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Notes and Documents

The African Experience of the “20. and Odd Negroes” Arriving in Virginia in 1619

John Thornton

ENGEL Sluiter's recent note on the origins of the Africans brought to Virginia in 1619 to work as laborers in the emerging English colony serves as an opportunity to explore the background of the best known of the “founders” of African America.¹ Thanks to documentary records uncovered by Sluiter, we now know that the “20. and odd Negroes” that arrived at Point Comfort in August had been taken on the high seas from the *São João Bautista*. This ship was a Portuguese slaver captained by Manuel Mendes da Cunha bound from Luanda, Angola, to Vera Cruz carrying slaves in conformity with an *asiento*, a contract to deliver slaves to Spanish colonies. Sluiter thus establishes that they were not seasoned slaves of many origins brought from the Caribbean, as was previously accepted by most historians, but probably a much more ethnically coherent group just recently enslaved in Africa.² The information on the time and place of their enslavement in Africa allows us to present them in their own historic context and not simply that of their owners-to-be.

Knowing that these Africans came from Luanda, the recently established capital of the Portuguese colony of Angola, allows us to estimate their ethnic background and the likely conditions of their enslavement. In those days the colony of Angola was a sliver of land extending inland from Luanda and along the Kwanza River until its confluence with the Lukala River and not the larger country of the late twentieth century. Some of the cargo of the *São João Bautista* and the twenty-odd negroes may have been enslaved in the Kingdom of Kongo, the Portuguese colony's northern neighbor, or by its eastern neighbors. Portugal had been exporting slaves from Kongo sources since the early sixteenth century, primarily through the port of Mpinda on the Zaire River. When the colony of Angola was founded, many traders

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¹ They were not the first, for the presence of some 32 Afro-Virginians was already noted 5 months earlier in a census; William Thorndale, “The Virginia Census of 1619,” *Magazine of Virginia Genealogy*, 33 (1995), 155–70.

² Sluiter, “New Light on the ‘20. and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia, August 1619,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., 54 (1997), 396–98. I have changed the ship's and its captain's names to reflect Portuguese orthography rather than the Spanish of the documents.

shifted their export operations southward, and, by the end of the century, Luanda-based merchants had developed a series of trading networks east across Kongo to the Maleba Pool area.³ At the time, King Álvaro III of Kongo was involved in a complex dispute with his uncles, and, although this seems to have entailed little bloodshed, it had generated one major war against the duke of Nsundi sometime between 1616 and 1619 as well, perhaps, as some judicial enslavement.⁴ Alternatively, the Africans may have come from beyond Kongo's eastern or northern frontier and been enslaved under circumstances that are beyond the reach of our documentation. It is quite possible, then, that among the slaves who boarded the *São João Bautista* in 1619 there were those who spoke the Kikongo language and were enslaved in Kongo's province of Nsundi or the land lying just beyond Kongo's eastern frontier.

It is also possible that some of those who left Luanda in 1619 were captured or otherwise enslaved in the lands south of the Portuguese colony, across the Kwanza River. Since the late sixteenth century the Portuguese had been buying slaves there who probably spoke the Kimbundu and Umbundu languages and transporting them to Luanda for shipment abroad. Wars, especially those of a marauding group of mercenary soldiers known as Imbangala, had disrupted the region greatly. In 1618, the Imbangala had just left the region, and the area was so devastated that it is unlikely that any more captives could have come from those districts, at least for a time.

The most important military and enslavement operations in Angola, however, were the large and complex military campaigns waged in 1618–1620 under Portuguese leadership against the Kingdom of Ndongo, during which thousands of its Kimbundu-speaking subjects were captured and deported.⁵ Given the significance and size of this war, most if not all of the slaves of the *São João Bautista* were very likely captured in these engagements. The

³ A good survey of these routes and the merchants involved in the late 16th century can be found in Arquivo Nacional de Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, Inquisição de Lisboa, 1597/1877, "Visita a Angola," esp. fols. 23–23v, 28v, 54v–55v, 64–64v, 82–83, 102v–103v. These were traders denounced to the Inquisition, mostly for being secret Jews. For a fuller treatment of the Portugal-Kongo connection in this period see John Thornton, "Angola," in *O Império Africano*, vol. 9 of Joel Serrão and A. H. de Oliveira Marques, gen. eds., *Nova História da Expansão Portuguesa* (Lisbon, 1992–); on the life of these merchants see José da Silva Horta, "Africanos e Portugueses na Documentação Inquisitorial, de Luanda a Mbanza Kongo" (1596–1598), and Rosa Cruz e Silva, "As Feiras do Ndongo: A Outra Vertente do Comércio no Século XVII," in Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, *Actas do Seminário: Encontro de Povos e Culturas em Angola (Luanda, April 3–6, 1995)* (Lisbon, 1997), 301–22, 405–22.

⁴ Manuel Bautista Soares, "Relação," in António Brásio, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, 1st Ser., 15 vols. (Lisbon, 1952–1988), 6:375.

⁵ For a general English-language overview of Angolan history see David Birmingham, *Trade and Conflict in Angola: The Mbundu and Their Neighbours under the Influence of the Portuguese, 1483–1790* (Oxford, 1966); for detailed chronology of this period the best work is Beatrix Heintze, "Das Ende des Unabhängigen Staats Ndongo (Angola): Neue Chronologie und Reinterpretation (1617–1630)," *Paideuma*, 27 (1981), 197–273; a revised version without full annotation is found in Heintze, *Studien zur Geschichte Angolas im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Ein Lesebuch* (Cologne, 1996), 111–68.

