

THE POPULATION OF THE LOWER KWANZA VALLEY, 1792-1796 *

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Abstract: This paper draws upon an under-exploited quantitative source, the “Convenção dos Dízimos”, to explore certain demographic characteristics of the populations that inhabited the lower Kwanza River valley during the mid-1790s, just before nominal and summary censuses began to be produced in the areas that comprised this region. Compiled between 1792 and 1796 by Captain Francisco António Pita Bezerra de Alpoim e Castro, this document represents a regional census, in summary form, whose information was intended for colonial officials to improve the extraction of taxes in Ambaca, Pundo Andongo, Cambambe, Massangano, Muxima, and Calumbo, a corridor through which annually passed thousands of captives destined largely for the Americas, especially Brazil. Offering the earliest profile of the size, gender, broad age-groups, and geographic distribution of the populations that inhabited these spaces, the “Convenção dos Dízimos” not only allows us to gain a better understanding of the production of demographic data in colonial Angola, but also leads to a refinement, if not correction, of certain notions relating to the impact of the Atlantic slave trade.

Keywords: Demographic history, Angola, Censuses

A POPULAÇÃO DO VALE DO BAIXO KWANZA, 1792-1796 *

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Resumo: Este trabalho baseia-se numa fonte quantitativa pouco explorada, a “Convenção dos Dízimos”. Esta documentação contém características demográficas das populações que habitaram o vale do baixo Kwanza em meados da década de 1790 e foi produzida pouco antes dos recenseamentos nominais e sumários começarem a serem feitos nas áreas que compunham essa região. Compilado entre 1792 e 1796 pelo Capitão Francisco António Pita Bezerra de Alpoim e Castro, esse documento representa um censo regional cuja informação era para funcionários coloniais melhorar a extração de impostos entre as populações de Ambaca, Pundo Andongo, Cambambe, Massangano, Muxima e Calumbo. Esses territórios formavam um corredor através do qual anualmente passavam milhares de cativos destinados em grande parte para as Américas, especialmente o Brasil. Oferecendo o mais antigo perfil do tamanho, gênero, grupos etários e distribuição geográfica das populações que habitavam os territórios supracitados, a “Convenção dos Dízimos” não só permite obter uma melhor compreensão da produção de dados demográficos na Angola colonial, como também possibilita um refinamento, se não a correção, de certas noções relativas ao impacto do comércio de escravos no Atlântico.

Palavras-Chaves: História demográfica, Angola, Recenseamentos.

On 18 July, 1792, Manoel de Almeida e Vasconcellos, the then Governor of colonial Angola, ordered Captain Francisco Antonio Pita Bezerra de Alpoim e Castro to devise a less vexing system through which the *dízimo*, a combination of the hut tax and the religious tithe, could be extracted from the overwhelmingly African populations that lived along the lower Kwanza River Valley.¹ Commander of the *presídio* (or interior military-administrative unit) of Cambambe during 1788-1790, this mid-level military officer had much experience in the region,² which is precisely what led Governor Almeida e Vasconcellos to entrust him with the task. Instead of starting his assignment up the Kwanza River from the coast, a “relatively easy” endeavour as far as the falls of Cambambe (DOMINGUES DA SILVA, 2015, p. 117), Captain Alpoim e Castro was specifically instructed to use a different route. Departing from Luanda, the capital of colonial Angola, soon upon receiving his orders, he took the northeast, more direct, overland path through Golungo, before turning south to the *presídio* of Ambaca, roughly two hundred and fifty kilometres inland, where his mission began in earnest.³ From there, Captain Alpoim e Castro subsequently proceeded to Pungo Andongo, another 50 kilometres or so distant: it was from this easternmost military-administrative unit of the Portuguese that he began his trek westward, successively probing the *presídios* of Cambambe, Massangano, and Muxima, before ending up in the district of Calumbo, close to the Kwanza River estuary.⁴ In the process, this experienced mid-level military officer came to produce a detailed survey of areas along the lower Kwanza River valley under the nominal control of the Portuguese Crown. Part of this assessment, otherwise known as the “Convenção dos Dízimos”, includes what is effectively the first differentiated population count of this region⁵

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¹ Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino [hereinafter AHU], Angola, 1a Secção, Cx. 86 - Doc. 36, fls. 17-20 for a copy of the original instructions.

² Governor Manoel de Almeida e Vasconcellos to José de Siabra da Silva, 25 January, 1792, *Arquivos de Angola*, 2nd Series, XXV, Nos. 99-102, 1968, p.: 96. See also Governor Antonio de Mello to the Crown, 30 November, 1797, *Arquivos de Angola*, 2nd Series, XX, Nos. 79-82, 1963, p. 14-16.

³ Had Captain Alpoim e Castro started his trek on the estuary of the Kwanza River and gone through Calumbo, Muxima, Massangano to reach Ambaca, he would have required some 24 days: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical (Lisbon), Cartoteca, Cx. 18, Doc. 6, Planta Topográfica da margem e certão do Rio Coanza do Reyno de Angola feita pelo governador e Capitão Geral D. António Alvares da Cunha, 1 May, 1754 (my thanks to Catarina Madeira Santos for graciously sharing this document with me). As it is, he would have travelled overland 8 to 9 days from Luanda to Ambaca: CASTELLO BRANCO E TORRES, 1825, p. 355-357.

