



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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NZINGA M BANDI

QUEEN OF NDONGO AND MATAMBA



UNESCO Series on Women in African History





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Cultural Organization

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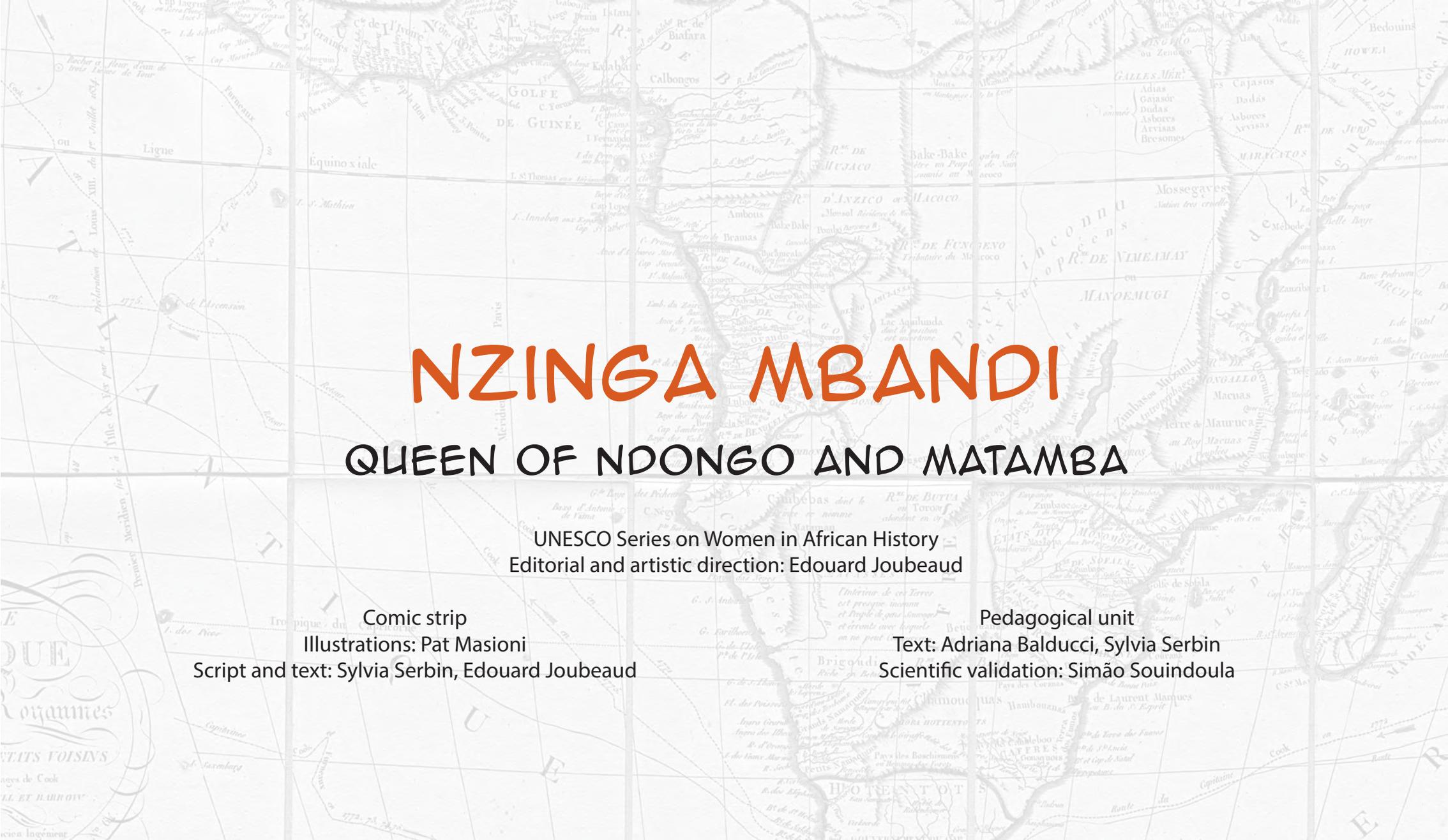


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Cover illustration: Pat Masioni
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Logo of the project: Jonathas Mello
Iconography: Obioma Ofoego, Adriana Balducci

A detailed historical map of West Africa, showing various regions, rivers, and coastal areas. The map is rendered in a light, faded style, serving as a background for the text. Key geographical features include the Gulf of Guinea (Golfe de Guinée), the Niger River (R. de Niger), and the Benue River (R. de Benue). Numerous place names and tribal names are visible, such as 'R. de Fouta Djallon', 'R. de Haoussa', and 'R. de Bornou'. The map also shows the equatorial line (Equinoxiale) and various coastal regions like 'R. de Biafara' and 'R. de Cameroons'.

NZINGA MBANDI

QUEEN OF NDONGO AND MATAMBA

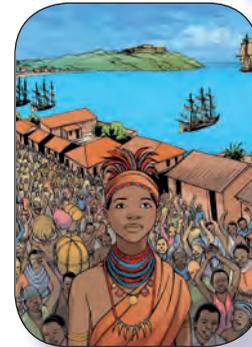
UNESCO Series on Women in African History
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1 Introduction

Spotlight on women!

The UNESCO Women in African History Series, and its corresponding website, aims to highlight a selection of key women figures in African history.

Through the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the project showcases 20 African women or women of African descent. It demonstrates that historically, women have distinguished themselves in diverse fields such as politics (Gisèle Rabesahala), diplomacy and resistance against colonization (Nzinga Mbandi), defence of women's rights (Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti) and environmental protection (Wangari Maathai).

This list of 20 women represents only a small part of the contribution of African women, known and unknown, to the history of their countries, Africa and all mankind.

Through this project and by emphasizing the education, academic careers and main achievements of these exceptional women, UNESCO seeks to highlight their legacy and calls for continued research on the role of women in African history.

Visit and share the UNESCO website on Women Figures in African History:

www.unesco.org/womeninafrica



Photograph by Rita Barreto, 2013.



Photograph by UNESCO/M. Benchelah, 2012.



Photograph by David Blumenkrantz, 2010.

Gender equality is one of the global priorities of UNESCO

The Organisation strives to promote gender equality and women's empowerment by integrating these principles in all its programmes, notably in education.

Education makes possible the transmission of the essential value of gender equality: it provides leverage to enforce the fundamental human rights of women and highlights their central role in all societies.

As such, the teaching of history has a crucial role to play since it enables the understanding of cultural features, and highlights the social, political, and economic conditions in the lives of women in past societies.

The General History of Africa

This publication is part of UNESCO's General History of Africa project.

Phase I of the project was launched in 1964 and completed in 1999. It resulted in the preparation and publication of a collection of eight volumes, a main edition, and an abridged version which have been translated into thirteen languages (including three African languages). A digital version available for download can be found on the UNESCO website.

Phase II, launched in 2009 and entitled *The Pedagogical Use of the General History of Africa*, aims to develop educational content in order to encourage the teaching of African history. The *Women in African History* project has been developed within the framework of Phase II.

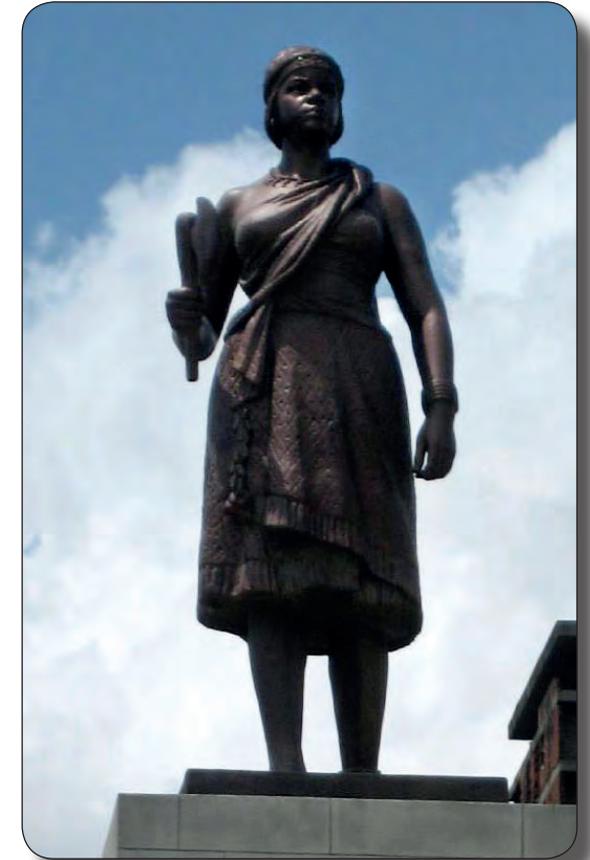
2 Biography

Nzinga Mbandi, Queen of Ndongo and Matamba

Nzinga Mbandi (1581–1663), Queen of Ndongo and Matamba, defined much of the history of seventeenth-century Angola. The Europeans' mercantilist designs, in particular the development of the slave trade along the southern African coast, drastically changed the political, social, economic and cultural environment of the Kingdom of Ndongo and the entire region. It was against that backdrop that Nzinga Mbandi made her mark as an outstanding example of female governance.

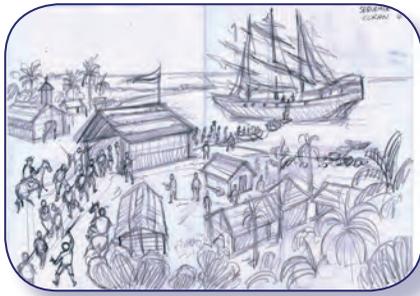
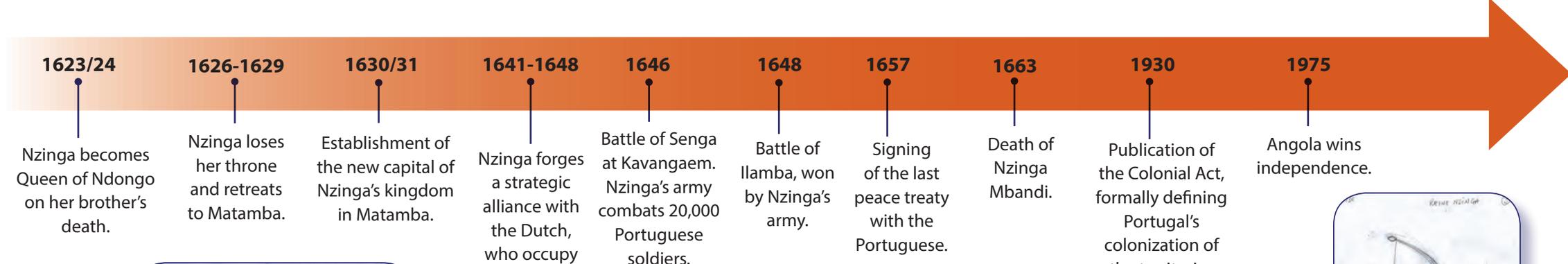
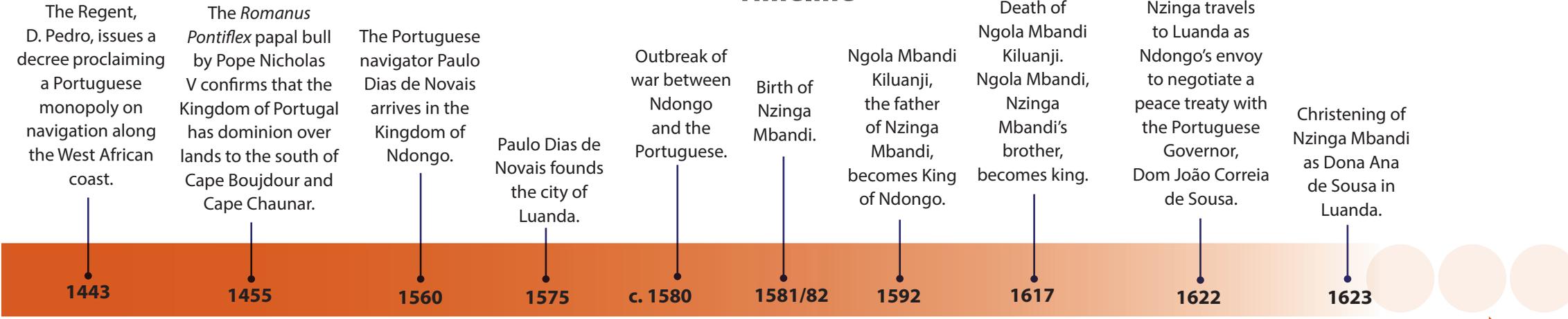
Ngola Mbandi Kiluanji, the King of Ndongo, died in 1617. His son, Ngola Mbandi, became the new king but he had neither his father's charisma nor the intelligence of his sister Nzinga Mbandi. In 1622, harried by the Portuguese, he sent Nzinga Mbandi to Luanda as his envoy to negotiate for peace with Dom João Correia de Sousa, the Portuguese Governor. Nzinga proved to be an outstanding negotiator and diplomat.

In 1624, Ngola Mbandi died. Nzinga took power and became queen. She quickly distinguished herself as an excellent sovereign. Her tactics in warfare and espionage, her diplomatic skills, her ability to forge numerous strategic alliances, and her knowledge of trade and religious issues served her well in tenaciously resisting Portugal's colonialist aspirations until her death in 1663.



Statue of Nzinga Mbandi, Luanda,
Republic of Angola.
Photograph by Erik Cleves Kristensen, 2006.

Timeline



3 Comic Strip

Nzinga Mbandi, Queen of Ndongo and Matamba

Foreword

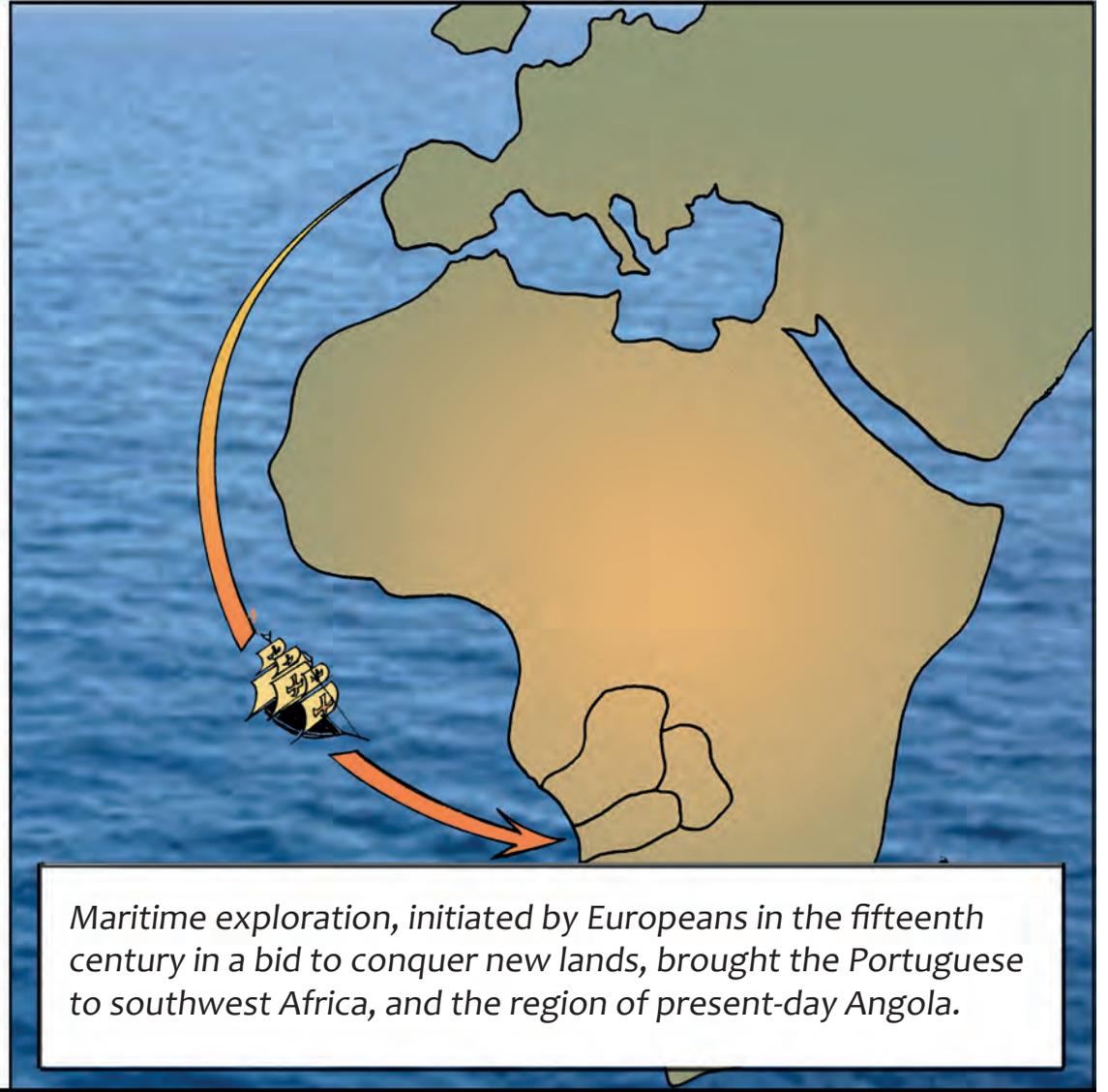
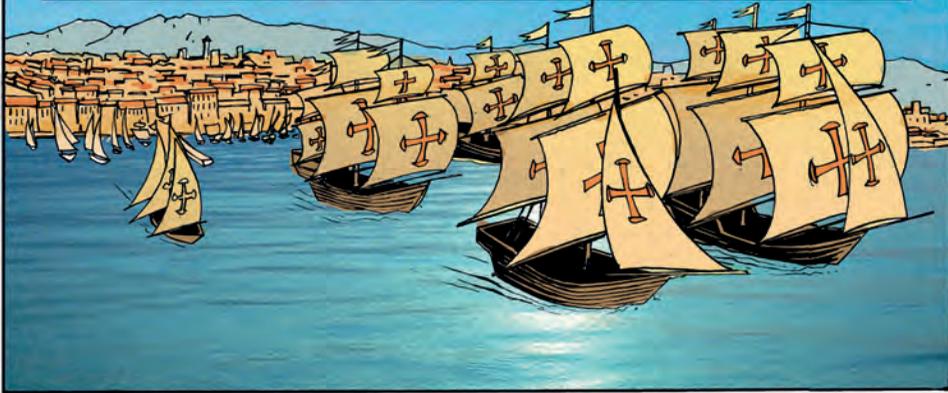
The following comic strip is an interpretation of certain periods in the life of Nzinga Mbandi. The illustrations are based on historical and iconographic research on Nzinga Mbandi and the seventeenth century in Angola. They do not claim to be an exact representation of the events, people, architecture, hairstyles, or clothing of the period.



