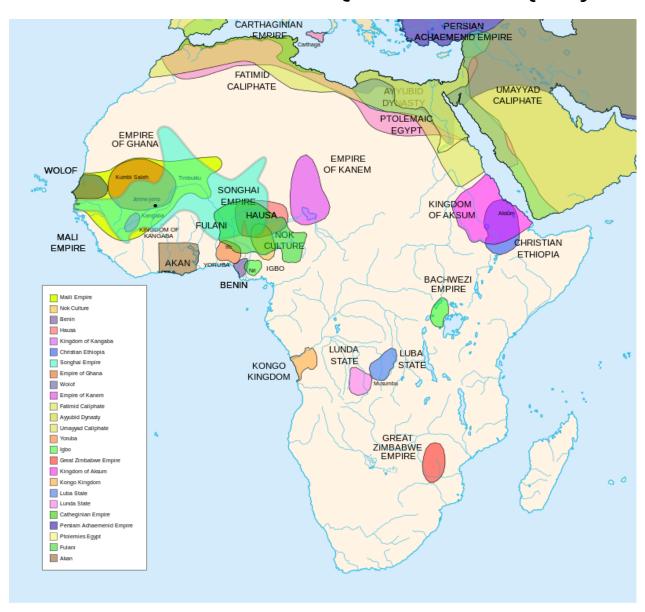
The Kingdom of Kongo

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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 Portugese 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 Portugese 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 Portugese merchants and diplomatic relations with the Portugese 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 Kongolese 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 (Saõ 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 Portugese diplomats meeting with the King of Kongo

- Relations with Portugal brought wealth and foreign (European) recognition to the kingdom of Kongo, but at a cost of Portugese infiltration into its society.
- In exchange for the textiles, weapons, advisors, and artisans that they brought to Congo, the
 Portugese merchants sought high-value merchandise such as ivory, copper, and most of all, slaves.
 The Portugese sometimes embarked on slaving expeditions themselves, but more often made
 alliances with local authorities in interior regions and provided them with weapons in exchange for
 slaves.
- Some of the Portuguese's allies were enemies of the kings of Kongo, while others were royal subordinates. In either case, the Portuguese tactics undermined the authority of the kings, who appealed repeatedly but successfully for the Portuguese to cease, or at least limit their trade in slaves.