⁴ AHU, Angola, 1a Secção, Cx. 77, Doc. 85, “1792, Angola, Convenção dos Dízimos,” unpaginated.

before the institutionalization of census taking began to take place throughout colonial Angola in 1797 (CURTO, 1994; DOMINGUES DA SILVA, 2015).

Lower Kwanza Valley, 1790



Source: “Carta Geographica da Costa occidental da Africa...desenhada pelo Ten.e Coronel Eng.o L. C. C. Pinheiro Furtado em 1790”, in CASTELLO BRANCO E TORRES, 1825, insert before p. 1.

My objective here is to draw upon this invaluable, if underutilized, document to develop an early base line understanding of the size, gender, broad age groups, and distribution of the late eighteenth century population along an important commercial axis in the hinterland of Luanda. Delving into the methodology used to collect the data, this contribution not only highlights the problems encountered by the census taker, but also provides solutions for the quantitative information provided to be effectively exploited. In doing so, certain notions of the impact of the Atlantic slave trade in colonial Angola at the very end of the eighteenth century stand to be refined and others corrected.

⁵ The colony wide, summary censuses of 1777 and 1778, which surely covered this region, do not discriminated the summary data between districts and presidiums: AHU, Angola, 1a Secção, Cx. 61 - Doc. 87, “Mappa de todos of Moradores, e Habitantes deste Reyno de Angola, e suas conquistas ... 1777”; AHU, Angola, 1a Secção, Cx. 62, Doc. 67, “Mappa de todos of Moradores, e Habitantes deste Reyno de Angola, e suas conquistas ... 1778”. For an analysis, see THORNTON, 1980. For the context, see CURTO, 1994.

The “Convenção dos Dízimos” compiled by Captain Alpoim e Castro has been dated to 1792.⁶ Had the said document been written at the very end of that particular year, our surveyor would have succeeded in carrying out his mission within less than six months. A close reading of the manuscript he compiled, however, indicates that this took place over a much longer period of time. Indeed, Captain Alpoim e Castro took up towards the middle of 1794 to complete his task within the *presídio* of Ambaca alone. Early in the following year, after having further probed Pungo Andongo and Cambambe, he was busy at work in Massangano.⁷ Around the middle of 1796, Captain Alpoim e Castro reached Calumbo, the last of the areas to be surveyed. With his health deteriorating, he was subsequently ordered to return to Luanda. That is where, before the end of 1796 or early in 1797,⁸ Captain Alpoim e Castro finished compiling the document here under consideration.⁹

Collecting the demographic data underpinning the “Convenção dos Dízimos” was anything but an easy task. The 300 or so kilometre corridor along the lower Kwanza river covered by Captain Alpoim e Castro presented a number of logistical challenges. Given his particular instructions, the most important was to gauge the population of each *presídio* and district within this huge stretch of land so as to determine the value of the *dízimo* to be collected. Daniel Domingues da Silva (2015, p. 121) has recently suggested that:

...Portuguese officials developed creative ways of counting the population of their territories. One of them was to count the number of villages in a district and multiply it by an average number of dwellings. The results could then be multiplied by an average number of people living in that particular district.

With reference specifically to the middle of the nineteenth century, Jan Vansina (2005, p. 2, ft. 3) has, in turn, posited that Portuguese “colonial administrators drew upon a figure of 3 individuals per hearth for their demographic calculations.” Captain Alpoim e Castro, on the

⁶ AHU, Angola, 1a Secção, Cx. 77 - Doc. 85, “1792, Angola, Convenção dos Dízimos”: and so initially referred to in CURTO, 1994, p. 326. See also the discussion below.

⁷ Governor Manoel de Almeida e Vasconcellos to Martinho de Mello e Castro, 7 February, 1795, *Arquivos de Angola*, 2nd Series, XVI, Nos. 66-67, 1959, p. 134.

⁸ AHU, Angola, 1a Secção, Cx. 77 - Doc. 85, “1792, Angola, Convenção dos Dízimos”.

⁹ He passed away in Luanda in mid-March, 1799: Governor Miguel Antonio de Melo to D. Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho, 16 March, 1799, *Arquivos de Angola*, 2nd Series, XVI, Nos. 66-67, 1959, p. 161.

other hand, claimed to have examined every *fogo* or hearth in each of the military-administrative units he was responsible for, verified the number of souls that made up each of the said dwellings, determined their gender, and ascertained their broad-age groups. None of this is found among the instructions received in mid-July, 1792, from Governor Almeida e Vasconcellos. However, by focusing on the problems evident in the data collected we gain a better understanding of the *modus operandi* employed by our surveyor.

Like other population enumerations of the later eighteenth century, the first censuses to have been carried out in colonial Angola, that undertaken by Captain Alpoim e Castro between 1792 and 1796 suffers from a number of complications. One of the most important is that our surveyor did not consistently draw upon the same demographic classifications throughout the lower Kwanza River valley. Thus, in the case of Ambaca, where he spent some 24 months successively enumerating the constituent sub-jurisdictions of Dongo, Hari, Piri, Zenza, Samba, Lucala, and Lucamba, Captain Alpoim e Castro specifically referred to the “adult” male population as *pretos capazes de todo o serviço* or blacks capable of every type of work. The same phenotype, however, was not used in relation to their female counterparts, whom he simply referred to as *femeas capazes de terem filhos* or women capable of bearing children. Moreover, in no other landscape did Captain Alpoim e Castro again utilize the term *pretos* as an enumeration category. What, then, did he mean by *pretos*?

