

# The Florentine Relation: A Newly Discovered Sixteenth-Century Description of the Kingdom of Kongo

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**Abstract:** A newly discovered Spanish description of Kongo increases our knowledge of the country, joining Filippo Pigafetta's famous account to expand our knowledge of Kongo in this early period. This research shows that the MS was written in 1587 or 1588 and was written by Carmelite Diego de la Encarnación. It adds details on the history of the country, daily life culture, and links to other Carmelite works, including an unpublished chapter of an account by Diego de Santissimo Santo and shows the author could have written a longer but well-known account in the Vatican Library. It includes extensive quotations from the new text.

**Résumé:** Un récit espagnol récemment découvert améliore notre connaissance du Kongo, s'ajoutant au célèbre récit de Filippo Pigafetta pour étendre notre connaissance du pays à cette époque. Cette recherche montre que le manuscrit a été écrit en 1587 ou 1588 et a été rédigé par le carme Diego de la Encarnación. Il donne des détails sur l'histoire du pays, la vie quotidienne et des liens avec d'autres œuvres carmélites, y compris un chapitre inédit d'un récit de Diego de Santissimo Santo. Il montre que l'auteur aurait pu écrire un récit plus long mais bien connu dans la bibliothèque du Vatican. Il comprend de nombreuses citations tirées du nouveau texte.

**Keywords:** Kongo, Carmelite Missionaries, Central Africa, sixteenth century, primary sources

Although the kingdom of Kongo is well known for having an extraordinary quantity of documentation, it is not evenly spread over time, with rich periods and nearly blank periods. Dense and informative documentation, allowing

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for a close-grained description of Kongo's history and social structure is mostly reliant on the great bulk and detail of the Capuchin reports written between 1645 and 1720. Good examples of less well documented history come from later periods in the kingdom's history; for example, the period 1720–1760 and 1810–1840 are nearly bereft of first-hand documentation. Much of Kongo's early historiography, especially that dealing with social and economic history, relied heavily on the Capuchin documentation, with the unspoken but underlying assumption that Kongo was always as the documentation of the seventeenth century revealed it.

The early period, from 1491 to about 1580 is also relatively document poor, although this is not as clear as there are a fair number of letters (such as Afonso I's correspondence) documents (the investigation of Pedro Nkanga a Mvemba's plot in 1550) and other reports that would allow historians to construct a reasonable time line and, using later documents, propose how some institutions worked. But strikingly, there is not a general description of the country laying out a systematic view of political geography and governmental practice until the 1580s.<sup>1</sup>

This leaves an awkward gap in understanding how Kongo operated in the first half of the sixteenth century, and further raises the important question: how much did contact with Portugal and Christianization affect the country, which is currently frequently answered on the basis of speculations from information in later texts? The only truly early-contrast description is a single page document written in 1491 based on interviews with the returning mission to Kongo, which resulted in Nzinga a Nkuwu's baptism.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, it is only in 1591 when Filippo Pigafetta published an account of Kongo from the dictated and written testimony of Duarte Lopes, Kongo's ambassador to Rome, that a more or less comprehensive account of Kongo was published. Lopes had lived in Kongo from 1579 until he left for Rome in 1583, and most historical treatments of Kongo's political institutions and cultural geography rely on Pigafetta. Indeed, Pigafetta's description was one of the most popular accounts in its own time, having been republished and translated many times, and was often the main source for information on Kongo even until the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

As it happens, the very next year after Lopes left, a mission of Spanish Discalced Carmelites arrived in Kongo, leaving in 1586. They too, left a few

<sup>1</sup> Virtually all the relevant sixteenth century documentation has been published by António Brásio in *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, 1st series, 15 volumes (Lisbon: Agência geral do Ultramar, 1952–1988), vols. 1–4 and 15.

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous Italian letter, 6 November 1491, in Kate Lowe, "Africa in the News in Renaissance Italy: News Extracts from Portugal about Western Africa Circulating in Northern and Central Italy in the 1480s and 1490s," *Italian Studies* 65 (2013), 327.

