

THE  
BRITISH  
MUSEUM



# The wealth of Africa

## The kingdom of Kongo

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Presentation

Supported by



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council



The CarAf Centre

[www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org)



**How much did the arrival  
of the Portuguese affect  
the kingdom of Kongo?**

## VIEW FROM KONGO

Who does this figure represent?



**Source 1:** Drum with European figure,  
Kongo, 19th century  
British Museum

## VIEW FROM KONGO

**Who does this figure represent?**

**What does he have in his hand?**

Alcohol was one of the things exchanged by European traders for captives in the Kongo area.



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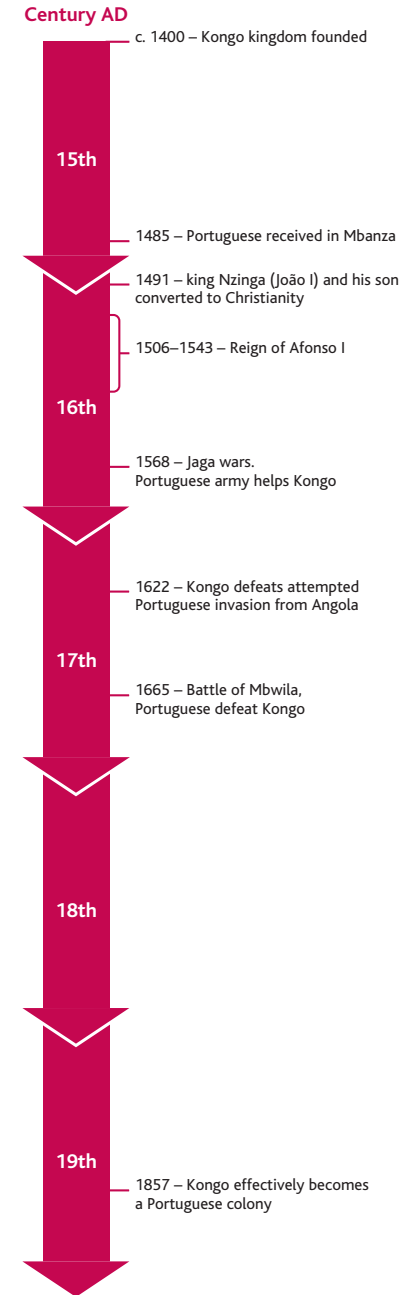
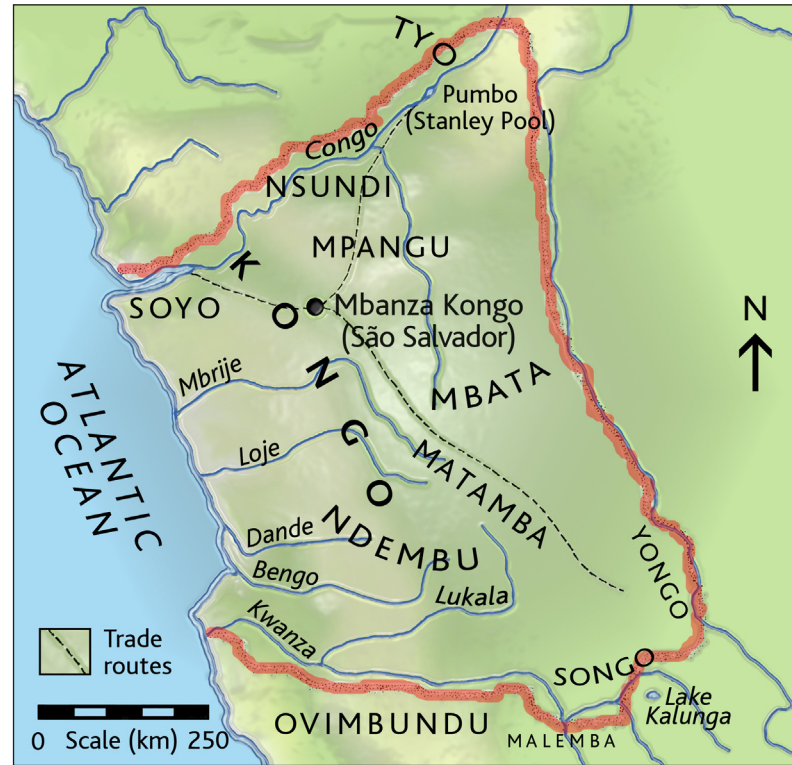
**Why might the Kongo craftsman have had this attitude towards Europeans?**



**Source 1:** Drum with European figure,  
Kongo, 19th century  
British Museum

## WHERE IS KONGO?

Why might Kongo have been attractive to Europeans?



## THE KING OF KONGO

What impression do you get of the king of Kongo?

### Source 2

The kingdom was the most organised state that the Portuguese had yet found in Africa. The king ruled from a palace, accompanied by elaborate ceremony, through a network of officials and nobles who administered the provinces of the state to collect tribute in copper, iron, and slaves.

Collins & Burns 2007: 180



Source 3: The king of Kongo receiving Dutch envoys.  
Dapper 1668: 353

## WHAT WAS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE KINGS OF KONGO AND PORTUGAL?

### Source 4

'Most powerful and excellent king of Manycongo,' King Manuel wrote from Lisbon in 1512.