A recent incursion into the Angolan past by an afro-brasilianist historian suggests that, in late eighteenth century Ambaca, the term *preto* (and *negro*) designated an enslaved person (GUEDES, 2011). Yet, not all of the *pretos capazes de todo o serviço* counted by our surveyor in this military-administrative unit could have been enslaved individuals. Here, as elsewhere in colonial Angola, the overwhelming majority of the adult male population was made up by blacks and *mulatos/pardos* (persons of African and European descent) who could have been enslaved, freed or free persons.¹⁰ To standardize the enumeration categories in Table I, the original classification of *pretos capazes de todo o serviço* for Ambaca has been aligned with the terminology used by Captain Alpoim e Castro for the same group of persons

¹⁰ As is clear from other demographic data produced soon after Captain Alpoim e Castro’s survey was completed: Arquivo do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro [hereinafter AIHGB], DL32,04, fls. 1-15, Ofício de Joaquim José da Silva...a d. Miguel Antônio de Melo, governador de Angola dando notícias sobre o Presídio de Ambaca...30 October, 1797; and the 1797, 1798 and 1799 “Mappa do Predizio de Ambaca” available in AHU, Angola, 1a Secção, Cx. 86 – Doc. 76, Cx. 91 – Doc. 41, and Cx. 89 – Doc. 88, respectively.

in other jurisdictions: that is *homens capazes de todo o serviço* or men capable of every type of work.

Other inconsistencies made their way into the demographic data upon which the “Convenção dos Dízimos” is based. Thus, the *raparigas* or girls first referred to in Ambaca, Pungo Andongo, and Cambambe as ranging from 5 to over 6 *palmas* in height, are subsequently represented in Massangano, Muxima and Calumbo as falling between 5 and 6 *palmas* in height. Similarly, in the case of *crias de peito, machos e femeas, até 4 palmas e meio* or nursing infants and male and female children up to four and a half *palmas* in height, a term first used in Ambaca, thereafter takes on a different meaning to denote *crias de peito, machos e femeas, até 5 palmas* or nursing infants and male and female children up to five *palmas* in height. A measurement of length, the *palmo* was clearly being drawn upon by Captain Alpoim e Castro as a proxy for the broad-age categories of children and of youth. But what he actually meant by the *palmo* is not disclosed within the “Convenção dos Dízimos”.

In the nineteenth century, according to Domingues da Silva (2017, p. 113-14), the *palmo* was equivalent to about 22 centimetres. This would have made *muleques* and *raparigas* from 1.1 to over 1.32 metres in height, with non-nursing children no taller than .99 metres. Whatever the case, a discrepancy of half a *palmo* existed between what defined children in Ambaca and elsewhere along the lower Kwanza River valley, while the height requirement for girls in Ambaca, Pungo Andongo, and Cambambe was somehow different from that in Massangano, Muxima, and Calumbo. To standardize these issues in Table I, the original classification of *crias de peito, machos e femeas, até 4 palmas e meio* for Ambaca has also been aligned with the terminology used by Captain Alpoim e Castro for the same group of individuals in other jurisdictions: that is, *crias de peito, machos e femeas, até 5 palmas*. In the same vein, the *raparigas* in Ambaca, Pungo Andongo, and Cambambe classified as ranging from 5 to over 6 *palmas* in height have been aligned with those falling between 5 and 6 *palmas* in height in Massangano, Muxima and Calumbo.

Table 1: Population of the Lower Kwanza River Valley, Angola, 1792-1796

	Ambaca	Pungo Andongo	Cambambe	Massangano	Muxima	Calumbo	TOTAL
Hearths (fogos)	3.2/fogo 26,435	3.2/fogo 5,405	3.6/fogo 5,077	3.2/fogo 5,066	3.2/fogo 3,013	3.4/fogo 893	3.2/fogo 45,889
MALES							
Moleques de 5 até 6 palmos (M 7-15)	10,891 12.9%	2,160 12.8%	2,360 13.0%	2,080 13.0%	1,236 13.0%	397 12.9%	19,124 12.9%
Homens capazes de todo o serviço (M 15-60)	13,217 15.7%	2,700 16.0%	2,850 15.6%	2,520 15.7%	1,500 15.7%	483 15.7%	23,270 15.7%
Velhos (M > 60)	6,608 7.8%	1,350 8.0%	1,470 8.1%	1,270 7.9%	750 7.9%	236 7.7%	11,684 7.9%
Male Total	30,716 36.5%	6,210 36.8%	6,680 36.7%	5,870 36.6%	3,486 36.5%	1116 36.3%	54,078 36.6%
FEMALES							
Raparigas donzellas de 5 até 6 palmos (F 7-14)	10,574 12.6%	2,100 12.4%	2,300 12.6%	2,020 12.6%	1,200 12.6%	385 12.5%	18,579 12.6%
Femeas capazes de terem filhos (F 14-40)	21,148 25.1%	4,150 24.6%	4,500 24.7%	4,020 25.0%	2,400 25.1%	783 25.4%	37,001 25.0%
Velhas (F > 40)	7,930 9.4%	1,600 9.5%	1,750 9.6%	1,520 9.5%	900 9.4%	286 9.3%	13,986 9.4%
Female Total	39,652 47.1%	7,850 46.5%	8,550 47.0%	7,560 47.1%	4,500 47.1%	1454 47.2%	69,566 47.0%
MALES & FEMALES UNDER 7 years old							
Crias de peito, machos e femeas, até 5 palmos	13,799 16.4%	2,810 16.7%	2,970 16.3%	2,626 16.3%	1,560 16.3%	507 16.5%	24,272 16.4%
TOTAL	84,167 100.0%	16,870 100.0%	18,200 100.0%	16,056 100.0%	9,546 100.0%	3,077 100.0%	147,916 100.0%

