a combined set of self-identifiers present (or absent) in the documentation, namely: (a) the *language* and *alphabet* used; (b) the personal *names* the agents used to identify themselves as signatories or producers of the manuscript; (c) and/or the *social categories* present in the text, reflecting one’s self-perceived identity (e.g. “son of the land” [“*filho da terra*”], vanyia [“*baneane*”], “Moor,” “gentile” [“*gentio*”], “Arabian,” “mujojos,” and so forth). We thus favoured the ways the proclaimed authors of the documents interacted with Portuguese administration by resorting to a variety of forms of “presentation of their selves,” as sociologist Erving Goffman would put it, that signalled privileged connexion to non-European idioms, languages, and/or to an African or Asian place as identity places of birth/origin (that is: places from which they perceived themselves to be “native” or *natural*).<sup>15</sup> The use of vernacular personal names and languages was one relevant (though not exclusive) indicator of what we categorized as an “indigenous document.” The use of non-Latin could be an obvious indicator (for instance, the writing in Kiswahili, Arabic, and Gujarati languages and alphabets, as in several cases discussed herein), yet we also categorized as indigenous documents many cases of African and Asian uses of the Portuguese language written in the Latin alphabet. The expansion of Christianization, along with the disseminated use of Portuguese names, inevitably made this endeavor even more complex. Yet, we were aware that sometimes European Christian personal names could hide African

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Moderna,” *Revista de História* 172 (2015): 15–41; Jean-Loup Amselle and Elikia M’Bokolo (eds.), *No centro da etnia: etnias, tribalismo e Estado na África* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Vozes, 2017); António Hespanha, *Filhos da Terra: Identidades mestiças nos confins da expansão portuguesa* (Lisbon: Tinta-da-China, 2019). For just a recent example of the complexities of indigeneity as a colonial and postcolonial marker, see James Clifford, *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-first century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1956).

or Asian producers, and thus – after careful interpretation of each specific written source – we came to the decision of classifying some of them also as “indigenous documents.” Hence, as slippery and challenging as the terms “indigenous” or “indigenous documentation” may be, the project was able to confront the invisibility of writing practices by subjects within colonial documentation, especially the documents stored at the AHU.

The survey therefore applied the terms “indigenous” and “indigenous document” not as watertight categories. On the contrary, we put them forward as heuristic research tools that made it possible to move beyond the straitjacket of Western colonial archiving. The way the archives are organized and how the contents of the documents they safeguard are presented, directly influence historical research. In this regard, as shall be seen below, the formats currently used to inventory the colonial archival records present at the AHU do not necessarily present themselves as useful for historians interested in the agency of Africans in colonial contexts. Our survey and the resulting online catalog have countered this tendency. Thus, although our research cannot simply eliminate or undo these logics in archival serial storage and ordering, we argue that it interfered in relevant ways with the colonial tendency to suppress indigenous voices and agencies in the archives of colonization. It resulted in an original catalog and database, in which prime place is given to avowedly non-European, rather than European, writings that *exist* within the colonial archive itself.

### Researching documents from Mozambique at the AHU

It is necessary to explain why we chose to focus our survey at the AHU and, more specifically, the miscellaneous handwritten documents that comprise the Overseas Council Collections (*Fundo do Conselho Ultramarino* [FCU]). There are other collections of relevant colonial documentation in Lisbon, such as the *Corpo Cronológico* (Chronological Body) held at the Torre do Tombo National Archives; the codices kept at the Academy of Sciences of Lisbon; or the collection of manuscripts held at the *Biblioteca da Ajuda* (Ajuda Library).<sup>16</sup> The AHU, however, remains the main archival site for observing the workings of Portuguese imperial administration in the long term and across varied geographies.<sup>17</sup> This was a state institution created by the Portuguese fascist imperial regime of *Estado Novo* in 1931. Originally under the name of *Colonial Historical Archives* (*Arquivo Histórico Colonial*, renamed AHU in 1951) its function was to house all dispersed official collections and historical documents related to the imperial administration of Portugal’s colonial territories, with the ideological purpose of providing evidence for a celebratory nationalist narrative of the colonialist identity and

<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the initial objective of the project was to compare documentation collected and surveyed at the AHU with other collections located in Angola, Mozambique, Goa, and Timor. However, the COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible to travel and carry out similar in-depth research in countries other than Portugal.

<sup>17</sup> For different perspectives of the establishment of colonial archives by European powers, see Vincent Hiribarren, “Hiding the European Colonial Past: A Comparison of Archival Policies,” in *Displaced Archives*, ed. J. Lowry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 74–85.

imperial past of the country.<sup>18</sup> The AHU would thus concentrate on a single site a variety of former archival formations associated with imperial governance in Lisbon – including, importantly for our purposes, the collections of the *Conselho Ultramarino* (Overseas Council), the main structure related to the central management of the Portuguese Empire for almost 200 years (c. 1642–1833).<sup>19</sup> Currently, this council's miscellaneous collections at AHU correspond to a vast corpus of documentation concerning two governing bodies of the Portuguese colonial territories, namely the Overseas Council itself, and also the *Secretaria de Estado dos Negócios da Marinha e dos Domínios Ultramarinos* (Secretary of State for Naval Affairs and Overseas Domains, for the period 1750–1833), plus documentation from the *Governo Geral* (General Government) as well as several documents from the *Conselho da Fazenda* (Treasury Council).<sup>20</sup> In particular, the FCU records make it possible to survey a wide variety of Ancien Régime documentation typologies (from petitionary-style *representations* to diplomatic treaties, land titles, or mere travel permits, for example) across different temporal and geographic contexts. This allowed us to assess how the indigenous populations communicated with the Portuguese administration on a variety of subjects and through the media of different document genres and written forms. The survey covered four main geographical regions: Angola, Mozambique, Timor, and Goa. Yet, for the purpose of this article, we will focus specifically on the findings about the former colonial territory of Mozambique.

### **The Mozambique Collection at the FCU**

Our point of departure was the (partial) inventory of the Mozambique series of the FCU made available online by the AHU since June 2015. This inventory originates in the 1980s in the context of a project of the government of Mozambique (supported by the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with

<sup>18</sup> The existence of archives in Lisbon linked to the imperial administration was not, in itself, new. Throughout the centuries, the various institutions responsible for governing the empire in Lisbon had kept organized repositories to process and store the documents arriving from the territories controlled by the Portuguese Crown in Africa, America, and Asia. Chiefly among those were the House of Guinea, Mina, and India (Casa da Guiné, Mina e Índia, c. 1503–1755) and the Overseas Council (c. 1640–1834). On the history of AHU we follow José Miguel Ferreira and Ricardo Roque, “Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino,” in *Ecos Coloniais: Histórias, Patrimónios e Memórias*, ed. A. Guardião, M.B. Jerónimo, and P. Peixoto (Lisbon: Tinta-da-China, 2022), 13–20. See also Gautier Garnier, “Arquivos da memória colonial portuguesa: o Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, 1931–1974,” *Ler História* 85 (2024): 143–164.

