

Excerpts of letters from affonso i history essay



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If you were asked to do a rough work but by someone else without him or her giving to you anything in return, would you do it? Of course not. Nobody in this world would want to be told what to do. Nobody in this world would want to be forced to do something. However, in the late fifteen century, something very simmilar to that, happened. The Africans were being enslaved by The Europeans (in this case, we focus more to Portugal). Actually, it began with trading slaves between Africa and Portugal, but as time engages by, the needs for the slaves is getting bigger because of the succesful sugar plantation.

The Portugese first came to the Kongo in 1482 and met the King Nzinga a Nkuwu, who welcomed them. They had good relations, so they established a peace and friendship policy. Portugal started to send ships, priests, craftsmen and soldiers to Kongo. Then, The Portugese tried to “ drive” Congolese from their cultures, rituals, religion by sending some priests there just like what they did when they went to Benin. However, in Benin, they didn’t succeeded to bring Christianity because in Benin the king was more formal towards tradition, culture, and religion in Benin. In the other hand, in Kongo, the king was less formal, so little by little King Nzinga a Nkuwu started to get the attraction of the Christian religion. So, he and his son converted into Christianity and get baptized with the name Joao I and Affonso I. At first, the Congolese didn’t oppose this but the priests started to destroy Kongo’s rituals, so many Kongolese left Christianity (including Nzinga a Nkuwu). In the year 1505, Nzinga a Nkuwu died and his son, Nzinga Mbemba (Affonso I) replaced him. Affonso I kept maintaining the good relation between Kongo and Portugal. He sent Kongo’s valuable resources

like ivory, cooper, parrots, and slaves, in return for Portuguese's priests, craftsmen, soldiers, and teachers. They keep doing this for quite long time because King Affonso felt they need as much source as possible from Portugal to trade with them in order to develop their country. He also sent his sons to study in Lisbon (the capital city of Portugal). He began to make Kongo into modernized country by building schools and he adopted Portuguese's manners and style of dress. However, many Congolese were oppsoed the plan of King Affonso building Catholic Church. The Congolese felt that King Affonos was doing way too much and started to decay their own culture, tradition, and religion.

The Portuguese tried to kill Affonso and Affonso's position became loosen. Then, his son, Diogo I replaced him (after his brother Pedro I failed) and tried to negotiate directly with the Portuguese in São Tomé but he didn't made it and Portuguese invade Ndongo (part of southern kingdom that has been free) and took Luanda Port. Affonso died and got replaced by his sons, but none of them can make the solve the problem of the illegal trading. Why even after Kongo changed their policy of " Europenization" (difference between Affonso I, Pedro I, Diogo I), they still couldn't solve the problem of illegal slave trading? What I mean with illegal trading is the action of kidnapping that was done by the Europeans towards the African, because actually there was a agreement between Africa and Portugal about slave trade. However, the Portuguese were so freeddy that they need more slaves so they just took them. This happened because both of the kings who replaced King Affonso I, Pedro I and Diogo I, didn't really try to directly deal with the Portugese company who run the plation in São Tomé. They just

tried to deal with the king of Portugal at that time. In order to solve the illegal trading that was happening, they should have dealt with the Portugal company which handled the plantation in São Tomé, because if it's not directly to them, we can make sure the idea of stopping this illegal trading could never been stopped even Kongo change its king.

As time goes by, the relation between Kongo and Portugal started to crack even bigger because the Portuguese kept doing the illegal slave trading for the sugar plantation work in São Tomé. Affonso I tried to stop this illegally trading by sending letters to Manuel and King Joao III (the king who replaced Manuel I). After several letters of his warning to stop the trading, he banned the illegal trading, King Joao III wrote and forced him to cancel the ban, so Affonso I cancelled it. From the primary source reader, we can see that Affonso I wrote about the condition in Kongo which was depopulated. He also pitied that even the noblemen and their sons got branded by red-hot-iron. However, King Joao III doesn't care about the depopulation in Kongo and said that the Portuguese in Kongo made the growth of Kongo faster. Affonso's statement that Kongo was depopulated wasn't an exaggerate statement. It was true that Kongo was depopulated at that time because of the illegal slave trading. The number of population in Kongo was largely reduced and in the other hand the number of slaves being traded was largely increased. The sex ratio was also getting smaller and smaller each year.

The interesting thing is that even the noblemen and their sons were kidnapped by the Portuguese to do the plantation. Maybe if we think rationally, noblemen could have been more useful if the Portuguese forced them to give their money to invest in the plantation to make the plantation

even bigger so that the benefit from the plantation is even bigger. However, the Portuguese chose to kidnap the noblemen and even their sons to do the plantation because at that time they were only focusing on the slaves. They were assuming if they had more slaves, the plantation will be more successful.

We don't know much from the king in Portugal since there is not enough source to interpret whether they reply the complaints of King Affonso I in a negative way or in a positive way because the letters were all written in portuguese. However, from the only letter that we got from the primary source reader, it can tell us clearly that King Joao III didn't really care about the depopulation that happened in Kongo at that time. He was only thinking about the sake of Portugal.

There was a primary source that I found quite interesting. A chapter in a book that was written by Rui de Aguiar, who was a Portuguese missionary and worked in Kongo as a Vicar-General. He described Affonso as a good Christian who God has spoken to him to converted Kongo into Christian so that God would have His blessings over Kongo. He also believe that Affonso was a great king that the Congolese shouldn't have protested. He also admitted that his highness was the King of Kongo (King Affonso I) and King of Portugal (King Joao III). So, it's quite interesting for me to see a Portuguese missionary in Kongo who secretly saved some respect towards Kongo. However, he didn't really mention about the slave trade that happened between Kongo and Portugal.

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