Source: AHU, Angola, 1a Secção, Cx. 77, Doc. 85, "Nova convenção dos Dizimos feita por Francisco Antonio Pita Bezerra de Alpoim e Castro, Capitão de infantaria nos prezídios de Ambaca, Pedras de Pungoandongo, Cambambe, villa de Massangano, prezidio de Muchima, e districto de Calumbo tudo ao sul da mesma cidade, sendo despachado o dito capitão no anno de 1792 pelo Gov. Manoel de Almeida e Vasconcellos.

Height data on children or youth are, of course, not a particularly good indicator of age (ELTIS, 1982). The same is true of generic terms such as *velhos / velhas* or *homens capazes de todo o serviço / femeas capazes de terem filhos*. To impart more precise meanings onto such classifications, Joseph C. Miller (1988, p. 161, ft. 44) has long ago suggested that the census classifications used by Captain Alpoim e Castro be “taken to be the equivalent” of the age categories first imbedded into the two colony wide enumerations of the late 1770s. That is: *velhos* and *velhas* representing males above 60 years old and females more than 40 years old, respectively; *homens capazes de todo o serviço* and *femeas capazes de terem filhos* respectively referring to males aged 15-60 and females aged 14-40; *muleques* and *raparigas* from 5 to beyond 6 *palmos* in height designating, respectively, boys aged 7-15 and girls 7-14; and *crias de peito, machos e femeas, até 5 palmos* denoting children, from babies at the breast up to 7 year olds.¹¹ By grafting these more precise meanings onto the census categories used by Captain Alpoim e Castro we both gain a better idea as to the broad age groups involved and enhance the contextualization of the 1792-1796 data alongside other late eighteenth century sources.

A final problem with the 1792-1796 enumeration of the population along the lower Kwanza River valley relates to how the demographic data was produced. As can be seen in Table I, the quantitative information provided by Captain Alpoim e Castro do not project anomalies for Ambaca or for Calumbo, the first and last areas he surveyed. However, beyond the data on hearths, nearly all of the quantitative information for the *presídios* of Pungo Andongo, Cambambe, Muxima, and Massangano end in zero. There are only two exceptions to this pattern: the categories of *muleques* in Muxima and of *crias de peito, machos e femeas, até 5 palmos* in Massangano. How Captain Alpoim e Castro managed such a feat is not known. Yet, it seems clear that the prolonged enumeration process in Ambaca allowed him to develop a certain demographic profile of the population that was subsequently applied, with minor variations, upon the totality of dwellings counted in Pungo Andongo, Cambambe, Muxima, Massangano, and even Calumbo, where our surveyor’s time was cut short by illness. How else, can we explain the fact that the percentages of the Ambaca enumeration categories materialize again within less than one point in each of the other five areas surveyed? Consequently, Captain Alpoim e Castro’s 1792-1796 enumeration of the lower

¹¹ AHU, Angola, 1a Secção, Cx. 61, Doc. 87, "Mappa de todos of Moradores...1777"; and AHU, Angola, 1a Secção, Cx. 62, Doc. 67, "Mappa de todos os Moradores...1778".

Kwanza River valley represents a regional demographic projection based on the populational profile of Ambaca rather than a census of the various military-administrative units under Portuguese nominal control in this region.

Such a *modus operandi* is thus more akin to that discerned by John K. Thornton in the case of the 1777-1778 colony-wide censuses than what has been generically indicated by Vansina and Domingues da Silva. In the view of the former (THORNTON, 1980, p. 419-420):

...it seems likely that the numerical core of the census[es] was the enumeration of the areas under Portuguese administration. Here we can assume that the numbers of people and the information on age and sex were relatively accurate. To this we must add regions which were known only through estimates. Their total numbers might be quite wrong, and their age-sex structure would in all likelihood be based on estimates made by the census takers. Since takers would have had a mental model based on their knowledge of the core areas of Angola, the estimates would have tended to be represented as having the same structure. This might have been modified by especially well-qualified estimators...[who] might have had fairly reliable ideas about the rough proportions of males and females and their age structures.

The methodology adopted by Captain Alpoim e Castro thus had its antecedents. And once it is realized that knowing the total number of people is not a vital component of demographic analysis, the 1792-1796 enumeration of the lower Kwanza River valley can then provide interesting insights into the distribution, structure, age, and gender of the population.