<sup>19</sup> The Overseas Council was regulated by Regulation of 14 July 1642 and established by Decree of 14 July 1643, being responsible for dealing with all matters and business of any quality relating to India, Brazil, Guinea, the islands of São Tomé and Cape Verde, and all other Portuguese overseas parts, advising the king. Its powers extended to the administration of the Treasury (inheriting jurisdiction over assets in the Overseas Dominions from the Treasury Council, except the Azores, Madeira, and places in North Africa), Justice and War, and included the regulation of the movement of ships, appointments to overseas positions, and the granting of favors for services rendered in the colonies, with several exceptions. About this council's archival attributions and administrative see <https://digitarq.ahu.arquivos.pt/details?id=1119329> (accessed 29 July 2024).

<sup>20</sup> Ana Canas Delgado Martins, “A documentação do Conselho Ultramarino como património arquivístico comum: subsídios à sua história,” *Revista Brasileira de História* 38, no. 78 (2018): 39–54.

Developing Countries) to produce microfilms of the colonial documentation about Mozambique held in the AHU. The microfilm rolls produced in that context were to be sent to the *Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique* (Historical Archives of Mozambique, hereafter AHM), where they would allow researchers based in Mozambique to have easier access to sources about their country located in Portugal. This was a valuable objective that, however, was not yet fulfilled.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the AHU revised some of the catalog descriptions produced in the 1980s. These revised descriptions were not in continuity with former practices, nor did they adopt the same criteria of description across the FCU documentation for the different regions of the Portuguese Empire.<sup>22</sup> The outcome of these work to the Mozambique inventory produced in the 1980s was a partially revised catalog that includes just a few more document descriptions. Hence, the current catalog of the Mozambique series remains basically the result of systematic work done in the 1980s; in addition, it continues to be a partial and incomplete inventory of the Mozambique series.<sup>23</sup>

Based on this partial inventory (and also on our own research), we concluded that, at present, the Mozambique collection at FCU comprises 271 boxes, with a total of 25,325 documents, dated from 1605 to 1893 (three boxes, however, are undated).<sup>24</sup> Although there are documents from the late nineteenth century, the

<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, the microfilms appear to be those stored today at the AHM's old building in Maputo, specifically on the Av. Filipe Samuel Magaia, which is partially abandoned and in a poor state of conservation and not available to the public. In a way, the INDICO online database, to a certain extent, makes it possible now for researchers based in Mozambique to regain open and public access to information contained in some of the records microfilmed in the 1980s. Everything indicates that this was a microfilming project linked to the development of structures for the consolidation of Mozambican independence and the promotion of nation-building. About this process, see Matheus Pereira, "Social History of a Global Document: The Lives of the Film 25 and the Writings of a Post-colonial African History (Mozambique, Brazil, and Europe, 1974–2019)," *Esboços* 28, no. 48 (2021): 447–470.

<sup>22</sup> In fact, the inventory carried out in the 1980s described more documents than the current catalog, and this procedure is unlike what was done, for example, by the projects "Rescue: Baron of Rio Branco" (*Resgate: Barão do Rio Branco*) and "Atlantic Africa: from documentation to knowledge, 17th–19th century" (*África Atlântica: da documentação ao conhecimento, séc. XVII–XIX*). Both projects aimed to produce descriptions of colonial sources in Portuguese archives. The project "Rescue" is an international archivist cooperation program held by the Brazilian government, with the mission of cataloging and reproducing historical documentation concerning Brazil's history before its independence, in 1822, held in European archives. Since the 1960s, and with more intensity from the 1990s onward, the project promoted the digitization of archival sources in Portuguese archives and the exchange of Brazilian researchers in Portugal. See <https://www.gov.br/bn/pt-br/central-de-conteudos/projeto-resgate>. The project "Atlantic Africa: From Documentation to Knowledge, 17th–19th Century" was a project founded by the Foundation for Science and Technology (Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia [FCT]), from Portugal, held by AHU, developed between 2009 and 2013, with the participation of the Angola National Archive (Arquivo Nacional de Angola), which financed the partial description and organization of the FCU for Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, and São Tomé and Príncipe.

<sup>23</sup> Of the 271 existing boxes from the Mozambique series from FCU, 124 have their contents briefly described and 147 are not inventoried. The boxes numbered between 1 and 7, 10 and 11, 18A, 30A, 64 to 83, 86, 93, 100, 104 to 119, 125 to 131, 133, 135 and 136, 139, 159 to 199A, 203 to 225, 247 to 257, and 264 to 267 are not inventoried.

<sup>24</sup> The partial AHU catalog may be found at <https://digitarq.ahu.arquivos.pt/details?id=1119366> (accessed 10 May 2021). The catalog states that there are 267 boxes organized according to the year of

main historical period covered by the documentation corresponds to the years between 1752 and 1833. This period spans from the beginning of the separation of the colonial administration of Mozambique from India in 1752; and ends with the bureaucratic reorganization of the Portuguese overseas structures in Lisbon in 1833, which extinguished the Overseas Council and led to the creation of the state Secretary of Navy and Overseas Affairs. The INDICO online catalog, however, offers a thorough reading and detailed description of every “indigenous document” that can be found in this collection. This sample represents only a small fraction of the vast collection of colonial documentation we have surveyed over nearly three years at AHU. For Mozambique alone, out of a total of 25,325 documents, approximately 9 percent (2,162) were initially selected as potentially of interest. From this, a sample of 66 percent (1,431) of manuscripts was chosen, including 1,341 items that we classified as “indigenous documents” properly; and yet another 90 documents that we have categorized as “*vestiges*”; that is, documents that, although not authored or signed by African agents, bore some form of direct or indirect evidence of indigenous practices of document writing and/or archiving – such as references in text to other documents, other indigenous writings, and/or local archives external to the AHU. These numbers make it evident that the bulk of the FCU documentation does not correspond, strictly speaking, to the above-defined category “indigenous document.” This was to be expected given the nature of the collection itself, which largely corresponds to documents produced by Portuguese agents and institutions representative of colonial authority in the region.

At the AHU, the dominant approach to this set of documents has so far been from a perspective that tends to perpetuate the original administrative logic of colonial archiving and the bureaucratic organization of the Portuguese empire when the document was produced. To maintain the original archiving system may have the virtue of allowing historians to access the classificatory logic of colonial power. However, it also fails to give visibility to distinct African or other non-European voices in these manuscripts, as is evident by the relevant number of “indigenous documents” which our catalog on Mozambique illuminates and that, until now, were left uncharted. Hence, although the former inventories (even if incomplete) are certainly useful, in what concerns the objective of highlighting the presence of indigenous documents, they have to be approached critically and their limitations have to be circumvented by a cataloging approach that makes that presence manifest. For, in contrast with former inventories, our

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production of the documents. However, upon detailed inspection, we accounted for a total of 271 boxes. This difference is because the boxes that are listed with a number plus the letter A, such as box 30 A, are not accounted for in the total official numbering. The lack of a complete online inventory of the FCU-Mozambique documents also makes it very difficult for researchers abroad, especially those based in Africa, to take the initial step of conceiving certain research questions remotely. In this regard, the INDICO online catalog has the additional value of providing researchers in Africa with at least a summary of the contents of the “indigenous documents” present in all the Mozambique boxes (including those never formerly inventoried by the institution), thereby empowering historians of Africa to raise questions that are only possible based on the prior knowledge of the existence of this kind of documentation.

survey was not aimed at simply continuing the politics of archival classification of the colonial past; it was specifically intended to counter this logic by spotlighting documentation that bears evidence of indigenous ways of writing about, and conveying, African views, interests, and aspirations through correspondence sent to Portuguese authorities. A remarkable example of this wealth of documentation, which has been under the radar of archival cataloging, is the correspondence exchanged between African Muslim rulers and Portuguese administrators in Mozambique. It is to this documentation that we now turn.