Davidson 1996: 138

### Source 5

In c. 1506 the king of Kongo, Afonso, sent 500 manillas of copper to King Manuel of Portugal, the first of a series of gifts intended to cement the alliance between the two kings.

Herbert 1984: 140

### Source 6

The 6 greatest chiefs [of Kongo] were to be dukes; lesser notables were to be marquises, counts and barons; while the children of the king were to be princes and princesses.

*Regimento* or instructions of King Manuel of Portugal (1512), quoted in Davidson 1996: 140

**What was King Manuel of Portugal trying to do in Kongo?**



**Source 7:** Copper manilla  
British Museum



## KONGO AND RELIGION

### Why did Afonso convert to Christianity?

#### Source 8

King Afonso I of Kongo read religious books far into the night, often falling asleep over them, and astounded the priests with his knowledge.

An account by Portuguese vicar, Rui d'Aguir, in 1516, quoted in Thornton 1984: 155

#### Source 9

King Afonso used Christianity as a royal cult under his direct control.

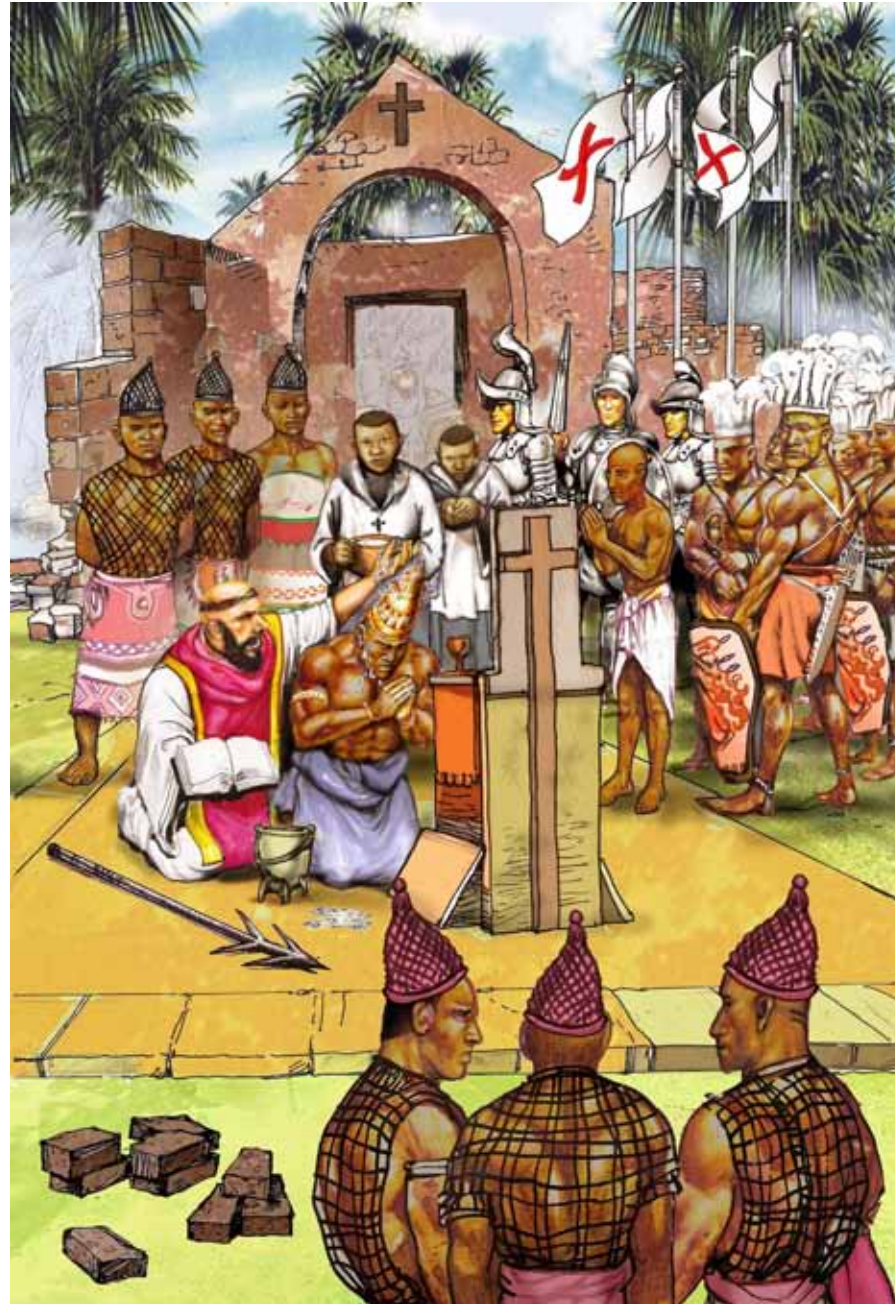
Hilton 1985: 60



Source 10: Capuchin missionary celebrating Mass, Songo, Kingdom of Kongo, 1740s  
Collo & Benso 1986: 115

