

Letter from Afonso I, King of Kongo,
to Manuel I, King of Portugal, regarding
the burning of the 'great house of idols',
Kingdom of Kongo, 5 October 1514.

Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon

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Note

Afonso I (1456-1543) is the second Christian monarch of the Kingdom of Kongo. Probably founded in the seventh century and reaching its peak in the fifteenth, this immense kingdom would today correspond, along the Atlantic coast, to the north of Angola, almost all of the Republic of Congo, the west of the Democratic Republic of Congo and part of Gabon; to the east, it extended from the Atlantic Ocean to the west of the Kwango river and, to the south, from the Congo river to the Loge river.

It was during the reign of Manuel I (1469–1521) that the Portuguese expansion into the Americas and the Indies took place. In the 1480s, the first commercial and diplomatic relations were established with the Kingdom of Kongo. During the following decade, the actions of Christian missionaries and local power struggles led to conversions among the Kongolese rulers: in 1509, the advent of Afonso I sealed an alliance with Manuel I, in the name of the propagation of the Christian faith. This agreement, in which each monarch had something to gain, was marred very quickly by conflicts with the Portuguese present in the Kongo. Due in part to the development of the slave trade, which Afonso I tried in vain to control, the kingdom gradually broke up and lost its sovereignty at the end of the sixteenth century to the benefit of the Portuguese.

With the kind permission of the Royal Academy for Overseas Sciences (Brussels), we are here reproducing an English translation of the French translation of the letter from Afonso I to Manuel I, published in 1974 in *Correspondance de Dom Afonso, roi du Kongo, 1506–1543*, by Louis Jadin, professor at the University of Louvain, and Mireille Dicorato, associate professor at the National University of Zaire in Lubumbashi.

It is preceded by excerpts from Louis Jadin's general introduction, which provides the context in which the letter was written and sheds light on the issues at stake.

Introduction by Louis Jadin

Correspondance de Dom Afonso, roi du Kongo, 1506-1543 Brussels,

Royal Academy for Overseas Sciences, 1974

(extracts)

DOCUMENTS ANALYSED

The Kingdom of Congo is the only country in Africa with the advantage of offering the historian an almost uninterrupted series of letters from African leaders defending or exposing the religious and political point of view of their country in the face of Portuguese claims. [...]

King Afonso's letters vary strongly in length. Some are ten pages long, others merely a few lines. They were written by order of King Afonso by four secretaries whose signatures have been preserved. Most were written by Dom João Teixeira, a Congolese pupil of the first missionaries. [...]

There are far fewer letters available from Kings Manuel I and João III of Portugal responding to King Afonso. There is, in fact, no repository of old archives from the Kongo still in existence. We must therefore content ourselves with the minutes or copies left in Portugal. [...]

EVANGELIZATION AND ACCULTURATION

[...] One of the important themes of the documents is the account of the providential victory of King Afonso over his pagan brother Panzu in Banza Kongo in 1506. The account sent to Lisbon in several copies and confirmed, before 1512, by Pedro de Sousa, the ambassador of the King of Kongo in Lisbon, provoked the admiration of the King of Portugal. Dom Manuel I proposed to Afonso to include in his coat of arms the memory of this victory, attributed by his enemies to the intervention of Saint James and of the Virgin. The design of the Kongo coat of arms, based on this theme, was brought to the

Kongo by Simão da Silva and Alvaro Lopes in 1512. King Afonso adopted it and also distributed coats of arms sent from Portugal to the main dignitaries of his kingdom. These dignitaries were, at the same time, given nobility titles. [...]

After his victory in 1506, one of the main preoccupations of Afonso I remained the elimination of the cult of the elders. The tradition was maintained in Banza Kongo by the presence in the sacred forest of the 'great house of idols'. The King of Kongo was eager to destroy it, but didn't feel strong enough to dare anger his people with only his Christians from Sundi. He asked Fernão de Melo, governor of São Tomé, to send him some ships with bombards and blunderbusses. He had sent him in advance eight hundred shackles and fifty slaves for himself and his wife, fifty shackles for their son, and more shackles for the captain of the ship and the clerk.

He waited in vain for this assistance for a year. Receiving no weapons, he prudently destroyed all known idols with his followers alone. He did so at the risk of his life with a profound spirit of faith, bitterly regretting the indifference of Fernão de Melo, who had left him unassisted. It was only in his letter of 5 October 1514 that he sent all these confidences to the King of Portugal, Manuel I. King Afonso insists above all on Christian instruction and the sending of educated missionaries in large numbers. He would thus be able to open schools in Banza Kongo for the sons of nobles, especially young people from his family. On several occasions, these attempts met with great success, given the desire of the young nobles for education. They wanted not only to learn to read and write and to be initiated into Christian doctrine, but also to devote themselves to study classics and even to prepare for the priesthood. These schools sometimes drew between six hundred and a thousand pupils. [...]

THE SLAVE TRADE

The importance of the slave trade in the relations between Portugal and Kongo in the early sixteenth century cannot be underestimated. Initially relatively modest, this traffic was reserved for Portuguese merchants from São Tomé paying heavy taxes to the island's feudatory governor, Fernão de Melo. It was not long before the latter committed abuses when King Afonso wanted to send copper shackles and slaves to Portugal to obtain, in return, from King Manuel I, ornaments, wine and flour for religious worship, in order to compensate also for the cost of sending artisans and missionaries urgently needed in his kingdom.

Part and sometimes all of Afonso I's consignments were embezzled by the greed of the governors of the island of São Tomé or their agents. The role of Gonçalo Roïs, leader of the relief expedition against the Pangelungos of northern Zaire in 1509, must be underlined, but not in his praise. He singularly abused the trust of the King of Kongo and cynically stripped the Kongo missionaries when they returned to Portugal.

Other similar disappointments disrupted the good relations between King Afonso and the Portuguese. Captains coming to the port of Pinda and to Banza Kongo didn't hesitate to deceive King Afonso, both when delivering the gifts and messages from King Dom Manuel I and when embarking slaves being sent to the King of Portugal by the King of Kongo and fraudulently stolen by the captains.

King Afonso feared the consequences of the increasingly ubiquitous slave trade. His compatriots let themselves be dazzled by European goods and began to forcibly recruit slaves, arbitrarily seizing free men and selling them to Pinda's European slave traders. The king was forced to issue strict decrees to ban these raids and establish legal markets in Banza Kongo and the Pumbos. Kongolese people travelled to these distant markets on the upper river to buy slaves from the interior, which they easily traded for the cheap rubbish from Europe.

On several occasions, King Afonso even wanted to ban completely this odious trade that threatened to depopulate his kingdom. He would have liked to allow only one ship per year to enter the Kongo, to ensure the necessary supplies for the religious service. He no longer wanted to expose his kingdom to the mercantilism of Portuguese brokers who wanted to establish their trading posts in all the regions of the Kongo. King João replied that it was impossible to go back and that progress required, on the contrary, the expansion of this trade, because the export of labour was, unfortunately, almost the only item of trade that the Kongo and Central Africa could offer Europe at that time. The quantities of ivory and copper shackles available were insufficient. Portugal recommended looking for precious metals, but the Kongolese sovereign viewed such undertakings with suspicion. [...]