### Documentation from African sheikdoms and sultanates

Between 1750 and 1850, and during the existence of the Overseas Council, the Portuguese possessions in Mozambique were surrounded, in the words of historian Eugénia Rodrigues, by “African states and besieged by European competitors,” often in “frequent military upheaval.”<sup>25</sup> The *Terras Firmes de Mossuril*, or simply the *Terras Firmes*, and its hinterland, known as *Macuana*, were areas without precise spatial boundaries and characterized by intense conflict. The *Macuana*, located in the hinterland bordering the Mozambique Island, was occupied by *macua* societies.<sup>26</sup> The coastal strip of land in northern Mozambique was occupied by Muslim-Swahili sultanates and sheikdoms, such as the Sancul, Sangage, Angoche, and Quitangonha, which exchanged correspondence with the Portuguese colonial administration on the Mozambique Island and/or the *Terras Firmes*. Composed of Islamic population centers, these sultanates and sheikdoms had connections with other Muslim entrepôts spread throughout the islands of the Indian Ocean, such as the sultanate of Anjouan, in the Comoros Islands, and along the coast of East Africa, such as the sultanates in Pate and Zanzibar.

During our survey we were able to uncover a wealth of letters exchanged (around 217 references) between African sheikdoms and sultanates in Northern Mozambique and in the Indian Ocean islands, on the one hand, and on the other, the Portuguese colonial administration settled on the Mozambique Island. The Sultanate of Anjouan, located in the Comoros Islands (with forty-two references), and the Sheikdom of Quitangonha (with ninety-two documents) stand out as producers of a large number of handwritten documents.<sup>27</sup> The most common

<sup>25</sup> Maria Eugénia Rodrigues, “Cipaiaos da Índia ou soldados da terra? Dilemas da naturalização do exército português em Moçambique no século XVIII,” *História & Debates* 45 (2006): 60.

<sup>26</sup> On *Macua* societies in this context, see: Maria Bastião, “Entre a Ilha e a Terra. Processos de construção do continente fronteiro à Ilha de Moçambique (1763–c. 1802)” (unpublished Master’s dissertation, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> Anjouan (forty-three) and Quitangonha (ninety-two) were the two regions that produced most documentation. The following regions were also identified as producers of correspondence with the Portuguese colonial administration in Mozambique: Pate (one), Mauruça (one), Malawi (one), Trate (two), Sangage (two), Angazija (four), Bombatoque or Majunga (seven), Mombasa (seven), Zanzibar (ten), Muscat (ten), Kilwa (ten), Sancul (eleven), and Angoche (sixteen). These numbers are significant when compared to similar research conducted at the Historical Archive of Mozambique (AHM), where over 728 manuscripts were located, spanning the period between 1850 and 1910, revealing the breadth of African literacy in northern Mozambique. At AHM, the region of “Cabo Delgado not only leads in terms of the number of letters and individual authors but also in the number of collective authors.” Mutiua, “Swahili manuscripts from Northern Mozambique,” 40. It is worth noting that,

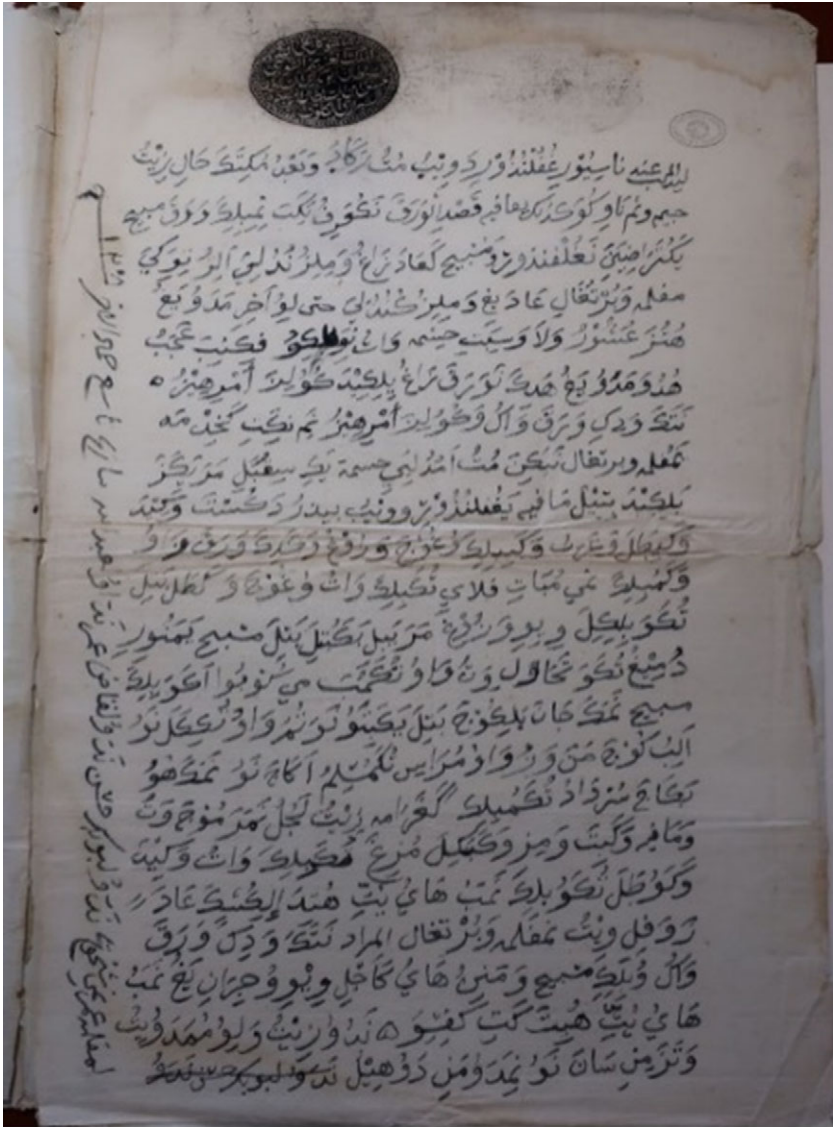
languages used in this corpus are Arabic (sometimes a specific Arabic dialect from the Zanzibar region) and Kiswahili. The majority of these documents were not translated and/or transliterated into Portuguese; only thirty-one manuscripts are accompanied by a Portuguese translation, possibly made locally at the time of their circulation by unnamed mediators.