## THE BAPTISM OF JOÃO I AND SIX OF HIS NOBLES, 1485

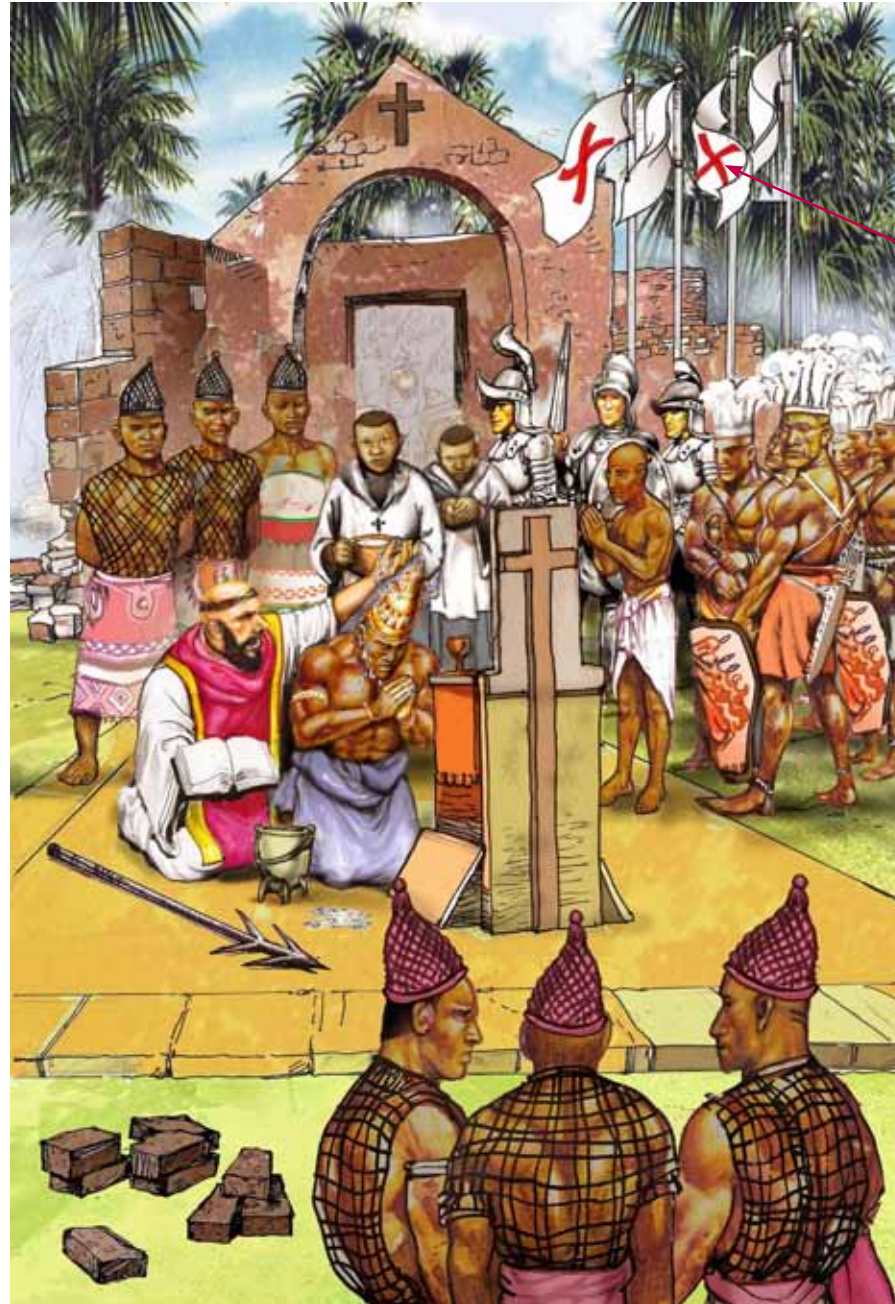
What is going on in this picture?



