

King Afonso I Protests Slave Trading in the Kingdom of Kongo

Name: _____

Period: _____

King Afonso I of Kongo wrote some twenty-four official letters to his fellow monarchs, the Kings of Portugal. The letters touch on many themes – relations between Portugal and Kongo, Afonso's devotion to Christianity, and the slave trade. The following excerpts come from two letters of 1526, when Portuguese slave trading was causing serious disruption in Kongo, prompting Afonso to request help in controlling the activities of Portuguese merchants.

Moreover Sir, in our Kingdoms there is another great inconvenience which is of little service to God, and this is that many of our people, keenly desirous as they are of the wares and things of your Kingdoms, which are brought here by your people, and in order to satisfy their voracious appetite, seize many of our people, freed and exempt men, and very often it happens that they kidnap even noblemen and the sons of noblemen, and our relatives and take them to be sold to the white men who are in our Kingdom...

And as soon as they are taken by the white men they are immediately ironed and branded with fire, and when they are carried to be embarked, if they are caught by our guards' men the whites allege that they have bought them but they cannot say from whom, so that it is our duty to do justice and restore to the freedmen their freedom, but it cannot be done if your subjects feel offended, as they claim to be.

And to avoid such a great evil we passed a law so that any white man living in our Kingdom and wanting to purchase goods [i.e., slaves] in any way should first inform three of our noblemen and officials of our court whom we rely upon in this matter, ... who should investigate if the mentioned goods are captives or freed men, and if cleared by them there will be no further doubt nor embargo for them to be taken and embarked. But if the white men do not comply with it they will lose aforementioned goods. And if we do them this favor and concession it is for the part Your Highness has in it, since we know that it is in your service too that these goods are taken from our Kingdom, otherwise we should not consent to this.

Source: Basil Davidson. *The African Past*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1964, pp 191-93

Key Vocabulary

Wares –

Voracious –

Exempt –

Embark –

Allege –

Captives –

Embargo –

Concession –

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Directions: Answer each of the following questions in complete sentences. Utilize evidence from the source to support your answers.

1. Why is King Afonso writing this letter to The King of Portugal?
2. What impact is the slave trade having on the Kingdom of the Kongo?
3. What motivations are driving the slave trade in the Kongo?
4. What does King Afonso need to combat the slave trade in his Kingdom?
5. What can we infer about the relationship between King Afonso and the King of Portugal?
6. Does King Afonso oppose all slave trading? Why or why not?

THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU READ – DRAW INFERENCES BASED ON THE TEXT

7. Why do you think King Afonso initially allowed the Portugues to enslave his subjects?
8. Why is he now requesting regulations?