A key figure in African resistance to colonialism, Queen Nzinga defined much of the history of seventeenth-century Angola. An outstanding strategist and skilful negotiator, she defended her country steadfastly until her death in 1663 at the age of 82.

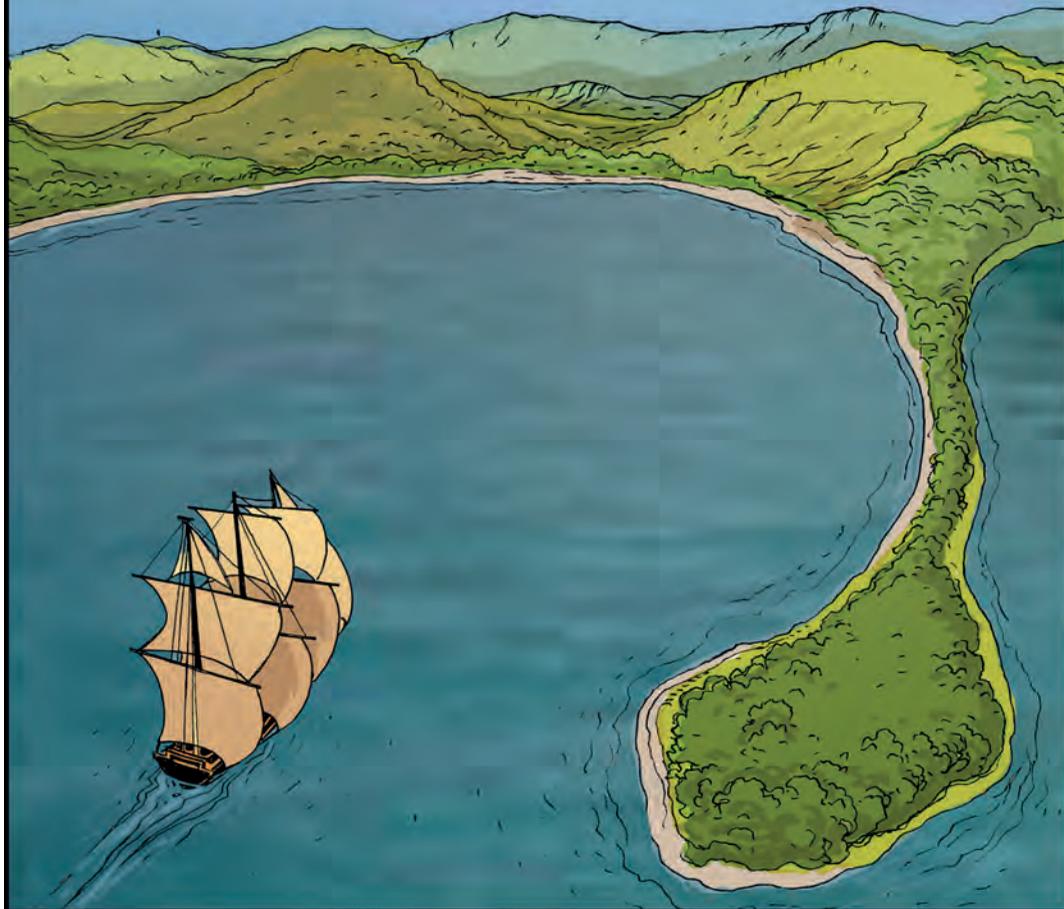


It was the sixteenth century.
The Kingdom of Ndongo was under threat.

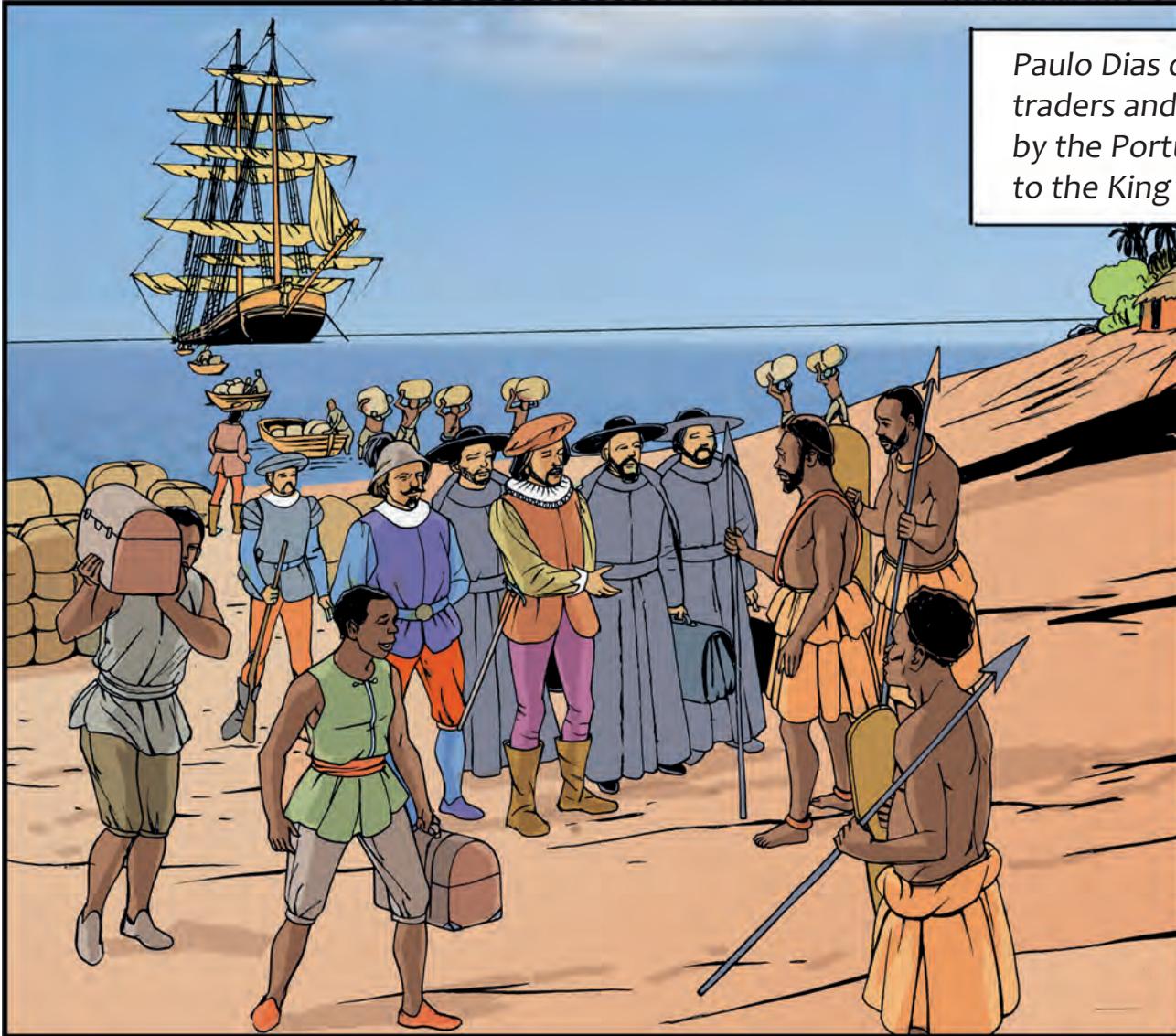


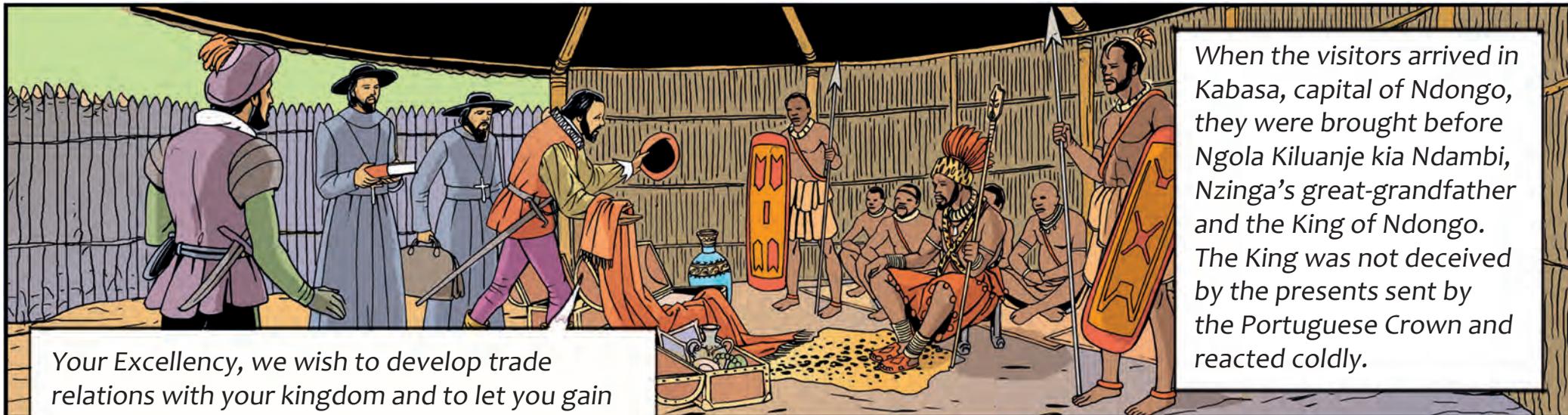
Maritime exploration, initiated by Europeans in the fifteenth century in a bid to conquer new lands, brought the Portuguese to southwest Africa, and the region of present-day Angola.

In 1560, after a long voyage, the Portuguese explorer Paulo Dias de Novais landed on the Ndongo coast, close to the mouth of the Kwanza River.



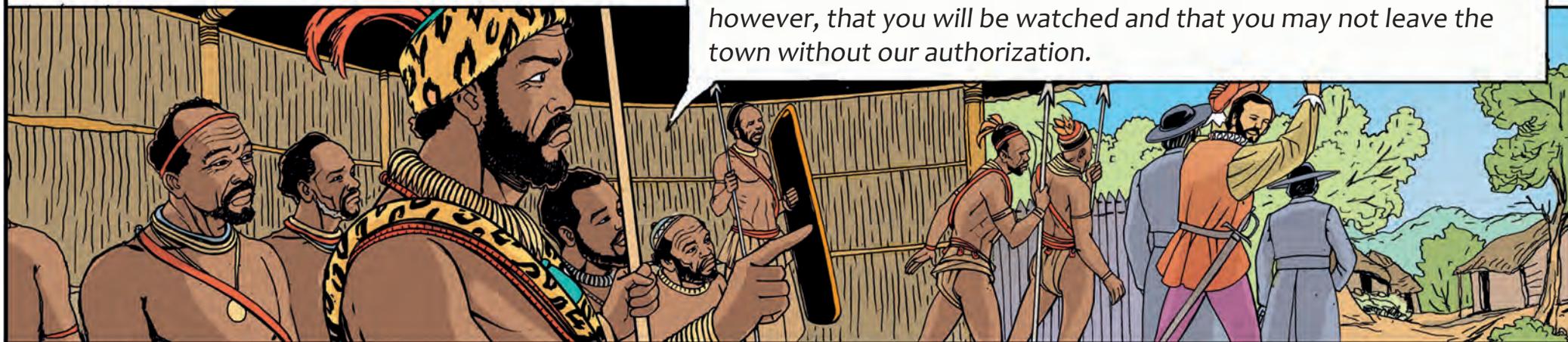
Paulo Dias de Novais, accompanied by Portuguese Jesuits, traders and dignitaries, announced that he had been sent by the Portuguese Crown and requested to be presented to the King of Ndongo.





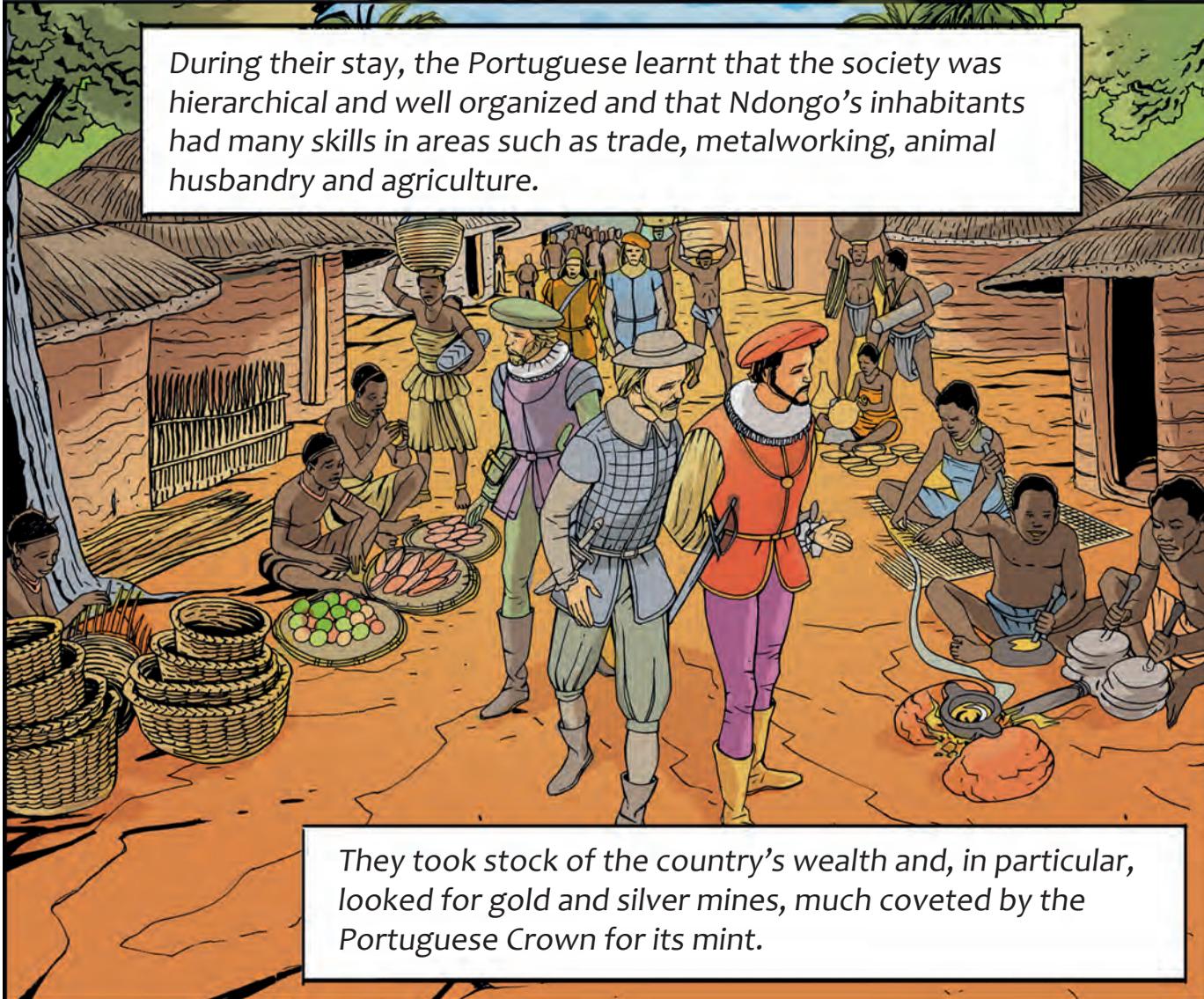
Your Excellency, we wish to develop trade relations with your kingdom and to let you gain from our missionaries' knowledge.