Source 11:  
Illustration by Tayo Fatunla

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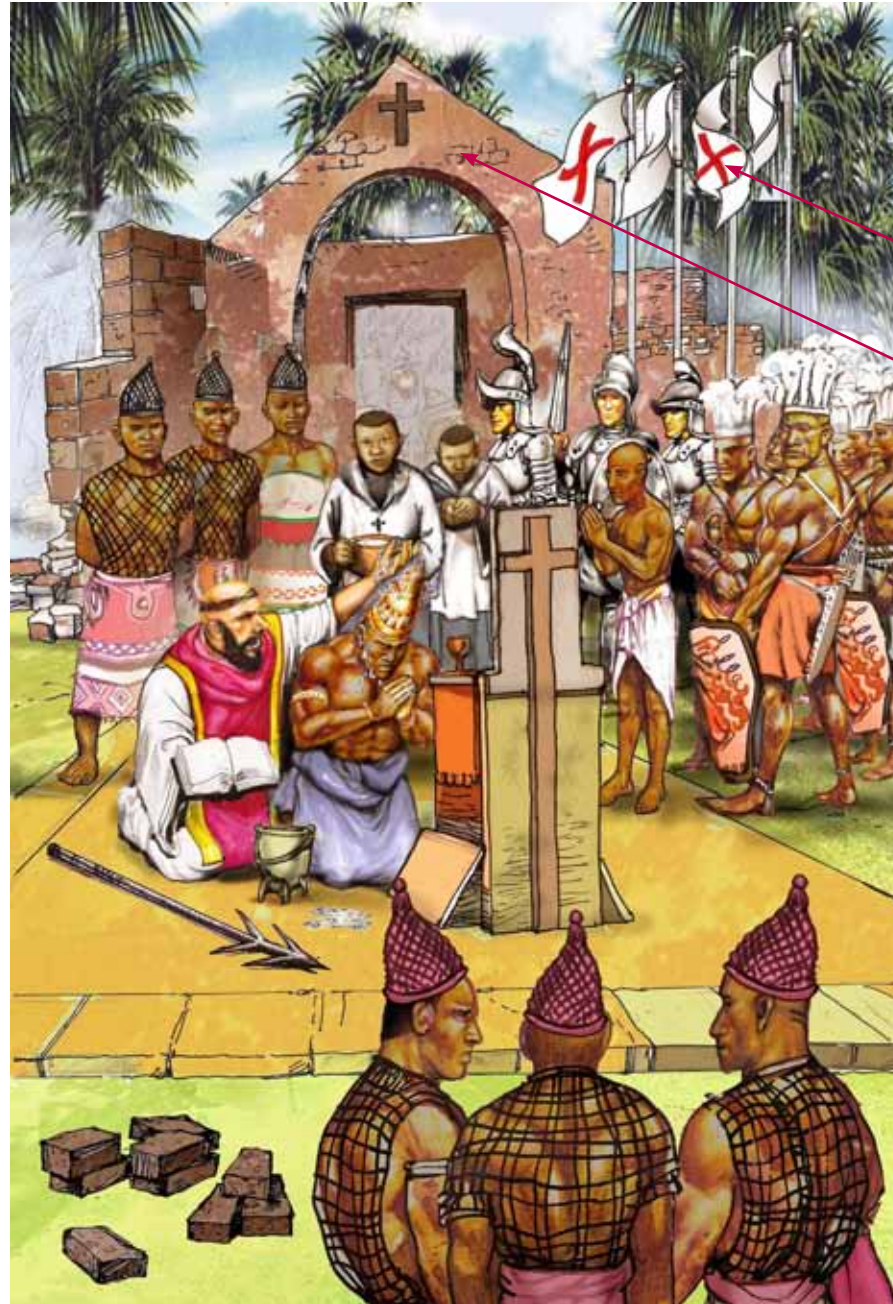


Flag of Kongo

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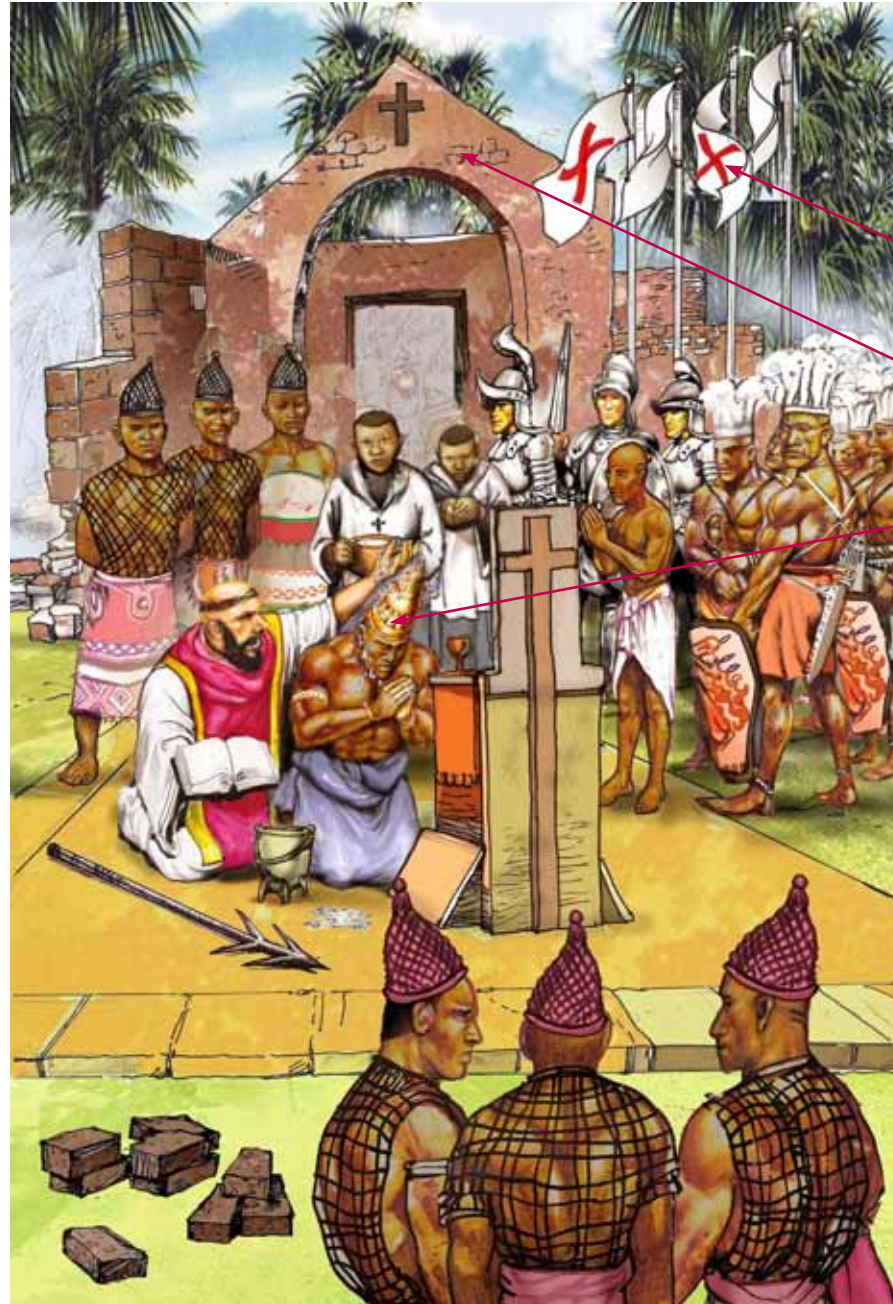
Flag of Kongo

