

Collapse of the Kingdom of Kongo

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- In spite of periodic invasions, Kongo remained strong until the mid-seventeenth century. Portuguese forces aided Kongo in expelling invaders, but at the same time they continued to trade in slaves.
- Some Portuguese merchants eventually settled in Kongo, took local wives and husbands, and henceforth looked more after the interests of their adoptive home than their native Portugal.
- Over time, the relations between Portugal and Kongo deteriorated, particularly after Portuguese agents began to pursue opportunities south of Kongo.
 - By 1665 Portuguese colonists in the south of Kongo even declared war on the kingdom, defeating the army and decapitating the king.
 - Portuguese merchants soon withdrew from Kongo and began dealing with its southern neighbour, the Kingdom of Ndongo.



- The Portuguese referred to Ndongo as *Angola* (after the title of the kingdom's ruler, "ngola"). Ndongo grew into a powerful regional kingdom thanks to its relationship with the Portuguese.

- The Portuguese founded a small coastal colony in 1575 which grew over the centuries. Finally, Portuguese forces landed in Ndongo with the hopes to conquer the region and establish a vast slave-supplying colony (Angola).

- Queen Nzinga (1623-1663) led a strong resistance against Portuguese forces for forty years.

- She dressed as a male warrior when leading troops in battle and insisted that her subjects refer to her as a king.

- She even would sometimes travel as a male, bringing “concubines” – young men dressed as women companions of the “king.”

- She effectively mobilized central African people against the Portuguese & was a cunning strategist and effective military leader.



Figure 1. Queen Nzinga

- The Kingdom of Kongo participated with the Queen’s forces in battles against the Portuguese.

- When Nzinga died, Portuguese forces faced less capable resistance, and they both extended and tightened their control over Angola, the first European colony in sub-Saharan Africa.

- Portugal returned its attention to Kongo, especially when the King of Kongo began to negotiate a new relationship with Spain (Portugal’s natural enemy). The king was killed by Portuguese forces based in Angola, triggering a Civil War in Kongo.

- Tens of thousands fleeing the conflict or caught up in the battles were deported as slaves to English, French, Dutch and Portuguese merchants every year.

Kongolese form of Christianity

- During this time, Dona Beariz emerged, as someone with a reputation for working miracles and curing diseases. She used her prominence to advocate an African form of Christianity.
 - She taught that Jesus was a Black African man born in Kongo

- Kongo was the true holy land of Christianity
- Heaven was for Africans
- Beatriz was burned at the stake by Christian missionaries in 1706, yet her movement (called the “Antonian movement” did not disappear, becoming a strong force in the country).
- The kingdom stabilized in the 17th and 18th centuries.
- In 1839 the Portuguese government, acting on British pressure, abolished the slave trade south of the equator which had so damaged Central Africa. Human trafficking continued until well into the 1920s, first as an illegal slave trade, then as contract labor.
- In 1855 or 1856, two potential kings emerged to contest the succession. Pedro V won the contest, thanks to soliciting Portuguese aid. The Portuguese support which had put Pedro V on the throne had a price, for when he was crowned Pedro V in 1857 he also swore a treaty of vassalage to Portugal. Portugal gained nominal authority over Kongo, and even constructed a fort in São Salvador to house a garrison.
- In 1866, citing excessive costs, the Portuguese government withdrew the garrison. Pedro continued his rule, however, though he faced increasing rivalry from clan-based trading magnates who drained his authority from much of the country.
- At the Conference of Berlin in 1884–1885, European powers divided most of Central Africa between them. Portugal claimed the lion's share of what remained of independent Kongo; however, Portugal was not then in a position to make "effective occupation". King Pedro V ruled ten more years using the Portuguese to strengthen his control. King Pedro V voluntarily reaffirmed Kongo's position as a Portuguese vassal in 1888. After a revolt against the Portuguese in 1914, Portugal abolished the title of king of Kongo, ending even symbolic native rule.

Fact: Forced labour remained legal in Angola until the 1960s.