This documentation points to an important and sustained exchange between the African sheikdoms and sultanates and the Portuguese establishment in Mozambique in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. This thriving activity of circulating and producing written documents throughout the Muslim-Swahili and Islamic-Portuguese world can be traced back to at least the beginning of the eighteenth century. However, at AHU many of these lively exchanges of documents have remained hidden from the historians' sight by cataloging procedures. Consider, for example, a letter from the so-called "king" of Quiloa, written in the Arabic alphabet and Kiswahili language (without translation and/or transliteration into Portuguese), classified as document number 28, in box 67 (Figure 1).<sup>28</sup> This letter is enclosed to another letter issued by the Portuguese Captain-Major and Governor of Mozambique, Diogo de Souza, dated 16 May 1794, in which he states having received a letter from that "king" who he treats as the "Moor Salé." The present catalog only indicates, however, the existence of the letter sent by the Governor of Mozambique, ignoring the presence of the enclosed African manuscript. In the governor's interpretation, the authority of Quiloa complained in his letter about the Portuguese not complying with the "rights" granted to Quiloa by a preceding governor. Diogo de Souza agreed with the complaint. Accordingly, to satisfy the African ruler's demands, he allowed "the [Quiloa vessel with] fabrics to pass free ... in customs" on Mozambique Island. African Islamic sources brought to light by our survey and online catalog include also the document designated "Agreement of friendship between the Kingdom of Portugal and the 'powerful sultan [Imam] of Muscat', produced by the governor and captain-general of Mozambique, Sebastião Botelho, written in Portuguese and in Arabic alphabet," and dated 10 August 1826. This source – a singular (though not unique) example of a bilingual manuscript – is stored in box 206, document 48 (Figure 2), and has not yet been inventoried by the AHU. This source is of potential significance for a growing historiography on the commercial and political networks that linked northern

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contrary to Chapane Mutiua's findings at the AHM, the manuscripts we found at AHU do not originate dominantly in the Cabo Delgado region. Instead, the period corresponding to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is characterized by a predominance of literate production in the region of the current Nampula province, designated during the colonial period as the District of Mozambique, with notable contributions from the sheikdoms of Sancul and especially Quitangonha.

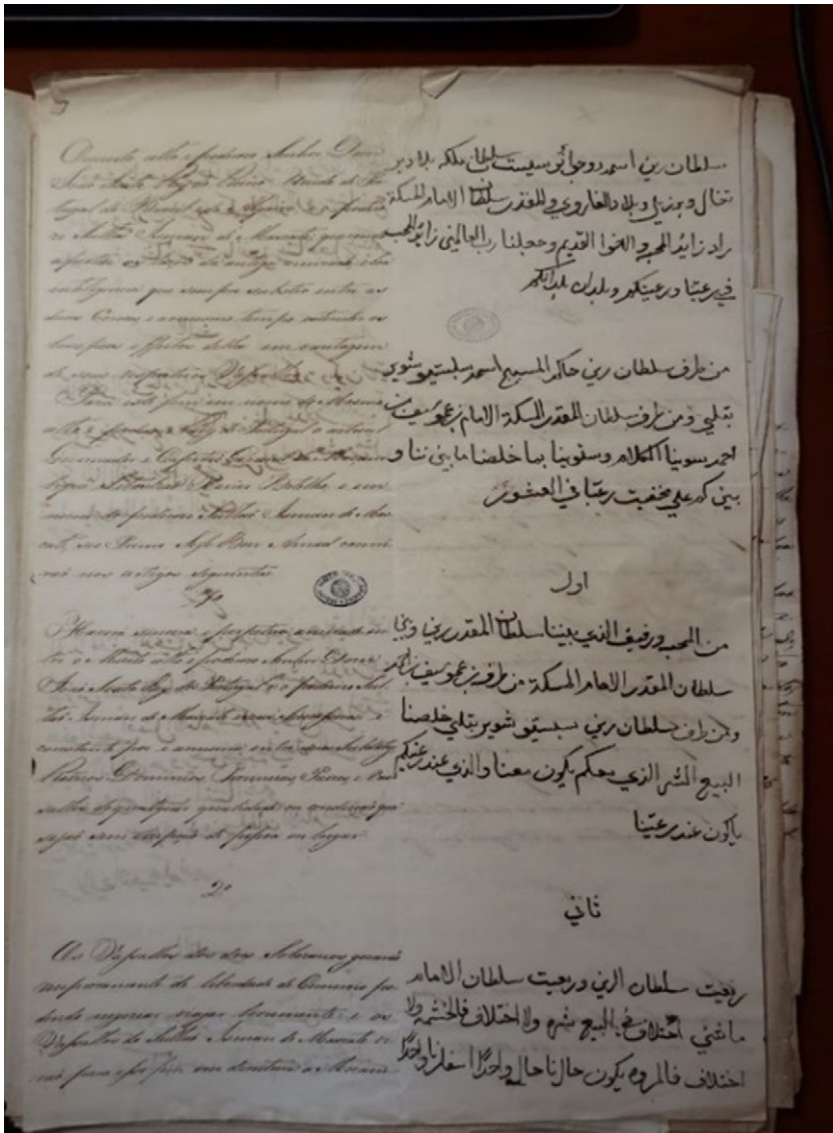
<sup>28</sup> We use the term "king" in quotation marks because it is the way in which the captain-major and governor of Mozambique identified the aforementioned African authority in his correspondence. Most likely this was a sultan or a sheikh. AHU, *Fundo do Conselho Ultramarino* (FCU), Mozambique series (miscellaneous documents), box 67, document 28. Letter from the "king" of Quiloa to the Captain-Major and Governor of Mozambique, Diego de Souza. The present-day catalog of the FCU-Mozambique series does not identify the existence of the letter. However, at odds with this catalog absence, someone (possibly a former archivist) highlighted this historical documentation as worthy of special reference at some point in the past. This is signalled by a handwritten note pointing out that the folder where the manuscript is stored "Contains a letter from the king of Quiloa, interesting for exhibitions."



**Figure 1.** AHU, FCU, Mozambique series (miscellaneous documents), box 67, document 28, letter from the “king” of Quiloa to the Captain-Major and Governor of Mozambique, Diego de Souza. Image reproduced with permission from PT, AHU.

Mozambique to the Indian Ocean, passing through the Arabian Sea, the Indian coast, and as far as China.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Edward Alpers, *East Africa and the Indian Ocean* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009); Edward Alpers, “A África e o oceano Índico,” in *África, margens e oceanos: perspectivas*



**Figure 2.** AHU, FCU, Mozambique series (miscellaneous), box 206, document 48, the first page of the “Agreement of friendship between the Kingdom of Portugal and the ‘powerful sultan [Imam] of Muscat.” Image reproduced with the permission of PT, AHU.

*de história social*, ed. Lucilene Reginaldo and Roquinaldo Ferreira (Campinas: Editora Unicamp, 2020), 47–72; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Between Eastern Africa and Western India, 1500–1650: Slavery, Commerce, and Elite Formation,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61, no. 4 (2019): 805–834.