Half-built church

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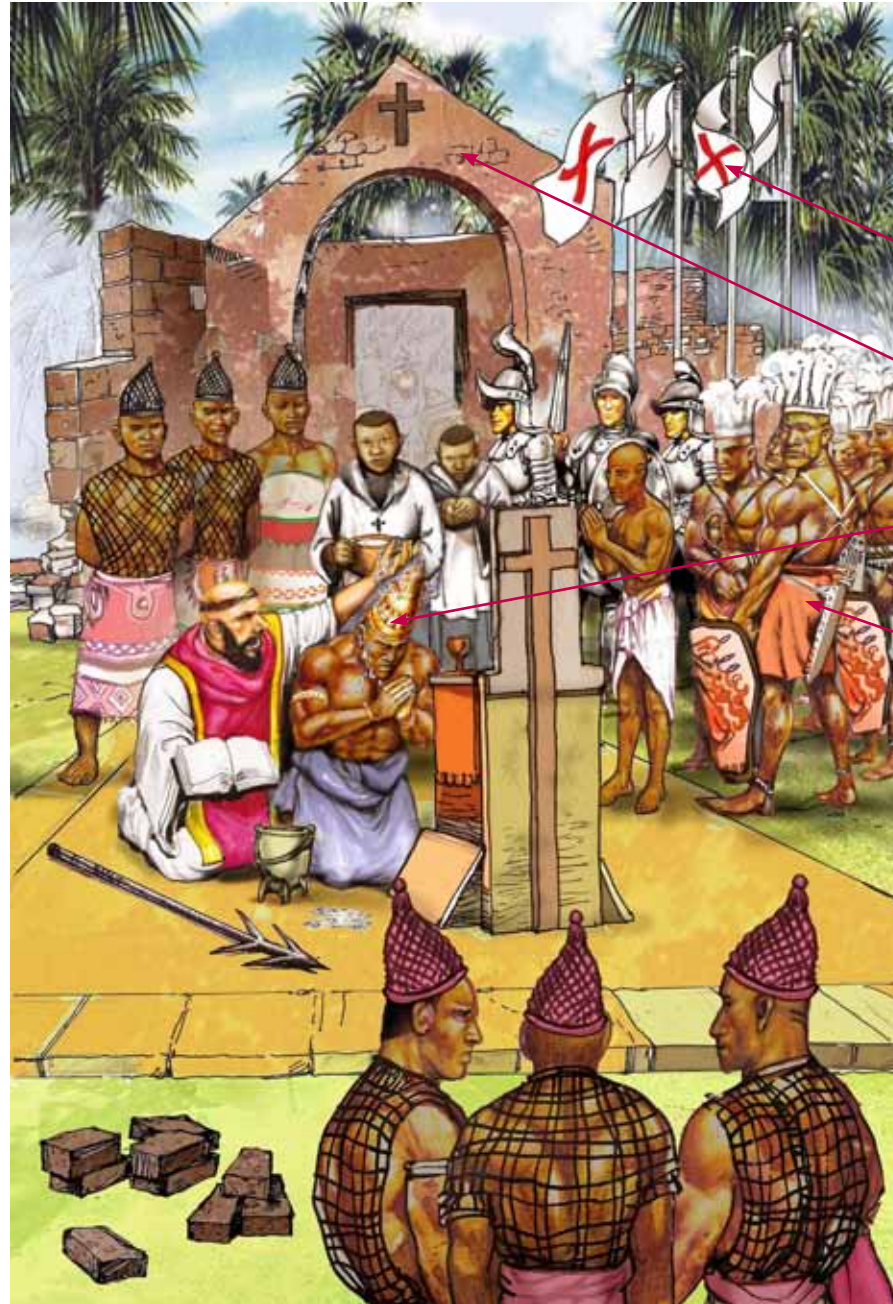
Half-built church