<sup>3</sup> Filippo Pigafetta, *Relatione del reame di Congo e delle circovincine contrade...* (Rome: Bartolomeo Grassi, 1591). For the history of the text, see the recent edition of Willy Bal's French translation by Michel Chandeigne, *Le royaume de Congo & les contrées environantes (1591)* (Paris: Chandeigne, 2002), 7–31.

written records in the form of some letters and a short report. While these reports added something to the information in Pigafetta, it was relatively little, and much of it was incidental to the primary purpose of those reports, which was to describe the activities of the mission.<sup>4</sup>

Just before Christmas of 2020, while scrolling through the internet, I came upon a hit that was called simply “Relación del Congo” at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale of Florence, which had digitized copies of its manuscript collection. It was an account of 10 folios length, recto and verso, undated, and without a title of its own, written in Spanish in a very clear hand. The library’s description assigned it a date in the late sixteenth century.<sup>5</sup> This document, which I will call the Florentine Relation, is, as will be shown below, a description of Kongo written by one of the Carmelites, and complements and enlarges the material found in Pigafetta’s book.

The Florentine Relation is remarkable document that contains a detailed description of Kongo, covering geography, flora and fauna, and customs and politics, among other things. It is one of the earliest attempts at a comprehensive statement made and a close match both in topics covered and detail to that of Pigafetta.

The discovery of the Florentine Relation also complements a second unpublished Carmelite document that has been overlooked until very recently, which is chapter 5 of Diego de Santissimo Sacramento’s long account of the mission, written probably in the late 1580s, well known since it was published by António Brásio in 1954 along with the account of another Carmelite, Diego de la Encarnación.<sup>6</sup> But for some reason, Brásio did not publish chapter 5, and it remains unpublished (though available on the internet) up to today. Its contents, some three and a half manuscript pages, have interesting details on oral tradition and religion, which further shed light on Kongo at the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

Although the Florentine Relation is not explicitly dated, clues within it provide good evidence for supporting the library’s assessment of it being a late sixteenth-century account. The author of the text named the ruler of Kongo as Álvaro, married to his queen Catarina, and thus Álvaro I (c. 1568–1587), but

<sup>4</sup> The original documentation is found in Brásio, *Monumenta*, vol. 3 and 4.

<sup>5</sup> Anonymous, untitled account, henceforth Florentine Relation, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Manoscritti Panciatichiani 200, fols. 163-173v. <https://archive.org/details/panc.-200/page/n329/mode/2up?view=theater>, (accessed 4 October 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Many of the more interesting and descriptive portions of Diego de la Encarnación’s account were published in Spanish translation (from Italian) by Florencio del Niño Jesus, *La Misión del Congo y los Carmelitas y Propaganda Fide* (Pamplona: R. Bengaray, 1929), 48–51.

<sup>7</sup> Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 2711. The original manuscript, in a clear manuscript hand, can be found online at <http://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000072922&page=1>, starting at fol. 108/89, (accessed 4 October 2023).

he was not aware that Álvaro I had died “shortly before” Easter (29 March) 1587.<sup>8</sup> News of Álvaro’s death only reached Madrid by 26 March 1588, probably a year after it took place.<sup>9</sup> The author of the Florentine Relation, however, was aware that Duarte Lopes, Álvaro I’s ambassador to the Vatican (and Pigafetta’s source), had received a grant of a lake containing pitch from the king and had come to Madrid. However, he dated Lopes’ arrival in a marginal note to February 1586.<sup>10</sup> The date was surely wrong, for the Apostolic Nuncio in Madrid informed the Vatican on 25 February 1588 that Lopes had arrived “a few months” earlier, likely late 1587.<sup>11</sup>

While residing in Madrid, Lopes learned of Álvaro I’s death and the dispatch of the Spanish Armada to England, then left Madrid for Rome sometime before 15 June 1588 and returned to Spain in May 1589.<sup>12</sup> The Florentine Relation ends with Lopes departing for Rome but does not mention his return or Álvaro’s death.<sup>13</sup>

The author was an eyewitness to life in the Kingdom of Kongo, as he mentioned discussing fig trees with King Álvaro I.<sup>14</sup> Given the dating and the fact that he wrote in Spanish, it is extremely likely that he was one of the Spanish Carmelite missionaries. The Carmelite mission left Kongo for Europe in June 1586 and had a difficult voyage, stopping over for a time in São Tomé, and then enduring storms and attacks by English privateers, reaching Europe in late 1586 or early in 1587.<sup>15</sup> However, even though the Florentine Relation pays relatively little attention to the work of the Carmelites until the last page, it was certainly a Carmelite who wrote it. All this points to the date of the account being written after late 1587 and before March 1588.