Overall, the data point to a total of 45,889 hearths in the presidiums of Ambaca, Pungo Andongo, Cambambe, Massangano, Muxima, and in the District of Calumbo, with 147,916 individuals residing therein. The geographical distribution of this population was anything but equal. A walloping 26,435 *fogos*, with a total of 84,167 residents, were found in Ambaca. This military-administrative unit alone accounted for 57.6% of all dwellings along the lower Kwanza River valley and 56.9% of its inhabitants. That this is where our surveyor spent most of his time is thus far from accidental. Calumbo, in contrast, lay on the other side

of the spectrum, with only 893 hearths accommodating 3,077 individuals. Between these extremes, Captain Alpoim e Castro found 5,405 *fogos* lodging 16,870 residents in Pungo Andongo, 5,077 homes quartering 18,200 souls in Cambambe, 5,066 residences housing 16,056 individuals in Massangano, and a further 3,013 abodes billeting 9,546 persons in Muxima. While an average of 3.2 persons lived in each of the 45,889 dwellings, the median rose to 3.4 in Calumbo and to 3.6 in Cambambe. These figures are not far from that advanced by Vansina for the mid-nineteenth century. Yet, their variance also suggests that the data were not simply the outcome of the “creative” method put forth by Domingues da Silva, but rather emanated from a relatively well-qualified understanding of the different population densities that existed throughout the region.

Of the 147,916 individuals enumerated by Captain Alpoim e Castro along the lower Kwanza River valley during 1792-1796, the majority were women. Indeed, within the youth, adult, and old broad-age categories, females accounted for 47.0% (69,566 individuals) of the total population. Meanwhile, males within the same broad-age categories totalled 36.6% (54,078 persons) of the overall population. In Ambaca, the most populous of the areas enumerated, the proportion was almost identical with females in the youth, adult, and old broad-age brackets representing 47.1% and their male counterparts accounting for 36.5% of the population counted. Only slight divergences from this pattern appeared elsewhere. While females in the youth, adult, and old broad-age categories accounted for 46.5% of the population in Pungo Andongo, the percentage rose only to 47.2% in Calumbo. Conversely, while in Calumbo males in the youth, adult, and old broad-age brackets accounted for 36.3% of the population, the percentage barely rose to 36.8% in Pungo Andongo. Such an excess of females aged seven and older was nothing new in Ambaca, nor elsewhere along the lower Kwanza River valley. The phenomenon had already been recorded in the colony-wide censuses of 1777-1778. Indeed, as pointed out by Thornton (1980, p. 423), later eighteenth-century colonial Angola “was very much a female’s world, at least as far as numbers were concerned.

The generalized excess of females, however, was not uniform across the broad-age groups. The proportional difference between genders was particularly acute in the adult category: while females between 14 and 40 years old (*femeas capazes de terem filhos*) represented 25.1% of the total population, males aged between 15 and 60 years old (*homens capazes de todo o serviço*) accounted for just 15.7%. The disparity decreased significantly in

other broad-age brackets. In the case of the old, for example, *velhas* (women over 40 years old) weighed in at 9.4% and *velhos* (men older than 60) at 7.9%. Almost equivalent proportions were displayed, in turn, by youth, with girls aged 7-14 and boys aged 7-15 representing 12.6% and 12.9%, respectively, of the total population. This regional profile largely derived, once again, from the data first collected in Ambaca: here, females capable of bearing children represented 25.1% of the population, with older women accounting for 9.4% and girls 12.6%; males capable of every type of work accounted for 15.7%, with older men representing 7.8% and boys 12.9%. Elsewhere, the proportional gender difference across broad-age groups evidenced but slight deviations. In the case of females, their weight varied between: 12.4% in Pungo Andongo and 12.6% in Massangano amongst girls; 24.6% in Pungo Andongo and 21.5% in Muxima within those capable of bearing children; and 9.6% in Cambambe and 9.3% in Calumbo in the older than 40 category. Amongst males, on the other hand, their proportions fluctuated between: 12.8% in Pungo Andongo and 13% in Muxima for *moleques*; 15.6% in Cambambe and 16% in Pungo Andongo for *homens capazes de todo o serviço*; and between 8.1% in Cambambe and 7.7% for *velhos*. In short, the women's world of late eighteenth century colonial Angola was largely dominated by females in the 14 to 40 age bracket.

Whether the proportion of males and females was similar or not within the category of children under 7 years of age is impossible to say. Unlike the enumerators responsible for 1777-1778 colony-wide censuses, Captain Alpoim e Castro did not differentiate the gender of the population labelled as *crias de peito, machos e femeas, até 4.5/5 palmos*. The 1792-1796 proportion of children under 7 years old stands at 16.4%. While the percentage was exactly the same in Ambaca, it only oscillated between 16.3% in Massangano and 16.7% in Pungo Andongo. As such, the populational weight of this particular age bracket corresponds roughly to what could be expected of the demographic structure of colonial Angola during this time (THORNTON, 1980, p. 423.).