Although the inclusion of some documents produced by African subjects, the criteria adopted by the AHU catalogs (eventually following the former colonial archiving criteria) end up omitting the major presence of these African writings. Another example of the result of this type of criteria (that followed the former colonial administration to produce the archival catalog) is in the document numbered 57, in box 25. The entry in the AHU inventory for this document describes it simply as “Letter from the Governor and Captain-General of Mozambique, Baltasar Manuel Pereira do Lago to the Secretary of State for Navy and Overseas Territories, Francisco Xavier de Mendonça Furtado, regarding the arrival of an ambassador from Mombasa,” dated 15 August 1765. This description makes detectible only one author and agent – the Portuguese authority – and conceals an African agency. In effect, when we analyse the document thus classified, we find enclosed a reference to another letter produced by the “King of Quiloa,” together with other “Moors,” dated 15 August 1765, which was translated and copied into Portuguese and delivered by the “King of Quiloa” ambassador to the abovementioned governor of Mozambique, Baltasar do Lago.<sup>30</sup>

The documentation highlighted by our survey therefore hints to a long-standing consolidated writing practice among merchants and political leaders in northern Mozambique. African literacy in the region, especially due to Islamic influence, did not start or cease to exist with the consolidation of the Portuguese colonial expansion. Certainly, the analysis of the uses of literacy by sultanates and Islamic social groups in northern Mozambique, Zanzibar, and the Comoros Islands, and their relations with Portuguese colonialism, requires further research. Regardless, an emphasis on these literate practices could help us identify the agency of African individuals and enhance our interpretation of the existing sultanates and sheikhdoms in that historical context. In particular, the letters exchanged between the sultans and sheiks and the Portuguese administration at AHU offer interesting clues about the African modes of interaction (either through negotiation, conflict, or resistance) with the Portuguese colonial presence in the region. Future research, we believe, should also consider the writings of Indian merchants and traders who circulated in the region.

### **Merchant and political literacies in northern Mozambique**

We pointed above to an intense exchange of correspondence between sultans, sheiks, and Islamic societies on the coast of East Africa and the Portuguese colonial administration. Yet, this exchange could also involve other social groups that lived and traded in the region, such as merchants of Indian origin, in the same historical period. In fact, in addition to the African Islamic authorities

<sup>30</sup> AHU, FCU-Mozambique, box 25, document 57, ofício do governador e capitão-general de Moçambique, Baltasar Manuel Pereira do Lago ao secretário do estado da Marinha e Ultramar, Francisco Xavier de Mendonça Furtado, sobre a chegada de um embaixador de Mombaça. Unfortunately, in this case, we only have the translation and a reference to the existence of the original letter, but not the letter itself.

discussed above, the documentation uncovered offers evidence of significant production and circulation of manuscripts drawn up by individuals that identified themselves and/or were identified by others as “mujojos,” “Moors,” and “baneanes.” Letters, requirements, petitions, and so-called “representations” (*representações*), reveal how these historical agents engaged through the media of writing with the Portuguese colonial administration, between around 1750 and 1840. This type of documentation can open up new research perspectives into the social experiences, political formations, and economic dynamics of East Africa and, more specifically, of the history of Mozambique and its relationship with the Indian Ocean. In particular, historians have yet to ascertain the significance of the commercial relationships established between Indian merchants, African chiefdoms and sultanates, and the Portuguese colonial administration. The exchange of correspondence, licenses, and passports required by these merchants and traders from the Portuguese administration to carry out commercial transactions, and economic and political agreements is a rich source material for investigating this aspect further. In order to set the stage for this ongoing research, we outline below some initial insights that might guide us in further research into this subject over the coming years.

### “Baneane” writings and the Indian Ocean trade

During the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, the term *baneane* was used in Portuguese to designate merchants of Indian origin, mainly from Gujerat, such as Daman and Diu, who played a leading role in the Afro-Asian trade networks of the Indian Ocean.<sup>31</sup> Research has concentrated on the importance of *baneanes* in long-distance trade and their intense conflicts with the Portuguese colonial administration due to their ability to control economic credit in the region. About the relation between trade and literacy, historian Pedro Machado, for example, affirms that the “functional literacy was limited in the eighteenth century to a small minority in Mozambique”; the credit systems developed by these merchants were based on oral agreements, since “literacy was limited to relatively few individuals.”<sup>32</sup> By contrast, Luís Frederico Antunes has identified a wider range of literate practices and archiving procedures carried out by *baneanes* in Mozambique. According to Antunes, the “baneanes” developed two types of writing activities and book-keeping procedures related to their trading activities. One was the “*livros de razão*,” which consisted of commercial accounting and credit books written in Marwari or Gujerat language/ alphabet. The second type was official correspondence exchanged with the Portuguese bureaucratic structure.<sup>33</sup> However, this same author states that

<sup>31</sup> Jorge Lúzio, “Os circuitos de marfim na Índia e suas conexões transcontinentais nas redes afro-asiáticas,” in *África, margens e oceanos: perspectivas de história social*, ed. Lucilene Reginaldo and Roquinaldo Ferreira (Campinas: Editora da Unicamp, 2020), 73–94.

<sup>32</sup> Pedro Machado, *Ocean of Trade: South Asian Merchants, Africa and the Indian Ocean, c. 1750–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 37 and 44.

<sup>33</sup> Luís Frederico Antunes, “O comércio com o Brasil e a comunidade mercantil em Moçambique (séc. XVIII),” *Atas do Congresso Internacional Espaço Atlântico de Antigo Regime: poderes e sociedades*

“baneanes” would not have “written [this correspondence] by [their] own hand” – they were presumably written by other intermediaries instead.<sup>34</sup> Hence, although Antunes identifies keeping and writing records as an important practice of these merchant groups, he also surprisingly rejects the possibility that these very documents – correspondence with the Portuguese in particular – could have been authored by Indian merchants, that letter-writing to the Portuguese could ultimately represent a meaningful writing practice in these agents’ own terms.

However, considering our findings, we believe it is possible to reassess these interpretations. We should acknowledge the possibility of Indian merchants in East Africa themselves engaging in written exchanges with the Portuguese – purposefully, systematically, directly, with or without the collaboration of intermediaries. In fact, we found a large number of requirements sent to the Portuguese administration that were most likely deliberately produced by persons identified as “baneanes.” Around 1,000 applications were submitted by “baneanes,” “Moors,” or “mujojos” to obtain Portuguese licenses and permits to carry out different types of commercial transactions, or to travel in the Eastern Coast of Africa, or even to travel to India (Daman and Diu). Many of these documents bear written signatures in *Gujerat* and/or indicate a close relationship between “baneanes” and “Moorish” merchants.<sup>35</sup> This finding at least must lead to the recognition of the importance of literacy and, above all, of handwritten documents in the networks of trading relations established between the Portuguese, “baneane” merchants, and Islamic African chiefdoms.

We would like to highlight, in this regard, two collective-authored documents shown in Figure 3. These correspond to bilingual representations made by the “baneane merchants and baneane inhabitants of the city of Mozambique” and by the “Moors inhabitants of the city of Mozambique and *Terras Firmes*” to the King of Portugal, in defence of the Captain-General and Governor of Mozambique.<sup>36</sup> The *baneanes* document contains the signature of the Captain-Major of the Baneanes, Sobachande Sauchande, and twenty-three other merchants, also self-identified *baneanes*, in non-Latin characters. In the document of the “Moors” we find the signatures of two sheiks, an imam, and twenty-four other “Moors” who present themselves under the titles of “merchants,” “inhabitants,” “Captain-Major,” “Master-Major,” “Sergeant,” and “Masters.”

