

damage. Pray Our Lord in His mercy to have Your Highness under His guard and let you do for ever the things of His service. \* \* \*

#### AFONSO I: AN AFRICAN RESPONSE TO CHRISTIANITY

Now we wish to tell your Highness about a certain Rui do Rego whom your Highness sent here to teach us and set an example for us, but as soon as he arrived here he wished to be treated like a nobleman and never wanted to teach a single boy. During the Lenten season [when Catholics are prohibited from eating meat] he came to us and asked for an ox, and we ordered one to be given to him. Then he said he was dying of hunger, and we ordered two sheep to be given to him, but that he was to eat them secretly, so that our people would not see him. Yet he, disregarding this, went and killed the ox in the middle of Lent, in front of all our nobles, and even tempted us with the meat; so that when our people saw it, those who were young and had only been Christians a short time all fled to their lands, and the older ones who remained with us said things that are not to be repeated, stating that we had forbidden them to eat meat, while the white men had plenty of meat, and that we had deceived them and they wanted to kill us. Then we, with much patience and many gifts, were able to pacify them, telling them that they should save their souls and not look at what that man was doing, and that if he wished to go to Hell then they should let him go.

We were so disgusted with all this that we could not see Rui do Rego again and ordered him to go to Chela, so that he could board the first ship that arrived—for he had not taught as your Highness had ordered him to, but had caused to return to idols those whom we, with much fatigue, had converted. \* \* \*

#### Questions

1. In the first letter, what does Nzinga Mbemba identify as the biggest problem with Portuguese trade? Why is it difficult for him to control what he sees as excesses?
2. Nzinga Mbemba explicitly requested priests and teachers, but individuals like Rui do Rego also posed problems. Describe the religious

and political challenges that do Rego's behavior created for Nzinga Mbemba. What considerations might have constrained Nzinga Mbemba from imposing a harsher punishment?

3. In both letters, the Kongolese seem to be undone by their own hospitality, providing more consideration to foreigners than they received in return. Why might the Kongolese have found it difficult to impose greater control in their own territories?

#### Anonymous Journal of Vasco da Gama's Voyage around Africa to India (1499)

In 1497–1498 Vasco da Gama (c. 1460–1524) became the first European to find an all-water route to India. Following the path of another Portuguese sailor, Bartolomeo Diaz, who had become the first European to round the Cape of Good Hope from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean in 1487, da Gama started up the East African coast, raiding Arab merchant ships along the way. But at Malindi, in present-day Kenya, da Gama was able to hire a navigator (according to some stories, a Muslim) who knew the monsoon winds and got him across the Indian Ocean to Calicut in twenty-three days. On the return trip, da Gama ignored what he had been told about the monsoon winds; that crossing took 132 days, and many sailors died.

As the document below shows, da Gama's time in Calicut was complicated by political and religious rivalries, by misunderstandings, and by what people in Calicut considered the inadequate gifts he had brought. But when two of his three ships made it back to Lisbon, the king was sufficiently encouraged to send other, much larger, missions, including two more led by da Gama. The result was the founding of several Portuguese colonies in Asia, important changes in the spice trade, and new patterns of rivalry and warfare in many parts of the world bordering the Indian Ocean. The author of this journal is unknown, and it has sometimes been mistakenly attributed to da Gama himself. It was probably written by a clerk or officer on the ship, but we cannot be sure. It is fairly certain, however, that it is a contemporaneous account. Spelling has been updated in the following excerpt to reflect modern orthography.

[Arrival.] That night (May 20, [1498]) we anchored two leagues from the city of Calicut, and we did so because our pilot mistook *Capna*, a town at that place, for Calicut. Still further there is another town called *Pandarani*. We anchored about a league and a half from the shore. After we were at anchor, four boats (*almadias*) approached us from the land, who asked of what nation we were. We told them, and they then pointed out Calicut to us.

On the following day (May 21) these same boats came again alongside, when the captain-major [da Gama] sent one of the convicts to Calicut, and those with whom he went took him to two Moors from Tunis, who could speak Castilian and Genoese. The first greeting that he received was in these words: "May the Devil take thee! What brought you hither?" They asked what he sought so far away from home, and he told them that we came in search of Christians and of spices. \* \* \* After this conversation they took him to their lodgings and gave him wheaten bread and honey. When he had eaten he returned to the ships, accompanied by one of the Moors, who was no sooner on board, than he said these words: "A lucky venture, a lucky venture! Plenty of rubies, plenty of emeralds! You owe great thanks to God, for having brought you to a country holding such riches!" We were greatly astonished to hear his talk, for we never expected to hear our language spoken so far away from Portugal.

The city of Calicut is inhabited by Christians. [The first voyagers to India mistook the Hindus for Christians.] They are of tawny complexion. Some of them have big beards and long hair, whilst others clip their hair short or shave the head, merely allowing a tuft to remain on the crown as a sign that they are Christians. They also wear moustaches. They pierce the ears and wear much gold in them. They go naked down to the waist, covering their lower extremities with very fine cotton stuffs. But it is only the most respectable who do this, for the others manage as best they are able.

The women of this country, as a rule, are ugly and of small stature. They wear many jewels of gold round the neck, numerous bracelets on their arms, and rings set with precious stones on their

SOURCE: *The Library of Original Sources*, edited by Oliver J. Thatcher (Milwaukee: University Research Extension Co., 1901), vol. 5, pp. 29-37.

toes. All these people are well-disposed and apparently of mild temper. At first sight they seem covetous and ignorant.