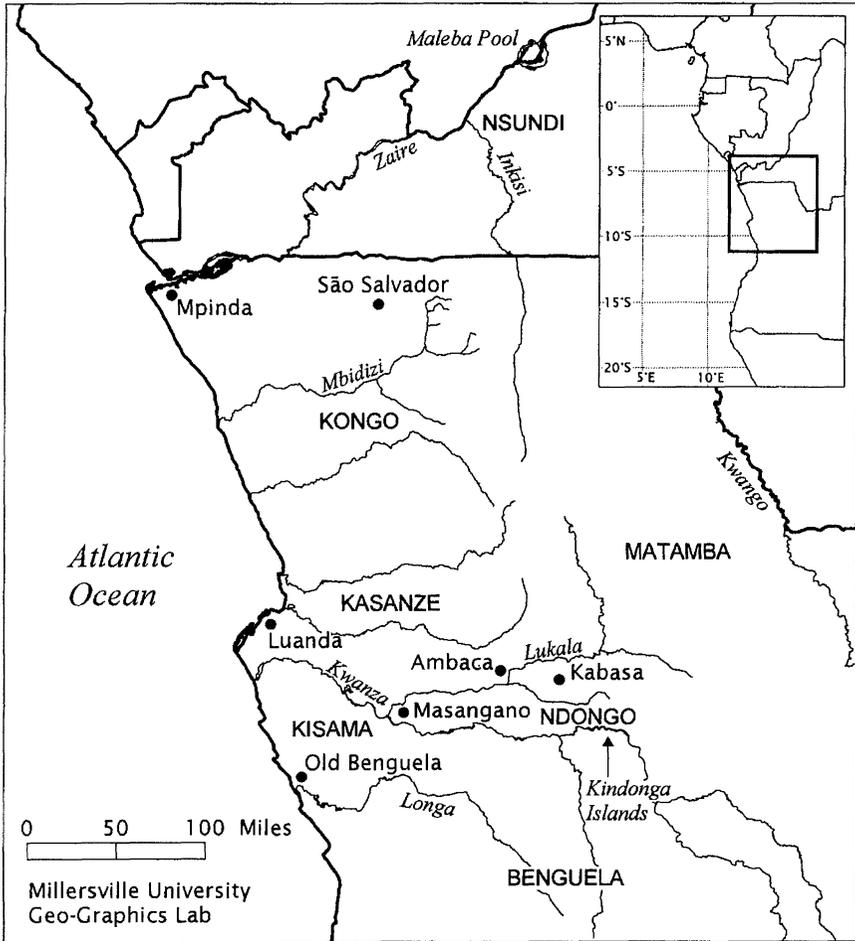


FIGURE I

Angola in West Africa in the period of Portuguese conquest, circa 1620.

Portuguese governor Luis Mendes de Vasconcelos, who arrived in the colony of Angola in 1617 and served as governor until 1621, led the campaigns. In the three years of his tenure, Angola exported about 50,000 slaves, far more than were exported before or would be again for some decades.⁶

A self-confident man, Mendes de Vasconcelos had served in Flanders as a soldier and had even written a treatise on the art of war.⁷ He was sure that he could break through the military and diplomatic stalemate that had halted Portuguese advance in Angola since their decisive defeat at the Battle of Lukala on December 29, 1589, by a coalition of the Kingdoms of Matamba and Ndongo.⁸ Indeed, he was so confident that, on receiving nomination as governor, he submitted a memorandum to the king announcing his intention to conquer the lands from one coast to the other and to join Angola with the equally new and uncertain Portuguese colony in what became Mozambique, thus opening a new route to India. In exchange, he proposed that he receive a variety of privileges and honors, including the title "Viceroy of Ethiopia" for his efforts.⁹

Mendes de Vasconcelos suggested that he would achieve these goals by his own skill as a soldier (and some 1,000 additional infantry and 200 cavalry he thought the crown should give him from Portugal). Instead, he arrived with very few reinforcements and immediately became aware of the generally unfavorable military situation. Since the beginning of the "conquest" of Angola, the Portuguese had relied on an assortment of military assets: soldiers from metropolitan Portugal, a few more from the island colony of São Tomé in the Gulf of Guinea, and personal slaves of those people armed for war. But they mainly depended on the supply of soldiers provided by African rulers (*sobas*) who submitted to Portuguese authority. *Sobas* were petty local nobles whose domains usually covered a few villages and who raised taxes and soldiers from among their subjects. Larger kingdoms such as Ndongo comprised dozens of these local vassals, who accepted the overlordship of larger powers while maintaining control in their local areas. The soldiers provided by the *sobas*, known as the "black army" or *guerra preta*, composed most of the troops in all Portuguese military efforts.¹⁰

Nevertheless, *guerra preta* had proven unreliable, for the *sobas* were playing a diplomatic game in which they balanced submission between one or

⁶ On this interpretation see Heintze, "Ende des Unabhängigen Staats Ndongo" (*Paideuma* version, 206–09; *Studien zur Geschichte Angolas* version, 115, 119–20).

⁷ António de Oliveira de Cadornega, *História geral das guerras angolanas (1680–81)* (1940–1942), ed. José Matias Delgado and Manuel Alves da Cunha, 3 vols. (Lisbon, 1972), 1:83. These notes were collected from recollections of contemporaries by the soldier-chronicler who arrived in Angola in 1639 and wrote his chronicle in 1680–1681. Although based on original materials, early portions of Cadornega's chronicle are sometimes garbled and contain errors of chronology. The treatise by Mendes de Vasconcelos, no longer extant, is cited in Cadornega.

⁸ The best account of the battle is in Pero Rodrigues, "História da residência dos Padres da Companhia de Jesus em Angola, e cousas tocantes ao reino, e Conquista" (May 1, 1594), in Brásio, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, 4:574–76.

⁹ Mendes des Vasconcelos, "Adbierte de las cosas de que tiene falta el gouierno de Angola" (1616), in Brásio, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, 6:263–70.