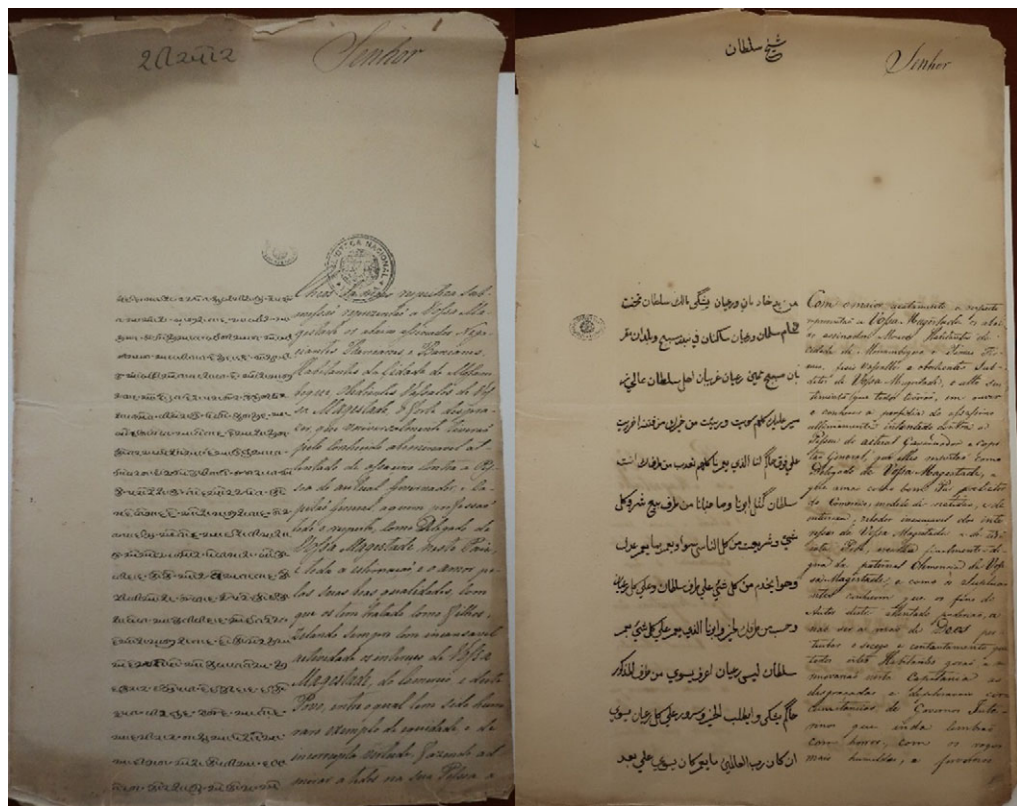
In addition, the sheiks and sultans of the region often requested Portuguese governors to intervene for encouraging *baneane* merchants to come to their lands. Thus in 1820, the Sultan of Angoche sent a letter to the Captain-Major and

(Lisbon, 2005), 1–9; Luís Frederico Antunes, “Formas de resistência africanas às autoridades portuguesas no século XVIII: a guerra de Murimuno e a tecelagem de machira no norte de Moçambique,” *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos* 33 (2017): 81–105.

<sup>34</sup> Luís Frederico Antunes, “À margem da escrita. Formas de comunicação entre mercadores indianos e autoridades portuguesas de África Oriental,” *Cultura. Revista de História e Teoria das Ideias* 24 (2007): 76.

<sup>35</sup> For example: AHU, FCU, Mozambique, box 179, document 81, ant. 21 August 1821. “Request from Diva Ary and her children, ‘baneanes’, to the governor of Mozambique.” The document has three signatures in *Gujerat*. Attached are the “*folhas corridas*” which purchased their clearance in the Mozambique market.

<sup>36</sup> AHU, FCU, Mozambique, box 266, documents 119 and 125, undated.



**Figure 3.** AHU-FCU-Mozambique, box 266, documents I 19 and I 25, undated, bilingual representations made by the “baneane merchants and baneane inhabitants of the city of Mozambique” and by the “Moors inhabitants of the city of Mozambique and Terras Firmes” to the King of Portugal. Image reproduced with the permission of PT, AHU.

Governor of Mozambique, asking him to intervene so that “baneanes” would come to his lands with “fabrics for the increase of this trade.”<sup>37</sup> These manuscripts thus provide clues for future research about the interactions between and across the sheikdoms, the sultanates, and the “baneane” and “Moorish” communities in northern Mozambique in this period. The prevailing presence in the colonial records of the collective ethnonyms *Moors* and *mujojos* – often applied also to the producers of the documents – provides additional evidence in this direction.

### “Moors” and “mujojos” writings

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Portuguese colonial administration typically referred to the population of northern Mozambique using the general ethnonyms “Moors” and “Mujojos.” Both were terms regularly employed by the Portuguese in Mozambique as synonyms to designate African Muslim populations as opposed to other Africans or, to a lesser extent, to identify individuals from Muslim majority societies originating from India.<sup>38</sup> According to José Capela, the term “mujojos” tended to refer to Swahili merchants, usually identified as Muslims, originally from Zanzibar, Comoros, and Madagascar who had dealings in the northern ports of Mozambique or who had immigrated to the coast of the present-day provinces of Nampula and Cabo Delgado. The broader term “Moor” (*mouro*, pl. *mouros*), in turn, has been used in the Portuguese language since at least the fourteenth century to refer to the Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula, regardless of their Arab, Persian, or North African origins.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> AHU, FCU, Mozambique series (miscellaneous documents), box 173, document 80, 26 November 1820. Translation of the letter from the Sultan of Angoche to the governor and captain-general of Mozambique, about boats to transit between Angoche and the Mozambique Island and about the trade in goods with the Baneans. See, also, AHU, FCU, Mozambique, box 192-A, document 15. “Contains documents written in ARAB from sultans and rulers ... Letters from sultans, rulers, and neighbouring cheques, allies and subjects of this captaincy.”

<sup>38</sup> Nancy Hafkin and José Capela have pioneered the study of both communities. Nancy Hafkin, “Trade, Society and Politics in Northern Mozambique, c. 1753–1913,” (unpublished PhD thesis, Boston University, 1973); José Capela, *O Escravismo Colonial em Moçambique* (Porto: Afrontamento, 1993).