When the visitors arrived in Kabasa, capital of Ndongo, they were brought before Ngola Kiluanje kia Ndambi, Nzinga's great-grandfather and the King of Ndongo. The King was not deceived by the presents sent by the Portuguese Crown and reacted coldly.



Very well. You may remain in my country and visit Kabasa. Be aware, however, that you will be watched and that you may not leave the town without our authorization.

During their stay, the Portuguese learnt that the society was hierarchical and well organized and that Ndongo's inhabitants had many skills in areas such as trade, metalworking, animal husbandry and agriculture.

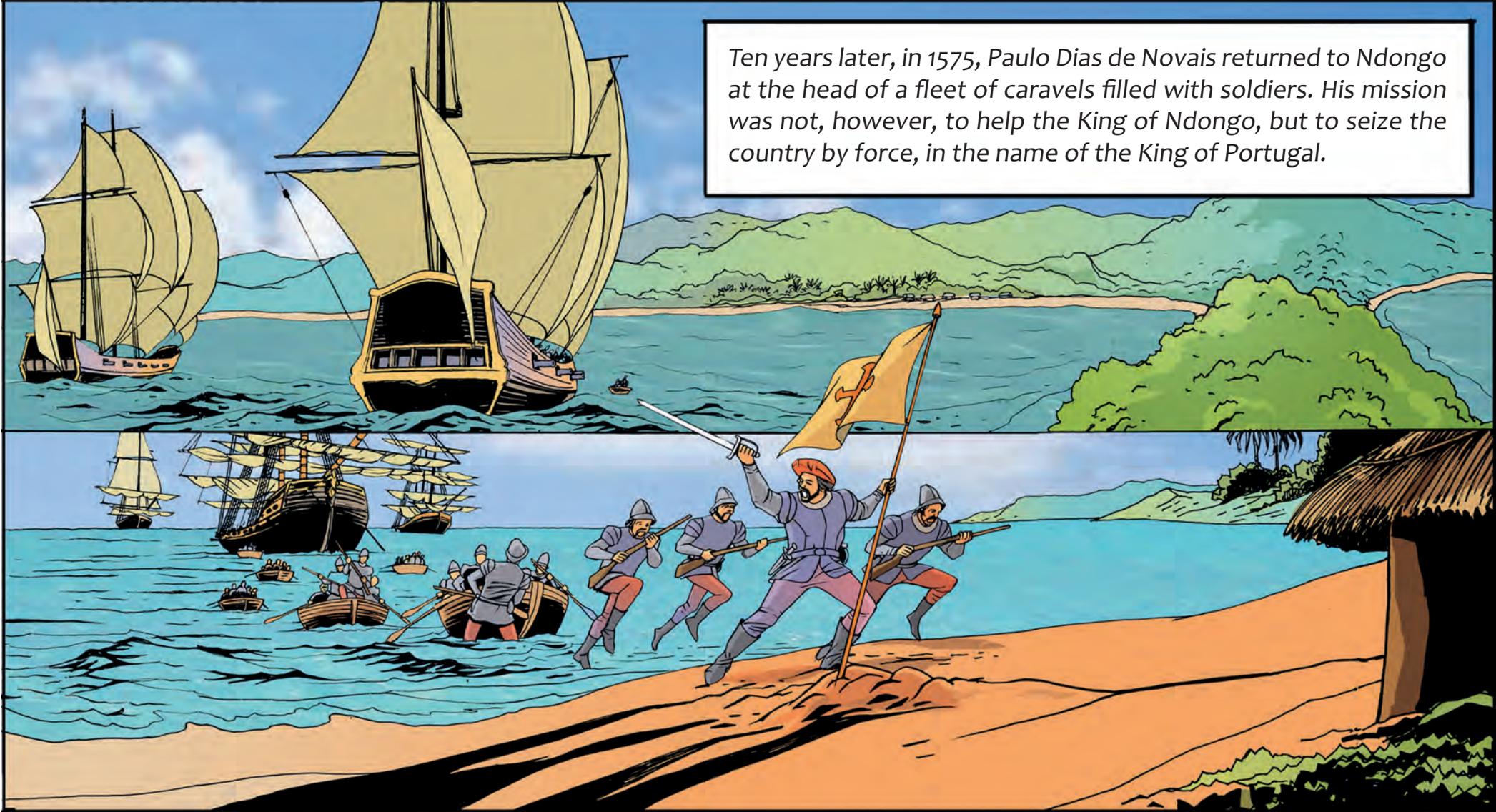


They took stock of the country's wealth and, in particular, looked for gold and silver mines, much coveted by the Portuguese Crown for its mint.

Five years later, Ngola Kiluanje kia Ndambi authorized Paulo Dias de Novais to leave for Portugal, on the condition that he returned at the head of an army, to help the Ngola to fight against neighbouring kingdoms.



Ten years later, in 1575, Paulo Dias de Novais returned to Ndongo at the head of a fleet of caravels filled with soldiers. His mission was not, however, to help the King of Ndongo, but to seize the country by force, in the name of the King of Portugal.



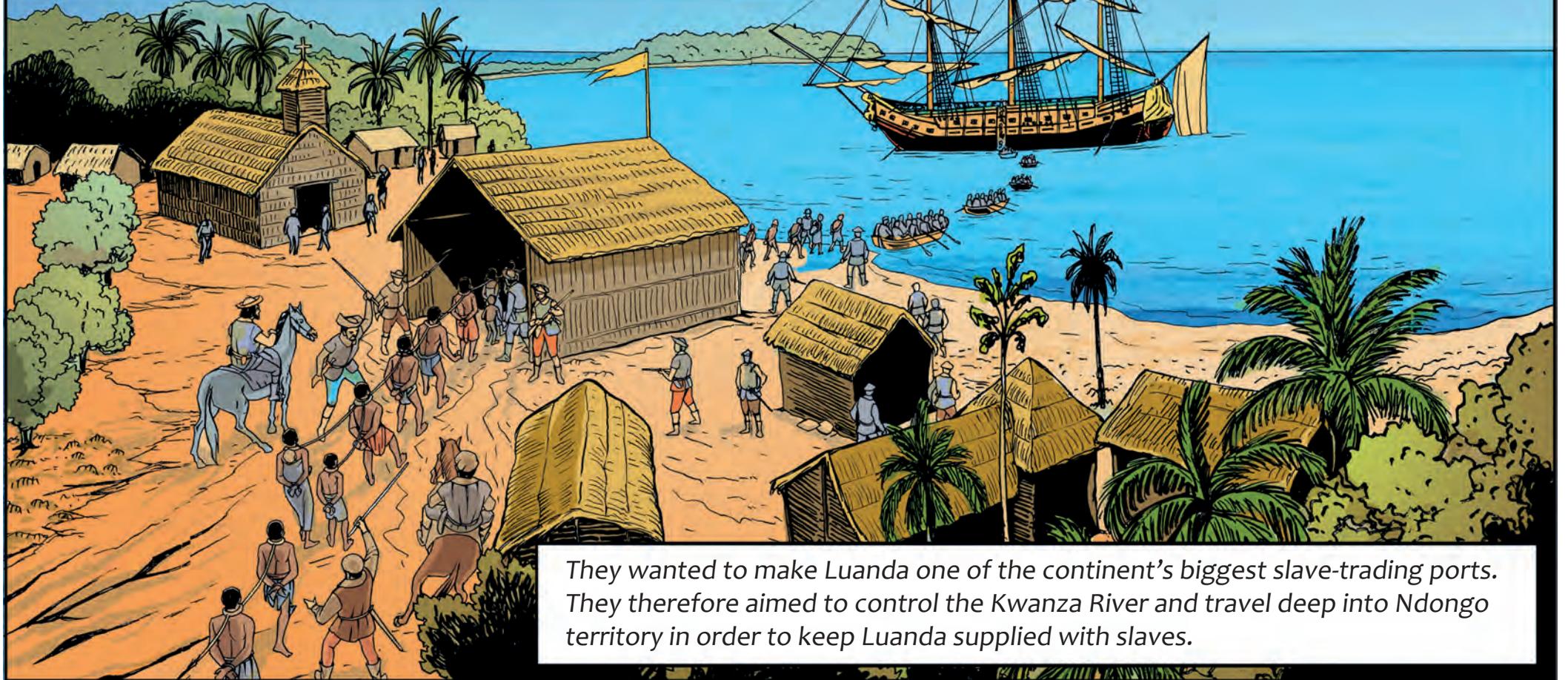
Ndongo's inhabitants were caught unaware. They defended their homeland valiantly but were beaten back by the Portuguese firepower. Desperation descended on the country.



With lightning speed, the Portuguese seized the Ndongo coastal strip and renamed it Angola. The same year, 1575, they founded the port city of São Paulo da Assunção de Loanda (Luanda). The invasion continued. Ndongo's borders were reduced towards the east, while Portuguese migrants, namely missionaries, farmers and merchants, poured into Luanda, and other adventurers acquired land taken from Africans.

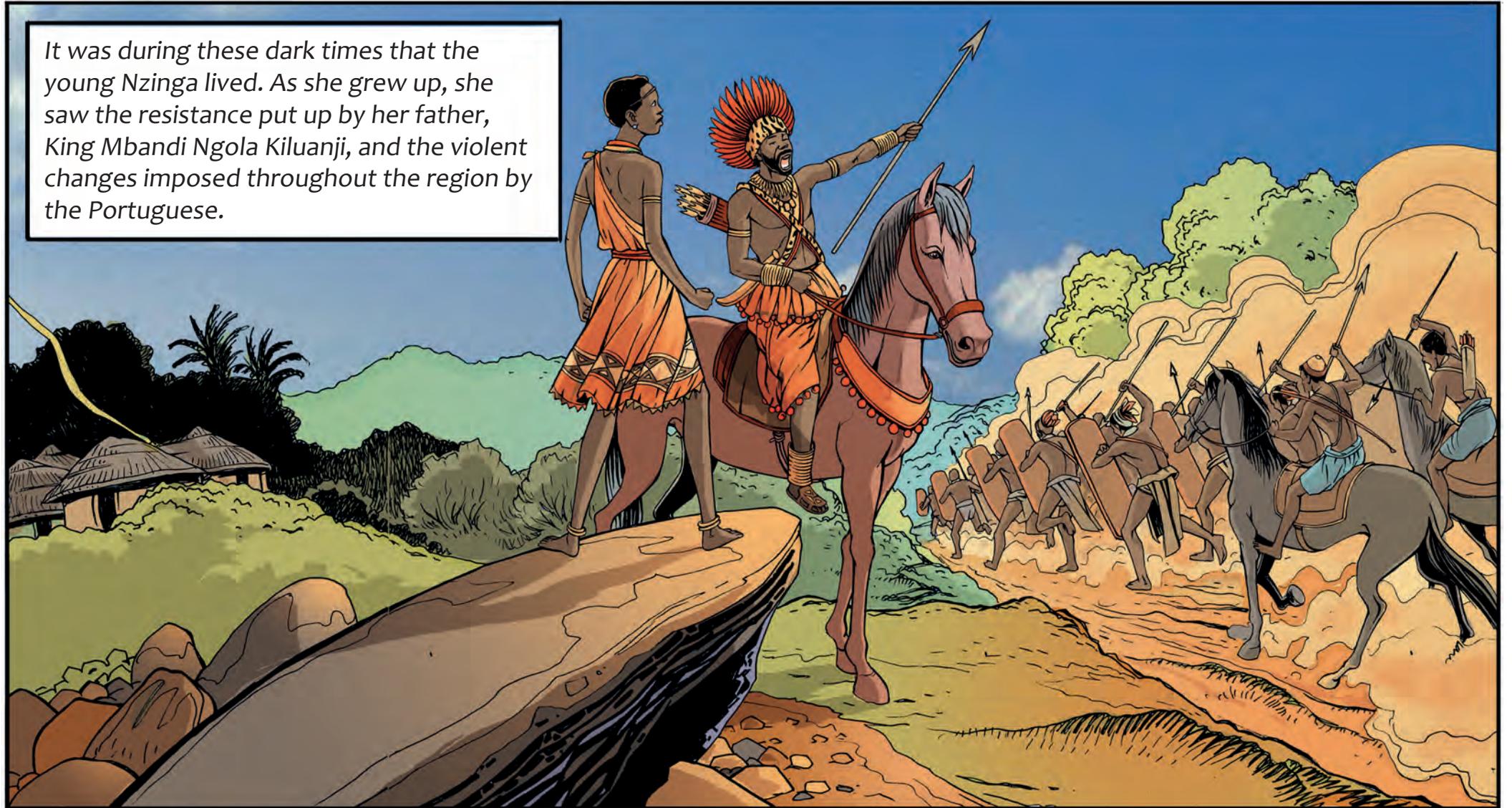


As they found no gold or silver mines, the Portuguese decided to trade in slaves on a massive scale in order to supply labour for the new colony of Brazil.

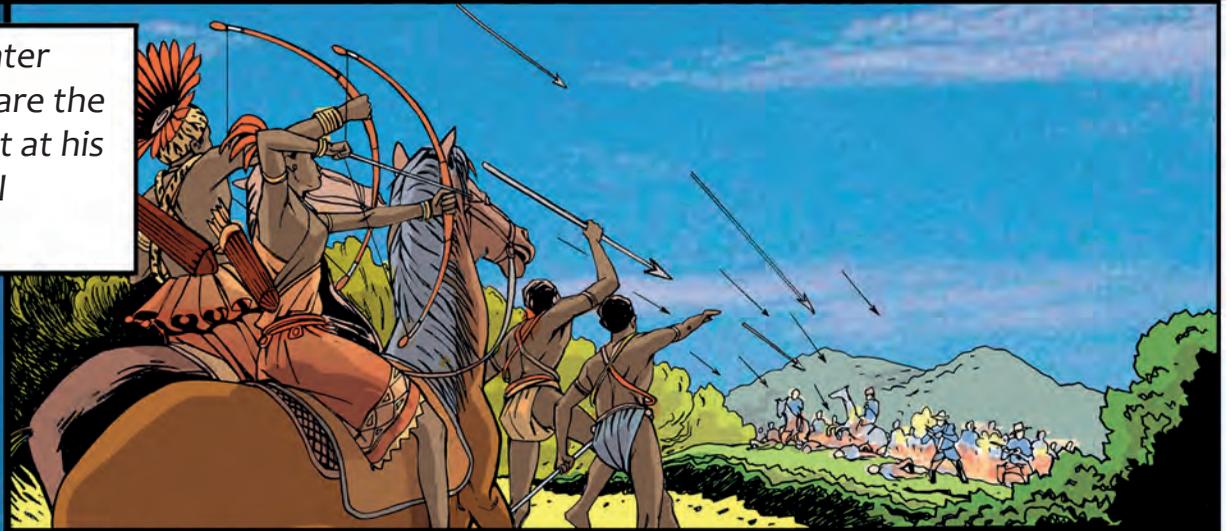


They wanted to make Luanda one of the continent's biggest slave-trading ports. They therefore aimed to control the Kwanza River and travel deep into Ndongo territory in order to keep Luanda supplied with slaves.