¹⁰ On the military situation see Thornton, "The Art of War in Angola, 1575–1680," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30 (1988), 360–78.

another of the greater African powers. They might claim obedience to the Kingdom of Kongo to the north or the Kingdom of Ndongo to the east, or alternatively swear vassalage to Portugal, since 1580 under the rule of the king of Spain. Slight changes in the military balance might bring disastrous results, so when the Portuguese lost at the Lukala, there were massive defections of the *sobas*.¹¹ Likewise, *sobas* sometimes changed sides without informing the Portuguese, also with catastrophic consequences for Portuguese policy.¹²

Portuguese inability to maintain an effective military force had compelled them to accept a status quo treaty (in 1599) with Ndongo, their principal African rival, after the Battle of Lukala. They had to content themselves with small-scale (and not always successful) raids against weaker polities to the north and south. The slave trade, which was the mainstay of Angola's international commerce, came to rely more on trading in the interior markets for people enslaved in surrounding countries than on direct capture in wars led by Portuguese officers. The Jesuit chronicler Pero Rodrigues wrote in 1594 that the numbers of "slaves taken in war are nothing compared to those bought at feiras [markets], at these feiras the kings and lords and all Ethiopia sell slaves," which were acquired in wars by the kings themselves or from among that portion of their population that was already enslaved.¹³

In the early years of the seventeenth century, help from an unexpected quarter allowed the Portuguese not only to break out of the military standoff but also to acquire thousands of slaves through direct capture. In those years, Portuguese merchants developing contacts south of their original colony, then known as the Kingdom of Benguela, first encountered the Imbangala, who would aid them and change the history of Angola fundamentally for the next half century.

The Imbangala are a mysterious group, and their origins have aroused much debate.¹⁴ Although Portuguese officials of the time routinely called them "Jagas" and linked them vaguely with a group that had invaded the Kingdom of Kongo in the 1570s, modern historians deny that connection and place their immediate origins in the central highlands of Angola in the region containing the modern cities of Huambo and Lubango.¹⁵ They are

¹¹ Rodrigues, "História da residência dos Padres da Companhia de Jesus em Angola," 570-71.

¹² *Ibid.*, 573-74; Baltasar Barreira, letter, May 14, 1586, in Brásio, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, 3:328-30.

¹³ Rodrigues, "História da residência dos Padres da Companhia de Jesus em Angola" 561.

¹⁴ Although I use the word here (and previously) as an ethnonym, since it is so used today, its noun class suggests that it was not originally an ethnonym. Membership in this noun class (Bantu class 7/8, sing. *ki-*, plu. *i-* or *yi-*) is more likely to link it to a trait or characteristic than an ethnonym. Therefore, because in general I pluralize Kimbundu words by adding "s" to the singular and treat ethnyonyms by ignoring class prefixes, I should make this term either "Kimbangalas" (a noun that is not an ethnonym) or "Mbngalas" (an ethnonym without a class marker). However, in my view the term Imbangala, used as an ethnonym, is too well fixed in the lexicon of central Africa to be handled this way, so I have retained what is now traditional usage, treating the word as both singular and plural.

¹⁵ Earlier theories connected all the "Jagas" of 17th-century sources and linked them in turn with movements from the Lunda areas of modern-day Congo-Kinshasa. Joseph C. Miller, "The Imbangala and the Chronology of Early Central African History," *Journal of African History*, 13 (1972), 549-74, separates them from the Jagas who invaded Kongo. Miller initially thought that the Imbangala of Angola might have risen from a folk movement from Lunda, as he argued in *Kings and Kinsmen: Early Mbundu States in Angola* (Oxford, 1976), esp. 128-75.

described for the first time in the historical record by Andrew Battell, a captured English sailor forced to serve the Portuguese. In an account of his sixteen-months' stay with an Imbangala band led by Imbe Kalandula in about 1599 to 1601, Battell does not characterize the Imbangala as an ethnic or folk group (though some of their descendants became one in the late seventeenth century and persist today). Rather, the Imbangala were a company, or several independent companies, of soldiers and raiders who lived entirely by pillage.

The Imbangala seem to have been a quasi-religious cult dedicated to evil in the central African sense of violent greed and selfishness. They allowed no children in their camp, killing all newborn babies by burying them alive, according to Battell, and reinforcing themselves and replacing their casualties by recruiting adolescent boys from among their captives. These boys were made to wear a distinctive collar until they had learned the art of war and had killed someone, when they were admitted to full membership in the group. Imbe Kalandula's band had recruited so many of its people by this method that only the senior officers were said to be members of his original company; the rest had been recruited through capture.¹⁶ Their penchant for cannibalism and human sacrifice was apparently rooted in beliefs about witchcraft. The Imbangala actively assumed the role of witches, whose fundamental characteristic was that they killed and ate their victims.¹⁷ That they were viewed as fighting in the cause of profound evil is revealed by a folk belief recorded a half century later. According to this tale, the protective deities of the Gangela region were so terrified by the Imbangala that they went and hid in the lakes and rivers, only to reemerge when time had caused the Imbangala to soften their ways.¹⁸ The Imbangala eschewed the cult of the protective deities (*kilundas*), who promoted peace and concord, in favor

Thornton, "The Chronology and Causes of the Lunda Expansion to the West c. 1700 to 1852," *Zambia Journal of History*, 1 (1981), 1-5, attacked the folk movement idea in favor of a purely local origin in the central highlands. Miller has subsequently modified his argument, linking it to a movement of titles and ideas from the east (but not necessarily migrations from Lunda) in a local situation of ecological and political crisis; see Miller, "The Paradoxes of Impoverishment in the Atlantic Zone," in Birmingham and Phyllis M. Martin, eds., *History of Central Africa*, 2 vols. (London, 1983), 1:139-43, and seconded by Jan Vansina, "Population Movements and Emergence of New Socio-Political Forms in Africa," *UNESCO General History of Africa*, 8 vols. (Los Angeles, 1981-1993), 5:60-61.