However, special regulations were jointly agreed upon for the purchase of slaves for the missionaries. These missionaries had only the proceeds from the sale of these slaves in São Tomé to cover their expenses for maintenance, clothing and religious objects in the Kongo. The missionaries' salaries and revenues were paid in *zimbus* or shells, which did not allow them to buy anything else. Around 1529, Portuguese and Kongolese experts were entrusted with all these operations to exempt the missionaries, on the advice of King João.

CONGOLESE STUDENTS IN PORTUGAL

An important part of the correspondence deals with the stay in Portugal of Congolese princes, sons, nephews and cousins of King Afonso.

As early as 1508, the king had sent his son, Dom Henrique, to study classics in Portugal. A few black youths accompanied the king's son. For almost forty years, the King would continue to send dozens of young people, from his family and others, to Portugal to study. They were received in the houses of the canons of St Eloi of Lisbon and Setubal, at the expense of the Portuguese court. As compensation, King Afonso sent slaves as gifts to the King of Portugal. Many of these students died or failed their studies. However, a number of them did brilliantly well in their studies. [...]

JUSTICE

To avoid any trouble with the Portuguese, who were settling in the Kongo in increasing numbers, King Manuel of Portugal proposed to Dom Afonso I to set up special courts and, as early as 1512, he obtained confirmation from the King of Kongo that a Portuguese jurist had been appointed to settle disputes between Portuguese and to propose solutions to disputes between blacks and Portuguese. The latter were thereby exempted from the customary courts of Kongo. These Portuguese judges would have a profound influence as advisers to King Afonso. They would often serve him for several years.

Among the documents published here are two investigations of a Portuguese type, one made in São Tomé about Gonçalo Roïs in 1512, the other made in the Kongo in 1514 about the disappearance of the list of gifts or presents sent from Portugal by Manuel I to King Afonso.

We must also mention the ever-cautious sanctions taken by King Afonso against Portuguese prevaricators or criminals. In such cases, he was careful to warn King Manuel of Portugal of expulsions or even capital executions. [...]

PRINCE HENRIQUE, BISHOP IN KONGO

[...] At the request of King Manuel I, Pope Leo X had promoted the young prince Henrique, aged 23, auxiliary bishop of Funchal, the diocese to which the Kingdom of Kongo had belonged since 1514. The young bishop, titular of Utica, was consecrated in 1521 and came to reside in Banza Kongo with four canons of St Eloi, jurists and theologians, who were to serve as advisers. [...] In 1526, King Afonso proposed to Dom João III of Portugal to organize an important missionary expedition of more than fifty priests. As early as 1512, he had already dispatched a few priests in the main duchies and counties, advising each chief to have a church and a school built in his banza. In 1526 he wanted to send c six to eight priests to each in order to ensure the evangelization of the people of the interior, who remained poorly educated. His rather ambitious plan was only partly successful. King Afonso would

have liked to see two other members of his family promoted to a bishopric. This would have made up for Bishop-Prince Henrique's deficient health. Unfortunately, he died of the disease, probably at the end of 1530, without any other Kongolese bishops having been promoted. [...]

RELATIONS WITH ROME

An interesting correspondence concerning King Afonso was found by our friend Teobaldo Filesi in the Vatican Archives.¹ It concerns requests for exemption from marriage within three degrees of consanguinity and affinity. These requests were sent, among others in 1532, by King João III of Portugal to his envoy in Rome, Martinho of Portugal. They concerned the Kongolese in general and King Afonso in particular. [...]

In his letter of January 1534, the nuncio of Lisbon added some critical and interesting reflections on the conduct of priests residing in the Congo. They were few in number and included a relatively large number of concubinaries. Therefore, the nuncio considered it opportune to subject these priests, like the Maronites, to the discipline of the Eastern Church with regard to marriage.

Responding to the invitations of João III, King Afonso decided, in 1539, to send a delegation to present his obedience to Pope Paul III. He appointed his brother Dom Manuel as ambassador. He arrived in Portugal with his son and his retinue in 1540. Dom Manuel received subsidies from the King of Portugal for his living expenses. King Afonso had asked for a loan of five thousand *cruzados* for his ambassador in Rome. However, there are no reports of the arrival and stay in Rome of a Kongolese delegation.

1 T. Filesi, *Le relazioni tra il regno del Congo e la Sede Apostolica nel XVI secolo*, Como, 1968, p. 72-73. F. Bontinck, 'Du nouveau sur Dom Afonso, roi du Congo', *African Historical Studies*, II I, no. 1, 1970, p. 151-153.

In 1543, the ambassador Dom Manuel wrote several times to the King of Portugal asking for favours. On 27 April 1543, he even asked to be allowed to return to the Kongo. On 15 July he announced the death of King Afonso, his brother. [...]

Louvain, 1 October 1971

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The king relates at length his difficulties with the Portuguese, primarily with Fernão de Melo. He provides an account of the sermon he delivered to his people on the arrival of the canons of St Eloi. He announces the construction of a school for four hundred youths. He makes it known that the missionaries immediately dissolved their community. He complains about artisans. He recalls the sending of twenty-two black people, especially by the ship named 'Gaio'. He asks that São Tomé be donated to him, so that a college for young boys and girls of the Kongo be established there.

Most high and mighty Prince and Lord. We, Dom Afonso, by the grace of God, King of Kongo and Lord of the Ambundus, etc., we commend ourselves to your Royal Highness as to a king and lord who we dearly love. We would have you know that, already in my father's time, we were Christian and firmly believed in the faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ, as did our cousin Dom Pedro. A nobleman of our country reported to the king¹ that we were Christian and that we believed in God and not in idols. For that reason, the king our father said that he wished to summon Dom Pedro before his Council to have him executed and see if God would deliver him. As regards us, he would withdraw our annuity from us and let us wander like a vagabond, until either we

1 My father.

died or he had us killed. He wanted to see if, in this situation, Our Lord God would grant us other subjects, since we believed in him so much. Therefore, learning that our father had ordered that we be killed, my cousin and I gave praise to Our Lord God. In temporal terms we were very affected and felt great sorrow and dread, but in spiritual terms we felt great joy to die out of love for Our Lord God and not for the evil that we were said to have done to our father. At that time our father died and, with the help of God and the Holy Virgin Mary, his mother, we came to this city to take possession of the kingdom. Everybody was against us, including our kinsmen and our brothers. Our only help was Our Lord and the Fathers Rodrigo Anes and Antonio Fernandes, who gave us much courage.

Dom Pedro and I began to pray and asked Our Lord to grant us victory over our enemies. God showed them his mercy with regard to us in gifting us the object of our wishes.