It was during these dark times that the young Nzinga lived. As she grew up, she saw the resistance put up by her father, King Mbandi Ngola Kiluanji, and the violent changes imposed throughout the region by the Portuguese.



Very early on Nzinga's father discerned in his daughter the fiery temperament and proud intelligence that are the hallmarks of heroes. On many occasions, she fought at his side against the Portuguese conquistadors and rival kingdoms in the region.



Nzinga had been given a good education and been taught to write by visiting Portuguese missionaries and merchants. However, she would never allow her kingdom to be subjugated by a foreign power.

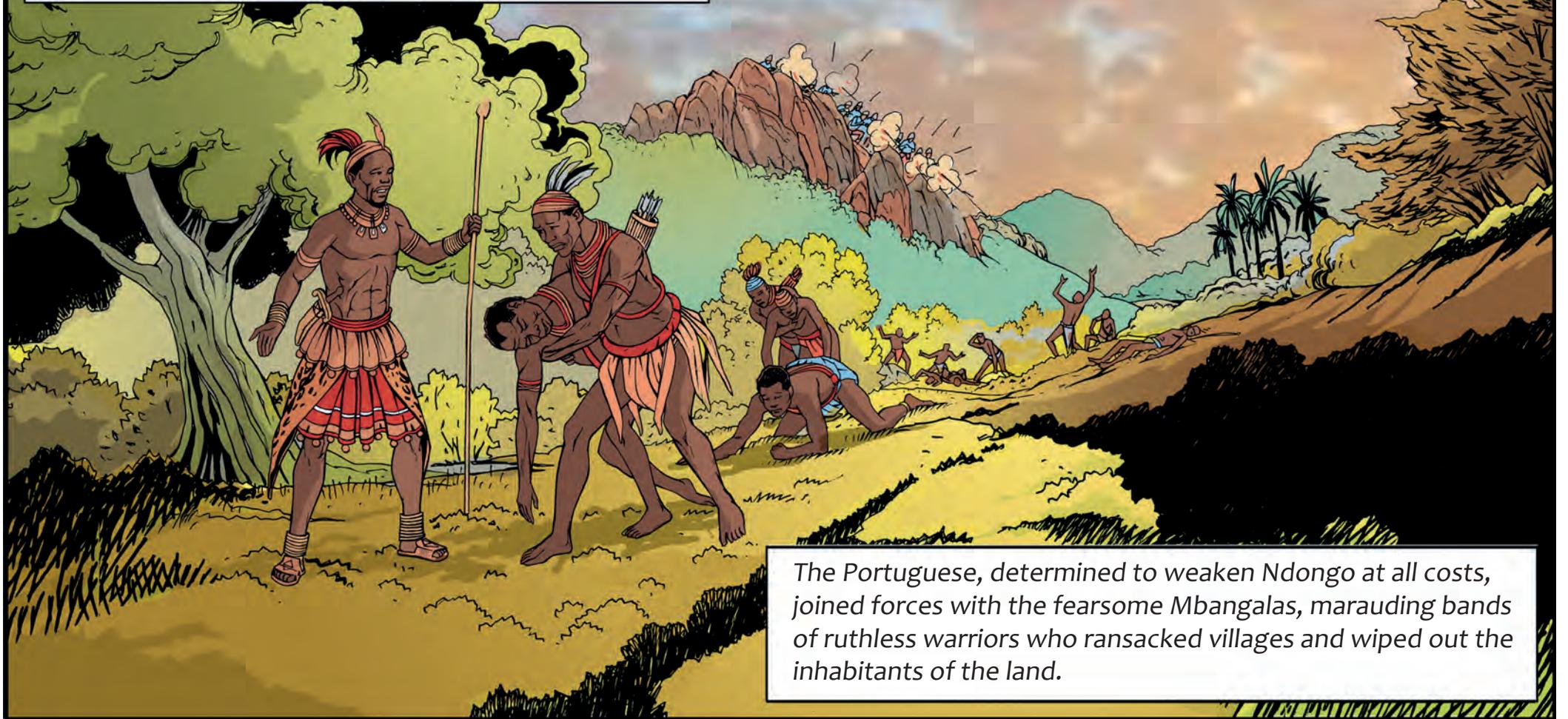
Mbandi Ngola Kiluanji, the King of Ndongo, died in 1617. His son, Ngola Mbandi, took power and became the new king, but he possessed neither his father's charisma nor the intelligence of his sister, Nzinga, for whom he felt only hatred and jealousy.



Fearing a plot against him by her entourage, Ngola Mbandi ordered the execution of Nzinga's only son, a mere child. Nzinga was grief-stricken.

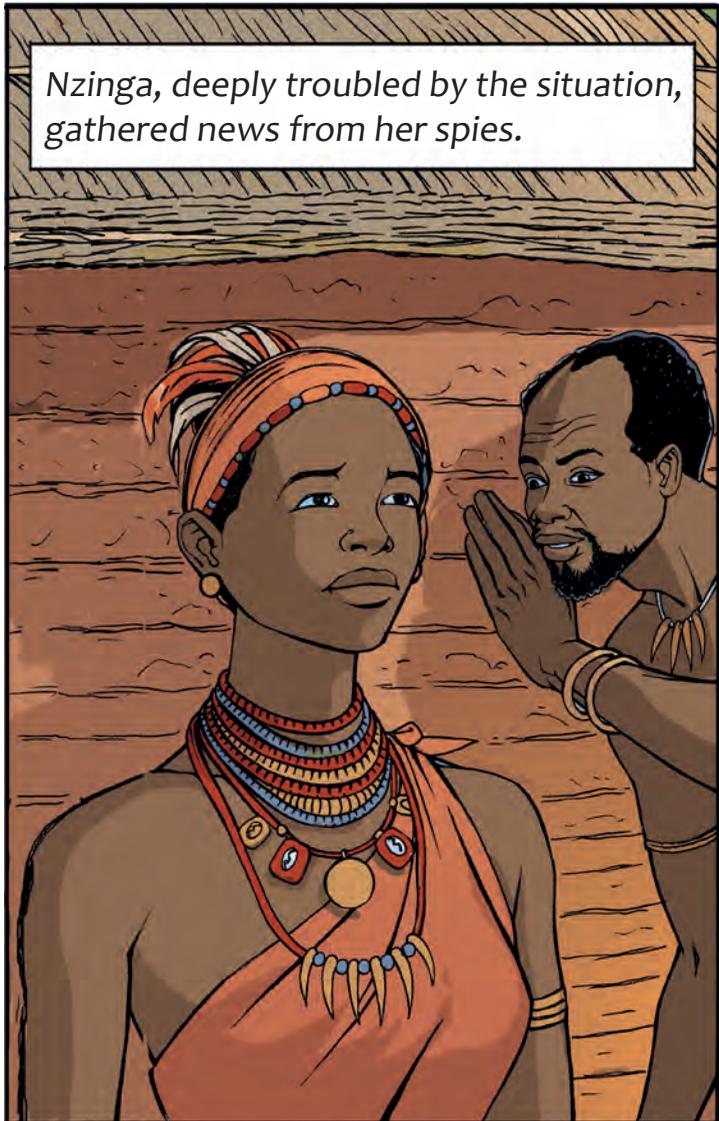


Ngola Mbandi again declared war on the Portuguese but could not repel the enemy's attacks.

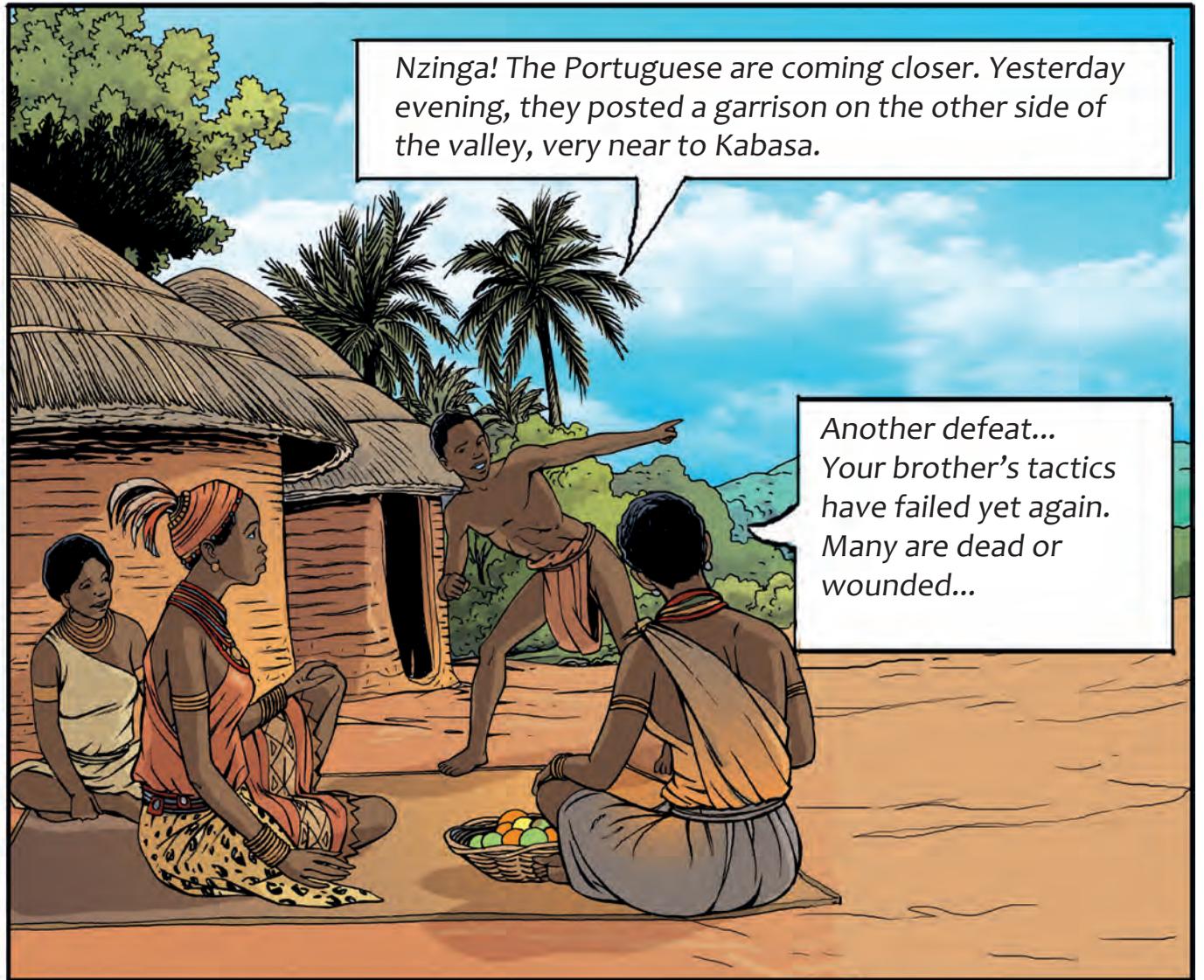


The Portuguese, determined to weaken Ndongo at all costs, joined forces with the fearsome Mbangalas, marauding bands of ruthless warriors who ransacked villages and wiped out the inhabitants of the land.

Nzinga, deeply troubled by the situation, gathered news from her spies.

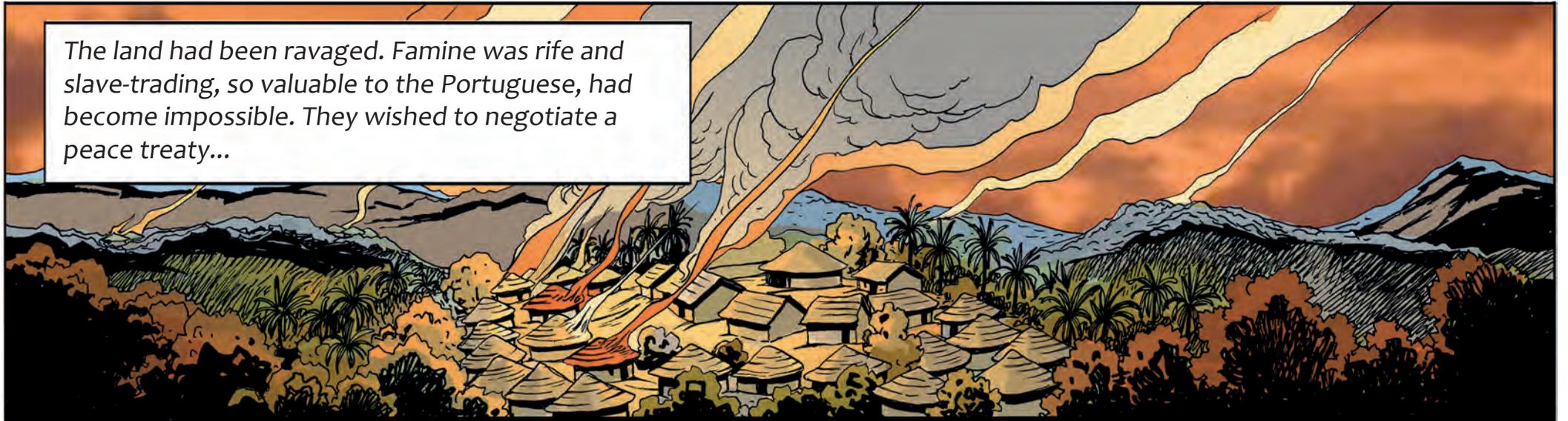


Nzinga! The Portuguese are coming closer. Yesterday evening, they posted a garrison on the other side of the valley, very near to Kabasa.



Another defeat...
Your brother's tactics
have failed yet again.
Many are dead or
wounded...

The land had been ravaged. Famine was rife and slave-trading, so valuable to the Portuguese, had become impossible. They wished to negotiate a peace treaty...



Your sister Nzinga! Only your sister will succeed in protecting your interests!

She speaks their language and can stand up to them. Let me lead the delegation and I will keep a close watch on your sister!



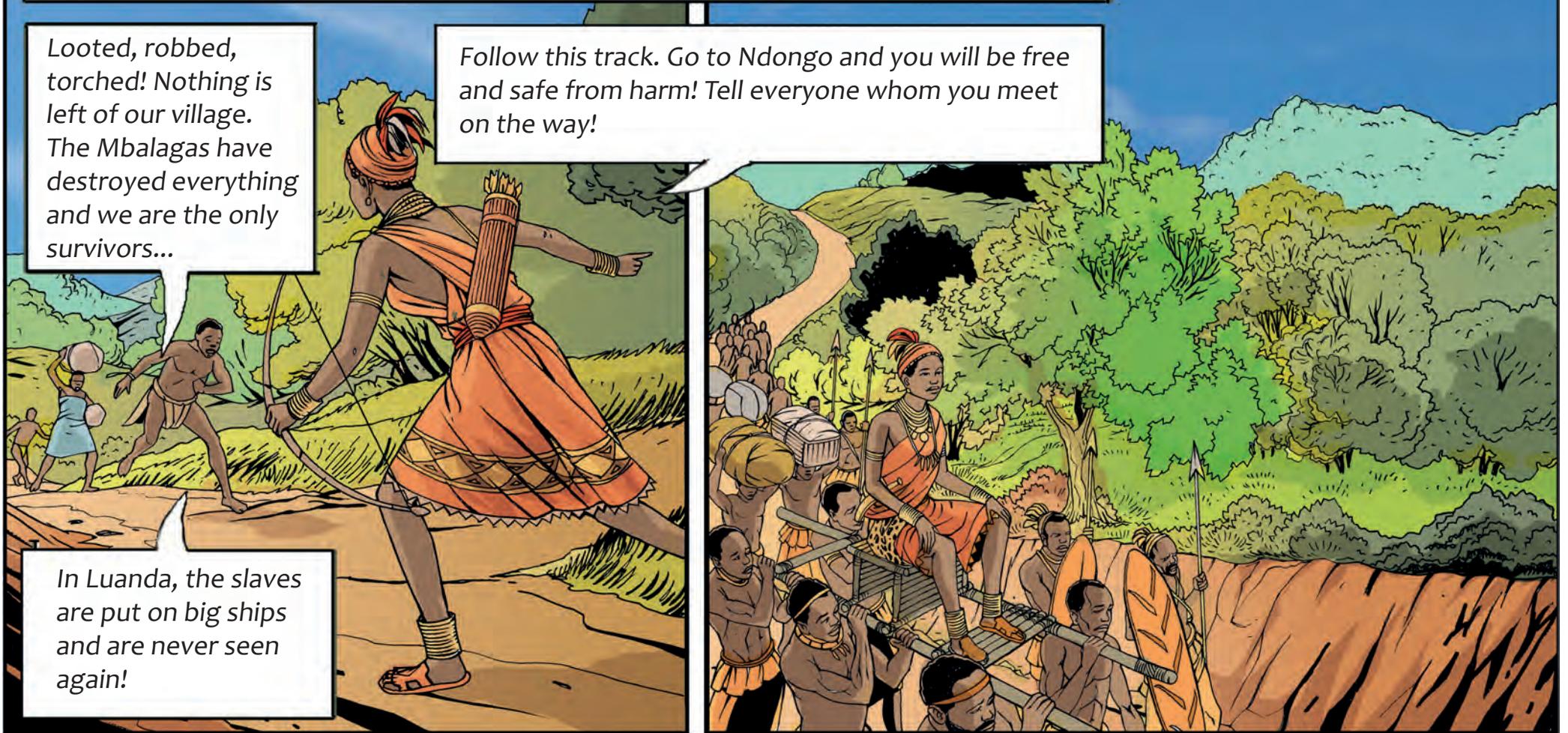
Ngola Mbandi finally accepted the elders' advice and instructed Nzinga to go to Luanda to negotiate for peace with Dom João Correia de Sousa, the Portuguese Governor.