<sup>39</sup> According to Capela, “mujojos” was a “Swahili trader from the islands of Madagascar and Comoros, who frequented the ports of Mozambique”. José Capela, “Como as aringas de Moçambique se transformaram em quilombos,” *Tempo* 10, no. 20 (2006), 86. According to Hafkin, “Trade, Society and Politics,” 35: “mujojos” – “meaning peoples of the coastal districts of Mozambique and Cape Delgado, immigrants from the Zanzibar coast and Comoro Islands, who spoke the language of the coast.” It is interesting to note that while the name “Moors” is linked to Portuguese history on the Iberian Peninsula, in the case of the “Mujojos,” the Portuguese appropriated a name that circulated in the Indian Ocean. According to Sophie Blanchy, “mujojos” comes from “ajojo,” a name given by the Malagasy to the Comorians for their role in the slave trade. Sophie Blanchy, *Karana et Banians. Les communautés commerçantes d’origine indienne à Madagascar* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1995). More recently, Francesca Declich pointed out that “Swahili traders in most areas are known as Ajojo (pl.; Mujojo, sing.) in northern Mozambique, where many Afro-Arab traders came from the Comoros, or Maka in the coastal area of Angoche.” Francesca Declich, “Translocal Relations across the Indian Ocean: An Introduction,” in *Translocal Relations across the Indian Ocean: Swahili Speaking Networks on the Move* ed. Francesca Declich (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 15. The (often pejorative) term “monhé” is also identified in the literature. According to Valdemir Zamparoni, “monhé” “encompassed both the Banians, Hindus primarily from Gujarat, and the Moors, followers of Islam, whether they were Omanis or originating

Historical research on Muslim communities and political powers established in northern Mozambique has focused on the period between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>40</sup> This research addresses diverse aspects of the sultanates and sheikhdoms, such as the establishment of loyalty and kinship ties, especially through successive land grants, mercantile relations, the practice of the Muslim religion, and the establishment of literacy through Islam. They have also drawn attention to the insertion of these political-religious organizations within the wider Indian Ocean world and the Swahili culture of the coast of East Africa, the dismantling of their power, and their resistance to the Portuguese colonial expansion from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The African sources that we have found add valuably to this literature. In particular, the letters from the aforementioned sultanates and sheikhdoms may allow historians to consider further the web of connections between different Muslim-Swahili powers in East Africa as well as the complex pattern of exchange with the Portuguese establishment. Concerning the latter, our survey also identified relevant source material to investigate these sultanates' forms of conflict, opposition, and resistance related to the escalation of Portuguese military intrusion that took off in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century.

### **Conflict, rebellion, opposition**

Consider, for example, a letter found in the FCU from Joaquim Xavier Diniz Costa, who, in March 1832, temporarily assumed the position of Captain-major and

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from British India." Valdemir Zamparoni, "Monhés, Baneanes, Chinas e Afroaometanos. Colonialismo e racismo em Lourenço Marques, Moçambique, 1890–1940," *Lusotopie* 7 (2000): 192. Regiane Mattos identified a more specific use of the term "monhé": in "Portuguese and English documentation, the chiefs, sultans, or sheikhs of the Islamic establishments on the coast were called monhés (from the Swahili word mwinyi, which can mean an important person or owner, lord of the land, the one who first arrived in the territory)." Regiane Mattos, "Entre suaílis e macuas, mujojos e muzungos: o norte de Moçambique como complexo de interconexões," *Estudos Ibero-Americanos* 44, no. 3 (2018): 460. During the research, however, this term was found only once (AHU, CU, Mozambique, Cx. 132. Doc. 93).

<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that the most cited, Nancy Hafkin's PhD dissertation, covers the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, since then, research has focused on the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. In addition to Hafkin's and Capela's aforementioned works, see also Edward Alpers, "A Complex Relationship: Mozambique and the Comoro Islands in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 41, no. 161 (2001): 73–95; Chapane Mutiua, *Ajami Literacy*, 2014; Liazzat Bonate, "Islam in Northern Mozambique: A Historical Overview," *History Compass* 8, no. 7 (2010): 573–593; Liazzat Bonate, "Islamic Education in Mozambique," *Annual Review of Islam in South Africa* 9 (2006–7): 53–57; Regiane Mattos, *As dimensões da resistência em Angóche: da expansão política do sultanato à política colonialista portuguesa no norte de Moçambique (1842–1910)* (São Paulo: Alameda, 2015); Mattos, "Entre suaílis e macuas, mujojos e muzungos." On Portuguese relations with the Swahili world of the East African coast prior to the eighteenth century see, for example, Isaac Samuel, "The Portuguese and the Swahili, from Foes to Unlikely Partners: Afro-European Interface in the Early Modern Era," [https://isaacsamuel.substack.com/p/the-portuguese-and-the-swahili-from?s=r&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web&utm\\_source=direct](https://isaacsamuel.substack.com/p/the-portuguese-and-the-swahili-from?s=r&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&utm_source=direct) (accessed 22 January 2025).

Governor of Mozambique. In this document, we are told that, on the day of the death of the previous governor, a ship arrived with the sheik of Anjouan, “carrying on board Abdulá, King [sheik] of that Island with part of his family, who were seeking refuge because of the revolutionary events, which he said had taken place on that Island.”<sup>41</sup> At that time, there was a long-standing relationship between the Portuguese colonial administration in Mozambique Island and the sultanate of Anjouan, evidenced by a regular friendly exchange of correspondence. Given this sheik’s importance, he was kept under surveillance. The governor explained that this procedure was adopted “because we cannot be completely sure of the veracity of the events that he refers to” and also because he was “very fond and favoured by the Iman of Mascate, and on the other hand, served as a mediator with the sheik of Quitangonha in the previous disagreement and war with the governor.”<sup>42</sup> The “king of Anjouan” did not remain for very long among the Portuguese. In April of that year, another letter reported that the sheik, after requesting a passport for himself and his entourage, had boarded a *pangaio* ship, bound for Zanzibar, accompanied by fifty people. When questioned by the District Attorney General of Mozambique, Abdulá avoided answering questions “both about the state of that Island, and the consequences of the rebellion that he had mentioned as a cause for taking refuge in this city, as well as about the projects he was considering to recover the government that belonged to him.” He answered the questions “in vague terms.” The main concern of the sheik was that on Mozambique Island he would be isolated and, in order to establish a wider contact with other partners, he intended to go “to some land where he could obtain more comprehensive news, that would enable him to decide what he should do.”<sup>43</sup>

Even though the sheik of Anjouan managed to side-step the Portuguese colonial authorities, it is important to note the existence of a flow of correspondence exchanged between the various sultanates in the region, which could reach as far as the Gulf of Oman. This network extended beyond the territories controlled by Portugal, such as Mozambique Island. After all, Abdulá left Mozambique Island to settle in “some land where he could obtain more comprehensive news.” The existence of this constant circulation of people and information brought together sultanates and sheikhdoms established in the Comoros islands (as was the case of Anjouan) with Islamic kingdoms located in northern

<sup>41</sup> AHU, FCU, Mozambique, box 257, document 18, 22 March 1832. *Ofício de Joaquim Xavier Diniz Costa, ao Duque de Cadaval, sobre acontecimentos ocorridos após o falecimento do Governador Geral de Moçambique.*

<sup>42</sup> AHU, FCU, Mozambique, box 257, document 18, 22 March 1832. *Ofício de Joaquim Xavier Diniz Costa, ao Duque de Cadaval, sobre acontecimentos ocorridos após o falecimento do Governador Geral de Moçambique.*

<sup>43</sup> AHU, FCU, Mozambique, box 258, document 3, 1 April 1832. *Ofício do governo interino de Moçambique para o Duque de Cadaval, Nuno Caetano Álvares Pereira de Melo, sobre, dentre outras coisas, o embarque de Abdulá para um destino desconhecido.* It is interesting to point out the fact that the “revolutionary wave” analyzed by Eric Hobsbawm in Europe and the Americas and by Paul Lovejoy in West-Central Africa, has also been identified for other regions of the world, as pointed out in the work of Sujit Sivasundaram, *Waves across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

Mozambique. The Portuguese presence was also a common component of these circuits, as attested by the fact that Abdulá was a mediator in the conflicts between Portugal and the sheikdom of the island of Quitangonha – a set of significant conflicts that began in the last decade of the eighteenth century and lasted until the early twentieth century.