¹⁶ Battell, "The Strange Adventures of Andrew Battel of Leigh in Essex," in Samuel Purchas, *Purchas, His Pilgrimes* (London, 1625), vol. 6; mod. ed. E. G. Ravenstein, *The Strange Adventures of Andrew Battel, of Leigh, in Angola and the Adjoining Regions* (London, 1901; reprinted 1967), 21, 32-33. See also the "quixilla laws" that the founder of the Jagas gave her followers, as reported in the 1660s by Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi da Montecucolo, "Missione Evangelica al regno de Congo," MSS Araldi (ca. 1668), vol. A, bk. 26.

¹⁷ The most systematic later account is that of Cavazzi da Montecucolo, an Italian Capuchin priest who spent more than a dozen years in the region and collected their traditions and observed their life. His original account is found in the "Missione Evangelica al regno de Congo," vol. A, bk. 1, pp. 1-44, much of which found its way into the published edition cited in note 16. For a modern interpretation see Miller, *Kings and Kinsmen*; for linkages with witchcraft and evil see Thornton, "Cannibals and Slave Traders in the Atlantic World," paper presented at the conference "More than Cool Reason: Black Responses to Enslavement, Exile, and Resettlement," Haifa, Israel, Jan. 18-20, 1998.

¹⁸ Cavazzi da Montecucolo, "Missione Evangelica al regno de Congo," vol. A, bk. 1, 97.

of their own ancestors, who were themselves selfish and bloody individuals and kept these characteristics in the Other World when they died.¹⁹

This radical devotion to evil was confirmed by their exploitative economy. Battell noted that "[they] doe reap thier Enemies Corne, and take their Cattell. For they will not sowe, nor plant, nor bring up any Cattell, more then they take by Warres." Their favorite pillage was palm wine taken from cultivated trees. Instead of tapping the trees and drawing small quantities of sap for oil or to ferment for wine, they cut down the whole tree. It gave no yield for ten days, then a small hole was drilled into the heart of the tree, which would yield about two quarts of sap a day for twenty-six days, when it dried up. By this method they destroyed all the palm trees in a region, and when all had been used up they moved on.²⁰

The Portuguese from the colony of Angola took an interest in the Imbangala to their south largely because the marauders were prepared to sell their captives as slaves to Portuguese buyers. In the late 1590s, a group of Portuguese merchants had organized four voyages that included Battell to the area for the express purpose of buying captives for export. These merchants assisted Imbe Kalandula in crossing the River Kuvo to attack the Kingdom of Benguela.²¹

The Imbangala generally made a large encampment in the country they intended to pillage, often arriving near harvest time. They forced the local authorities either to fight them outright or to withdraw into fortified locations, leaving the fields for the Imbangala to harvest. Once their enemies were weakened by fighting or lack of food, they could make a final assault on their lands and capture them. The presence of Portuguese slave buyers, who also provided firearms, made raiding people as profitable or even more profitable as raiding food and livestock had been before. Battell joined the group that entered the Kingdom of Benguela, and after their first successful battles they remained in that region for five months (during which time the Portuguese freighted three voyages with captives). Then, because they "wanted palm trees," they marched five days inland to an unidentifiable place named Kali ka Nsamba, where they remained pillaging for another four months. This band, which valued Battell and his musket, traveled steadily eastward just north of the great highlands for sixteen months, almost as far as the southward bend of the Kwanza River. In general, they took about four to five months to waste completely each country in which they stayed.²² Whether because of the large size of their fighting force (which Battell estimated at 16,000) or the terror they spread through rumors of their ruthless evil and cannibalism, they seemed to have been uniformly successful, overcoming the determined resistance of country after country.

The ruined Kingdom of Benguela was so stripped of people, cattle, and palm trees by the Imbangala whom Battell and his associates assisted that when

¹⁹ Cadornega, *História geral das guerras angolas*, 3:223-35. I have pluralized all Kimbundu nouns according to English usage; the Kimbundu plural of *kilunda* is *ilunda*.

²⁰ Battell, in Ravenstein, ed., *Strange Adventures of Andrew Battell*, 30-31.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 17-21.

²² *Ibid.*, 21-28.

Manuel Cerveira Pereira went to the country in 1617 to become governor of a new Portuguese colony of Benguela, which initially was planned to be built around the abandoned commercial settlement of Benguela, he was unable to find enough people and economic activity to justify his efforts and moved farther south.²³ By the start of the second decade of the seventeenth century, much of the land south of the Kwanza River (more or less the southern border of Portuguese control) had been demolished and destroyed by Imbangala activity. For this reason, few people from this region probably found their way onto the *São João Bautista* in 1619.

Portuguese private merchants, such as those whom Battell was forced to serve about 1598, hoped to continue what for them was a profitable enterprise in the north. At some point they began to introduce Imbangala bands north of the river into lands under Portuguese authority. Royal governors, especially Pereira (1615–1617) and Antonio Gonçalves Pita (1617), made this unofficial practice official. They did so in large measure because governors could benefit more from leading military campaigns that took slaves directly than they could from their salaries, which derived from taxing exports at markets or the coast. The Portuguese crown, however, instructed its governors to promote peaceful trade and frowned on practices such as recruiting Imbangala raiders. Local Portuguese settlers, for their part, commonly preferred the crown's policy of staying clear of wars because they could acquire slaves by trade and conflict disrupted that trade.²⁴

When Mendes de Vasconçelos arrived in Angola, then, despite his desire to conquer straight across Africa to Mozambique, he echoed the crown's concerns (and his own instructions) about the use of Imbangala by renouncing employment of those "who sustain themselves on human flesh and are enemies of all living things and thieves of the lands where they enter." Not only had they destroyed lands, but the government could no longer collect its tribute from the area, and even the markets were in ruins, thanks to Imbangala depredations. His predecessors' employment of them was a mistake, he argued, or even a crime, punishable by death and confiscation.²⁵ When Mendes de Vasconçelos took his first military action in the projected conquest of Ndongo, however, he quickly found he needed the Imbangala as allies.