Nzinga set out immediately, heading across country towards Luanda. On the way, she met runaway slaves and refugee families.

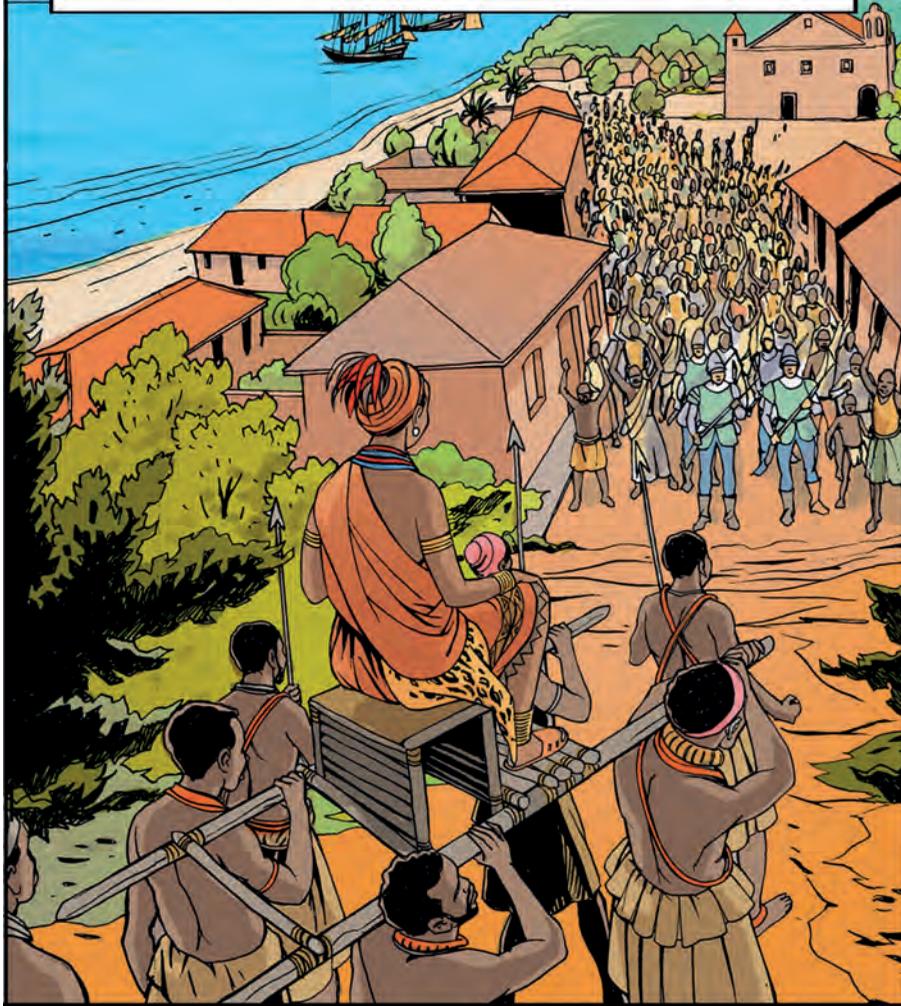
Looted, robbed, torched! Nothing is left of our village. The Mbalagas have destroyed everything and we are the only survivors...

Follow this track. Go to Ndongo and you will be free and safe from harm! Tell everyone whom you meet on the way!

In Luanda, the slaves are put on big ships and are never seen again!



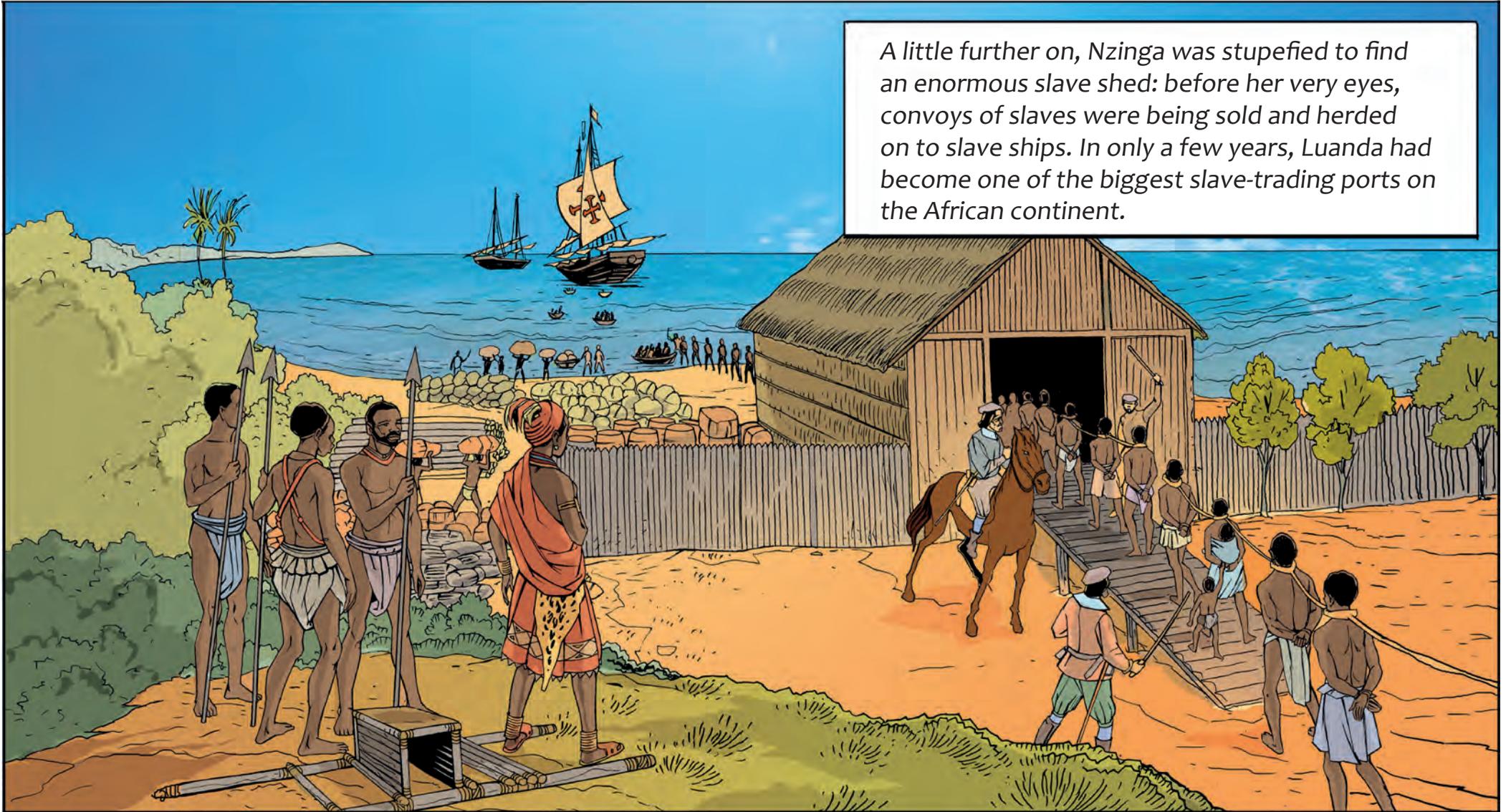
Luanda! Nzinga saw the colonial trading post for the first time.



There were many buildings in the old African village and many more inhabitants than in the past – whites, blacks as well as a new population of mixed origin people.



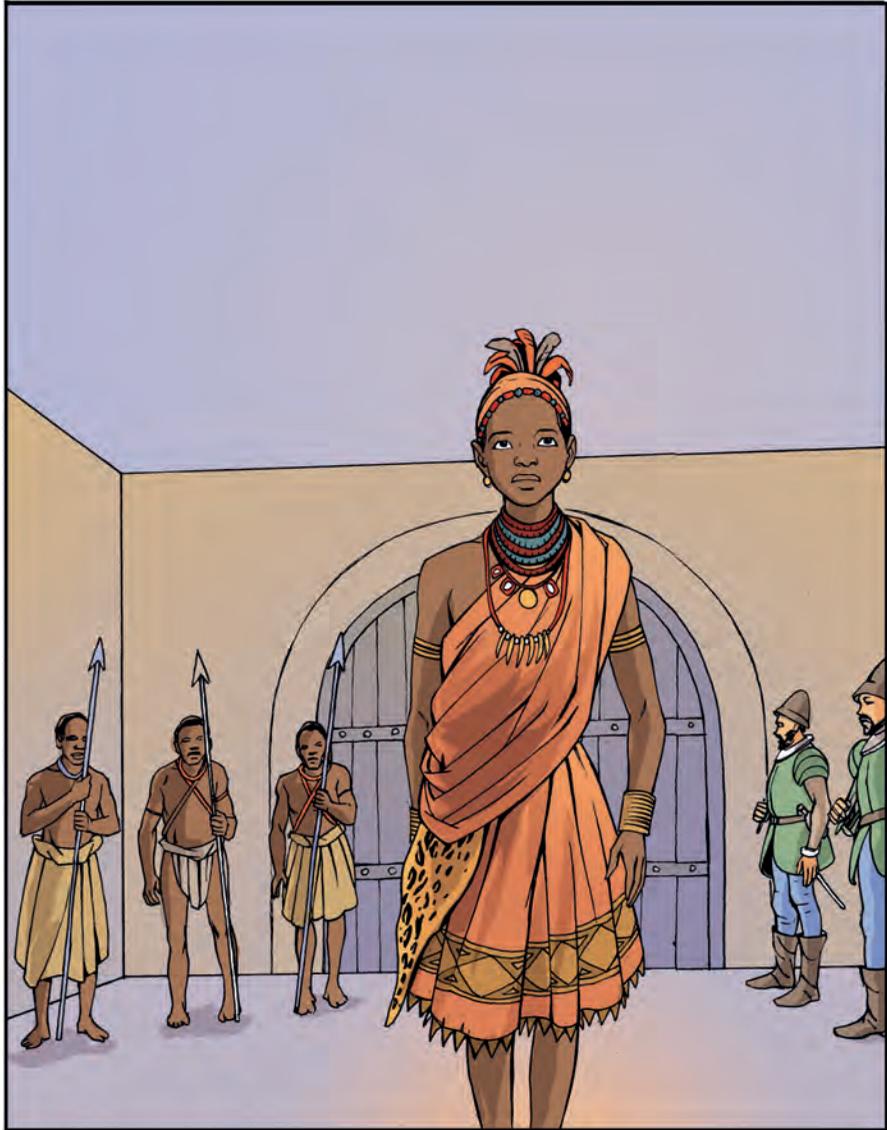
A little further on, Nzinga was stupefied to find an enormous slave shed: before her very eyes, convoys of slaves were being sold and herded on to slave ships. In only a few years, Luanda had become one of the biggest slave-trading ports on the African continent.



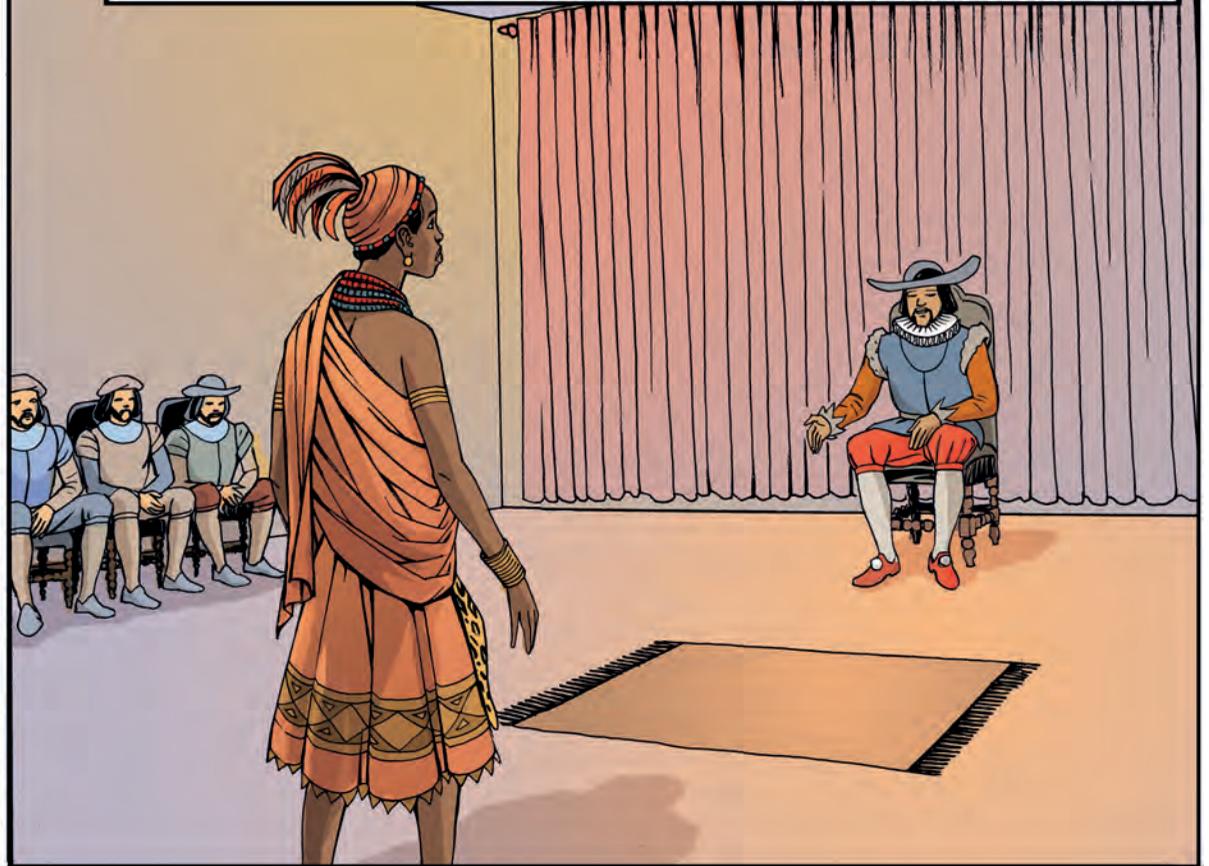
Shortly after she arrived, the Portuguese welcomed Nzinga graciously and placed a residence at her disposal.



Just before the negotiations, Nzinga stood to one side, thinking of the men, women and children on board the slave ships. Where were they going? What did fate have in store for them? She also thought sadly of her son, murdered by her brother a few years before.



The time for negotiations had come, but when Nzinga arrived at the palace, she was astounded to find that she was to sit on a carpet spread out before her in the reception room, while the Captain-General sat in a spacious armchair.



Nzinga communicated her wishes to her maid with a mere look: the maid immediately crouched on all fours in front of her so that Nzinga could sit on her back.



With that eminently regal gesture, Nzinga suggested to the Governor that she had not come to swear allegiance to him, but to negotiate on an equal footing. The negotiations then began.





Madam, we offer you peace on condition that all of our prisoners of war are released.

We have no objection to this. It will be done... as soon as you undertake to respect our borders and cease using brute force to occupy our territory.

The negotiations were hard but courteous. The Governor, like the rest of the assembly, was surprised by Nzinga's eloquence and her command of Portuguese. He had not expected such a formidable adversary.

Madam, you have our word, Ndongo's new borders will be respected. Furthermore, we are prepared to place your kingdom under the protection of the King of Portugal in return for an annual tribute of 12,000 slaves.