Of the three Carmelites who returned to Europe, two have left surviving accounts, Diego de Santissimo Sacramento and Diego de la Encarnación. De Santissimo Sacramento’s account deals more with the life and activities of the missionaries, while the longest extant one of de la Encarnación gives more information about life in Kongo describing customs, animal life, and flora

<sup>8</sup> Letter of a provincial of Portugal, written in Luanda, Angola, 15 December 1587 in Brásio, *Monumenta* III, 350.

<sup>9</sup> Apostolic Nuncio to Cardinal Montalto, 26 March 1588, in Brásio, *Monumenta* III, 365.

<sup>10</sup> Florentine Relation, fol. 165v.

<sup>11</sup> Apostolic Nuncio to Fabio Biondi, 25 February 1588, Brásio, *Monumenta* III, 362.

<sup>12</sup> Apostolic Nuncio to Fabio Biondi, 24 June 1588, Brásio, *Monumenta* III, 366–67; See Pigafetta, *Relatione*, 65 for an account of Lopes’ travels from his own testimony.

<sup>13</sup> Florentine Relation, fols. 173–173v.

<sup>14</sup> Florentine Relation, fol. 165. The species of the tree in the Garden of Eden is not named (Genesis 3:1–8), but since Adam and Eve covered their nakedness with fig leaves, it seems likely that one might assume the tree was a fig tree.

<sup>15</sup> Diego de Santissimo Sacramento, “Relacion de viage de Gvina que hizo el Padre fray...” undated, c. 1588, Brásio, *Monumenta* IV, 373–388 (but minus the first chapters and chapter 5).

and fauna.<sup>16</sup> In Francisco de Santa Maria's seventeenth-century chronicle of the order, he noted that the two had written "two copious accounts" of their travels, and then quoted from de la Encarnación's to give a few geographic details of the kingdom. Among the descriptions, he noted that "in olden days the kingdom took in other kingdoms which formerly had their own heads."<sup>17</sup> Of all the works known of these two men, only the Florentine Relation contains a specific statement of this fact; indeed, it names the former kingdoms and notes they were now ruled by royal appointees.<sup>18</sup>

Since two accounts, each written by either of the two and roughly equal in length were published by Brásio in 1954, it would be enough to say that they would be sufficiently copious to fulfill the chronicler's descriptions.<sup>19</sup> The Florentine Relation could also fulfill that requirement even better, though all would seem too short to be "copious." However, a brief seventeenth-century biography of de la Encarnación in the Spanish National Library hints at a much longer work, noting that he also wrote a "great book in which there are most notable things that illustrate the chronicle not a little" that could be found, in those days, in the library of the Carmelite convent of Calahorra, where it says de la Encarnación died in 1618.<sup>20</sup>

The mention of the great book, or a longer and more detailed account, does raise the question of the existence at one time or another of a longer account written by de la Encarnación. In 1863, the bibliophile Bartolomé José Gallardo claimed that there was a book written by de la Encarnación called "Relación amplísima de los Reinos de Congo y Angola," published during the reign of Philip III (1598–1621), which might refer to the text in the Carmelite convent. Since it would have had to be published after 1598, it is not clear if it meant a later book. However, at present, there is no known exemplar of the book.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Santissimo Sacramento, "Relacion" Brásio, *Monumenta* IV, 355–392; [Diego de la Encarnación], "Relatione de q. occorre, et videro nel Regno di Congo tre religioni scalzi Carmelitini....," Brásio, *Monumenta* IV, 393–415 (the author was identified by Brásio as Diego de la Encarnación). A second near identical copy is found in the Carmelite Archives in Rome, Cartapaccio, AG 281/e in section 430/b "Vera relazione...." I read this text in the archive and found variations in place names, which made me believe that it was more likely to be original than the text printed in Brásio.

<sup>17</sup> Francisco de Santa Maria, *Reforma de los descalços de nuestra Senora del Carmen de la primitiva*, 4 vols. (Madrid: Diego Díaz de Cabrera, 1655), vol. 2, 84.

<sup>18</sup> Florentine Relation, fols. 163–163v.

<sup>19</sup> There are two versions of de la Encarnación's account: Brásio published an account held in the Biblioteca Civica Gambalunghiana in Rimini; a second unpublished version is found in the Carmelite Archive in Rome (see note 16 above).

<sup>20</sup> Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 2711, fol. 197. I have tried unsuccessfully to contact this monastery, which is now closed. If it had a library, it is not known where it went.