What explains these demographic contours? As early as 1630, Ambaca was already the area along the lower Kwanza River valley that was the most heavily taxed by the Portuguese colonial administration (FREUDENTHAL and PANTOJA, 2013, p. 229-230). When Captain Alpoim e Castro was instructed to begin his survey, that reality had not changed. At the very end of the 1780s, a Brazilian born military officer listed Ambaca as the *presídio* where the *dízimo* collected still surpassed, by far, the combination of this hut tax and

religious title extracted elsewhere (SILVA CORRÊA, 1937, I, p. 167). In other words, this particular landscape had long been the most populous of the military-administrative units under nominal Portuguese control. Indeed, as another source disclosed some decades later, Ambaca “is the largest, the most populated, and the wealthiest of the presidiums” (CASTELLO BRANCO E TORRES, 1825, p. 356).

Similarly, by the early 1790s, the lower Kwanza River valley had long emerged as a hub for various West Central African trade networks. Year in and year out, it forwarded to Luanda significant volumes of the most important commodity involved in this commerce: enslaved individuals for export into the Atlantic world (BIRMINGHAM, 1966; MILLER, 1988; CURTO, 2017, p. 23-47; DOMINGUES DA SILVA, 2017, p. 73-99). As is well established, this Atlantic demand for enslaved persons involved a significant preference for males in their productive and reproductive prime (KLEIN, 1972; ELTIS and RICHARDSON, 2010; DOMINGUES DA SILVA, 2013). The data collected by Captain Alpoim e Castro do not include information on the social status of the population enumerated. Hence, we can not know the proportion of slaves, freed persons, and free individuals, let alone their weight by gender or broad-age groups, within the population(s) enumerated. Yet, the significant excess of adult women relative to their male counterparts in Ambaca and elsewhere along the lower Kwanza River valley between 1792 and 1796 can only be attributed to the higher Atlantic demand for enslaved men in their prime. That was also the case of the data arising from the late 1770s colony-wide censuses (THORNTON, 1980, p. 422-423; MILLER, 1988, p. 161), which surely covered this same region. In other words, the position of fertile (14 to 40 years old) women in the 1792-1796 demography of the lower Kwanza River valley seems to have been part of a larger populational profile, both geographically and temporally, determined by specific gender and age demands emanating from the Atlantic.

Table 2. Population of the Lower Kwanza River Valley, Angola, 1792-1796: Sex Ratio (males per 100 females) according to Broad Age-Groups

Broad Age-Groups	Ambaca	Pungo Andongo	Cambambe	Massangano	Muxima	Calumbo	TOTAL
Males and Females 7-15/14 years old (<i>Moleques e Raparigas donzellas de 5 até 6 palmos</i>)	103.0	102.9	102.6	103.0	103.0	103.1	103.0
Males 15-60 and Females 14-40 (<i>Homens capazes de todo o serviço / Femeas capazes de terem filhos</i>)	62.5	65.0	63.3	62.7	62.5	61.7	62.9
Males > 60 and Females > 40 (<i>Velhos / Velhas</i>)	83.3	84.4	84.0	83.5	83.3	82.5	83.5
Sub-total, Males & Females > 7 years old	77.5	79.1	78.1	77.6	77.5	76.7	77.7

Source: AHU, Angola, 1a Secção, Cx. 77, Doc. 85, "Nova convenção dos Dizimos feita por Francisco Antonio Pita Bezerra de Alpoim e Castro, Capitão de infantaria nos prezídios de Ambaca, Pedras de Pungoandongo, Cambambe, villa de Massangano, prezidio de Muchima, e districto de Calumbo tudo ao sul da mesma cidade, sendo despachado o dito capitão no anno de 1792 pelo Gov. Manoel de Almeida e Vasconcellos.

The 1792-1796 Ambaca centered enumeration of the lower Kwanza River valley thus adds another documented layer to the (negative) demographic impact of the Atlantic slave trade (LOVEJOY, 2012 [1983], p. 61-65; MANNING, 1990, p. 69-72; CURTO, 1991; DOMINGUES DA SILVA, 2017, p. 103-110). The gender imbalance it induced upon West Central Africa was significant. And this, in turn, produced its own ripple effects upon the birth, death, and growth rates of the population that remained behind (LOVEJOY, 2012 [1983], p. 61-65; MANNING, 1990, p. 69-72; CURTO, 1991; DOMINGUES DA SILVA, 2017, p. 103-110). But, equally as important, the data collected by Captain Alpoim e Castro also allows us to refine, if not correct, certain segments of an established historiography on the region he surveyed.

In his “preliminary synthesis” of the incidence of children in the Atlantic slave trade, for example, Paul E. Lovejoy (2006, p. 200-201) claims that “West central Africa stands out as an anomaly”, with the proportion of children “greater than average in all periods”. Support for this assertion is drawn from two overlapping sources. One, based on selected slave trade data available in the early 1990s and whose authors (ELTIS and ENGERMAN, 1993, p. 308–323) readily admit to major evidentiary gaps in “the trade to Brazil, and the Portuguese traffic generally before 1810”, shows children as “accounting for 21.7 per cent before 1700, 28.1 percent in the eighteenth century, and approximately 50 per cent in the nineteenth century” (LOVEJOY, 2006, p. 200), of the traffic from West Central Africa. The other is the original edition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database (ELTIS, BEHRENDT, RICHARDSON, and KLEIN, 1999), which also shows children as representing ever rising proportions of enslaved Africans crossing the Atlantic, with those embarking in West Central Africa “reaching an estimated 52.9% in the second quarter of the nineteenth century” (LOVEJOY, 2006, p. 200-201).¹² That the West Central Africa proportion in this first rendition of the TSTD attained but 18.3% during 1776-1800, the lowest registered between 1675 and 1867, does not warrant discussion. This oversight possibly resulted from the fact that, in 2006, with a revised edition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database looming, Lovejoy (2006, p. 198) “expected...that this preliminary synthesis will require revision”. The said revision has not materialized. Nevertheless, Domingues da Silva has recently drawn upon the 2008 update of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, with more robust data on the Portuguese traffic to

