

Nzinga, Queen of Ndongo-Matamba

One of history's most celebrated African queens is Ana de Sousa Nzinga Mbande of the Mbundu people. The Mbundu people inhabited the Kingdom of Ndongo in present day Angola.

Nzinga is remembered for her military skill and genius that she employed to fight the Portuguese, as well as her devotion to keeping Ndongo independent. Living a long, influential life of negotiations and war, she is remembered fondly by the Angolan people.

Queen Nzinga was born in the first half of the 1580s. Her father was Mbande a Ngola, the king of Ndongo. Her mother was Kengela ka Nkombe. Kengela gave birth to four children for Mbande a Ngola. A son named Mbande and three girls, Nzinga, Kambu, and Funji.

Nzinga's father died in 1617 by the Lucala River where he was ambushed and killed. Nzinga's older brother took the throne, becoming Ngola Mbande. He killed many people to ensure his power, including Nzinga's son.

Later, in 1617, the Portuguese forced Ngola Mbande to flee his court. Then in 1621 Nzinga went on her brother's behalf to negotiate a peace treaty with the Portuguese in Luanda. When Nzinga entered the negotiations room, only one chair was prepared, and that chair belonged to the governor. Refusing to sit on a rug like an inferior during negotiations, a servant got down on their hands and knees and served as her chair.

The Portuguese agreed to allow Ngola Mbande to return to retake his throne, and they also agreed to limit their slave raiding activities. Nzinga was then baptized Dona Ana de Sousa. The governor of Luanda, João Correia de Sousa, served as her godfather. Likewise, her host, Ana da Silva, served as her godmother.

The Portuguese began breaking parts of the treaty several years later, Ngola Mbande either committed suicide or Nzinga murdered him. After Ngola Mbande died Nzinga became Ngola.

In 1625 Nzinga married Kasa, ruler of an Imbangala band, a group of cannibalistic warriors that were greatly feared. The Imbangala would come into many of her political plans throughout her life.

After this Nzinga focused on rebuilding her people. However, she found herself competing for control with the Portuguese governor, João Correia de Sousa. De Sousa started reopening slave markets under Portuguese watch, which was something Nzinga wanted to do herself. De Sousa also ordered Nzinga to return all slaves and *kimbares* who had ran away from the Portuguese to seek asylum with Nzinga. *Kimbares* are Mbundu warriors that worked for the Portuguese. The governor also forced Mbundu leaders, called *sobas*, to become vassals of the Portuguese king and promise to pay tribute. This angered Nzinga because *sobas* were supposed to pay tribute to her. De Sousa also began pressuring Nzinga to accept vassalage under the Portuguese.

Nzinga refused to meet his demands, and the Portuguese realized her threat to their power in Angola. To solve their problem, the Portuguese chose a man named Hari a Kiluanje to hold the throne instead.

Fernao de Sousa called an army together to go to war with Nzinga. The troops left Luanda in February, 1626. The Portuguese based themselves at a place called Pungo Ndongo, a place that gave them access to Kindonga Islands, where Nzinga and her troops were located.

The fighting began, with the Portuguese sailing to the islands while being fired upon by Nzinga's troops. Most of Nzinga's soldiers were in trenches, so while the Portuguese emerged victorious, causing Nzinga to flee, many Portuguese died trying to capture each individual trench on the islands.

Hari a Kiluanje died in the same year. His half brother, Ngola Hari, replaced him, even though he was Nzinga's little sister Funji's slave.

Nzinga tried to regain power in Ndongo, but was forced to run again in 1629. While she escaped, the Portuguese captured her two sisters. Kambu and Funji were marched to Luanda to be held as prisoners.

Nzinga's husband Kasa abandoned her, and Nzinga sent a message to Imbangala Kasanje asking for refuge. Imbangala Kasanje agreed to give her asylum as long as she married him and abandoned her bell, or *lunga*, a symbol of her military status. She agreed.

Nzinga became an Imbangala, undergoing many of their murderous rituals. This was important as she combined Mbundu and Imangala rituals, forcing her many followers to undergo these rituals before joining her. She had many followers, and her adeptness at influencing people through their beliefs caused her to become even more influential in African politics.

She harassed the Portuguese, and the slave markets closed, drastically influencing merchants in Luanda's success. In 1632-1633, the new governor of Luanda, Manuel Pereira Coutinho, decided to release Kambu, but that did not calm Nzinga. From 1631 to 1635 Nzinga conquered the neighboring kingdom, Matamba.

By the time the Dutch armada arrived to conquer Luanda in 1641 Nzinga was the most powerful ruler of her region Africa. When the Dutch captured Luanda she decided to make an alliance with them. The Dutch agreed, and the alliance would last for seven years. In March 1646 the Portuguese attacked her *kilombo* in Dembos. Nzinga fled, and Kambu was recaptured. Letters also fell into Portuguese hands. These letters said that Funji, who was in Luanda, had been spying on the Portuguese.

In 1647, Nzinga was told that Funji was drowned for being a spy, but Kambu was still alive and captive. At this time Nzinga had also had a written alliance with the Dutch created, both of them intent on defeating the Portuguese. The Portuguese attacked on October 25. Nzinga's army combined with the Dutch's beat the Portuguese. However, they could not take the important Portuguese fort of Massangano, and the Dutch returned to Luanda.

In August 1648 the Portuguese sailed into Luanda. The Dutch surrendered before Nzinga could arrive, and a betrayed Nzinga retreated to Matamba.

After Nzinga returned to Matamba she focused on making it a commercial power. In 1665, she decided to end her thirty-year war with the Portuguese. Nzinga negotiated a peace treaty in which she returned to the Catholic Church, the children of Matamba were allowed to be

baptized, Nzinga vowed to obey King Joao IV, the lands of Kituxela were given to Nzinga, and her sister was returned to her.

In 1657 Nzinga and Kambu, although elderly, both married in the Church. The effects were immediate. In March of the same year the capital of Matamba, called Santa Maria de Matamba, held 2,506 baptized, with many studying the catechism.

In December of 1663 she died, her last words being requests for her priest's and other official's prayers.

Not all of Nzinga's influence was while she was alive. It is true that she changed life in her kingdoms of Ndongo-Matamba. Many people viewed her as a goddess, one who would always protect them. They flocked to her, many joining her *kilombo*. They Portuguese learned to fear her as she gained the public's support. Her attacks at times influenced the slave trade, as her army blocked main routes, keeping slaves from reaching Luanda to be sold to Brazil. This action caused alarm in Luanda as profits dropped.

Across the ocean in Brazil, Nzinga was a legend. Her stories were spread through the Mbundu slaves sold there. Afro-Brazilians viewed her as a sign of independence. In Africa, the Portuguese had conquered Angola after her death. They did everything in their power to suppress stories about her, but when the Angolans rebelled in the Angolan National Revolution, Nzinga became a prominent figure. Her guerilla attacks inspired the different groups fighting for freedom, and after they won independence oral stories about Nzinga began to be told, and the government largely promoted her.

While Europeans tried to make her as a savage, evil person, the Africans painted a different picture. Instead of a murderous women she is known a respected and well loved queen, a symbol of independence.

Nzinga lived to her eighties, and from the time she was chosen to be a diplomat to the time of her death she was always working. She used her intellect to achieve in a world of men, with the Portuguese always trying to stop her. While the western world has heard little about her, she is, nevertheless, a legend that tells of independence and freedom in many places. She is now known as the "Mother of the Nation" in Angola.

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