<sup>21</sup> Bartolomé José Gallardo, *Ensayo de una biblioteca española de libros raros y curiosos*, 4 vols. (Madrid, 1863–1884), vol. 1, 409; a similar claim was made in Acisclo F. Vallín y

Taking all this information together, it seems most likely that Diego de la Encarnación was the author of the Florentine Relation, and that he wrote it soon after he returned from Africa. While it seems a bit short to be the larger book that some other writers claim he wrote, he is the only Carmelite who seems to have been interested in presenting a systematic account of Kongo above and beyond the details of the mission.

As I will suggest later in this article, I believe that a fairly copious account, perhaps an early version of the longer, now lost book is found in the Vatican Library's well-known description of Kongo, thus making the Carmelite contribution of Kongo's history more extensive.

### The Florentine Relation: Contents and Novelties

The Florentine Relation is by far the most detailed of the presently known Carmelite accounts, especially with regards to Kongo, as it gives hardly any details about the Carmelite missionaries' story but focuses almost entirely on the kingdom itself. It begins with a description of the geography of Kongo, naming a number of rivers and provinces (fols. 163-63v). A critical passage describes the history of Kongo's expansion:

[fol. 163] Under the Kingdom of Congo there are many other kingdoms which in olden times had their own separate kings; now all are subject and tributary to that of Congo. Batta, a very great kingdom which is governed these days by a prince called Manibatta who is also called Prince of Congo, because if the Kingdom of Congo lacks a legitimate successor, this Manibatta will succeed as being closest to the trunk and lineage of the Kings of Congo. This prince and all those of his followers speak the same language as Congo, although with a few different words.

There is another kingdom called Humde [or Hamde, perhaps Wandu?], next to this one of Batta which is governed by the natural principal lords of Congo and they do not cede the [163v] government to any others except the sons of the same king of Congo or other principal lords of that kingdom.

There is another called Pango which is not very great and is governed by principle nobles of Kingdom of Congo who satisfy the king with their service in these duties; from these three kingdoms the king of Congo receives the greatest part of his revenue, because they make cloth and rich clothes and outfits to wear in their fashion, and which also circulate as merchandise among the neighboring kingdoms which are in the interior away from the sea.

On the seacoast there are other kingdoms which similarly had their own separate kingdoms in olden times, as is the Kingdom of Bamba and Pemba

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Bustillo, *Discursos leídos ante la Real Academia de Ciencias exactas, físicas y naturales* (Madrid, 1893), 242, but under de la Encarnación's secular name of Diego Montaña, and assigning it the impossible date of 1584.

and Soño, which are kingdoms governed by trusted principle nobles of Congo. The income which the King has from one or the other which they call çymbos, which are seashells that they collect on the edge of the sea and circulate as money in this land, and also Ivory which are the teeth of elephants which is their tribute that they give to the King every year. And in these kingdoms of Bamba and Pemba there are mines of gold and silver of the Kingdom of Congo and most of them form the border between the kingdoms of Congo and Angola.

For the first time, we have a detailed exposition of the way in which Kongo developed following its establishment at Mbanza Kongo in the late fourteenth century—that is, by conquering preexisting kingdoms and replacing their leaders with selected members of the royal family or other noble families from Kongo.<sup>22</sup> The other Carmelite accounts of the period and Pigafetta mention that Nsundi and Mpangu were former kingdoms that had been conquered and that Mbata had a special relationship with Kongo, but this is the first one to list other provinces as having formerly been kingdoms.<sup>23</sup>

Also, in this immediate introduction to Kongo's geography, the text notes it borders "on the east with the Empire of Monmunge," augmenting Pigafetta's mention of an Empire of Moenemuge to confirm its existence and location.<sup>24</sup> While this particular place name is sometimes mentioned in later literature, all such references had their ultimate origin in Pigafetta, except Olfert Dapper's mid-seventeenth century reference to it was in Pigafetta, who, placed it so far east that it was almost on the East African coast such that subsequent cartographers made it appear more as a part of the Mozambican hinterland than that of Kongo. Early in the twentieth century, geographers located it in east Africa, and dismissed it as a distortion of some toponym.<sup>25</sup> Erika Sulzmann, an anthropologist student of the region around the Lower

<sup>22</sup> For a reconstruction of the early history of Kongo using traditions from the sixteenth and seventeenth century, see John Thornton, *A History of West Central Africa to 1850* (Cambridge, 2020), 24–33; and for an earlier but more extensively documented account, see John Thornton, "The Origins of Kongo: A Revised Vision," in Bostoen, Koen and Brinkman, Inge, eds., *The Kingdom of Kongo: Origins, Dynamics and Cosmopolitan Culture of an African Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 17–41.