King João I

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Flag of Kongo

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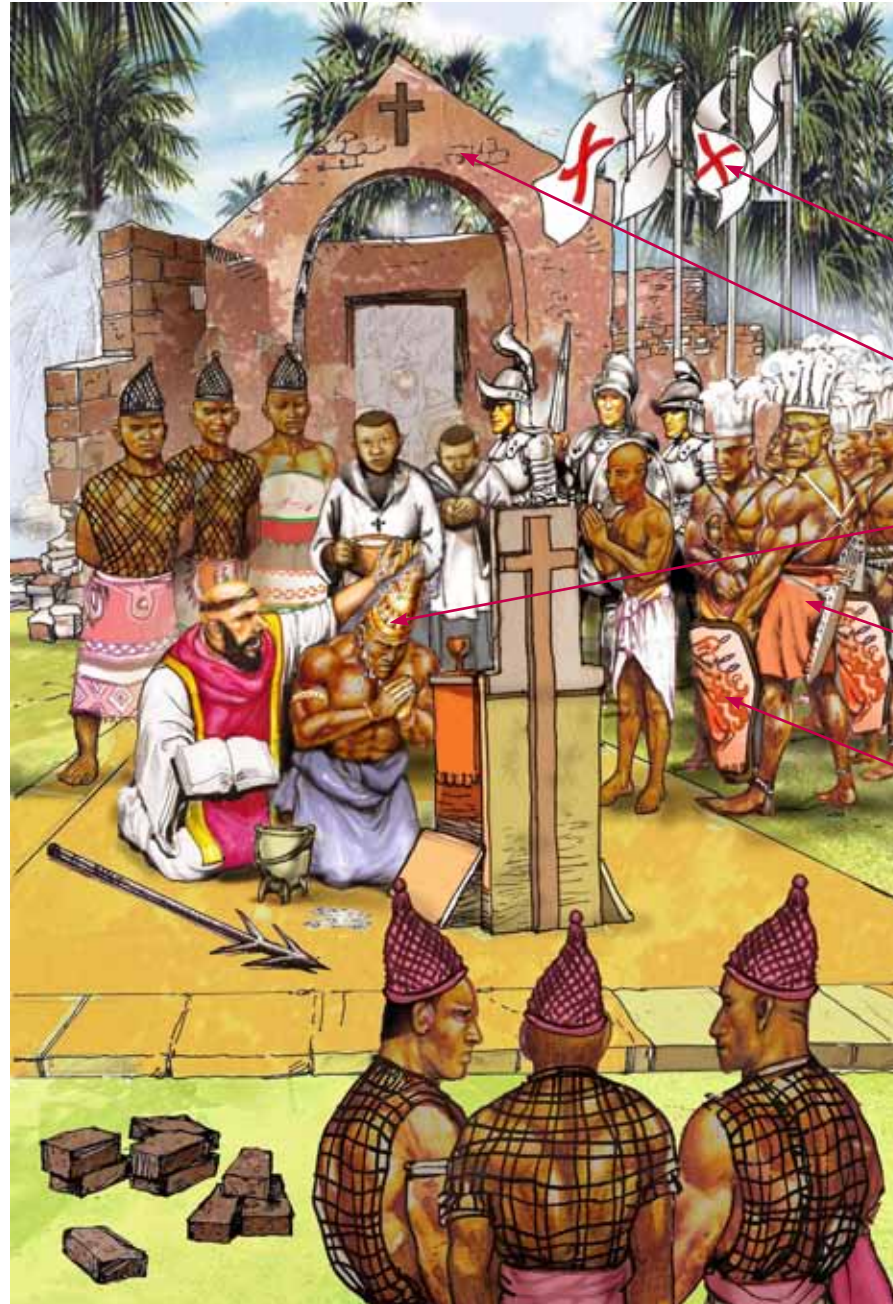
King João I

Kongo army ready to go to war

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Flag of Kongo

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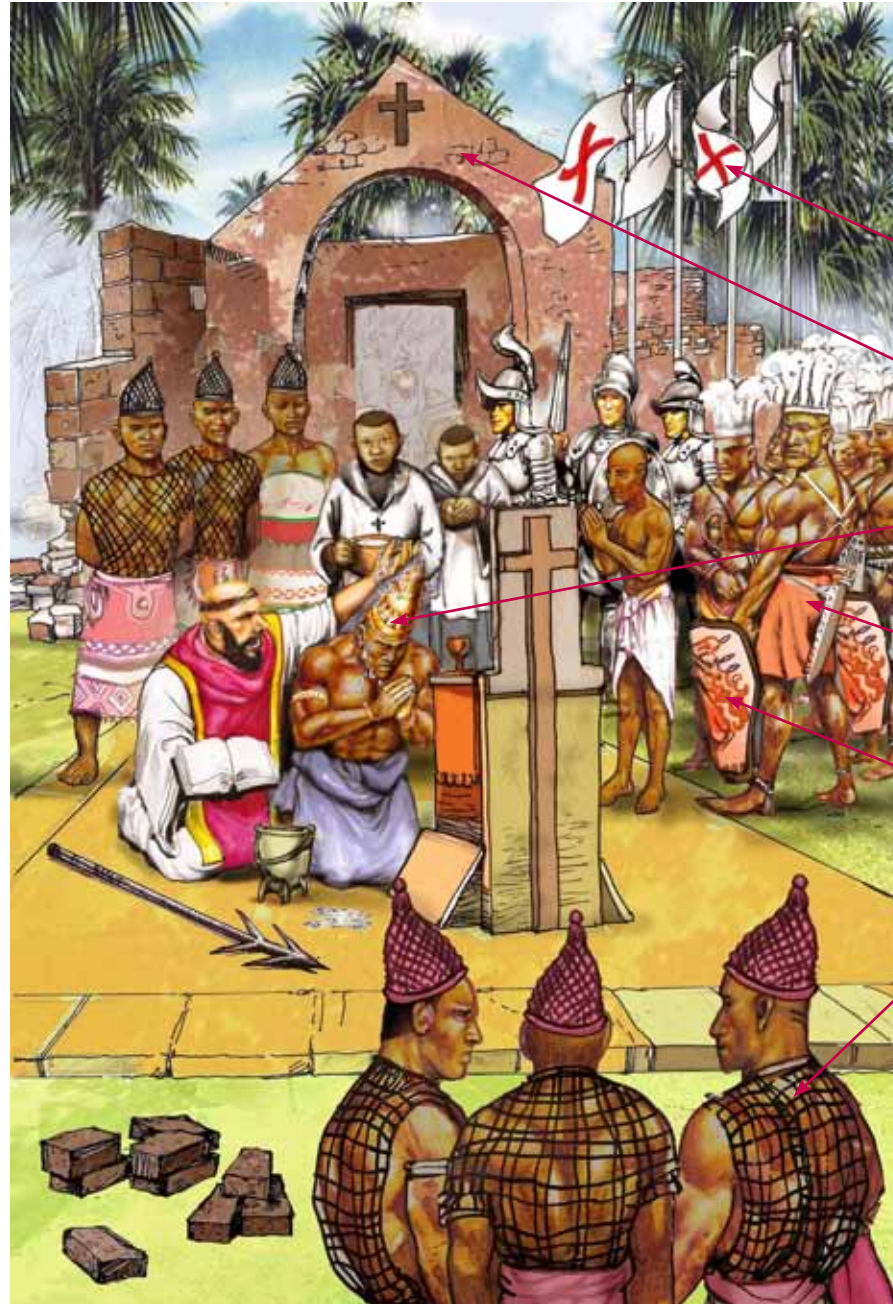
Kongo army ready to go to war