This was a tumultuous context about which we were able to uncover a regular correspondence exchange between high-ranked African agents (who held positions of power in Quitangonha) and Portuguese officials (representatives of colonial administration). The total of documents from Quitangonha includes letters and requests, which may be copies, translations, or originals. They are written in Portuguese, Arabic and/or *Kiswahili*, in some cases translated into Portuguese language. These are untapped sources for writing the history of African relations with, and resistance to, the colonial presence of Portugal in northern Mozambique. For example, in 1819 Sheikh Janfar Salim was accused of harboring slaves who had fled to his lands. In his defence, he wrote promptly to the Portuguese Captain-Major and Governor. However, because he did not trust the Portuguese-appointed interpreter – the so-called *Língua do Estado* – Janfar Salim sent not one but two letters to the Portuguese authority explaining the situation: one written in Portuguese language; and an Arabic text written in *qjami*.<sup>44</sup> Another example that illustrates the relevance of this documentation is the remarkable set of twelve letters exchanged in 1801 between members of the royal family of Quitangonha and different representatives of the Portuguese administration, during negotiations for the re-establishment of peace between Quitangonha and Portugal, after the conflicts that had begun in 1795.<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusion

Archives can be approached not as intact repositories of the past, but as dynamic social agencies and places of power and knowledge-production. Indigenous documentation in colonial archives – such as the AHU – was once put to the service of glorifying narratives of Portuguese colonialism, with a deep entanglement with the nationalist-imperialist ideologies and the government of colonial memory from the outset. Yet, this narrative might be countered, we have argued, by research that puts the agency of African and Asian people other than the colonizers as document-producers under the spotlight of archival orderings. Of course, the article did not aim to reinvent the way that European colonial documentation is or should be organized in archives. Rather, we offered a critique of the way that the archive has been organized in the past. This organization tends to reproduce, rather than to question or subvert, the Euro-centric logic of documentary production of colonial administrations. Certainly,

<sup>44</sup> AHU, FCU, Mozambique, box 166, document 76, 3 December 1819.

<sup>45</sup> AHU, FCU, Mozambique, box 89, document 31. 13 October 1801. “Carta do governador e capitão-general de Moçambique, Isidro de Almeida Sousa e Sá, em que concede o perdão ao Cheque de Quintangonha, Toacali Hya e manda que ele se desloque à capital para pedir perdão pessoalmente. Contém anexos.”

in the case of AHU (as of other comparable repositories) contingent institutional histories and prosaic reasons related to limited finances, staff, and other organizational (in)efficiencies help explain the postcolonial persistence of colonial orderings. However, even if not intentionally, these contingencies unite with Eurocentric logic to somehow silence or make invisible the presence of many documents which bear evidence of indigenous Africans and Asians as prolific producers of written documents since the early days of European intrusions. The INDICO survey based on the heuristics of “indigenous documents” contributes to counter these processes of occultation. Here, we focus the use of INDICO survey as an analytical potential for Mozambique’s history.<sup>46</sup> The Overseas Council’s Archive of the AHU has privileged an interpretation of the Portuguese colonial past based on colonial administrative bodies and Portuguese historical agents, in this process leaving in the shadow many other voices present in the documentation. Efforts are being currently made by the AHU authorities to improve knowledge of the Mozambique series and to reassess cataloging procedures that continue to reflect, to a large extent, a system inherited directly from the 1930s, when the AHU was created as “Colonial Historical Archives” by the fascist regime of Salazar.<sup>47</sup> Yet, through our independent survey, we believe to have been able to bring to light indigenous writings contained in a colonial archive, while also offering new tools for cataloging and accessing these writings, that may help to counter the persistent archiving biases of the colonial past.

The handwritten documents produced by populations that could be identified or that identified themselves as “indigenous,” their use and circulation of documents within the regimes instituted by the Portuguese empire, and their demand for written documents issued by a Portuguese authority can be understood as part of a vast world of Luso-African and African-Islamic literate practices and modes of relating to writing. Of course, this is not to say that these activities are under colonial control or that they can be simply or exclusively understood from a colonial-centered perceptive – in effect, it is fundamental to take into account autonomous African and Asian frameworks and interests irreducible to these interactions with Europeans.<sup>48</sup> It is important nonetheless

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<sup>46</sup> As argued by Hiribarren (“Hiding the European Colonial Past,” 74), the question of colonial sources and archives in contemporary European political contexts concerns the fact that “Europeans have consistently tried to hide their colonial past and that this colonial past is still haunting the political debates.”

<sup>47</sup> In a lecture presented during the seminar *Iberian Seascapes: Culture, Performance and Resistance in Asia, Africa, and the Americas*, held at the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon in May 2024, the director of the AHU, Ana Canas Delgado Martins, declared that a significant part of the funds obtained through the European Union for the Portuguese Recovery and Resilience Plan (PRR) earmarked for the AHU is being invested in completing the inventory of the Mozambique series at the Overseas Council Collections, and advancing a first inventory for the boxes of “Portuguese India.” This work is expected to be completed by 2026.

<sup>48</sup> Mariana Dias Paes’s work on the nineteenth-century judicial archives in the Benguela district, for example, also points in this direction. She argues that documents and archives “mediate relations between people in broader terms than the reductionist assumption that they are mere tools for governments’ control over population.” Mariana Armond Dias Paes, “Legal Files and Empires: Form and Materiality of the Benguela District Court Documents,” *Administroy* 4, no. 1 (2019): 54.

to consider the *relational* dimension of these indigenous forms of engaging literacy and writing. For instance, the African demand for and possession of a paper produced by the Portuguese authority could mean a form of proof capable of expressing the "truth," serving as evidence that attested to the status and credibility of its African holders. In this regard, handwritten documents materialized and created powers and rights. Establishing and storing a regular exchange of correspondence with a colonial administrator or requesting and circulating documents prepared by the colonial administration was a technique adopted by different individuals and social, political, and economic groups to produce authority. On the one hand, the materiality of the possession of one or more documents was used and understood as a fundamental aspect for the pleading, validation, and attainment of intended goals, especially those linked to political and economic aspects. On the other hand, the use of certain signs to rectify the legitimacy of the document, such as signatures, seals, dates, and so on, point to how the social individuals that produced – or requested a colonial agent to produce – these documents, by their own hand or through the colonial bureaucratic structure, understood the signs that had to be used to turn them into evidence capable of proving and consequently gaining power. Although not addressed in this article, these issues deserve further research. In any case, by introducing an archival gaze that privileges African-authored documents, by allowing African voices that have been clouded by colonial archiving procedures to gain prominence, we will be in a better position to develop new research pathways in the history of Africa.

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