A boat belonging to Gonçalo Roïs then arrived in our kingdom. He had sailed to São Jorge d'El Mina and had come to look for these fathers who had resided here for a long time. We gave to the two fathers and to Gonçalo Roïs one thousand five hundred copper shackles and one hundred and fifty slaves. We also sent to your Royal Highness a letter transcribed by Francisco Fernandes.² In it we recounted the great victory which Our Lord had granted us. We explained that our kingdom was already Christian and we asked your Royal Highness to send us several clerics or brothers to teach us and to help us spread the faith. We also sent Dom Henrique, our son, and Rodrigo de Santa Maria, our nephew, so that your Royal Highness may have them ed-

2 This person is mentioned further on in the same document among the friends of Dom Afonso, as well as Dom Pedro and the Christians of Sundi, who had aided the king in the battle of Banza Kongo. Theirs was the only assistance Dom Afonso had when he decided to burn down the great house of idols, after having waited in vain for a year for the weapons requested from Fernão de Melo. This same letter also mentions a certain Francisco Fernades. He had transcribed, by a young Congolese from the king's school, a letter to an unscrupulous ship's captain, Estevão da Rocha. Thanks to the information thus imparted, the latter was able to improperly obtain Dom Afonso's gifts. It has not been ascertained if these two homonyms refer to one and the same person. The former could write and was a friend to the king, while the latter had his missive written up for him and acted against the interests of Dom Afonso.

ucated. By this same ship we had conveyed a letter to Fernão de Melo. We requested him to send us several priests to teach us the ways of God Fathers Rodrigo Anes and Antonio Fernandes arrived in São Tomé with Gonçalo Roãs. When Fernão de Melo learned that they were bearing so many goods, greed took hold of him. He sent us a ship carrying no merchandise, except for a bed cover, a carpet, a curtain fringe and a glass carafe. By this same ship, whose captain and pilot was Gonçalo Pires and whose clerk was João Godinho, he also sent us a priest. We received this ship with great pleasure because we believed it to be armed for the service of God, whereas it came purely out of greed. We asked Gonçalo Pires whether Fernão de Melo could send us several ships with bombards and blunderbusses to help us burn down the great house of idols.³ Indeed, without the backing of the Christians, the pagans could turn against us and kill us. Fernão de Melo replied that he did not possess such arms, but that, if we were to send him merchandise, he would purchase them and send us all the aid we needed. For our part, Highness, we would rather have sent⁴ everything that we had in the kingdom than lose the faith of Our Lord. If we, who were pagans but a short time ago and who had recently learned the ways of God, feared losing his faith, it seemed, all the more, to us that Fernão de Melo, who was a Christian and the son of a Christian, would be concerned with the faith of Our Lord. With the merchandise we had sent him, we would have believed that he would have bought several ships⁵ of which we had a pressing need to help us increase the faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ, destroy the service of the devil and burn all the idols. Also, we asked Gonçalo Pires if Fathers Rodrigo Anes and Antonio Fernandes had arrived in Portugal, because they bore a letter on my part to Your Highness. He responded that one had died at sea and the other on an island of Cape Verde. We felt a great sadness both at their death and because Your Highness had

3 Of Banza Kongo, the future São Salvador.

4 To São Tomé.

5 Cargo included, of course.

not received our letter, in which we gave an account of the great victory we had won. We therefore decided to send another letter to Your Highness and have it brought to you by Dom Gonçalo and our servant Manuel.⁶ We had them embark on Melo's ship. So that he could buy us the assistance in arms we had need of, we sent to him eight hundred shackles and fifty slaves for him and his wife, fifty shackles for his son, thirty for the captain and twenty for the clerk. In doing so, we pleaded with him, with tears in our eyes, to come to our aid for the love of God, in order to maintain the faith of Our Lord. Indeed, we were only a few Christians here: ourselves, our cousin Pedro and our servants. All the others were disposed to idols and were against us. After the departure of this ship for Portugal, there only remained ourselves with our cousin Dom Pedro, Francisco Fernandes and the Christians of Sundi, who had helped us to win this battle. We waited in vain, for a year, for Fernão de Melo's consignment. We then decided to burn all of the idols as secretly as possible, no longer worrying about Fernão de Melo, because aid from the heavens is greater than that from the earth. We trusted that the Lord would aid us. Nonetheless, were it to occur that the people of our kingdom rebelled against us and killed us, we were determined to resignedly accept death for the salvation of our souls. We therefore began to burn all the idols. When the people realized this, they all started to say that we were a very wicked person. They plotted with Jorge Moxuebata,⁷ who was the main leader

6 Dom Gonçalo, the nephew of Dom Afonso, and Manuel, the king's servant, went to Portugal. They returned to the Kongo on a ship belonging to Estevão Jusarte but, to Dom Afonso's bitter disappointment, they did not bring a response from the king, Dom Manuel. It nevertheless appears that this setback was not to be blamed on the King of Portugal, but on Dom Gonçalo. The latter, in fact, not wishing to return home, had not replied to Dom Manuel's summons, the king having sent for him before his departure. We cannot identify Dom Gonçalo with the young boy, his homonym, and like him, nephew of the King of Kongo, who, on 25 March 1539, was to journey to Portugal to receive minor orders.

7 Dom Jorge Mani-Bata, of who the King of Kongo later says, in the same document, that he is, along with Mani Panhu, the main leader of the kingdom. Dom Afonso also explains that both of them have a church to the glory of God. Dom João III appends to his letter of 1529 a message to Dom Jorge Mani-Bata. He specifies that this dignitary was the chief advisor to the king and that without him no election could take place. See J. Cuvelier, *L'Ancien royaume*, p.78 and p.274.

of our kingdom, urging him to burn and destroy our properties. But Our Lord inspired him in such a fashion that he incited him to become a Christian. He therefore replied to those who spoke ill of us that he himself wished to know the faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ. If he killed us, when we were his uncle, who would have more title than him to becoming king because, among our kindred, he was the closest? This is how that we preserved our kingdom and its Christianity.

Shortly afterwards there arrived the fathers of St Eloi who Your Highness had sent us.⁸ As soon as we learned that they had entered our kingdom, we ordered all of the nobles to go and meet them. When, a little later, they arrived in our town, we went to the square and preached to all of our people the following sermon:

‘Now, brothers, you will know that, apart from the faith in which we believe, all is illusion and wind, because the true faith is that of Our Lord God, who created heaven and earth. It was he who made our parents Adam and Eve and placed them in the earthly paradise, while forbidding them from eating an apple which was there. Deceived by the devil, our mother Eve ate it, thus violating the commandment of God. She committed the sin and had our father Adam commit it as well. That is why we have all been condemned. Seeing that those who failed to follow a single commandment were lost, we should be even more fearful, we who have ten of them to observe. Nevertheless, so that we knew how merciful Our Lord is, seeing our perdition, brought about by a woman, he wanted us to be saved by another, the glorious Virgin, Our Lady. He sent his Son to take on fleshly form in her womb in order to redeem us. This Son was subjected to death and perished to save us, and left us twelve apostles who went to preach to the entire world and teach the holy faith according to which all those who believe will be saved and will gain the holy kingdom. Up until now, we have not had the occasion to be acquainted with this faith.