An attack on Ndongo was inviting because the kingdom was undergoing a domestic political crisis. According to traditions collected about forty years later, the ruler of Ndongo, Mbandi Ngola Kiluanji, allowed the brothers of his wife to commit many crimes that outraged the nobility of the country, who, probably early in 1617, joined together, lured him into an ambush at the lands of a rebel *soba*, Kavulo ka Kabasa, near the Lukala, and overthrew him.²⁶

²³ Pereira, according to Mendes de Vasconçelos to king of Portugal, Aug. 28, 1617, in Brásio, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, 6:284.

²⁴ For an overview and chronology see Heintze, "Ende des Unabhängigen Staats Ndongo," 202–09 (*Paideuma*); 114–20 (*Studien zur Geschichte Angolas*).

²⁵ Mendes de Vasconçelos to king of Portugal, Aug. 28, Sept. 9, 1617, in Brásio, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, 6:283–85, 286.

²⁶ Cavazzi da Montecuccolo, "Missione Evangelica al regno de Congo" (ca. 1665, updated to 1668), vol. A, bk. 2, 11–15; for the interpretation of these highly politicized and manipulated sources see Thornton, "Legitimacy and Political Power: Queen Njinga, 1624–1663," *J. African Hist.*, 32 (1991), 27–40.

Mbandi Ngola Kiluanji's son and successor, Ngola Mbandi, was not yet secure on his throne, and the coalition of *sobas* who had overthrown his father not yet fully loyal when Mendes de Vasconçelos arrived in August 1617. The new governor soon moved the Portuguese *presidio* of Hango eastward along the Lukala River to Ambaca, a point much closer to the court of Ndongo, but the new fort, probably a simple palisade mounting a few pieces of artillery, was soon besieged by the local ruler, Kaita ka Balanga, "a favorite of the King of Angola."²⁷ In this predicament, Mendes found the Imbangala useful allies. Consequently, as Bishop Manuel Bautista Soares of Kongo wrote to Lisbon in 1619, "in place of leaving off with the Jagas, he embraced them, and he has gone to war with them for two years, killing with them and capturing innumerable innocent people, not only against the law of God but also against the expressed regulations of Your Majesty."²⁸

To start his campaign Mendes de Vasconçelos brought three Imbangala bands across the Kwanza to assist him. He had two of them baptized as João Kasanje and João Kasa ka Ngola, although the third, Donga, apparently declined to be baptized.²⁹ Thanks to their assistance, in the campaign season of 1618 Mendes de Vasconçelos was able to defeat completely the forces of the *soba* Kaita ka Balanga and break out of the siege. His opponents were probably already mobilized at the start of the campaign.

Mobilization in Ndongo began, according to late sixteenth-century witnesses, by the sounding of the *ngongo*, a double clapperless bell used for war calls in all the settlements of the area, followed by the cry, in Kimbundu, "*Ita! Ita!*" (War! War!). Old people, some women, and most children were ordered to retire to hills or other inaccessible places until the fighting was over, while the men prepared for battle. Some took up arms, mostly bows and arrows but also crescent-shaped axes and lances; others carried supplies. Some women accompanied the armies to cook for and comfort the soldiers. These militia soldiers were not expected to remain in position beyond the initial shock of battle, which progressed quickly. At some point the soldiers' nerves broke, and they retreated so rapidly that sometimes the front ranks hacked their way through the rearward soldiers who did not flee fast enough.³⁰ Although they might reform later, even within a few days, they left strategic positions undefended, and the remaining civilians who had not taken adequate shelter in hills or forests were vulnerable to enslavement.

²⁷ The *presidio* was moved sometime before 1618, when Baltasar Rebelo de Aragão, one of the original conquerors of Angola, wrote his memoirs (a date established by Brásio as being 25 years after his arrival in 1593); Rebelo de Aragão to king of Portugal [?], 1618, in Brásio, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, 6:334 (date on 343).

²⁸ Soares, "Copia dos excessos que se cometem no governo de Angola que o bispo deu a V. Magestade pedindo remedio delles de presente, e de futuro," Sept. 7, 1619, in Brásio, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, 6:368. If the "two years" in this statement is taken literally, Mendes de Vasconçelos would have begun the Imbangala alliance virtually on the same day as he wrote his letters to Lisbon denouncing their use by his predecessors, which strikes me as unlikely.

²⁹ Fernão de Sousa, "Guerras do Reino de Angola," ca. 1630, fol. 217, in Heintze, ed., *Fontes para a História de Angola do século XVII*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1985-1988), 1:212. This rather late source (de Sousa came to Angola only in 1624 but had access to official documents filed there) is the only one to name the Imbangala bands or to give details about their origins.

³⁰ For military culture and the role of noncombatants see Thornton, "Art of War," and Rodrigues, "História da residência dos Padres da Companhia de Jesus em Angola," 562-64.