Royal emblem

Source 11:  
Illustration by Tayo Fatunla

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Flag of Kongo

Half-built church

King João I

Kongo army ready to go to war

Royal emblem

Nobles waiting for baptism

Source 11:  
Illustration by Tayo Fatunla



## DID THE PORTUGUESE FORCE KONGO TO TRADE IN CAPTIVES?

### Source 12

This expedition has cost us much: it would be unreasonable to send it home with empty hands. Although our principle wish is to serve God and the pleasure of the king of Kongo, none the less you will make him understand – as though speaking in our name – what he should do to fill the ships, whether with slaves, or copper, or ivory. Instructions of King Manuel of Portugal to his envoy (1512), quoted in Davidson 1996: 139–140



**Source 13:** Nobles travelling by litter, Kongo, late 16th century  
Aa 1729:A

**What did King Manuel want from Kongo?**

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### Source 14

It is quite clear that King Afonso, and probably Kongo law in general, had little problem with either the holding of slaves, or their export from the country.

Thornton: King Afonso and the Slave Trade

### Source 15

Since slaves were not readily available inside Kongo, the kings began at an early stage to seek captives from outside. Border raids became a regular feature of the kingdom, and may have led to territorial expansion.

Birmingham 1977: 550

### Source 16

At one stage, Afonso considered the [slave] trade so destructive that he threatened to end it. He informed the king of Portugal that he wanted Portuguese teachers and priests, but he no longer wanted traders and merchants 'for it is our will that in our kingdom there should no longer be a trade or export of slaves.'

Hilton 1985: 58



Source 13: Nobles travelling by litter, Kongo, late 16th century  
Aa 1729:A

**What did King Manuel want from Kongo?**

**What was Kongo's attitude to enslavement?**

## THE PORTUGUESE AND KONGO POLITICS

### Source 17

The Portuguese, settled in São Salvador, reinforced the royal power materially and spiritually. They altered a delicate balance in favour of royalty. They supplied the advantage of their technology and their manufactured goods, and they introduced incentives to trade. They were the carriers of a new religion, which was all the more warmly welcomed because it seemed to be extremely powerful.

Balandier 1968: 46

### Source 18

The king used the whites in the internal power struggle, receiving them with open arms.

Ekholm 1972: 18

**How did the king benefit from the Portuguese?**

**What was the harm in this?**



Source 19: Court of king of Kongo, late 16th century  
Aa 1729: 51B

## WAS THE ARRIVAL OF THE PORTUGUESE GOOD FOR KONGO?

### Source 20

Growth was stimulated by new Portuguese contributions to the ruling group in the form not only of goods but also of services by teachers, artisans, lawyers and priests.

Birmingham 1977: 548

### Source 21

With the aid of Portuguese mercenaries and firearms Afonso was able to extend and consolidate his influence over the region.

Reader 1997: 366

### Source 22

By the 16th century, rulers became increasingly separated from their subjects, and traders became an increasingly powerful middle class. These changes were closely connected with the arrival of the Portuguese.