8 Canons regular of St John the Evangelist, named ‘of St Eloi’
owing to the monastery they occupied in Lisbon.

Now, brothers, it opens up the path to salvation for us. May everybody benefit from it to be Christians, to know our holy faith and follow the example of those holy servants who, maintaining chastity, live in austerity and fasting and lead very holy lives. As regards the stones and wood you adore, the Lord God gave us to them, the former to erect houses, the latter for firewood. Countless numbers of men and women then converted and became Christians. Afterwards, we gathered together all our brothers, sons and nephews, as well as the sons of our servants. There must have been four hundred in total, men and young people. We had very high fences erected with many thorns at their peak, so that they could not jump and make their escape. Then we entrusted these young people to the clergy so that they be taught by them. We also had other fences constructed, adjoining the first. Within this enclosure were four cells where the fathers were to live in a community, as the rules of their Order commanded. These fathers only stayed together for three or four days. João de Santa Maria immediately broke up the community. Two fathers then asked us to be able to return to Portugal — since Your Highness had sent them here to serve God and set a good example and others were now destroying this good order. They wanted to leave so that they would not have to see such an evil. These fathers were Antonio de Santa Cruz and Diego de Santa Maria. Father Aleixo died from sorrow. At the same time, other fathers asked us to elect Pero Fernandes⁹ as father superior, not to live within an enclosure, but on the contrary to cast aside this link and to live separately. We replied to them that we did not have the power to make of a secular priest a religious one. Thus everybody went their separate ways. They went to particular huts and there received boys who they taught. They came to us every day asking for money.¹⁰ As we gave them some, they all started trading, buying and selling. Seeing this disorder, we urged them, for

9 Dom Afonso also reports in the same document that Pero Fernandes was said to have a mulatto child. He nevertheless accompanied the king in the war against the Ambundus.

10 Zimbus.

the love of Our Lord, to only buy genuine slaves and no women, so as not to set a bad example and not have us appear as a liar in the eyes of the people to who we had preached. Without concerning themselves with that, they began to fill their houses with women of ill repute. Father Pero Fernandes took a woman into his house. She gave birth to a mulatto. For this reason the young people who he was teaching and kept in his house fled and went to relate this fact to their fathers and mothers and other kinsfolk. Everybody thus started to mock us and laugh at us. They said that it was all a lie and that, through our words and those of the white men, we had deceived them. We felt extremely sorrowful and did not know what to reply.

A short time afterwards, Estevão da Rocha arrived on the river with a ship. He informed us that he was an official of Your Highness's Chamber and that he had come, on your orders, to imprison Gonçalo Roïs, which we greatly appreciated. We even wanted to have more information about what Your Highness had commanded. Estevão da Rocha replied that Fernão de Melo had received the order to arrest Gonçalo Roïs if he was on the island. As Fernão de Melo did not know where to find him, he had dispatched Estevão da Rocha to the Kongo to look for him. Moreover, he declared to us that, if we wished to write to Your Highness or to send him a message, the task could be entrusted to him. We had faith in him because he claimed to be your servant, and we sent with him Dom Pedro. The latter had been our adversary, with great forces to battle against us, when there appeared in the sky the white cross which smote them in such a way that they no longer had the heart to fight. Dom Pedro then became a Christian along with many others, owing to the miracle they had seen. We sent him to Your Highness so that he himself could tell you of what he had seen. On the same occasion we dispatched Dom Pedro, our cousin, Dom Manuel, our brother, and our other nephews with a letter for Your Highness and another for Queen Dona Leonor.¹¹ Through the good offices of these kinsfolk, we sent to you seven hundred shackles, many

11 Dona Leonor, wife of João II (1458-1525).

slaves, parrots, other animals as well as several civets. Estevão da Rocha told us to send the gifts to the port before the ambassadors and we ordered this to be done. He had them taken onboard. Then, he made his way to the port along with our kinsfolk, and saw all of the merchandise within the ship. He then took the letter intended for Your Highness and threw it in the mud. He also broke one of the arms of our nephew, Dom Pedro de Castro, who did not wish to leave the ship and clung firmly to it. He also threw off the ship Dom Pedro, Dom Manuel and all of our kinsfolk and fled with all that we had intended to send Your Highness. He did so on the advice of Francisco Fernandes, who had written a letter to him by means of one of our boys at school. For this reason, we had Francisco Fernandes arrested. Other misdeeds¹² had taken place which it would take too long to relate.

Seeing that, our people and our nobles accorded little consideration to our entreaties and taunted us. For our part, we had wood cut in order to make fences, so that the young people of the school remained there. It was then that a ship belonging to Fernão de Melo arrived in our kingdom. Estevão Jusarte, Melo's nephew, was its captain and Lope Ferreira its secretary. Dom Gonçalo, our nephew, and Manuel, our servant, arrived with them.¹³ We then asked Estevão Jusarte if he had brought a reply to the letter which we had sent to Your Highness via our nephew. He answered that, when Gonçalo was departing, Your Highness had summoned him in order to give him the reply, but as he did not wish to return,¹⁴ he had not brought it. Nonetheless, Your Highness, he said, was writing to us by another ship which would come later and was sending us many gifts and priests to serve God. We responded to him that this delay on the part of Your Highness caused us great anguish, but that we would bear everything with patience. We then had him come to our capital and he gave us twenty pieces of coarse fabric, which were

12 By Portuguese.

13 From Portugal.

14 To the Kongo.

not enough to clothe small rats. Altogether these offcuts measured forty or fifty cubits. When Estevão Jusarte arrived in this town, he got in touch with Christovão d'Aguiar, a nephew of Gonçalo Roïs, who was formerly in our kingdom. Christovão d'Aguiar gave us a blue bed cover and fifteen cubits of coarse fabric. He said to us that in exchange for that, when he wished to return to Portugal, we would give him slaves or money to go and buy some. We gifted him so much money that he could procure twenty-seven slaves, without taking into account many other objects we had presented to him. Estevão Jusarte furthermore claimed that Fernão de Melo was your cousin and that he himself was a nephew of Your Highness.

On hearing that, we were very happy, for we believed that he was telling the truth. We thus gave him a great many gifts. We immediately sent to Fernão de Melo a thousand shackles and slaves, and, for Jusarte, twenty slaves and three hundred shackles, because he claimed to be the nephew of Your Highness. We also gave him many fabrics, leopard skins, twenty jars of honey and four civets for Fernão de Melo. What's more, he had said that if we were to send you shackles and slaves, Your Highness would be very grateful. We thus had sent through his intermediary and that of João Fernandes four hundred shackles for yourself and twenty slaves to buy us items of clothing from Portugal, so that we would not be dressed like savages.