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When we were at anchor, a message arrived <sup>Portuguese</sup> informing the captain-major that the king was already in the city. At the same time the king sent a *bale*, with other men of distinction, to *Pandarani*, to conduct the captain-major to where the king awaited him. This *bale* is like an *alcaide*, and is always attended by two hundred men armed with swords and bucklers. \* \* \*

On the following morning, which was Monday, May 28th, the captain-major set out to speak to the king, and took with him thirteen men, of whom I was one. We put on our best attire, placed bombards in our boats, and took with us trumpets and many flags. On landing, the captain-major was received by the *alcaide*, with whom were many men, armed and unarmed. The reception was friendly, as if the people were pleased to see us, though at first appearances looked threatening, for they carried naked swords in their hands. A <sup>palanquin</sup> *palanquin* was provided for the captain-major, such as is used by men of distinction in that country, as also by some of the merchants, who pay something to the king for this privilege. \* \* \*

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After we had left that place, and had arrived at the entrance to the city (of Calicut) we were shown another church, where we saw things like those described above. Here the crowd grew so dense that progress along the street became next to impossible, and for this reason they put the captain into a house, and us with him.

The king sent a brother of the *bale*, who was a lord of this country, to accompany the captain, and he was attended by men beating drums, blowing *anafils* and bagpipes, and firing off <sup>snuff</sup> matchlocks. In conducting the captain they showed us much respect, more than is shown in Spain to a king. The number of people was countless, for in addition to those who surrounded us, and among whom there were two thousand armed men, they crowded the roofs and houses.

The further we advanced in the direction of the king's palace, the more did they increase in number. \* \* \* When we reached the

palace we passed through a gate into a courtyard of great size, and before we arrived at where the king was, we passed four doors, through which we had to force our way, giving many blows to the people. \* \* \* Several men were wounded at this [final] door, and we only got in by the use of much force.

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[In a private audience, the king asks da Gama what he wants.] And the captain told him he was the ambassador of a King of Portugal, who was Lord of many countries and the possessor of great wealth of every description, exceeding that of any king of these parts; that for a period of sixty years his ancestors had annually sent out vessels to make discoveries in the direction of India, as they knew that there were Christian kings there like themselves. This, he said, was the reason which induced them to order this country to be discovered, not because they sought for gold or silver, for of this they had such abundance that they needed not what was to be found in this country. He further stated that the captains sent out travelled for a year or two, until their provisions were exhausted, and then returned to Portugal, without having succeeded in making the desired discovery. There reigned a king now whose name was Dom Manuel, who had ordered him to build three vessels, of which he had been appointed captain-major, and who had ordered him not to return to Portugal until he should have discovered this King of the Christians, on pain of having his head cut off. That two letters had been intrusted to him to be presented in case he succeeded in discovering him, and that he would do so on the ensuing day; and, finally, he had been instructed to say by word of mouth that he [the King of Portugal] desired to be his friend and brother.

In reply to this the king said that he was welcome; that, on his part, he held him as a friend and brother, and would send ambassadors with him to Portugal. This latter had been asked as a favour, the captain pretending that he would not dare to present himself before his king and master unless he was able to present at the same time, some men of this country.

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On Tuesday [May 29] the captain got ready the following things to be sent to the king, viz., twelve pieces of *lambel*, four scarlet hoods, six hats, four strings of coral, a case containing six wash-hand basins, a case of sugar, two casks of oil, and two of honey. And as it is the custom not to send anything to the king without the knowledge of the Moor, his factor, and of the *bale*, the captain informed them of his intention. They came, and when they saw the present they laughed at it, saying that it was not a thing to offer to a king, that the poorest merchant from Mecca, or any other part of India, gave more, and that if he wanted to make a present it should be in gold, as the king would not accept such things. When the captain heard this he grew sad, and said that he had brought no gold, that, moreover, he was no merchant, but an ambassador; that he gave of that which he had, which was his own [private gift] and not the king's; that if the King of Portugal ordered him to return he would intrust him with far richer presents; and that if King Camolim would not accept these things he would send them back to the ships. Upon this they declared that they would not forward his presents, nor consent to his forwarding them himself. When they had gone there came certain Moorish merchants, and they all depreciated the present which the captain desired to be sent to the king.

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[Da Gama receives a second audience on May 30. He brings no presents, but promises that future ships will bring them.] The king then asked what it was he had come to discover: stones or men? If he came to discover men, as he said, why had he brought nothing? Moreover, he had been told that he carried with him the golden image of a Santa Maria. The captain said that the Santa Maria was not of gold, and that even if she were he would not part with her, as she had guided him across the ocean, and would guide him back to his own country. The king then asked for the letter. The captain said that he begged as a favour; that as the Moors wished him ill and might misinterpret him, a Christian able to speak Arabic should be sent for. The king said this was well, and at once sent for a young man, of small stature, whose name was Quaram. The captain then said that he had two letters, one written in his own language and

the other in that of the Moors; that he was able to read the former, and knew that it contained nothing but what would prove acceptable; but that as to the other he was unable to read it, and it might be good, or contain something that was erroneous. As the Christian was unable to read Moorish, four Moors took the letter and read it between them, after which they translated it to the king, who was well satisfied with its contents.

The king then asked what kind of merchandise was to be found in his country. The captain said there was much corn, cloth, iron, bronze, and many other things. The king asked whether he had any merchandise with him. The captain replied that he had a little of each sort, as samples, and that if permitted to return to the ships he would order it to be landed, and that meantime four or five men would remain at the lodgings assigned them. The king said no! He might take all his people with him, securely moor his ships, land his merchandise, and sell it to the best advantage. Having taken leave of the king the captain returned to his lodgings, and we with him.

## Questions

1. What examples of inter-religious hostility do you see here? What examples do you see of cooperation across religious lines?
2. What does da Gama say about who he is and what he wants out of his voyage? What do the people he encounters in Calicut seem to want from him?
3. How are the Portuguese received by the different groups they encounter in Calicut? What misunderstandings can you detect on either side of this encounter?