<sup>23</sup> [de la Encarnación], "Relatione...", Brásio, *Monumenta*, vol. 4, 410 (Mpangu, Nsundi and Mbata were formerly kingdoms now subject to Kongo); Pigafetta, *Relazione*, 36 (Mpangu formerly independent, and conquered for Kongo by Nsundi).

<sup>24</sup> Florentine Relation, fol. 163; Pigafetta, *Descrizione*, 18.

<sup>25</sup> For example, E. G. Ravenstein's commentary on the origin of the "Jagas" in his edition of Andrew Battel, *The Strange Adventures of Andrew Battell, of Leigh...* (London, 1901), Appendix 4, 150 (the lands of the Maravi).

Kasai, placed it in the region where it probably belongs, east of Kongo, subsequently followed by Jan Vansina.<sup>26</sup>

Much of what follows concerns physical geography and natural history; indeed, the Florentine Relation is one of the most detailed accounts of Kongo's flora and fauna written. It continues, using the course of rivers as a guiding theme but includes many details about fish and even more about trees, naming them in Kikongo and describing their properties (fols. 163v-165). In this section, the author also mentions his conversation with Álvaro about fig trees (fol. 165, see more below) and also includes a section concerning the production of cloth from trees, and then turns to palm wines (fols. 165-65v). Continuing with trees, he takes note of the salt works on the coast, includes both an account of local production of pitch, and mentions an island in the Congo River where rebels live:

[fol. 166] There is in the same Kingdom of Congo an island inhabited by rebel Blacks who live like gentiles, and for many years a snake as large as a barrel or pipe goes about on the island and is the same height and girth. They say this snake is the devil and those gentiles think it is their god and he speaks with them and they believe in him and adore him. They adore him for this reason, all these kinds of blacks who are sick are taken to him and he cures them with a bath and this is his remedy and medicine and the blacks who adore this snake consider themselves justified and sanctified and every day in the morning he goes and visits all the dwellings of the inhabitants of the island and he greets them with his bath and they gather together and return to the narrow valley [*queba*] where he lives and sometimes the kings of Congo send armies to this island to devastate it but they do not succeed [*saron*] for fear that the devil might drown all of the people because it is necessary to go to this island by the same river.

It seems likely that the island in question is part of the territory called Mpanzalungu (with many variant spellings) in the early sixteenth century. While Afonso I's correspondence notes his battles with these people, he did claim to conquer them in 1526. However, we should never imagine that conquest was the end of the story; presumably, it continued forward.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Erika Sulzmann, "Orale Tradition und Chronologie: Der Fall Baboma-Bolia (Nordwest Zaire)," in Faik-Nzuji Madiya, Clémentine and Sulzmann, Erika (eds.), *Mélanges de culture et linguistique africaine à la mémoire de Leo Stappers* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1983), 527 and 570–571 (note 10). See also Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforest: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1990), 163.

<sup>27</sup> For a fuller discussion of the toponym, see Igor Matonda, "L'identité des Pamzoallumbu ou Pangelungus du royaume Kongo: Essai d'interprétation du sens et du contexte d'un terme au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 2–238 (2020), 371–406.



There follow (fols. 165v-168) additional notes about trees and their properties, but amongst these botanical observations is precious early information about the production of bark and raffia cloth:

[167v] There are some small flat palm trees which resemble wheat, from whose leaves they take a silk-like thread the size of the same leaf, which would be about four palms of the Blacks' silk thread. They make very good cloths in the manner of patterned velvet of all sorts and another kind [which is] like a brocade in the fineness of the workmanship and there are many officials and weavers of them; the loom is made of stakes on which the cloth is woven, and this loom serves to make only one cloth, [which measures] about four palms square. There are some cloths that it takes almost a year to weave and decorate, and two of these cloths may only be worn by nobles to whom the King makes a grant of them. The Blacks make these cloths in many different colors, one of them is a beautiful dye that is made from a red wood that they call taculla [*takula* (*Pterocarpus soyauxii*)] and which has lines above them as is done in Europe with its own silk.

There is another red color similar to this taculla wood that [mixed] with other herbs to make a very fine ink color with which they write, mixing one with another makes a very agreeable color.