When the ship arrived in São Tomé, Fernão de Melo took half of the shackles and nine slaves; there thus remained eleven slaves for us. As for the shackles, he exchanged them for slaves at a rate of thirty shackles for one slave. João Fernandes took the few remaining slaves, transported them to Portugal and bought us what we had asked him for. He brought us a case full of silver-coloured silk and velvet. Fernão de Melo took this chest and opened it. He subsequently had João Fernandes arrested and sent him to Portugal. He then sent us the empty case.

We wrote to Your Highness on the subject of the disorderliness of Gonçalo Roïs and his difficult nature. We would now like to give you an account of the behaviour of the masons you sent us in order to have a church built.

Thus Your Highness will learn the extent to which Fernão de Melo does a disservice to God. For that the Lord will give him the reward he deserves. Your Highness must know that Gonçalo Roïs found us eight artisans and brought them to our kingdom. They came from the island, but, as soon as Fernão de Melo learned of this bad news and knew that the masons were here, he sent a ship with one of his clerks, Manuel Gonçalves, and others of his servants. By means of this ship he sent us four bowls of lead, twelve glass carafes, a belt of yarn, and a fragment of brocade of little value. There was also a sword in exchange for another we had sent him to have a sheath added to it and which was very good. He had kept that one and sent us one belonging to one of his servants. It wasn't worth two sous.

As soon as the clerk arrived here he began to annoy the masons, to such an extent that all of them asked us for permission to leave. Each of them had already bought, with the money we had given them, fifteen to twenty slaves without having done anything. When we saw that, I understandably thought that Fernão de Melo had done that to bring about our dishonour. We put up with it all for the love of the Lord Our God. The masons fled, taking with them all their slaves and their merchandise. Only three remained here. We immediately let leave this ship on which we sent Fernão de Melo two hundred shackles and sixty slaves, in addition to those we had given to his servants. We also placed aboard this ship our nephew, Pero Afonso, with a letter for Your Highness, in which we gave an account of our affairs. Pero Afonso transported with him two hundred shackles and several slaves to buy us some items of clothing. Indeed, Fernão de Melo had made us ask in a notice for, through this ship, the merchandise we wished to obtain. When this ship arrived at the island, Fernão de Melo, despite this notice, once again took half of the shackles and the slaves. He would not let Pero Afonso leave for Portugal, but retained him at São Tomé for a year. He had our merchandise sold at the lowest price possible. With this money, he bought a slave from Goa and one other. He sent them to us by one of the first ships, saying that they were carpenters. At the same time he sent us one and a half cubits of blue fabric, completely gnawed by rats, and

returned to us the letter we had written for Your Highness. Not content with having stolen from us, he overwhelmed us with names so ill-mannered and heaped such abuse on us that we cannot repeat them to Your Highness. All of that, we suffered for no other reason than for the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, when we are overburdened by so many insults and so much dishonesty we cannot cease to serve Our Lord and to believe in him. Quite the contrary, we wish to suffer the disdain of this world and to merit the other which is eternal, rather than live in the midst of pleasures and vain compliments and lose our soul. For this reason, brother, we have suffered all the agonies, disdain and importunities that we have been subjected to each day. So that Your Highness may know how many deceits have been carried out on us, please learn that we asked the masons who remained here to build us a house in which we could live with the Queen, without somebody setting fire to it in the middle of the night, as could be done to our thatched huts. They built its foundations for over a year. They went there each day to lay a stone and then returned to their homes, but this did not prevent them from coming to me asking for money. For each stone I gave them one or two *lufuku*.¹⁵ When they had to prepare the lime materials we sent many nobles to look for stones and wood. They occupied themselves placing the stones in a kiln for a year, tiring our nobles and exploiting them in such a manner that they made them abandon the work. When they came to tell us that they had no servants, we gave them money to buy slaves and to provide for their upkeep. But so as not to have to put them to work, they told us that the slaves had fled. They also came to tell us that they had no wine. We thus commanded that they be given money. Thus we have never been able to obtain anything at all, save by dint of money. They worked on this house for five years and they could not complete it. They will not have it completed ten years from now. We ask Your Highness, for the love of Our Lord God, to find a solution to this situation, because the deceptions and insults these men burden us with also affect Your Highness. Not only are they not content to take our property, but they also provide

15 A measure comprising ten thousand *zimbus*.

such a bad example in the service of God that the nobles make fun of their cunning tricks with regard to us. When we want to chastise them they say that they are neither the slaves of Your Highness nor of myself and that they owe us nothing. As for ourselves, hearing all of that, we do not have the heart to chastise them. We bear our ills and we are here giving Your Highness an account of all that we have suffered each day for the love of God.

We will now speak to you about a certain Rui de Reguo, who Your Highness sent to provide teaching and to set good examples. On his arrival, he immediately had everybody look upon him as a noble and taught nothing to any children. However, during the fast to observe Lent he asked us for an ox. We gave it to him, because he said that he was dying of hunger. At the same time we gave him two sheep, not without advising him to eat them in secret so that our people would not see it. But he, being totally heedless of anything, had the oxen killed in the middle of the fasting period, in front of all our nobles, and he even had the audacity to invite us to eat the meat. When our people saw that, those who were young and who had only quite recently become Christian all fled back to their villages. The elder people remained with us and said things which cannot be repeated, namely that we forbade the eating of meat and that the white men were gorging on it, that we were deceiving them, to such an extent that they even wanted to kill us. By means of much patience and gifts we managed to calm them, telling them that they were saving their souls and that they must not take notice of what others were doing; if the latter wanted to go to hell, they should let them go there. This case caused us so much trouble that we could no longer look at Rui de Reguo. We ordered him to go Chela¹⁶ and to board any ship which was passing through. Indeed, contrary to what Your Highness had ordered him to do, he taught nothing and made the people who we had converted with a great deal of effort return to the idols. He thus fled and settled in Chela.

At that moment Simão da Silva arrived with two ships. Rui de Reguo went to find him, saying malicious things and countless lies, telling him that people

16 Pinda.

were swindling him on our account. Simão da Silva was thus warned against us by this difficult character, Rui de Reguo,¹⁷ and by what he had said to him, because he did not tell him about his own misdemeanours and the heresies he practised here. That is why Simão da Silva did not wish to come to the place where we were, as Your Highness had ordered him to. He sent his doctor here with his letters. We gave him a fine welcome as if he was our own brother. A curate who had come from the island asked us to let the doctor go to his home so that he could converse with him. This priest spoke ill of us and turned his head so that Simão da Silva would not come.

Your Highness should be aware that Fernão de Melo had engineered all of this so that there would not be any trading post here in the name of Your Highness, and because he had his own shops here, in which he robbed us as he pleased. All of a sudden the doctor fell ill and could not take back our response back to Simão da Silva. On the contrary he wrote him a letter by which he advised him not to come, saying that we were a João Pires¹⁸ and that we deserved nothing that Your Highness sent us. He gave this letter to one of our servants. It came into our hands and we showed it to all of Your Highness's servants who had come in this convoy. In the light of these events, we understood that everything was being done on the orders of Fernão de Melo and we offered thanks to the Lord that we were being called João Pires for the love of him. All of these things, brother Lord, we bore with a great deal of patience, shedding many tears, without showing any of this to our nobles and our people, so as not to encourage any form of treason.