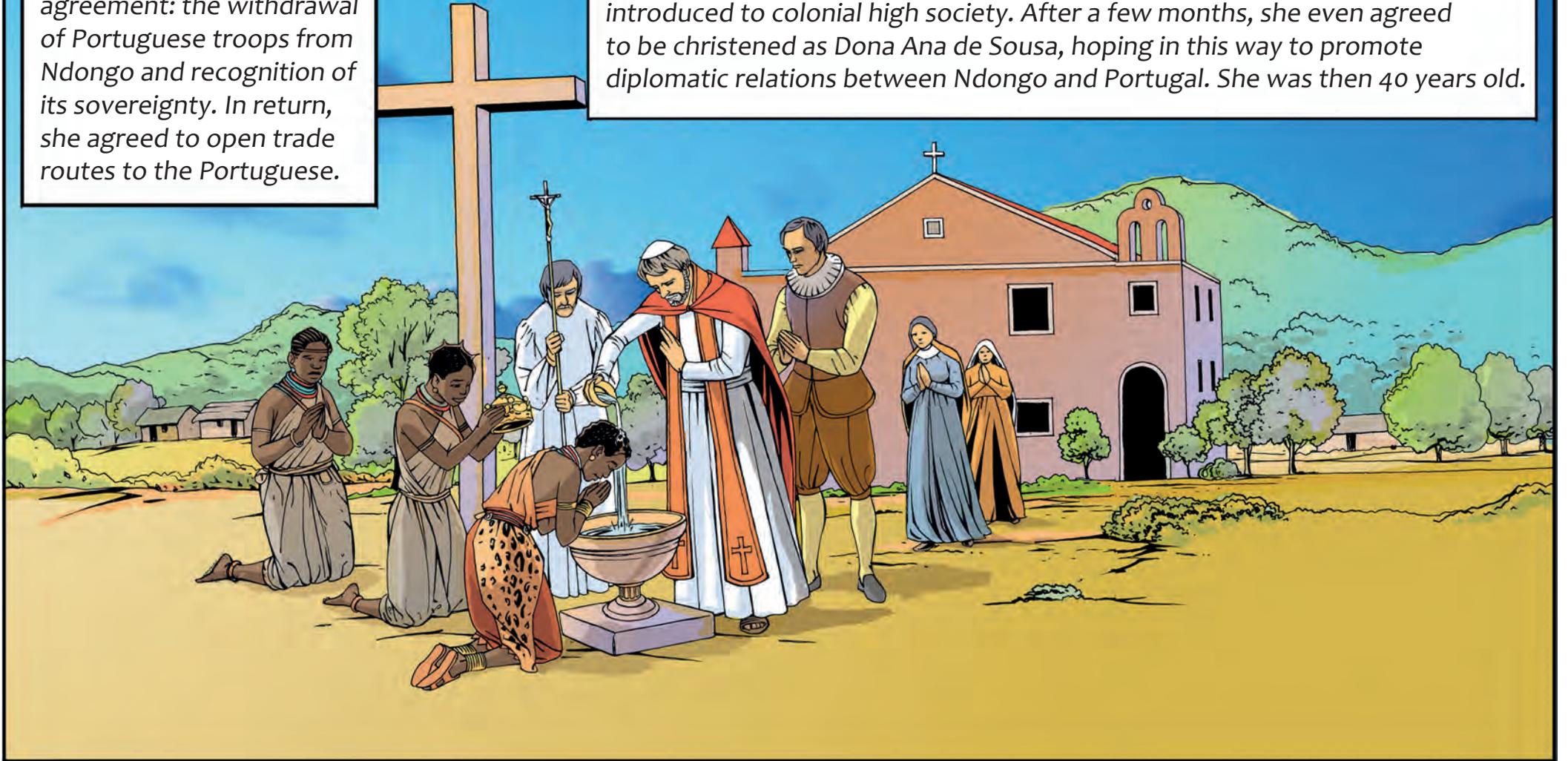


Sir, you are demanding a tribute from a people whom you have pushed to the absolute limit. Surely you know that if we pay such a tribute in the first year, we will declare war the following year in order to be released from it. Do not ask for more than we can grant!

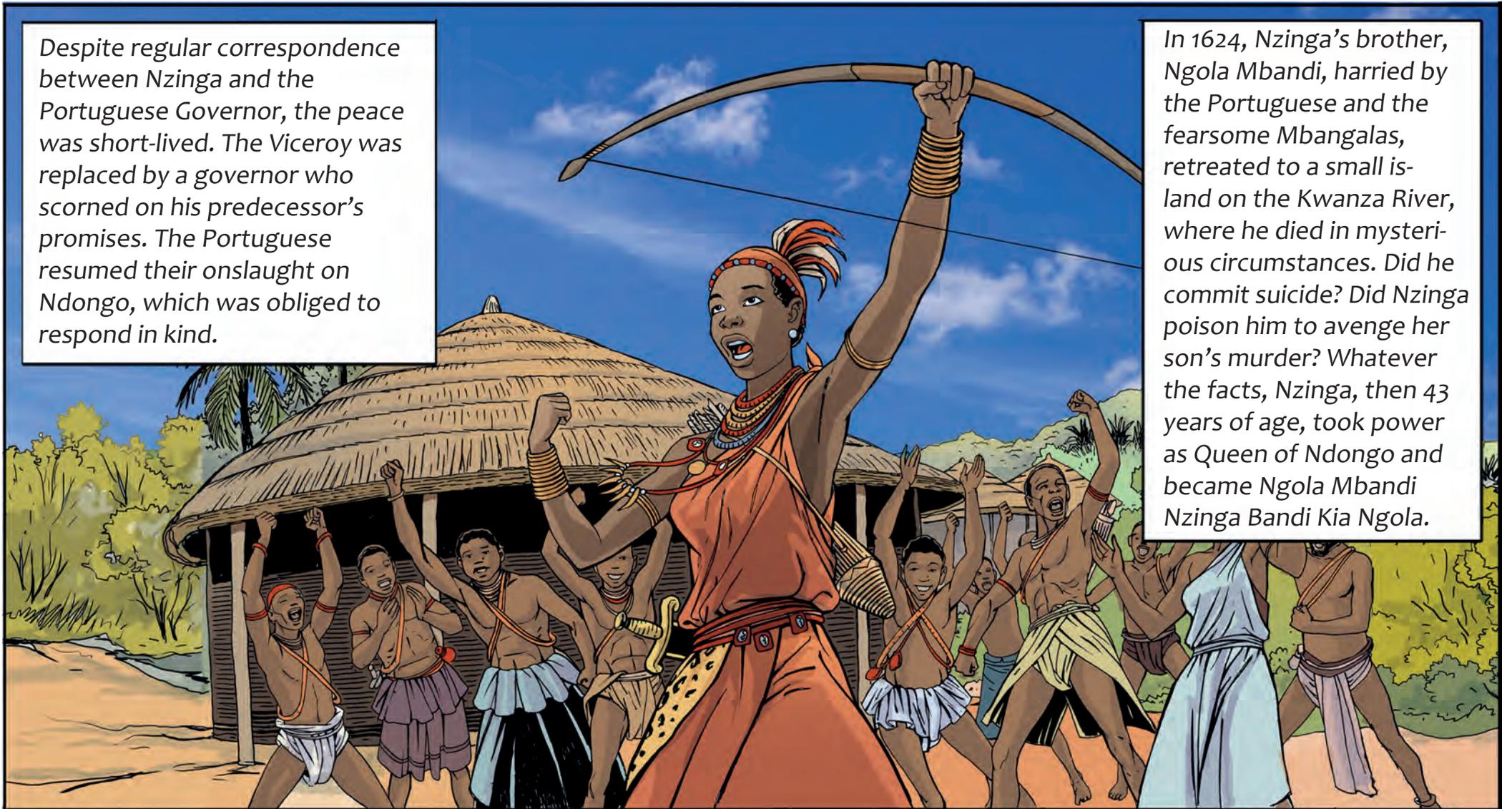


Nzinga reached a twofold agreement: the withdrawal of Portuguese troops from Ndongo and recognition of its sovereignty. In return, she agreed to open trade routes to the Portuguese.

At the Governor's invitation, she extended her stay in Luanda and was introduced to colonial high society. After a few months, she even agreed to be christened as Dona Ana de Sousa, hoping in this way to promote diplomatic relations between Ndongo and Portugal. She was then 40 years old.



Despite regular correspondence between Nzinga and the Portuguese Governor, the peace was short-lived. The Viceroy was replaced by a governor who scorned on his predecessor's promises. The Portuguese resumed their onslaught on Ndongo, which was obliged to respond in kind.



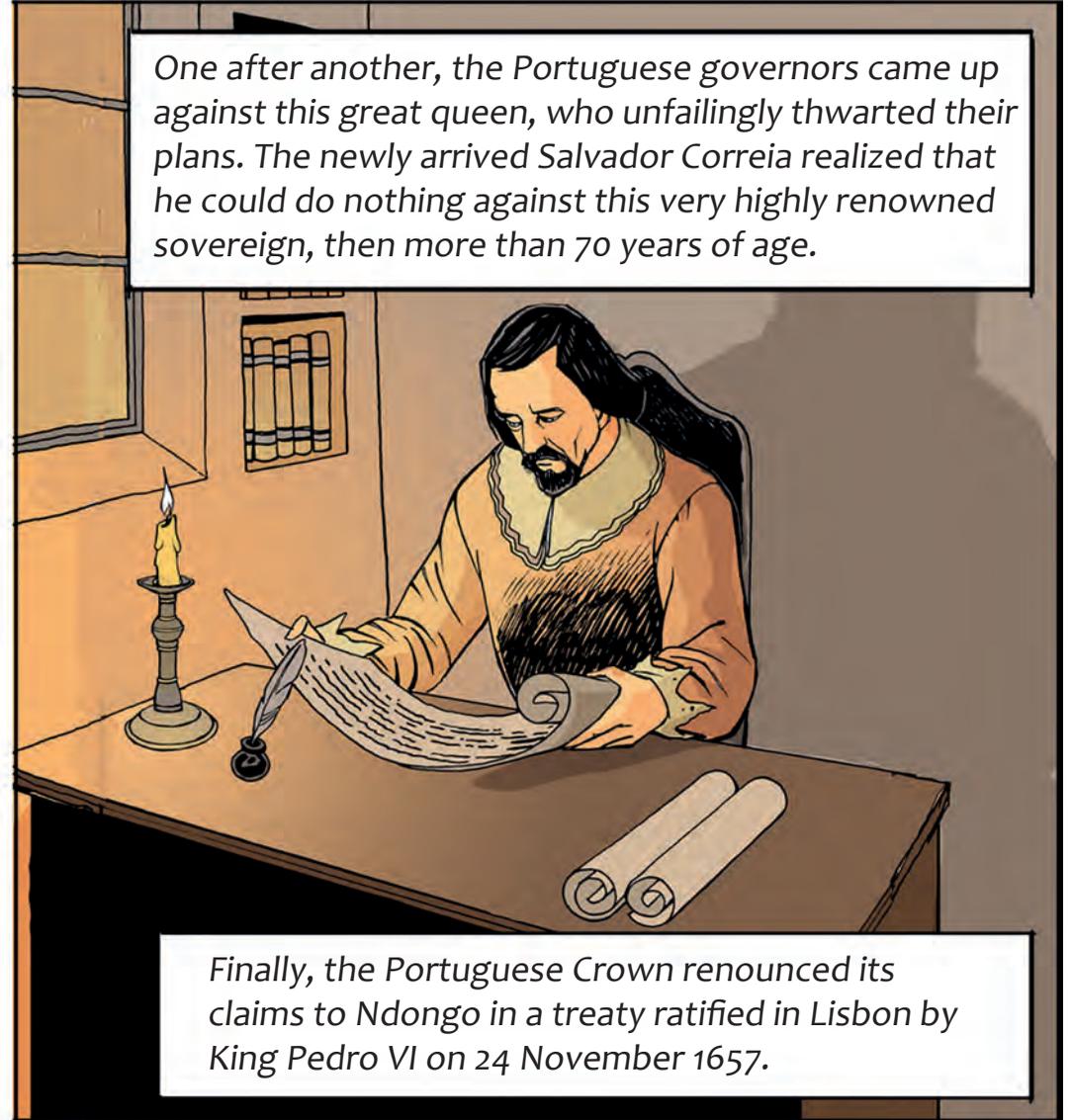
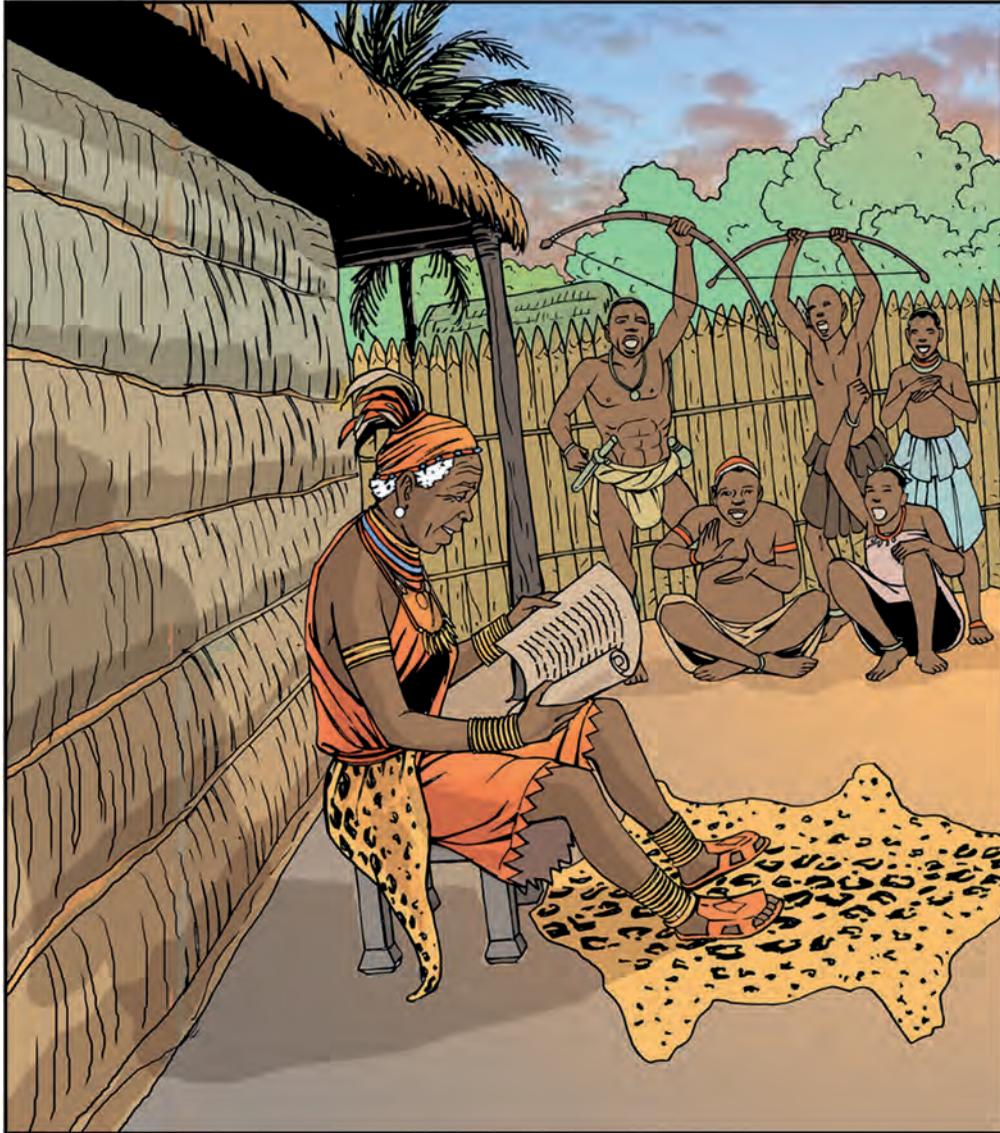
In 1624, Nzinga's brother, Ngola Mbandi, harried by the Portuguese and the fearsome Mbangalas, retreated to a small island on the Kwanza River, where he died in mysterious circumstances. Did he commit suicide? Did Nzinga poison him to avenge her son's murder? Whatever the facts, Nzinga, then 43 years of age, took power as Queen of Ndongo and became Ngola Mbandi Nzinga Bandi Kia Ngola.