The Portuguese-Imbangala forces capitalized on their victory by attacking the now undefended royal palace in the city of Kabasa, taking “many captives,” who represented the real fruit of the war. The army “wintered” in the city but suffered a great deal from sicknesses common to the central African rainy season (September 1618 to March 1619). Falling ill himself, Mendes de Vasconçelos withdrew his forces to Hango and returned to Luanda, entrusting the new army to his nineteen-year-old son, João. In 1619, João returned to the field, defeated and killed the *soba* Kaita ka Balanga and ninety-four other nobles, attacked Kabasa, and drove out Ngola Mbandi, leaving his mother and wives, in the words of a contemporary Portuguese chronicler, “in our power, who with many prisoners and slaves were carried away as captives.”³¹ The bishop wrote in September 1619 that the dead from this campaign had infected the rivers, and “a great multitude of innocent people had been captured without cause.”³² The demographic impact of this war was starkly obvious when the campaign was resumed the next year; the army “met no resistance in any part of the back-country [*Sertião*], these provinces having become destitute of inhabitants.”³³ Although many people had been killed or enslaved, others simply fled the region—either hiding in the hills or the bush or following the king to his new headquarters on the Kindonga Islands in the Kwanza River.

This stunning military success was largely the work of the Imbangala allies. As the bishop noted, “as he had Jagas [Imbangala], the wars were without any danger [to them] but with discredit to the Portuguese.”³⁴ Although Mendes de Vasconçelos was a soldier experienced in European wars and thus thought himself capable of great achievements in Africa, his initial approach to warfare in Angola was flawed. According to later accounts, he endangered his troops in their first actions by mustering them into tight formations, and only after suffering losses did he accept the wisdom of African methods of warfare, which included the use of Imbangala expertise and prowess.³⁵

The military forces unleashed by Mendes de Vasconçelos got far out of hand. The Imbangala bands broke free from Portuguese alliance and began a long campaign of freebooting in lands formerly under Ndongo’s rule: one

³¹ Manuel Severim da Faria, “História portuguesa e de outras provincias do occidente desde o anno de 1610 até o de 1640 . . .,” Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, MS 241, fol. 163v, under date Mar. 1, 1619, to end of Feb. 1620, but related to material of a year earlier (1618–1619), quoted in Cadornega, *História geral das guerras angolanas*, ed. Delgado, 1:88–90 n. 1. The formation of the Imbangala alliance and movement of the *presidio* is given as 1618 in Manuel Vogado Sotomaior, “Papel sobre as cousas de Angola” (undated, but probably around 1620), in Brásio, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, 15:476 (date on 480).

³² Soares, “Copia dos excessos,” Sept. 7, 1619, in Brásio, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, 6:369–70. Vogado Sotomaior, then holding the position of ouvidor geral de Angola, noted that the city of Angola (Kabasa) was “sacked in such a way that many thousand souls were captured, eaten and killed” and all the palm trees were cut down (in Imbangala fashion) so that the area was effectively barren of them; “Papel,” *ibid.*, 15:476.

³³ Manuel Severim da Faria, “História portuguesa e de outras provincias,” fol. 174v, Mar. 1621 to Feb. 1622, but relating to 1620–1621, quoted in Cadornega, *História geral das guerras angolanas*, ed. Delgado, 1:90 n. 1.

³⁴ Soares, “Copia dos excessos,” Sept. 7, 1619, in Brásio, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, 6:370.

³⁵ Cadornega, *História geral das guerras angolanas*, ed. Delgado, 1:83. For a fuller discussion of the art of war in Angola see Thornton, “Art of War in Angola,” 360–78.

band, led by João Kasa ka Ngola, ended up entering the king of Ndongo's service against the Portuguese. The bishop maintained that some 4,000 baptized Christians from the Portuguese baggage train, some free, some enslaved, had been captured illegally by rampaging Imbangalas in the 1619 campaign.³⁶ Beyond that, the king of Kongo also protested on behalf of his own Kimbundu-speaking subordinates north of Ndongo who had also been attacked and closed the border to trade. A number of Portuguese settlers and the bishop protested vigorously as well, because they were all but ruined by the Imbangala raids on their lands and also saw their trade disrupted. But their protests were to no avail, for Mendes de Vasconcelos served out his three-year term and returned to Portugal, wealthier by far.³⁷

So many people were captured and designated for sale abroad during this brief time that they overwhelmed the capacities of Luanda to manage them. During the confusion, thousands of slaves escaped to Kisama south of the city or to the swampy Kasanze region to the north, forming runaway communities that required an entire military campaign to round up two years later.³⁸ Shipping was probably inadequate to transport all the slaves captured in 1618 who remained imprisoned in the city in makeshift and not always secure pens, to be joined by the flood arriving from the more successful and devastating campaign of 1619. The *São João Bautista* was one of thirty-six slave ships that left Luanda for Brazil or ports of the Spanish Indies in 1619.³⁹

The people enslaved by Mendes de Vasconcelos's army and his Imbangala allies were from the narrow corridor of land about thirty miles broad and some fifty miles deep between the Lukala and Lutete Rivers, a cool plateau region mostly over 4,000-foot elevation. Within this larger region most of the enslaved came from the royal district of Ndongo, the target of both the 1618 and 1619 campaigns and the heartland of the area. As such, they were probably from urban backgrounds. Kabasa, the royal court, and nearby settlements formed a dense complex of towns in a thickly populated countryside. The royal district was not much different in 1618 than it had been in 1564 when it was first visited by Portuguese who described the nucleated town of Angoleme as being as large as the Portuguese city of Évora. Aligned along streets inside a stockade interwoven with grasses were 5,000–6,000 thatched dwellings that probably housed 20,000–30,000 people. There were several such enclosed towns in close proximity in the royal district as well as a rural population tightly settled between them. Central African cities were more rural than European ones, so there was a great deal of farming going on nearby, and many urban residents raised food crops and even domestic animals. Yet the rural areas formed a continuous landscape of settlement, so that

³⁶ Soares, "Copia dos excessos," Sept. 7, 1619, in Brasília, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, 6:370.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 369–71; Vogado Sotomaior, "Papel sobre as cousas de Angola," *ibid.*, 15:476–77.