We then sent one of our cousins with a young noble and we wrote to Simão da Silva that, for the love of God, he come to console us and punish these people who were here. We had not, in fact, asked for anything other from Your Highness than to obtain justice. Following this request, conveyed by Dom João, our cousin, Simão da Silva set off to visit us but, halfway along the journey,

17 In 1512.

18 A contemptible, worthless man.

contracted fevers so strong that he died. This news completely devastated us and caused us so much sorrow that ever since we have no longer experienced happiness. In fact, the men who were with him occasioned great disturbances and great miseries. Once he was dead, they all came, at full tilt, to demand his succession. The first to arrive was a certain Manuel Cão.¹⁹ He informed us that Your Highness had sent him with Simão da Silva for both of them to be captains, so that if one of them should die, the other would remain. As God had taken Simão da Silva, he wanted to become captain. We replied to him that he should first let everybody arrive, and that the most capable and most qualified would be appointed. Two days later, Lourenço Vaz²⁰ and Jorge de Lemos arrived and also demanded to be made captain. Seeing that all of them wanted this post and that they were pestering me, I summoned all the white men and asked them who was the most capable. They replied to us that it was the *feitor* of Your Highness [Alvaro Lopes]. The latter was arriving on board the ship *Gaio* to be the manager of Your Highness's trading post. If he should happen to die, the post could be filled by either Jorge de Lemos or Lourenço Vaz. The two of them immediately got in touch with a curate who Fernão de Melo had here. This curate set about complicating things so well that he put into their minds the idea of returning. Thus Fernão de Melo so arranged it that the trading post he owned here was not destroyed. This same curate would not allow us to see Your Highness's instructions. We retorted that if we could not read them, it would be impossible for us to know what Your Highness desired. Three days nevertheless passed with him not wanting to give me them. However, when we had read them and understood all that Your Highness was sending us, we were greatly overjoyed. It was then that our nobles arrived with cases of merchandise which we had placed within our walls, considering that it was what Your

19 Manuel Cão would later accompany Dom Afonso to the war against the Ambundus. He was placed in charge of leading about a hundred slaves to Pinda, but he supervised them so badly that they killed him en route.

20 Lourenço Vaz died shortly afterwards in Pinda, where he had gone on the orders of Dom Afonso to look for the gifts sent by Dom Manuel.

Highness was sending us. It was only three days after that all the Portuguese came to demand them, claiming that they were their own belongings. We gave back to them only three cases belonging to Simão da Silva, because what Your Highness was sending us was still on the ships.

Immediately, we sent Lourenço Vaz to the port so that he could bring us the gifts Your Highness had sent. In the event of the *Gaio* not arriving, we would have to make him captain because he had more supporters than anybody else. He thus departed. On his arrival at Pinda, the *Gaio* arrived. Dom Pedro and Alvaro Lopes were at the port. The latter told Lourenço Vaz not to send us the cases before he himself had had the opportunity to meet me. Lourenço Vaz obeyed him but he fell so ill from fevers that he died. Alvaro Lopes and Dom Pedro immediately left for the capital to catch up with a pilot working for Fernão de Melo who was on his way there. They wanted to tell us not to favour this pilot and to inform us of the insults Fernão de Melo had said against Dom Pedro and against us. Fernão de Melo had even ordered the arrest of Dona Anna²¹ and Dom Pedro. They told us that, when Dom Pedro had arrived on the island, Fernão de Melo had insulted him, had told him that he was a dog, that he had deceived Your Highness, that we were not at war with the Pangelungus,²² that I was an infidel dog and a thousand other insults which I would be ashamed to repeat to Your Highness. Despite everything, I offered a thousand praises to Our Lord, because, when we were young, in our father's time, we had received a thousand million threats and insults because of our love of God. We always firmly believed in him and we remained Christian. Afterwards, despite the wars and the sufferings, especially when we had burned numerous idols, we have never ceased serving him. Now that we are old and we have Christian sons and grandsons, we will not abandon him because of Fernão de Melo. Regardless of our loyalty to God, the latter took from us all of the horses which Your Highness had sent us. When Dom Pedro

21 Probably the wife of Dom Pedro.

22 Pirates of the lower Kongo river, whose islands and north bank they inhabited.

and Alvaro Lopes had finished giving their account, we asked them to leave immediately and to send us the gifts of Your Highness. They replied that they were tired and that they would depart the next day. From the next day to the next day, they never went there. We felt no anger concerning this, because we had simply asked Your Highness to help us increase the faith of Our Lord. That is what we wanted. Were the cases to arrive, we would receive them because Your Highness was sending them to us; but if they did not arrive, it was of little import. Indeed, we had not purchased them, because in that event we would have made every effort to lay our hands on them. We then hurried to send back Your Highness's ships. We immediately dispatched two of our nephews, by ship and by caravel, Francisco our son as well as five hundred slaves on the two ships, and thirty others to make up for any shortfall. Dom Francisco our son had the duty to kiss Your Highness's hands and to present him these slaves because he was the son of a king and not the son of a dog, as Fernão de Melo had named us. Our nephews were to do the same. Nineteen of these young people were to accompany Dom Pedro on the *Gaio*. That is how, lord brother, we sent our son after having given him our blessing. Five days later we learned that Muza, one of the leaders of the Ambundus, was waging war against one of our sons who was his neighbour²³ and that he wished to kill him. It was thus necessary to go to war and to leave in our town Alvaro Lopes as captain, with one of our servants to guard the slaves we were sending to Your Highness. Were somebody to do something they shouldn't, Alvaro Lopes would administer a punishment in justice as Your Highness ordered, whether it concerned the actions of our people or those of the white men. We thus departed for war. Among the people Your Highness sent, three men came with us and the others remained with Alvaro Lopes, because they never wanted to accompany us. Among those who had already

settled in the Kongo, only Manuel Gonçalo, Antonio Vieira, João d'Estremos,²⁴ João Gomes, Pero Fernandes, Fernão Vaz and a mason called Diogo Alonso came with us. The latter, midway through the journey, told us that he was dying of hunger. We had meat given to him and, when it was given to him, he returned to the capital and let us go to war. At the same time, Diogo Bello and Manuel Cão departed for Chela in order to drive a little more than one hundred slaves to the ship *Gaio*. They were so little on their guard that they began to drink the water from a river. The slaves grabbed them, killed Manuel Cão and seriously injured the curate. He thus returned to our town, but with a few slaves only. As for those who had killed Manuel Cão, they fled. When the curate had returned to the capital, these slaves took refuge in the hills, stole and burgled from the marketplaces, and demolished all our enclosures and all our houses so as to burn them. They thus caused as much destruction as a war. Alvaro Lopes, seeing all the damage caused by these slaves who the curate had not wanted to punish, bought them with our money. He then had them taken and punished. The Queen, my wife, had the others who had killed Manuel Cão searched for. They were held captive. Then, she ordered Alvaro Lopes to have them executed, because according to our customs those who kill must be executed. Alvaro Lopes carried out this order and had them killed. While we were at war the cases which Your Highness had sent arrived in the capital. The fleet's royal steward and secretary, who were supposed to give us the register of all the merchandise, also arrived. As soon as the secretary had reached the town, he returned immediately and left the list here without giving us an account of anything. Everyone thus took what they wanted as if these objects had been abandoned. On our return, we found only nearly empty cases. We drew up a list of all that remained, to send to your Highness. You should also be aware that after these mishaps, we brought back from the war, to have them de-