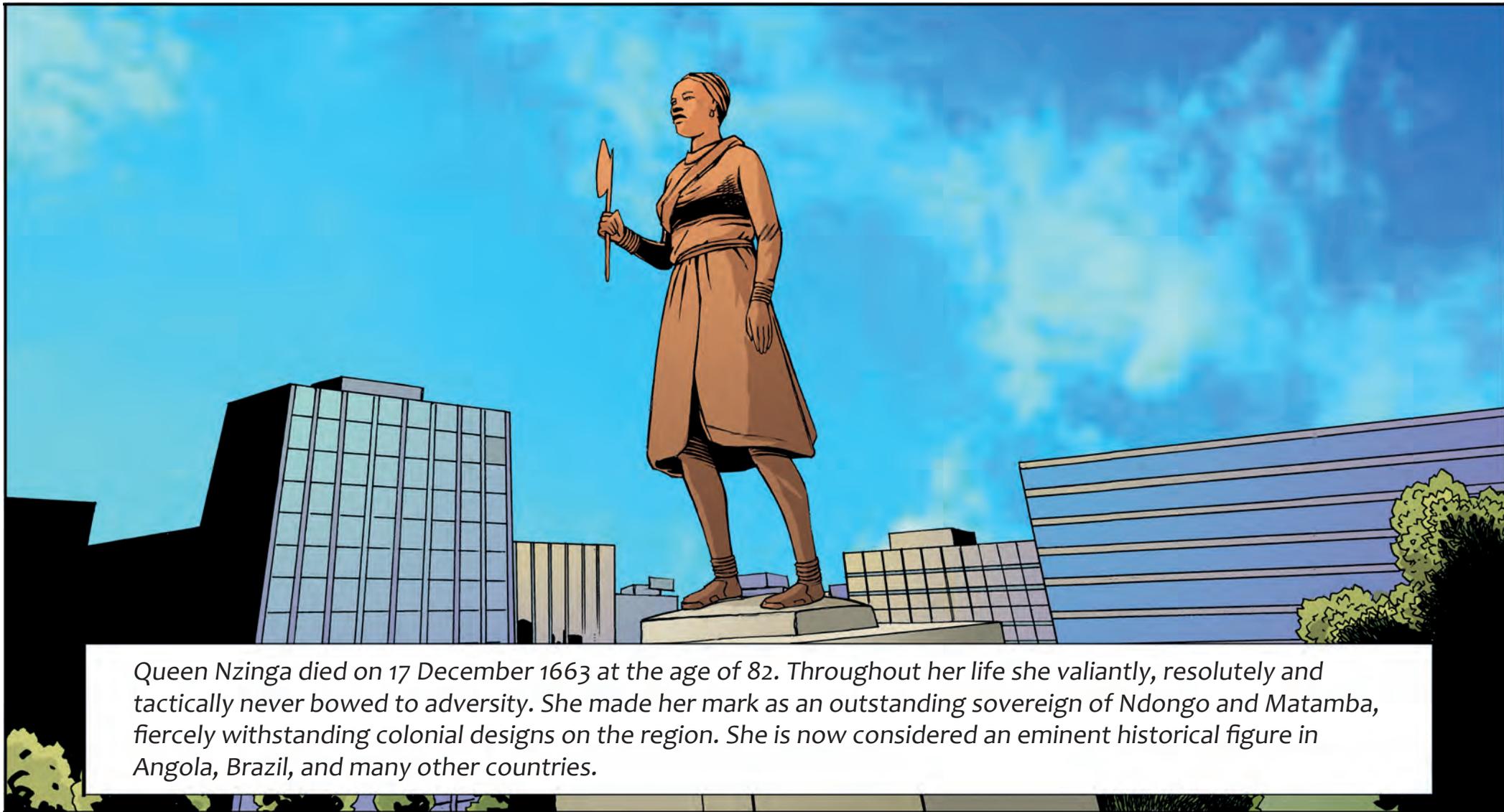
She asserted her authority over the local chieftains, conquered the neighbouring Kingdom of Matamba and staunchly defended her two kingdoms.



During the four decades of her rule, the Queen of Ndongo and Matamba vigorously opposed Portugal's colonial designs, building strategic alliances, maintaining a diplomatic correspondence and often directing military operations in person.





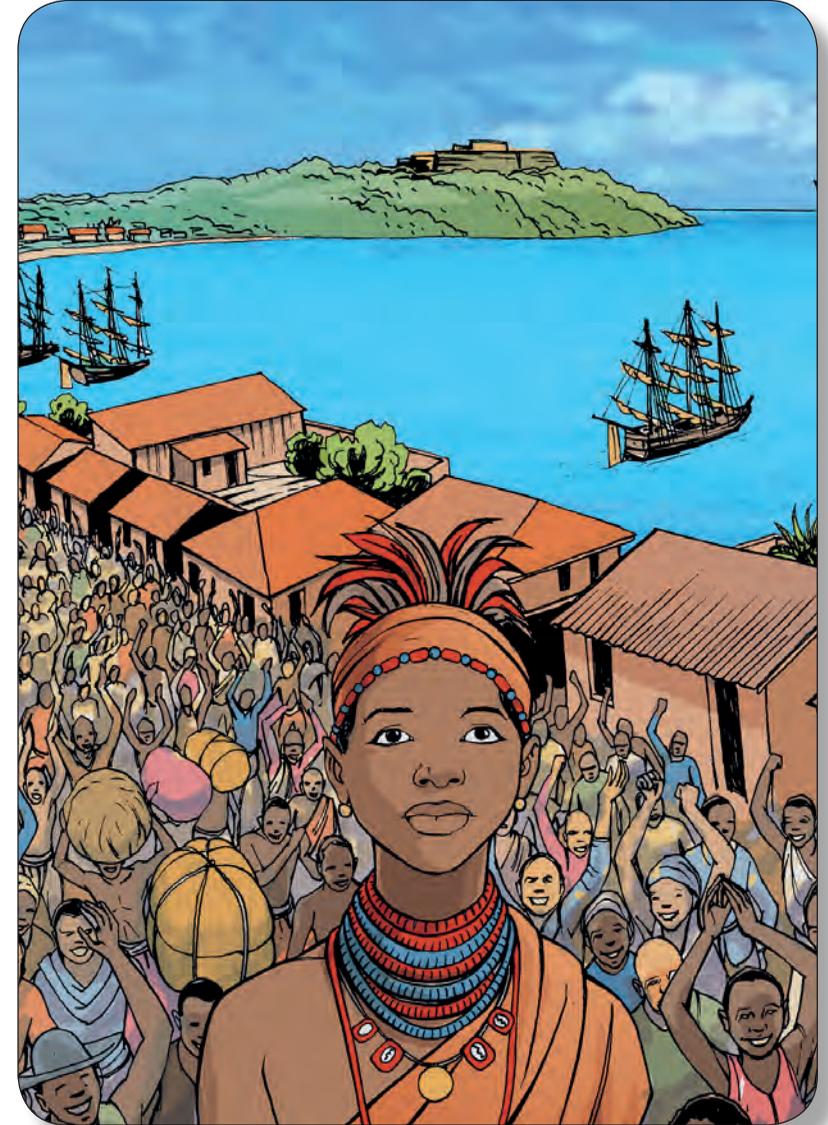


Queen Nzinga died on 17 December 1663 at the age of 82. Throughout her life she valiantly, resolutely and tactically never bowed to adversity. She made her mark as an outstanding sovereign of Ndongo and Matamba, fiercely withstanding colonial designs on the region. She is now considered an eminent historical figure in Angola, Brazil, and many other countries.

4 Pedagogical Unit

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Nzinga Mbandi – Pedagogical Unit



Illustration of Nzinga Mbandi by the French illustrator Achille Devéria, 1830.

The figure of Nzinga Mbandi in the *Congada* procession, Brazil.
Photograph by Luciano Osorio, 2011.

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1. Historical background: the Portuguese in Ndongo and resistance

Introduction

The arrival of the Portuguese in Ndongo in the late sixteenth century profoundly disrupted the local situation. The wars of conquest, the development of the slave trade and the emergence of new economic markets transformed the political, social, economic and cultural landscape of the region.

It was against a backdrop of resistance that Nzinga Mbandi became renowned as an outstanding example of female governance in the history of Africa.

1.1 Local kingdoms

In the sixteenth century, central Africa consisted of different kingdoms, above all the great Kingdom of Kongo, but there were also smaller kingdoms such as Ndongo and Matamba, over which the Kingdom of Kongo slowly lost influence.

At the time, it was relatively common for these political entities to be organized along political and geographic lines, based on centralized power and intermediate tiers known – in Ndongo, for instance – as chieftains (*sobas*).



Portuguese caravels.
Painting by King Frederic Leonard, 1934-1935.



Map of the Kingdoms of Congo, Angola, and Benguela.
Map from the David Rumsey Map Collection.

Owing to trade among the kingdoms, complementary products moved primarily between coastal and inland areas. Those commodities were, in particular, iron, ivory, fabrics, salt and foodstuffs such as fish, animals, and other farm produce.

In Ndongo, centralized power was traditionally passed on by lineage and situated in the interior, at the crossing of trade routes, in order to ensure widespread control.

1.2 Slave trade

From the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese and the Spanish launched major expeditions to conquer new lands, thus extending their political influence and developing trade links. The Dutch, French and English followed suit one century later.

Portugal's mercantilist venture, especially its large-scale slave-trading operations in Luanda, had a great impact on the local peoples and kingdoms from the late sixteenth century onwards.

In Angola, the slave trade continued until the middle of the nineteenth century. Millions of children, women and men, who had either been rounded up or were victims of wars, raids or local trading, were shipped to Brazil, Central America and Portugal. In addition, Portugal's determination to extend its control over the country gave rise to conflicts, resistance and the interplay of political alliances, either between the invaders and local rulers, or among various local rulers themselves.

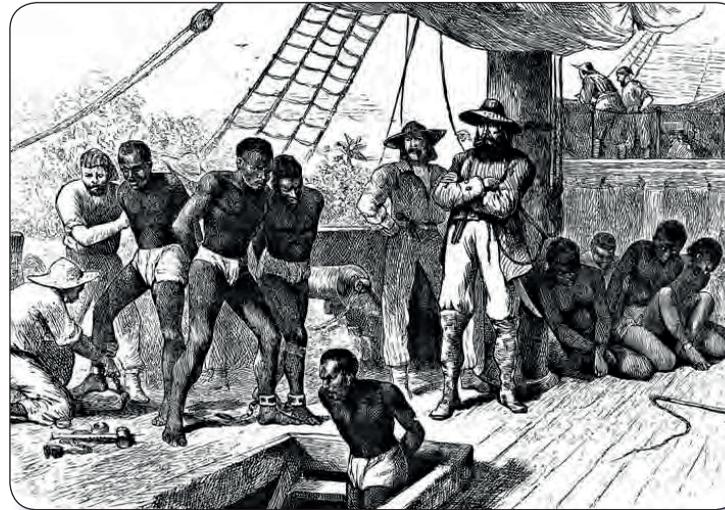
1.3 Ndongo cornered by the Portuguese

In 1575, the Portuguese navigator and conqueror Paulo Dias de Novais founded the port city of São Paulo da Assunção de Loanda, now the city of Luanda. From 1580 onwards, the Portuguese stepped up their slave-trading activities, declared war on Ndongo and sought to conquer the whole country.

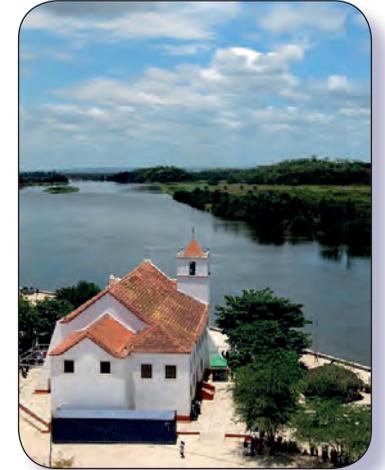
They advanced by stages into the interior, from forts built along the Kwanza River. The construction of Fort Ambaca (1611) took them close to Kabasa, the capital of Ndongo, situated some 250 kilometres from the coast. Decade after decade, successive sovereigns of Ndongo resisted their advance, but were eventually forced to yield before the firepower of the Portuguese and the diplomatic manoeuvres of the Portuguese Crown.

Successive sovereigns of Ndongo from 1575 to 1663:

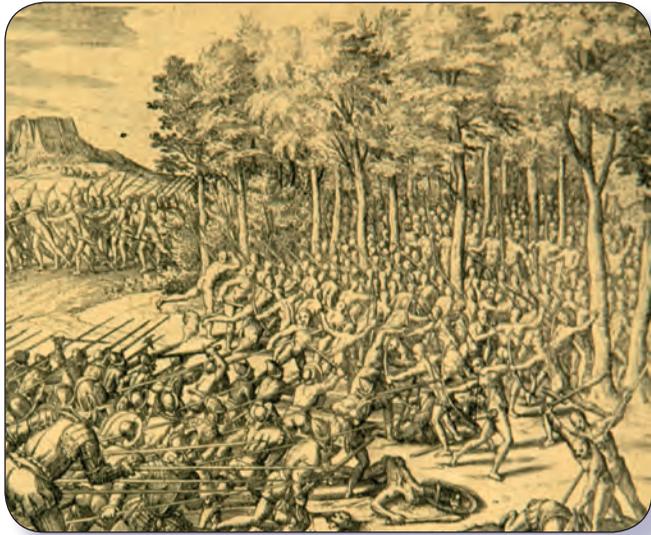
Njinga Ngola Kilombo Kia Kasenda	(1575, 1592)
Ngola Mbandi Kiluanji	(1592, 1617)
Ngola Mbandi	(1617, 1623)
Nzinga Mbandi	(1623, 1663)



Slaves being loaded onto a European slaving ship.
Illustration from the UNESCO General History of Africa.



The Kwanza River and the church *Nossa Senhora da Conceição*, built by the Portuguese at the end of the Sixteenth century.
Photograph by Paulo Cesar Santos, 2009.



The resistance of the African kingdoms against the Europeans.
Illustration from the UNESCO General History of Africa.

1.4 Resistance

Ndongo's resistance, epitomized by Nzinga Mbandi in particular, slowed down Portuguese plans. The Queen relied not only on her skills in warfare, guerrilla methods and her tactics in the field of espionage, but also on her tremendous ability as a negotiator.

Sent to Luanda as an envoy by her brother Ngola Mbandi in 1622, Nzinga succeeded in negotiating peace with the Portuguese governor. After her brother's death, Nzinga became Queen and tenaciously resisted the Portuguese until her death in 1663.

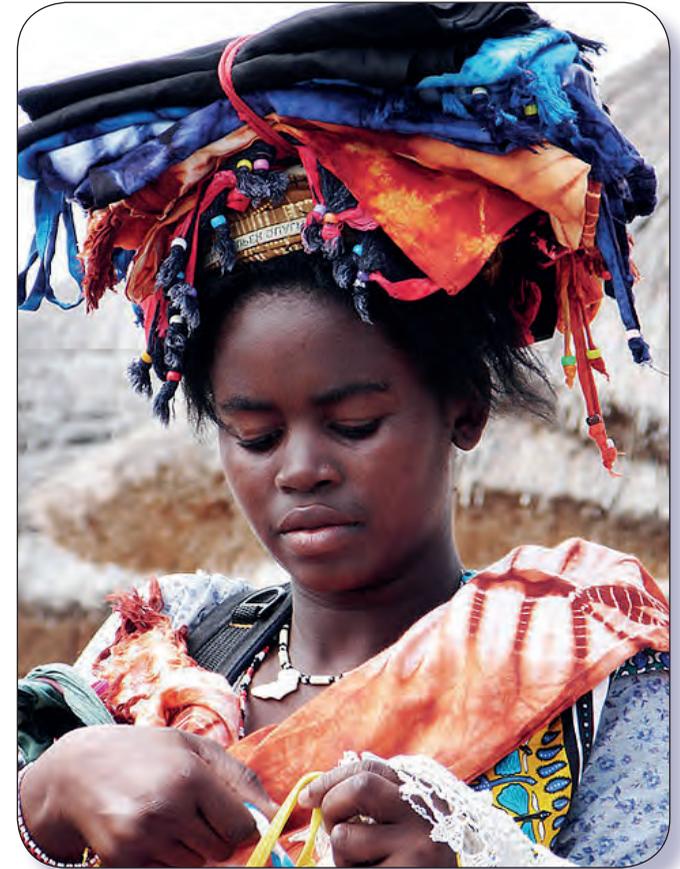
In spite of numerous attempts to capture her, Nzinga thwarted every plot. After her death, the Portuguese occupation was extended deep into the interior of the continent in order to supply slaves to the slave-trading posts, with 7,000 soldiers from Nzinga's army being shipped to Brazil as slaves.