Others have a dark color with made from pitch that is made up from the mud of rivers, which when mixed with the same leaves mentioned above makes a black ink that remains a very natural dark color that never loses its color no matter how long it is in water. And in this way they dye all the colors they want with a mixture from the herbs that grow in the very kingdom.<sup>28</sup>

Previously, on the same page, the author mentions dyes when discussing the Ensanda (*nsanda* [*Ficus thonningii*]) tree:

From this tree they take a bark that is later cured and crushed so that a very white canvas is made and they dye them the color they want, which their children wear, and they also print with many designs that look like damasks which they take every year from this tree as in Europe they do from cork oaks.

Eventually, he turns to animals, including both descriptions and anecdotes about elephants and monkeys (168v-169v).

On folio 170, however, he addresses society and culture, describing houses, rural life and money. He then describes the court briefly, observing that the king had a body of chosen Portuguese musketeers at his service (Pigafetta only mentions a guard of "Anziques"). The description of the court notes the judicial process for commoners and nobles, the extraterritorial

<sup>28</sup> Other details on cloth production can also be found in Pigafetta, *Descrizione*, 17–18.

status of the Portuguese, of which Pigafetta has a more extensive account, the location of the capital city (called here San Salvador) and the palace, taking time to describe Kongo's kings' notable practice of hand-feeding his nobles (fols. 170-171).<sup>29</sup>

[fol. 170v] The King has the habit of feeding his fidalgos by his own hand, in which he spends a lot of time and after having finishing the mouths of the fidalgos, the King and Queen then eat very late. They do this to win the hearts of their own people because the people of that land are not very constant in obedience to their King and might even seek out someone else for King when they feel like it.

The Florentine Relation has a brief account of commoners, primarily praising their diet and claiming very long lives for them, while also noting their generosity in sharing with each other. He also makes one small point about housing, which is the first mention of the use of beds for sleeping:

[fol. 171] The furniture in their houses is a pot where they cook their stews and a bed on four stakes covered with a mat which they call Chaló [*nzalo*] and with this they are as happy and contented as if they had all the gold in the world.<sup>30</sup>

One of the most notable features of the account is his description of the invasion of the Jagas, which differs substantially from the account of Duarte Lopes recorded by Pigafetta, giving them much fewer numbers and describing their attack on Kongo in the time of Bernardo I, rather than Henrique as related by Lopes (fols. 171-171v).<sup>31</sup>

[fol. 171] There are in these parts a nation of Blacks who are so cruel and inhuman that one could believe that nature created them as wolves for the human race, who are called Jacas and are so feared by the other Blacks that just hearing that they are coming in search of them causes such terror that they leave property, houses, children and wives and this is augmented because the Jacas eat them by biting into them whether they are alive or dead. The Jacas do not have a fixed domicile nor their own kingdom, so that one might think Our Lord made them to be such a flagellation because in

<sup>29</sup> These topics are covered more fully in Pigafetta, *Descrizione*, passim.

<sup>30</sup> There is a fuller account of village life in BAV Vat. Lat. 12516, fol. 109, as we shall see below, written probably by Diego de la Encarnación in language very similar to this; see also his account in Brásio, *Monumenta* IV, 399. However, the mention of a bed and giving its Kikongo name is unique to the Florentine Relation.

<sup>31</sup> I have written a new version of the Jaga invasion thanks to this and a few other formerly unknown sources. See John Thornton, "New Light on the 'Jaga' Episode in the History of Kongo: 1567–1608," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 53–247, 441–459.

that part of Ethiopia the greatest part of them are witches, pagan sooth-sayers, sacrilegious and schismatics who abandoned the Faith of Jesus Christ that they once followed. The Jacas are strong and vigorous to such a degree that just three thousand of them were enough to destroy all the Kingdom of Congo in the time of King D. Bernardo, the predecessor of King D. Alvaro who reigns at present. They eat no other meat except only that of men who they capture and after being sated with it, they make dried meat and smoke it in some smokehouses they make to accomplish this, and knowing how these Jacas ravaged Congo, the king of Portugal D. Sebastian sent seven hundred Portuguese soliders under Captain Francisco de Gouea to aid them and it took a great deal of effort to drive them out of this kingdom with the death of many Portuguese and now you see that it is true, by what these same Jacas did on the Island of San Tome, putting seven thousand men to death between nobles and natives and they destroyed more than eighty sugar plantations that they had there [fol. 171v] And as the children of these Jacas savor the taste of eating human flesh, they are accustomed since their childhood to eat the hands and feet of men and they give them nothing else to eat as they have pure hunger for it. These Jacas use shields of buffalo or antelope hide and iron axes, bows, arrows and hearts of wood [clubs] and they pierce their ears and noses. The drums which they carry are of human skin so that their sound is terrifying and immediately causes fear in those who hear it.