³⁸ On the general problem of slave flight see Heintze, "Gefährdetes Asyl. Chancen und Konsequenzen der Flucht angolanscher Skalven im 17. Jahrhundert," *Paideuma*, 39 (1993), 321–41, and revised but unannotated version of the same article in *Studien zur Geschichte Angolas*, 232–520. For details about the specific campaigns of 1621–1622 see Heintze, "Ende des Unabhängigen Staats Ndongo," 112–26 (*Studien zur Geschichte Angolas*).

³⁹ Heintze, "Ende des Unabhängigen Staats Ndongo," 115 (*Studien zur Geschichte Angolas*).

when a fire broke out in Angoleme in 1564 the destruction of proximate houses spread for miles and was said to have displaced 100,000 people—clearly an exaggeration but suggestive of the size and density of the general region.⁴⁰

The rural people of the district as well as many of the town dwellers raised millet and sorghum (American crops like manioc and maize had not yet become popular) to make into *funji*, a stiff porridge, that would be eaten along with *nicefo* (a banana) and a palm oil-based gravy. They also tended large herds of cattle and raised smaller stocks of goats, chicken, and guinea fowl in their fields and pastures. They dressed in cloth made locally from tree bark and cotton or imported from as far away as Kongo. They attended regular markets in their own district and regional markets to obtain what they did not produce—iron and steel from favored regions in an area famous for its steel production or salt from the region south of the Kwanza.⁴¹

The captives of Mendes de Vasconçelos's campaigns probably had a stronger sense of a common identity than was typical of single cargoes at other times or places, who might have come from diverse origins and have been acquired through wide-ranging trade routes, wars, or other means of enslavement. But because such a large number of captives in that year were taken from this single campaign, most of the people awaiting export in Luanda in 1619 must have come from a relatively small area.

People in seventeenth-century Ndongo had primary political loyalties connected to local territories, called *xi* in Kimbundu, which were ruled by the *sobas*. Within the area of the 1618–1619 campaigns, people in the royal district considered themselves “people of the court” (thus serving the king as a *soba*), which is more or less what Kabasa means, and subjects of Ndongo, whereas those living farther away, in Kaita ka Balanga, for instance, might have taken their loyalty to that *soba* as equally important as their loyalty to the king.⁴² In Kimbundu, *xi* represented geographically and juridically defined communities such as the royal district or the lands of the *soba* Kaita ka Balanga. In the Kimbundu catechism of 1642, the primary text for the seventeenth-century language (probably first composed within five years of the great wars of 1618–1620), Jerusalem was defined as a *xi*, and Pontius Pilate was “*tandala ya xi imoxi ailûca Terusalem*” or “governor of one *xi* known as Jerusalem.”⁴³ By contrast, in giving an example from local experi-

⁴⁰ Francisco de Gouveia to Jesuit General, Nov. 1, 1564, in Brásio, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, 15:230–31. This is the original version of a text printed from a copy *ibid.*, 2:528. Although the text is from more than 50 years before, it is the only description of the capital of Ndongo available to us. For a description of Kongo's capital and central African cities in general see Thornton, “Mbanza Kongo/São Salvador: Kongo's Holy City,” in Richard Rathbone and Andrew Roberts, eds., *Africa's Urban Past* (London, forthcoming).

⁴¹ Heintze, “Unbekanntes Angola: Der Staat Ndongo im 16. Jahrhundert,” *Anthropos*, 72 (1977), 771–76; a revised but reduced version, “Der Staat Ndongo im 16. Jahrhundert,” is in Heintze, *Studien zur Geschichte Angolas*, 74–75.

⁴² For detailed consideration of these elements of their identity see Virgílio Coelho, “Em busca de Kábasa: Uma tentativa de explicação da estrutura politico-administrativo do ‘Reino de Ndongo,’” in Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, *Actas do Semindrio: Encontro de Povos e Culturas em Angola (Luanda, Apr. 3–6, 1995)* (Lisbon, 1997), 443–78.

⁴³ Francesco Paccino, *Gentio de Angola sufficientemente instruido . . .*, ed. António do Couto (Lisbon, 1642), 4:2. The catechism was probably first composed by a native-speaking Kimbundu priest named Dionisio de Faria Barreto in the mid-1620s, though Paccino, a long-serving

ence, the Portuguese version of the catechism notes that "in the Kingdom of Ndongo, when a vassal is a traitor," whereas the Kimbundu text simply reads "*co Ndongo*" ("in Ndongo") and omits any term for kingdom or territory. At another point, where the Portuguese refers to the "kings and lords who govern," the text produces "*o Michino, no gingâna ginêne jâbata o xi gicalacalà,*" literally, "the kings, the great lords of villages and countries [*xi*] of all sorts."⁴⁴ These units were defined by clear boundaries (*mbande*), a term so widely used that it had entered Angolan Portuguese by the 1620s.⁴⁵

These terms defined political loyalty, not necessarily ethnic sense. Although people surely had a parochial identification with their *xi*, in a region like that between the Lukala and Kwanza Rivers, which was integrated economically thanks to the presence of the court and its settlements and ruled politically by the king, they were likely to have a regional identity defined by the kingdom itself. Each person was, as the catechism notes, *mucu Ndongo* (a person from that place, that is, Ndongo).⁴⁶ In modern Kimbundu, the *mukwa*-prefix (plural *akwa*-) is the normal way to express membership in an ethnic group that combines the personal class prefix with the locative prefix *ku*-; this is thus a second way of describing ethnic identity with a geographical place.⁴⁷ In the end, they also had a larger and vaguer identity as those who spoke Kimbundu. The "Ambundu language" (*lingua ambunda*) was a term for Kimbundu so widely used in Portuguese documents that Governor Fernão de Sousa, writing in 1626, told his subordinate to "make announcements in every *quilombo* [military camp] in Portuguese and Ambundo."⁴⁸ Kimbundu speakers used this term when speaking of themselves, as the "Ambundu people."⁴⁹ Thus a certain ethnic identity extended beyond the barriers of an individual *soba*'s territories and provided even stronger ethnic glue to people from the area when their removal and transportation to America made political identities and loyalties irrelevant. In America, when Kimbundu-speaking people were able to communicate and visit each other, a sense of an "Angola Nation" emerged. It