1.5 Emergence of a regional political figure

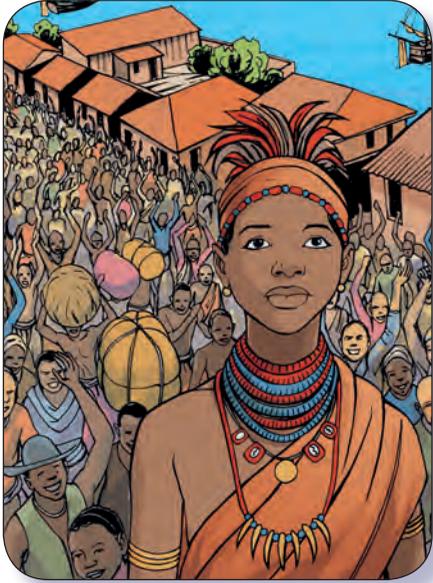
For several decades, Nzinga forged many strategic alliances with the neighbouring kingdoms (Kongo, Kassanje and Kissama), negotiated with the Portuguese and the Dutch, and protected people who had taken refuge in her kingdom. She asserted her authority over entire peoples in some instances. She emerged gradually as a powerful political figure in the region and a force to be reckoned with, often feared and never subdued.

Nzinga therefore never accepted the loss of Ndongo. Even after fleeing to Matamba, which she had seized, she signed her correspondence with the title Nzinga Mbandi Ngola, in other words, Queen of Ndongo and Matamba. As she considered herself to be queen of both kingdoms, she was also known as the “double Queen”.

By authorizing the slave trade between the Kingdom of Matamba and Luanda, she allowed a variety of commercial goods to flow between the two regions (domestic animals, fish, textile fibres, palm oil and palm wine), thus contributing to the formation of kitandas, popular markets of economic and social importance in which women played a key role.



A *Zungueira* (an Angolan hawker), Luanda, Republic of Angola.
Photograph by Jose Manuel Lima da Silva , 2010.



2. Outstanding governance by a woman

Introduction

Nzinga played a decisive role in the history of her country and was the catalyst of a genuinely socio-political and cultural revolution. As such, she has been a source of inspiration for African women for hundreds of years.

She is known throughout Africa for her intelligence, her political and diplomatic wisdom, and her flair as a military tactician – and as an exceptional woman and a key historical figure.

2.1 A cultivated woman of letters

Queen Nzinga was an educated, cultivated woman. She spoke her native language as well as the language of the Portuguese with whom she had to deal. She wrote her own letters to the Portuguese kings João IV and Alfonso VI and to their governors in Luanda.

Her education, intelligence and command of languages were key assets throughout her life, enabling her to adapt to the most complicated political situations and to turn them to her own advantage. Besides knowing the peoples with whom she was obliged to negotiate, she knew the Portuguese's culture and language, owing to contact in her childhood with the first missionaries and merchants to visit Ndongo.



2.2 An outstanding strategist and diplomat

A dexterous diplomat, she negotiated with the Dutch and the Portuguese to preserve her kingdom's territorial integrity.

Demonstrating extraordinary talent as a strategist, she sent spies regularly to Luanda in order to thwart colonial projects. Their particular mission was to wait for reinforcements to arrive from Lisbon and to study the training methods used by the conquistadors. Nzinga thus familiarized her army with Portuguese fighting techniques.

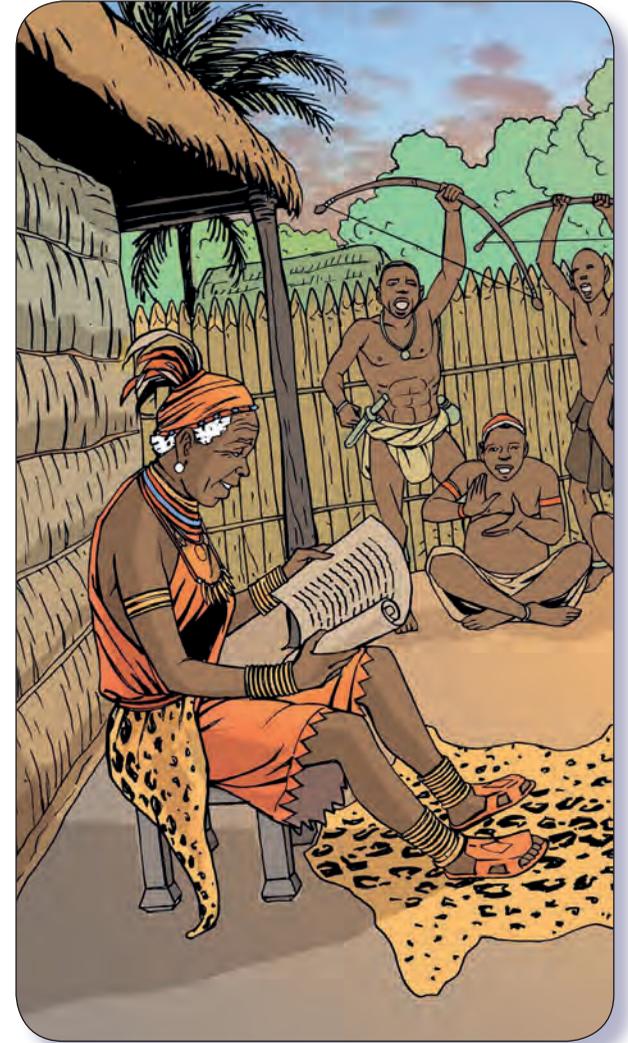
As she preferred guerrilla tactics, her army attacked at night to catch the enemy unaware. In thirty years of warfare, she evaded all traps laid to capture her.

Furthermore, she had a perfect grasp of religious and trade issues. She often used the promise that the Ndongo peoples would convert to Christianity as a bargaining method with the Portuguese. She herself agreed to be christened during a visit to Luanda in 1623.

2.3 A role model for women

Her deeds and strength of character inspired great resistance leaders of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) throughout the struggle for independence, in particular: Deolinda Rodrigues, Irene Engracia, Vastok Inga, Mambo Café, Roth Gil and Rita Tomas.

Nzinga is a leadership role model for all generations of Angolan women. Women in Angola today display remarkable social independence and are found in the country's army, police force, government, and public and private economic sectors.



Nzinga Mbandi – Pedagogical Unit



Illustration of Nzinga Mbandi by the French illustrator Achille Devéria, 1830.



An Angolan teacher, Luanda, Republic of Angola. Photograph by David Blumenkrantz, 2010.

3. Nzinga, an inexhaustible source of inspiration

Introduction

Since her outmanoeuvring of the Governor, João Correia de Sousa, during the 1622 peace-treaty negotiations in Luanda, the “double Queen” has been acknowledged as an enduring source of inspiration.

Her charisma and the complexity of her personality unfailingly fascinated the missionaries with whom she came into contact, but have also fascinated authors in Europe, Africa and Brazil and, more generally, artists in all countries. Moreover, Nzinga has inspired the religious rites of people of African descent throughout the world.

3.1 Plural and symbolic identities

Nzinga’s name is written in a variety of ways, partly on account of orthographic issues arising from the transcription of the Kimbundu language, but also because the Queen herself used different names to sign her letters. Among the following names (a non-exhaustive list), the last were given to her when she converted to Catholicism in Luanda in 1623: Njinga Mbande, Nzinga Mbandi, Jinga, Singa, Zhingá, Ginga, Njingha, Ana Nzinga, Ngola Nzinga, Nzinga of Matamba, Zinga, Zingua, Mbande Ana Nzinga, Ann Nzinga and Dona Ana de Sousa.

In Portuguese, the verb *gingar* denotes a movement of the body. Used figuratively, the verb conveys the idea of flexibility in the face of obstacles, especially during negotiations, in reference to Queen Nzinga.

3.2 Nzinga in the arts in past centuries

In 1687, in a book dedicated to the “double Queen”, the Italian priest Cavazzi described the famous 1622 meeting in Luanda between Nzinga and Correia de Sousa, the Portuguese Governor, at which a peace treaty was negotiated. When the Queen arrived in the reception room, the governor did not offer her a chair on which to sit. Stung by this action, she ordered one of her servants to crouch on all fours to make a seat for her, thus subtly suggesting that she had come to negotiate on an equal footing. This act inspired the priest Cavazzi to capture the scene in a now famous painting.

In 1769, the French author Jean-Louis Castillon published *Zingha, Reine d'Angola* [Nzinga, Queen of Angola], the first historical novel to be written on Africa from an anti-colonialist standpoint. The novel, depicting the queen as a rich, paradoxical and complex character, caused quite a stir.

In 1830, Achille Devéria, the French illustrator, fired by enthusiasm after reading portrayals of the Queen of Ndongo and Matamba, decided to draw her portrait. His imaginary depiction of Nzinga was widely accepted in Europe as the official portrait of Queen Nzinga.



Illustration extracted from the book *Njinga, Reine d'Angola. La Relation d'Antonio Cavazzi de Montecuccolo* presenting the negotiation between Nzinga Mbandi and the vice-King of Portugal in Luanda, in 1622.

3.3 Nzinga in the arts today

Nzinga has inspired many authors and artists in recent times. The following are but a few examples:

In 1960, Agostinho Neto wrote the poem *O Içar da Bandeira* [Raising the Banner] in tribute to the Angolan people's heroes, with reference to Nzinga.

In 1975, Manuel Pedro Pacavira published the novel *Nzinga Mbandi*.





Poster of the film *Nzinga* directed by the Brazilian director Octavio Bezerra, 2007.

Nzinga also inspired the eponymous film made in 2007 by Octávio Bezerra, the Brazilian film director.

In Brazil, a tribute was paid to the Queen at the 2010 Carnival in Rio de Janeiro, based on Alberto Mussa's novel *O Trono da Rainha Ginga* [Queen Ginga's Throne].

3.4 Religious portrayals in communities of people of African descent

Nzinga has inspired many religions of African origin. In Haiti, in a variant of voodoo, Nzinga is symbolized as a Bantu-Ewe-Fon character.

In Brazil, she is portrayed in *Candomblé* (an Afro-Brazilian religion) as the character 'Matamba' – the Lady of Thunder, a warrior chieftain and a friend of the heroes. Women seeking the strength to solve their problems ritually invoke her.

Nzinga also features in the Brazilian tradition of Congada, a religious rite that blends African traditions and European culture, performed in homage to black saints. In this rite, the coronation of the King of Kongo and Queen Nzinga symbolize the advent of Christianity in Angola and Brazil.

4 Nzinga Mbandi beyond national borders

Introduction

In 2013, at the request of the Republic of Angola, UNESCO marks the 350th anniversary of the death of Nzinga, a key figure in African history. The celebrations highlight the importance of her influence in Angola, Africa and Europe, and in many societies where there are people of African descent.

4.1 A figure closely linked to Angolan identity

Through her travels in the region, her ability to create alliances, and her unification of peoples, Nzinga helped to forge the Angolan identity. Today, she is a cultural icon for various groups in present-day Angola. Ambassador, negotiator, strategist and compatriot, Nzinga is a key historical figure essential to understanding the construction of Angolan identity.

During the Angolan war of liberation (1961–1974), nationalist leaders revived the memory of Nzinga and made her an icon of independence. In 1975, when the country's independence was proclaimed, her statue was erected in Luanda as a symbol of resistance and freedom. Today, Nzinga features prominently in the popular imagination of Angola as a symbol of identity, resistance and social cohesion.



Statue of Nzinga Mbandi, Luanda, Republic of Angola. Photograph by Erik Cleves Kristensen, 2006.



The figure of Matamba in *Candomblé*. Photograph by Anna Alves, 2012.



The figure of Nzinga Mbandi in the *Congada* procession, Brazil.

Photograph by Luciano Osorio, 2011.

4.2 A Pan-African symbol

The spirit of resistance and freedom symbolized by Queen Nzinga has spread well beyond the borders of Angola. Today, this queen is the embodiment of a central image in African history, that of resistance to Europe's colonialist goals.

After Nzinga's death, many African countries resisted and fought for centuries for independence, which they obtained at last in the twentieth century. In Africa, Nzinga's memory has been an inspiration in the struggle for independence.

4.3 A reference in societies where there are people of African descent

Nzinga's influence has spread as far as the Americas, where people of African descent know of her from stories, legends and the spirit of resistance that crossed the Atlantic in the slave ships. Queen Nzinga is part of the collective memory of the Afro-Atlantic world.

Accordingly, many *capoeira* groups¹ have been named after her in Brazil. Rosângela Costa Araújo, also known as *Mestre Janja*, drew inspiration from the "double Queen" in establishing the Nzinga Capoeira Angola Group Institute, a centre for education and social integration through *capoeira*. Its main goal is to promote gender equality within this traditionally male-dominated discipline.



The *Congada* procession in Brazil.

Photograph by Luciano Osorio, 2011.

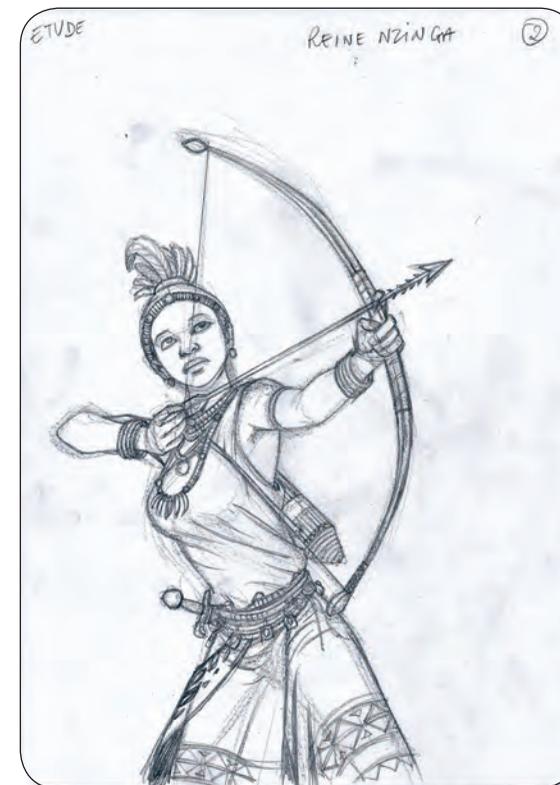
1 Capoeira is an expression of Afro-Brazilian culture, a symbol of resistance that combines martial art, popular culture and music.



Mestre Janja in her Capoeira school in Brazil.
Photograph by Ernesto Vara, 2011.



Children of the Capoeira school 'Nzinga' in Brazil.
Photograph by Rita Barreto, 2013.



Nzinga Mbandi – Pedagogical Unit

5 Bibliography

The “double Queen”'s feats are recorded in a host of documents, such as Portuguese military accounts, governors’ archives, Nzinga’s letters to the Portuguese kings João IV and Alfonso VI, and the accounts of two Italian missionaries who successively resided at her court (Antonio de Gaete and Antonio Cavazzi da Montecucolo).

Furthermore, there is now a substantial body of Angolan, Portuguese and Brazilian scholarly literature on the Queen. Oral tradition, too, has done much to keep the memory of Queen Nzinga’s story alive.

*

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Nzinga Mbandi, Queen of Ndongo and Matamba

Nzinga Mbandi (1581–1663), Queen of Ndongo and Matamba, defined much of the history of seventeenth-century Angola. A deft diplomat, skilful negotiator and formidable tactician, Nzinga resisted Portugal's colonial designs tenaciously until her death in 1663.

Women in African History

Through various pedagogical resources and the use of Information and Communication technologies (ICTs), UNESCO seeks to highlight the legacy of a selection of key women figures of African history and its diaspora. This project demonstrates that African women have always distinguished themselves in the history of their continent in areas as diverse as politics (Gisèle Rabesahala), diplomacy and resistance against colonization (Nzinga Mbandi), the defense of women's rights (Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti), and environmental protection (Wangari Maathai).

This list of 20 women represents only a small part of the contribution of African women, known and unknown, to the history of their countries, Africa and all mankind.

For additional resources, please visit the website www.unesco.org/womeninfrica

The UNESCO project *Women in African History* was realized with the financial contribution of the Republic of Bulgaria.



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