

WEEK 1 INTRODUCTION TO READINGS

Nzinga Mbemba (Affonso I), "Letters to the King of Portugal" (1526)

When Portuguese navigators and explorers reached central West Africa in the 1480s, the Kingdom of Kongo, was ruled by King Nzinga a Kuwu. In 1491, he and his heir, Nzinga Mbemba, were baptized as Catholics. Mbemba, who received the Christian name Affonso, succeeded his father in 1506 and ruled for nearly three decades as Affonso I. His own son, Henrique, was educated in Portugal and became the first West African bishop in the Roman Catholic Church. However, by the end of the sixteenth century, the Church held that only whites were fit to hold priestly offices. Under Affonso's rule, the Kongo kingdom was open to trade in firearms, horses, and cattle from Christendom, as well as new food items from the Americas. In this case, openness to the world led not to prosperity, but to political disintegration and disorder. In 1526, Affonso wrote the following letters to King João III of Portugal, in an attempt to modify and ameliorate the relationship of the Portuguese to his kingdom.

Unnamed author

You also have a text to read this week by an unnamed author.

WEEK 1 QUESTIONS

Nzinga Mbemba (Affonso I)

1. What does the word "factor" mean as used in King Affonso's letters? (Note: the dictionary you have at hand may or may not have the definition of "factor" that fits this text. The best dictionary of the English language is probably the Oxford English Dictionary, and it is especially useful for learning about archaic meanings of

words found in historical documents, such as this one. It is available on the MIT Libraries website: Resources -> Virtual Reference Collection -> Dictionaries -> OED).

2. On what ground or grounds does King Affonso object to slavery? Would you object to slavery on the same grounds?

Unnamed author

3. What reason or reasons does the author provide for his voyage?

4. What interested the author most about the people he encountered?