Italian Jesuit, undoubtedly produced the finishing touches, returning with the text to Lisbon where he died in 1641 before bringing it to press. The final editor, do Couto, was from Kongo, born in its capital city São Salvador and probably a mulatto. Héli Chatelain, the Swiss Protestant missionary who did much to define modern Kimbundu with his grammar, collection of folklore, and other texts, praised this catechism for its rigor and fidelity to the language; see Chatelain, ed., *Folk-Tales of Angola* (New York, 1894). In this and following translations, I have made my translation directly from the Kimbundu and not from the accompanying Portuguese text.

⁴⁴ Paccoino, *Gentio de Angola sufficientemente instruido*, fol. 55v (Portuguese on facing page, 56).

⁴⁵ See this usage in the Fernão de Sousa correspondence in Heintze, *Fontes para a História de Angola do século XVII*.

⁴⁶ Paccoino, introduction, *Gentio de Angola sufficientemente instruido*, ed. do Couto, unpagged.

⁴⁷ Chatelain, *Grammatica Elementar do Kimbundu ou Lingua de Angola* (1888–1889), (Ridgewood, N. J., 1964), xii.

⁴⁸ Regimento of Fernão de Sousa to Bento Banha Cardoso, ca. Jan. 1626, *ibid.*, 1:205.

⁴⁹ The catechism, for instance, notes that "Negroes of Angola who have not received baptism" (in the Portuguese text) were "*Ambundo caria mongoaia Nzambi*" in Kimbundu or "Mbundus who have not eaten the salt of God." Paccoino, *Gentio de Angola sufficientemente instruido*, ed. do Couto, fol. 65. In this Kimbundu text, *Ambundu* is a plural form (hence my translation as *Mbundus*).

was certainly observable in Spanish America, if not yet at the very beginnings of English-speaking Virginia's reception of Africans.

The Mbundus of the capital region followed the local religion, but Portuguese law required all African slaves to be baptized and made Christian before their arrival in America. By 1619, a Kimbundu-speaking Christian community existed in Angola, with its own informal catechismal literature, delivered by the Jesuit priests who had accompanied the first conquerors in 1575. The basic catechism, for those captives awaiting embarkation or on board ship, probably followed the outlines set down in a late sixteenth-century text, though undoubtedly delivered in Kimbundu.⁵⁰ Such a rudimentary instruction was probably oriented to the syncretic practice of the Angolan church, which followed patterns already a century old from the Kongo church that had originally fertilized it.⁵¹ Thus early seventeenth-century Spanish Jesuits, conducting an investigation of the state of knowledge of the Christian religion among newly arrived slaves, found that, for all the problems they noted, the Angolan slaves seemed to have adequate understanding of the faith by the time they arrived.⁵² Quite possibly then those slaves who ended up in Virginia instead of Vera Cruz had at least been introduced to the Christian faith, though Virginia slave holders, with their fear that Christianity would make slaves free, would have been reluctant to admit it, had they known.

If the victims of Mendes de Vasconcelos's war were among the twenty slaves brought to Virginia in 1619, they did not conform to the stereotyped, parochial image of Africans from precolonial villages. They were more likely from an urban or at least urbanized area (though they probably knew how to raise crops and domestic animals), and they had learned the rudiments of Christianity. It is probable that, in the decades that followed, those who survived the first year in Virginia eventually encountered more Angolans from their homeland or from the nearby Kongo, brought especially to New York by Dutch traders and resold to Virginia colonists.⁵³ They may even have met up with the slaves that one Captain Guy (or Gay) took from a ship off the Angolan coast and exchanged for tobacco in Virginia in 1628.⁵⁴ At that time, a series of wars in the region around the Kindonga Islands between Ndongo's new and vigorous Queen Njinga (ruled 1624–1663) and a Portuguese-assisted rival for her throne led to the enslavement of thousands.⁵⁵ These new captives perhaps gave a certain Angolan touch to the early Chesapeake. Significantly, the grandson of one of their contemporaries, who had arrived in 1621, in 1677 named his Eastern Shore estate "Angola."⁵⁶

⁵⁰ "Practica para bautizar as adultos de gentio dos R[ein]os de Angola" (undated but apparently late 16th or early 17th century), MS, Biblioteca Pública e Arquivo Distrial de Évora.

⁵¹ For more on the theology of these syncretic churches see Thornton, "Afro-Christian Syncretism in Central Africa," *Plantation Societies* (forthcoming).

⁵² Alonso de Sandoval, *Naturaleza, policia sagrada i profana, costumbres i ritos . . . de todos Etiopes* (Seville, 1627); mod. ed Angel Valtierra, *De instauranda Aethiopum salute: el mundo de la esclavitud en America* (Bogotá, 1956), 372–77, 380.

⁵³ T. H. Breen and Stephen Innes, "Myne Owne Ground": *Race and Freedom on Virginia's Eastern Shore, 1640–1676* (New York, 1980), 70–71.

⁵⁴ Alden T. Vaughan, "Blacks in Virginia: A Note on the First Decade," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., 29 (1972), 477.

⁵⁵ Heintze, "Ende des Unabhängigen Staats Ndongo" (*Paideuma* version, 216–53; *Studien* version, 127–55).

⁵⁶ Breen and Innes, "Myne Owne Ground," 17.