

The Kingdom of Kongo

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- In the 15th century, the principal kingdoms in central Africa were: Kongo, Ndongo, Luba & Lunda.
- In 1483 a small Portuguese fleet landed at the estuary of the Congo River and initiated relations with the kingdom of Kongo. Within a few years, the Portuguese merchants had established a close political and diplomatic relationship with the kings of Kongo. They supplied the kings with advisors, provided a military garrison to support the kings and protect Portuguese interests, and brought tailors, shoemakers, masons, miners, and priests to Kongo.

- The kings of Kongo converted to Christianity (Roman Catholicism) as a way to establish closer commercial relations with the Portuguese merchants and diplomatic relations with the Portuguese monarchy.
 - The kings appreciated the fact that Christianity offered a strong endorsement of their monarchical rule.
 - The saints of the Roman Catholic church also evoked the spirits long recognized by the Kongolesse religions.
 - King Nzinga Mbemba of Kongo, also known as King Alfonso I (1506-1542) became a devout Catholic and sought to convert all of his subjects to Christianity.
 - There were so many bells in the kingdom's capital, Mbanza (São Salvador to Europeans) it was nicknamed "Kongo of the Bell."



Figure 1. Coat of Arms issued to King Alfonso I



Figure 2. An engraving depicting Portuguese diplomats meeting with the King of Kongo