24 João d'Estremos, a mason, was later tasked with delivering slaves to Alvaro Lopes. He carried out his mission successfully.

part with the ship *Gaio*, four hundred and ten slaves with our guard. The mason, João d'Estremos, brought back one hundred and ninety of them, who he handed over to Alvaro Lopes on the royal square. The captain chose three hundred and twenty very good ones from among them and led them away. There thus only remained ninety of them, old and thin. We had seen neither the list nor the register of these slaves and we do not know how many, out of this number, he sent to Your Highness. On our arrival we found the judge Diogo Fernandes²⁵ here. He had come to meet us along the way, before we arrived home. Without waiting, he began to say that Alvaro Lopes should not be captain, that we should strip him of this post and appoint himself. We replied that what was done was done and that Alvaro Lopes had been sworn in. It was indeed the custom that when a captain arrived with the manager of the trading post, upon the death of the captain, the manager succeeded him. As he wanted to be both captain and judge, it was preferable that Alvaro Lopes was the captain and that Diogo Fernandes remained judge, so that both of them take part in judgements and experience trials. That is something Diogo Fernandes never wanted to do. When we saw that he did not want to work with Alvaro Lopes to dispense justice, we ordered him to return to the ship and sent him back straightaway. He thus left for the port, but, as he was not determined to leave, he remained on the road for so long that, when he arrived, he could no longer find the ship. After having made Diogo Fernandes depart for Pinda, we immediately sent Dom Pedro in his wake. Dom Pedro was taking with him one hundred and ninety slaves, one hundred for us and ninety to replace those of Your Highness who had grown thin and could not leave. He also carried the obedience for the Pope and all our nephews accompanied him. The clerics of Fernão de Melo and Rui de Reguo arrived before him. When they found out that Dom Pedro was already on his way, they acted with all the haste in the world: they made the ship

25 Diogo Fernandes, jealous of Alavaro Lopes, provoked him in the presence of the king. Following these insults, the manager of the trading post killed him, in all probability in 1515.

leave without Dom Pedro and without our message, on the orders of Fernão de Melo. Indeed the latter wanted to obfuscate everything so that people would believe his lies were truths. The ship thus weighed anchor without bringing on board either the secretary or somebody who could report to Your Highness about the slaves we were sending him, and who could supervise them. Each sailor took the slaves he wanted as if they were at his disposal. In this way, brother, when Dom Pedro arrived at the Kongo river, he saw that the ships had set sail. He climbed into a dugout canoe and followed them, shouting at them to wait, but they never wanted to.

Seeing that, he returned with the slaves he had brought, the ninety which were for Your Highness as well the hundred which were for us. If they had not wanted, brother, to take Dom Pedro with them, it was because they had appropriated all the merchandise we had sent you and they did not want him to tell you of the theft they had committed. We thus prepared another ship principally to send the obedience. Dom Pedro must also give an account to Your Highness of all that we had wished to send him on board the earlier ships, as well as of the profits that people are making here with the pay that Your Highness sends them.

Your Highness should know that we gave fifty skins to a shoemaker who had come here, so that he tan them and make us some shoes, twenty of goat, twenty of sheep and twenty others from animals native to the country.²⁶ He never knew how to tan these skins or never wanted to. In addition he squandered everything we had given him and made only five pairs of shoes, making use of many skins and everything that was necessary. That is all the profit we gained from it. The tailor made us a tunic with velvet sleeves. He also mended some items of clothing, grudgingly. The tile maker never wanted to make either tiles or bricks. Each day, we gave him money and sent him to work, but he never went. These artisans taught their professions to none of our servants: on the contrary, if these servants went to watch them

26 Which comes to sixty skins, and not fifty.

work in order to learn, they were struck so many times that they fled and no longer wished to return. It is said that the nobles who reside far from us fear us more than those who are at court. This is true, and it is these Portuguese who are to blame, owing to the taunts the nobles see them make and the bad examples they set. In fact, if those who reside far from us were to see such a display they would be worse still than those who are nearby. Thus, lord brother, such are the results which they have accomplished here for the service of Your Highness and ourselves. Ascertain, through all of this, if they deserve their salary, and if it is necessary to give it to them. For our part, it is solely incumbent upon us to write to Your Highness the whole truth because it does not appear correct that people take away your money and the salary without doing anything.

Now we will relate to Your Highness the arrival in our kingdom, after these events, of one of Fernão de Melo's ships, with Lopo Ferreira as its captain. It brought back Dom Manuel, our brother, and our nephews. Dom Manuel carried some letters from Fernão de Melo to Father Nuno,²⁷ in which he asked him, for the love of God, to take good care of his interests in the Kongo, even though he owned nothing here. Everything related to Your Highness's trading post. He promised to send a ship as quickly as possible for this father and for all those who were helping him. He also asked him to take to his home one of his own slaves being retained by Alvaro Lopes. He wrote another letter to Alvaro Lopes telling him that he would soon make him a prisoner. When these letters arrived, they immediately led to such an outpouring of discord and greed, both among the priests and the Portuguese who received a salary, that all of them wanted to kill Alvaro Lopes. They bought slaves without being concerned that Your Highness had prohibited it in his instructions. They also disregarded the edict which we had published and which restricted the buying

²⁷ Father Nuno served the interests of Fernão de Melo. He obtained from the King decrees by virtue of which all of the Portuguese began to investigate the affairs of Alvaro Lopes and even of Dom Afonso. In addition, he abducted the concubine of the trading post's manager and kept her at his home.

of slaves solely to the manager of the trading post. Then again, when they saw the letters written by Fernão de Melo, they began to trade, owing to the great greed which had come over them. Up until then the fathers had lived in a holy manner, but after having read these letters they were never again at peace. Father Nuno then came looking for us to tell us that it would be good if the royal steward became the judge to settle the legal cases. He brought with him a written decree and we had it signed. He then told us to appoint as the clerk a certain Tomé Lopes, a man in his pay who was with him. Because he was a father, we had believed that he should advise us solely on matters relating to the service of God. On his advice, we thus appointed Tomé Lopes as clerk and we signed another sheet of paper. As soon as they had these decrees, they began to get along well together, to eat and drink together, priests and lay-people. And so, brother, they all began to look after the interests of Fernão de Melo, as he had recommended. Every day, they carried out investigations against us and against Alvaro Lopes, the manager of your trading post. They all wanted harm to come to him, and all were witnesses, judges and clerks. At that time they tried to steal a goat from the fathers which we had given them. Because of this goat, the fathers met in the church, rang the bells and carried out an excommunication. This was done with chains placed the wrong way. They also cut a green branch while pronouncing a curse: just as this branch will dry out, may all those who were against them and who spoke ill of them waste away. Furthermore, Father Nuno took home the negroress which Alvaro Lopes had for a concubine and kept her confined in his home. Our nobles muttered about it every day, as well numerous other very unseemly things which we dare not write to Your Highness owing to the excommunication attached to them.