¹² Two earlier studies, each based on slave export data from mid-eighteenth century Angola that would have further re-enforced this claim, are surprisingly absent from the discussion: KLEIN, 1972; GUTIÉRREZ, 1989.

Brazil (ELTIS, et al, 2008), to show that the percentage of slave children leaving West Central Africa effectively evidences a more nuanced pattern: 10.6% during 1781-1805, 16.5% in 1806-1830, 52.9% during 1831-1855, and 42.9% in 1856-1867 (DOMINGUES DA SILVA, 2017, p. 116-118). In the particular case of the 1781-1805 period, the 2008 data point to “the percentage of children leaving the ports norths of Luanda at 16 percent, ...considerably higher than the 3 percent recorded for departure from Luanda and the southern ports together.” Hence, “societies in the hinterland of these more southerly ports were apparently less open to selling children into the trade than those to the north” (DOMINGUES DA SILVA, 2017, p. 117). However, if the last quarter of the eighteenth century was indeed characterized by lower volumes of enslaved children leaving West Central Africa, then one would expect a higher proportion of individuals within this broad-age group left behind. As we have seen above, the 1792-1796 data do not corroborate such a development along the lower Kwanza River valley. Neither does the quantitative information stemming from the 1777-1778 colony-wide censuses, which places the proportion of children under 7 years old relative to the overall population of colonial Angola at 19.0%.¹³

Jan Vansina has, in turn, posited a model of demographic collapsed for Ambaca under the context of the Atlantic Slave Trade. In reference to the populational and other exactions imposed by the export slave trade between 1760 and 1845 in this particular landscape, he has concluded that “[t]he full scale and weight of these impositions...become fully apparent only once one knows that the average population of the district was estimated at a mere 73,369 in 1845...” (VANSINA, 2005, p. 2). Vansina does not know what the mid-eighteenth century population of Ambaca may have been: no demographic data are available for that period. But drawing upon a published colony-wide census relating to 1844,¹⁴ he is certain that, almost one hundred years later, it was quite lower, at “a mere” 73,369 individuals. It is further noteworthy that Vansina draws upon only one other census year for Ambaca: the 1819 enumeration, which, as it happens, is also published (CASTELLO BRANCO E TORRES, 1825, p. 356). In his estimation (VANSINA, 2005, p. 2, ft. 3), this earlier census “allegedly included only 37,500 inhabitants...” Once characterized as “alleged”, the 1819 figure could

¹³ AHU, Angola, 1a Secção, Cx. 61 - Doc. 87, “Mappa de todos of Moradores, e Habitantes deste Reyno de Angola, e suas conquistas ... 1777”; AHU, Angola, 1a Secção, Cx. 62, Doc. 67, “Mappa de todos of Moradores, e Habitantes deste Reyno de Angola, e suas conquistas ... 1778”; THORNTON, 1980, p. 421-423.

¹⁴ This census was published almost simultaneously in two different volumes: OMBONI, 1845, p. 408-409; LOPES DE LIMA, 1846, III, Part I, p. 4-A. These publication dates place this colony-wide enumeration as referring to 1844, not 1845, as some, Vansina included, claim: CURTO, 1999, p. 385.

not have led Vansina to re-appraise his model of demographic collapse. However, had he gone beyond these two censuses, both found in the public domain, and drawn upon the numerous Ambaca annual enumerations housed, especially, in Lisbon's Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Vansina would have deciphered a much more complex process of demographic development over a much longer period time.¹⁵ That is quite clear from the 1792-1796 enumeration of the lower Kwanza River valley, which points to a base population of about 84,000 in Ambaca and represents the beginning of a long census series available for this *presídio* that subsequently continues, on an almost annual basis until 1832, resurfaces sporadically in the 1840s (under a different administrative nomenclature) and 1850s, and then ends with four other enumerations in the 1860s.¹⁶

The 1792-1796 enumeration of the lower Kwanza River valley forms part of what of what Joseph C. Miller (1988, p. 159) has labelled as “remarkable Portuguese colonial census[es]” for the post mid-1770s reconstruction of African historical demography. Such a characterization notwithstanding, he (MILLER, 1988, p. 161, ft. 44) inexplicably dates this source to 1771, or a full quarter century before it was effectively compiled. Moreover, Miller (1988, p. 161, ft. 44) then draws upon this “detailed survey, district by district” to posit sex ratios in the order of 91.5/100 in the youth age bracket and “36.9/100 in the adult category (“pretos machos capazes para todo o serviço/ femeas capazes de terem filhos”). His (MILLER, 1988, p. 161) intent is to drive home the point of the existence of “large numbers of females in the Angolan population during the slave trade”. The late eighteenth century proportions of males relative to females put forth by Miller for colonial Angola, however, are not always based on accurate data. Along the lower Kwanza River valley, as can be seen in Table II, the 1792-1796 sex ratio for the 7-14/15 age bracket was relatively equal at 103.0/100. The same proportion was displayed in Ambaca, while that of Cambambe was somewhat lower at 102.6/100 and that of Calumbo only very slightly higher at 103.1/100. In