Birmingham 1977: 547–548

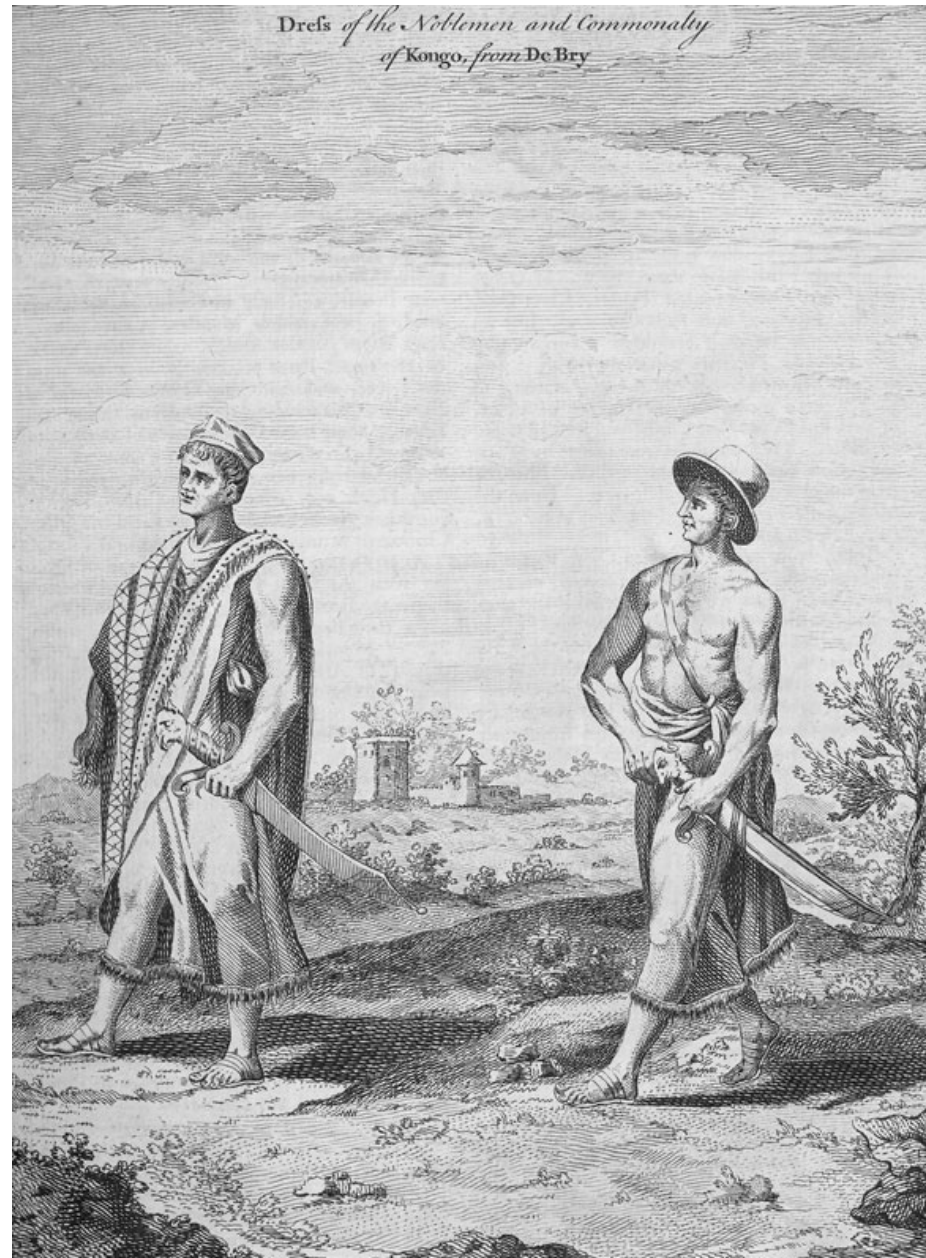
### Source 23

In 1665, at the great battle of Mbwila, King Antonio I and most of his nobles, court officials and 5000 Kongoleses troops were killed [by the Portuguese invaders]. The kingdom of Kongo dissolved into petty chiefdoms and never recovered.

Collins & Burns 2007, 188

**What advantages did the arrival of the Portuguese bring?**

**What were the disadvantages?**



**Source 24:** Men's clothing styles (noble and commoner), Kongo, late 16th century  
Astley 1745–7: facing 248

## Your feedback

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Please help the British Museum improve its educational resources for schools and teachers by giving your feedback. The first 250 teachers or tutors to complete the online survey before 12.00 on 1 September 2011 will receive a printed set of illustrations of African civilisations by artist Tayo Fatunla. Visit [www.surveymonkey.com/s/wealthofafrica](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/wealthofafrica) to complete the survey and for terms and conditions.

## Find out more

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The British Museum's collection spans over two million years of human history and culture, all under one roof and includes world-famous objects such as the Rosetta Stone, the Parthenon sculptures, and Egyptian mummies.

The Museum's collection of over 200,000 African objects includes material from ancient to contemporary cultures. Highlights on display throughout the Museum include a magnificent brass head of a Yoruba ruler from Ife in Nigeria, vibrant textiles from across the continent, and the Throne of Weapons – a sculpture made out of guns.

## For students

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Students can experience and engage with the collection in many ways, from taking part in activity sessions at the Museum to using free online resources or playing interactive games in the classroom and at home.

## For teachers

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Search the Museum's collection online at [www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org) for information about objects, including pictures to download or print.

## Schools and teachers newsletter

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Sign up to the schools and teachers newsletter to receive regular updates on free special exhibitions previews, teacher events and new free resources at [www.britishmuseum.org/schools](http://www.britishmuseum.org/schools)

## Ancient Civilizations websites

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These award-winning British Museum websites have been specially designed for students in Years 5 and 6. Each site is supported by information and guidance for teachers. [www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk](http://www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk)

## The CarAf Centre

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These resources have been produced by the British Museum in collaboration with The CarAf Centre, a community educational support centre and registered charity based in the London Borough of Camden. For more information, visit [www.thecarafcentre.org.uk](http://www.thecarafcentre.org.uk)

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