The revolt on São Tomé, mentioned at the end, was probably one that took some time before 1580, when the visitor Frutuoso Ribeiro noted that in “past times” there had been a rebellion so violent and effective that the whole island outside of a space three leagues from the capital was destroyed.<sup>32</sup>

The final section (fols. 171v-172v) describes the state of Christianity in the kingdom.

[fol. 171v] The Christian faith was planted in Congo a little less than a hundred years ago, but due to the lack of diligence that the kings of Portugal put into sending religious [orders] to conserve and carry the Holy Gospel forward, this land has fallen far from the faith and they only have the name [of Christian] and desire to be Christian. King Don Alvaro, who is very Catholic and devout, and no less his wife, Queen Doña Catalina, and the four daughters and three sons he has gather every day in an oratory they have in the palace to hear mass and he reads from the books of Father Fray Luis de Granada, and they get upset if another person reads.

Luis de Granada (1504–1588) was a celebrated Spanish ascetic and theologian who lived for many years in Portugal and so was popular in both countries, although the Spanish Inquisition was concerned that he read Protestant books, including Erasmus, and made life uncomfortable for him

<sup>32</sup> Frutuoso Ribeiro to Francisco Martins, 4 March 1580, *MMA* III, 188.

there. His works are not simply catechismal but assume a deep knowledge of Christianity and Biblical themes as a precondition.<sup>33</sup>

Álvaro also supported the church in the temporal realm, providing ample income for the priests:

[fol. 171v] The King is very obedient to the priests and wants his subjects to be as well. He gives twenty slaves annually to each priest in payment for the confessions of the country people and more for masses beyond the ordinary [payment] for their offices and alms. 1. He pays them another forty [fol. 172] Black slaves for confession and with the offering of the Blacks and Whites, they sustain themselves very well not [counting] what the King gives them for their maintenance and benefits.

The Florentine Relation ends with a generally positive assessment of the quality of Christianity in Álvaro's court, if not in the country. He also noted that Álvaro was already regretting the departure of the Carmelites and had sent Duarte Lopes to Spain and to Rome to seek new Carmelite missionaries.

### **Diego de la Encarnación and the Vatican Account of Kongo (Vat. Lat. 12516)**

Establishing de la Encarnación as the author of the Florentine Relation and its details then brings us to another important account of Kongo—that is, the long (22 folios), anonymous, and undated account of Kongo in the Vatican Library, Vaticana Latina (Vat. Lat.) 12516.<sup>34</sup> This account is well-known as Jean Cuvelier and Louis Jadin published a French translation of its most interesting parts in 1954. It clearly drew on Pigafetta's book, and as Cuvelier and Jadin noted, on Carmelite ones as well. It appears to have been written around 1608.

The document is part of a large dossier devoted entirely to Kongo and was assembled shortly after São Salvador was elevated to the head of the Diocese of Congo and Angola in 1596. In all likelihood, it was an information file for the use of Juan Baptista Vives, who served as “protector” a sort of official advocate of Kongo in the Holy See.<sup>35</sup> It is written mostly in Italian with a few items in Latin and documents the evidence used to elevate Kongo to the

<sup>33</sup> This is the impression one gets from his work, gathered together in numerous editions, including a recent one for Kindle: Luis de Granada, *Fray Luis de Granada: Obras completas*, Justo Cuervo, ed. (Madrid: Gómez y Fuentenero, 1906).

<sup>34</sup> Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vaticana Latina [BAV Lat.Vat.] 12516. A digital copy is available at [https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Vat.lat.12516](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.12516), (accessed 4 October 2023). Cuvelier published his translation of the text in Jean Cuvelier and Louis Jadin, *L'ancien Congo d'après les archives romaines* (Brussels: Académie royale des sciences coloniales, 1954), 112–160.

<sup>35</sup> Cuvelier and Jadin, *L'ancien Congo*, 8–10.

status of a diocese—the critical testimony of the Kongolese ambassador Antonio Vieira (in Lisbon) as well as other texts and documents relevant to that event. It also includes relevant documents on the embassy of Antonio Manuel, who came from Kongo to Rome, mortally ill, at the end of 1608. Finally, it also has Italian translations and summaries of letters and documents coming from Kongo until the end of 1623. While the documents are primarily arranged chronologically, the long account of Kongo is the very last one in the dossier.