Disregarding any concerns whatsoever, they were all in a rage against Alvaro Lopes. In order to humiliate us even more, when he was one day kneeling down before me, asking us for provisions for the slaves he was guarding in the trading post, the judge came up from behind and, right under our nose, grabbed him by the hair and shook him and kicked him. This incident deeply

upset us, because it was directed against us. Even though Alvaro Lopes had a dagger attached to his belt, he was so patient that he did not want to use it because he was in our presence. He promised him that he would make him pay elsewhere. And that is not all! Shortly afterwards, in fact, we were speaking informally with the judge. We said to him that Your Highness had sent him here so that he, Jorge Machado, Alvaro Lopes and all of their servants could live with us and teach us how to serve God, and not to live with the tailor and the mason. He replied to us that, for all Your Highness's treasure and for all the riches of Portugal, he would not live with us, and that it was a tragedy for him to have to keep the company of a black man.²⁸ Such is the service that he rendered and what he taught us. He rained down a thousand other insults against us too shameful to relate to Your Highness. We confide all of this to you so that you may be the judge of it and give to each the punishment they deserve. Is it the custom to talk in such a way to the king, to tear a man's hair before the very eyes of the king, above all if he is mandated to be a judge? If Your Highness so intends, we will endure him with great patience, for the love of Our Lord God, just as we have up until now put up with many things for the love of Our Lord God. When the ship of Fernão de Melo landed Dom Manuel and our nephews, he was at the side of the Pangelungus, to who Fernão de Melo sent a lot of silk and fabric to exchange with them and to be their friend. Yet he knew that we were their enemy because they were infidels and they had waged many wars on us during which several nobles of our kinsmen as well as white men had been killed. All this, brother, Fernão de Melo engineered to do us harm and to scandalize the nobles, so that they would be led to say that the white men were looking for friendship with the Pangelungus, that his way of acting complied with the truth and that the law of God we taught was made of lies. And so, all of the nobles are rising up against us and are returning to their idols. Our Lord, seeing the bad intentions of Fernão de Melo, gave him the

reward due to those who are in the service of the devil. His people arrived at the Pangelungus and set their feet on land to begin with. But, when the infidels had welcomed them, they slaughtered Lopo Ferreira, who was the captain, and three or four men; the others escaped from the boat and fled. May Your Highness thus see in how many ways Fernão de Melo has sought to destroy us and has so badly informed Your Highness, so that you refrain from having us visit. That is why we beg Your Highness to order Fernão de Melo to say for what reason he has imprisoned our son, Dom Francisco, and why he did not let him leave on Your Highness's ships, where we sent him to further greater friendship with Portugal. Your Highness in fact asked us to have sent there twenty or thirty young people from our family. In addition we despatched our son hurriedly so that he may offer Your Highness all the slaves and the gifts we had him take with him. Fernão de Melo did not let them reach their destination and had them brought to the island. There, a stick in hand, our young people had to beg for the love of God, even our nephews. This deeply affected us and we suffered greatly in the flesh because they were all of our blood, but, as for the soul, we did not lose out. We had indeed sent our son to learn the ways of God and, for that, all the sufferings of the world which beset him in droves to make him find the faith of Our Lord and to deepen it, we took them to have been well made use of and we suffered them for the love of Our Lord God so that he would always remember us.

Now, we ask Your Highness for the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ not to abandon us in order not to lose the fruits of Christianity already obtained in our kingdom. We can do no more, in fact, because we only have one mouth with which to preach and to teach. As for us, we are already married religiously, as are the nobles who are near us. As for those who are far off, they do not wish to marry religiously owing to the bad examples they see every day and they do not wish to obey me. That is why we are asking Your Highness, for the love of God, to help us to marry them. If Your Highness does not wish to help us spiritually, we beg of him, in kissing his royal hands, to send us five

or six ships for us, our children, our kinsfolk, so that we may not see such a great perdition.

We now ask Your Highness to dispense justice to Fernão de Melo, because he is slandering us and looking to destroy us. May Your Highness order him to pay for all the merchandise which he has stolen from us through trickery while he has never purchased anything from us. If he cannot find merchandise with which to pay us, compel him to give us the island, because it belongs to him.²⁹ This would give us great satisfaction. But let not Your Highness think that we are asking him for this for any other purpose than to extend Christianity. Your Highness should know that young people do not learn as well when they are with their fathers and their mothers than when they are far from them. With this in mind, we will send a man of our blood and Your Highness will send a good and virtuous priest. They will govern this island together primarily in spiritual terms and subsequently in temporal terms. This island is indeed so close to our kingdom that we will send many young boys and young girls there to be educated, because here they all regularly play truant. One day two hundred come to the school, another day a hundred, while over there they will learn in no time at all. Thus this island will procure us priests, wine and flour for the Holy Sacrifice. We will not write anymore to Your Highness because we would need a quire³⁰ of paper to recount all of the difficulties which have been created for us. Dom Pedro will give a full account of them to Your Highness. If in this letter certain things are badly written, we apologize for it because we are not familiar with the Portuguese style. We have written this letter with a pupil from the school, because we dare not do so with the white men who are here, because all those who are educated have committed several transgressions. We kiss the royal hands of Your Highness, asking him to write a letter to Mani Bata, Dom Jorge and Mani Pangu, who are the main

29 The island was ceded to the de Melo family in 1495.

30 Twenty-five folios.

leaders of our kingdom. May Your Highness give them recommendations so that they are good Christians. May he also send two priests to each of them, in addition to those who come for us. They will say mass in their churches, hear confessions and teach all the ways to serve God. These two nobles live at a distance of eighty or ninety leagues³¹ from us and each one has their church to the glory of God. Furthermore, we have sent to each of these leaders two children from the school to teach them as well as their children and their kinsfolk. In this way, these regions will begin to bear many fruits. May Your Highness now see if he wants to complete this work to which we have up until now devoted all of our efforts. That is, in fact, all that we can do. If they obtain fathers who will say mass for them and hear their confessions, they will derive great benefits from it and great steadfastness in their faith. May Our Lord extend the days of Your Highness so that he may always help us in spreading the holy faith.

Transcribed by João Texeira, the servant of the very patient, greatly afflicted prince-king of the Kingdom of Kongo, 5 October 1514.

Done by the King

[signed] King Dom Afonso

31 One league = 6km. There are in truth around 200 km from São Salvador to the Bata church. Nevertheless, Bata extended much further as far as the confluence of the Kwango and the Kasai.

Sammy Baloji. Other Tales

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