¹⁵ One should also point out that Vansina gives no importance at all to the administrative changes that the “old” presidium of Ambaca experienced in the late 1830s and early 1840s, especially since these are registered in two of his privileged, published sources: LOPES DE LIMA, 1846, III, Part II, p. 18-19; CASTRO FRANCINA, 1854, p. 6-7.

¹⁶ The existence of this series has been known since the mid-1990s: CURTO, 1994. Had Vansina been aware of this corpus, he would have realized that the 1819 census he draws upon from CASTELLO BRANCO E TORRES, 1825, p. 356, actually refers to the census of the previous year: AHU, Angola, Cx. 134, Doc. 37, “Mappa do Prezidio de Ambaca e Sua Jurisdição relatico ao estado delle no anno de 1818”. Moreover, had he pushed this line of inquiry further, Vansina would have also noted that this particular census is an almost exact copy of the enumeration undertaken in 1817: AHU, Angola, Cx. 132, Doc. 32, “Mappa do Prezidio de Ambaca e Sua Jurisdição relatico ao estado delle no anno de 1817”.

the case of the most reproductive and productive component of the population, on the other hand, the regional sex ratio effectively stood at 62.9/100. Ambaca, yet again mirrored this proportion at 62.5/100, while Calumbo's was lower at 61.7/100 and Pungo Andongo's higher at 65.0/100. In short, by the late eighteenth century, the populational exactions of the Atlantic slave trade had effectively led to the existence of large numbers of fertile women relative to men along the lower Kwanza River valley. Yet, the proportion was nowhere as extreme as suggested by Miller.¹⁷

As we have seen, the "Convenção dos Dizimos" throws no light at all on the socio-legal conditions of the population living along the lower Kwanza River valley during the late eighteenth century. The demographic data underpinning it also was not collected in a uniform fashion, while the categories of enumeration do not convey the same meaning throughout the areas surveyed. Yet, in spite of these problems, this remains an important primary source. Indeed, the 1792-1796 enumeration lends further weight to the proposition that the production of demographic data in colonial Angola was, by the later eighteenth century, not only based on a certain grounded experience on the part of enumerators, but that some census takers actually went from hamlet to hamlet, village to village, chiefdom to chiefdom counting hearths and people. This population count clearly also evidences an abundance of adult women and a dearth of adult men throughout the region under consideration. The proportion was not nearly as extreme as proposed by Miller. Still, scholars who have worked through other census materials from colonial Angola prior to and after this particular period have pointed to a similar reality during specific periods of time (THORNTON, 1980; VENÂNCIO, 1994; VANSINA, 2005). The large numbers of women in the 1792-1796 population of the lower Kwanza River valley is clearly consistent with "heavily slaved regions" continuing to supply proportionally higher volumes of enslaved adult males into the Atlantic export market. This is a process that, obviously, needs to be historicized over a much more comprehensive chronological span as, for example, had been done in other West Central African contexts (THORNTON, 1977a; THORNTON, 1977b, THORNTON, 1981;

¹⁷ This is not the only infelicity in Miller's *magnum opus*. For example, drawing upon the "1845" colony-wide data published in OMBONI, 1845, p. 408-409, and in LOPES DE LIMA, 1846, III, Part I, p. 4-A, he works out a sex ratio of 79.6/100 for free blacks and 86.2/100 for slaves (presumably all black). Although the actual data on the enslaved black population (40,143 males and 46,560 females) effectively works out to a ratio of 86.2/100, that is not the case with the actual data on the free black population, where 146,235 males and 145,985 females translate to quite a different ratio of 100.2/100. In a similar vein, while Miller accurately gives the colony-wide 1827 sex ratio among free blacks as 85.8/100 (91,471 males and 106,552 females), he fails to provide its counterpart of 114.4/100 within the enslaved black population (27,765 males and 24,265 females): see AHU, Angola, Cx. 156, Doc. 16, "Mappa da População do Reino de Angola," 20 June, 1827.

HEYWOOD and THORNTON, 1988; CURTO, 1999; CURTO and GERVAIS, 2001; CURTO, 2014). The same type of exhaustive analysis further needs to be undertaken upon the other, numerous censuses of colonial Angola up to the late 1860s so as to deal more convincingly with the assertions made by Lovejoy and nuanced by Domingues da Silva relative to an increasing incidence of children in the Atlantic slave trade from West Central Africa, as well as by Vansina relative to a demographic collapse in Ambaca resulting from the infamous commerce. In sum, once properly understood, the 1792-1796 population count of the lower Kwanza River valley now provides an earlier base line and point of reference for a part of West Central Africa from which these, and other, investigations can be carried out through to the very end of the transatlantic slave trade in enslaved individuals (TEODORO DE MATOS and VOS, 2013; VOS, 2014).

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