In publishing this description, Cuvelier and Jadin surmised that it was most likely the work of Giovanni Battista Confalonieri, who served as secretary to Fabio Biondi, the apostolic collector in Lisbon. It would likely have been he who maintained the collection, but not necessarily the author of any of the documents (in fact, some of the documents are originals from various people in a variety of hands). Graziano Saccardo, on the other hand, considered that Fabio Biondi, the Patriarch of Jerusalem and a high ranking official in the Vatican, was himself the author of the descriptive account of Kongo.<sup>36</sup> Biondi had played a vital role in working for Kongo's recognition as a diocese and spent many years in Lisbon, and in promoting African interests in general. He was particularly keen on seeing if it were possible to connect the Vatican's interest in the Ethiopian church and the prospect of an overland route from Kongo to Ethiopia. As the collection appears to be a working file—with documents, short notes, often on half sheets of paper, and summaries—the end document seems likely to have served as a general reference work for the best intelligence on all things related to Kongo.

Cuvelier and Jadin quickly noted that the account drew heavily on Pigafetta, with many passages very close in information to that account, even if not worded as an exact copy. They surmised that additional material came from Carmelite sources, quoting extensively from Diego de la Encarnación's short description in the Carmelite archives that Brásio later published, based on quotations that Florencio del Niño Jesus published in 1929 to show similarities in phraseology and word choice. But there are many other passages with considerable detail that probably came from Carmelite sources that are not found in de la Encarnación's text in the archives.

There is, however, substantial evidence that the entire work was based on a work written by Diego de la Encarnación himself. None of the proposed authors for the text had first-hand knowledge of Kongo, and at the very least were making summaries of Pigafetta and Carmelite documents. De la Encarnación was well positioned to write such an account, for upon returning to Spain he almost immediately set himself to pursuing the mounting of a return mission. When the Kongolese mission of Antonio Manuel reached Madrid in

<sup>36</sup> This information is added to Saccardo's typescript transcription of the text, found in the Capuchin Archives in Venice, *Raccolta L*, 91.

1605, it was de la Encarnación who was tasked with assisting his final trip to Rome.<sup>37</sup>

De la Encarnación did indeed write another, longer text that described Kongo besides the Florentine Relation, because he mentioned it in a letter to Antonio Manuel shortly after the ambassador arrived in Spain. De la Encarnación wrote to encourage him to support the Carmelite mission, but he added that the Kongo ambassador might

Present the account of my past voyage to Congo, having first put it into good handwriting and corrected the errors which you said it had, and it is certain that it has them, because many things that I wrote there were from the accounts of others, because I no longer remember those things that I saw, and it lacks the fidelity I hope for.

The “accounts of others” to which he referred is most likely Pigafetta, published in 1591 and certainly available to him. He proposed that Antonio Manuel make such changes and send them back so others could take advantage of the information.<sup>38</sup>

This statement adds considerable weight to the claim that de la Encarnación had written another synthetic account,; and in all probability, this was the copious relation mentioned in other sources (more or less twice as long as the Florentine Relation). However, Vat. Lat. 12516 is not written in either de la Encarnación’s or Antonio Manuel’s hands, which, based on their letters, are quite different. Instead, it must have been written in summary form from de la Encarnación’s long account. A final piece of evidence for the Carmelite’s authorship is that the Vatican account is written in a mixture of Spanish and Italian. In describing the text, Cuvelier and Jadin noted that “Spanish words abound” in it, but this is an understatement. Whole sentences and sometimes groups of sentences are written in Spanish, even though the bulk of the text is in Italian. For example (Spanish text in italics):

[fol. 117v] *los vicereyes tienen gobernadores y cabeças de pueblos, principalmente cuidando de cobrar de los inferiores los tributos que se pagan al Rey, li quali portano al Vice Rey di sua prov[inci]a e questo va ogni anno due volte alla Corte a portare questo tributo, e se il Re si contenta, gli responde questa parola Uote, che vuol dire; bien lo haveis hecho, por muy favorecido, y da muchas palmadas con entrambas manos, in segno di gratitudine, e si butta a terra, coprendosi de polvere tutto il corpo.*

<sup>37</sup> For a detailed discussion of this period, see Richard Gray, “A Kongo Princess, the Kongo Ambassadors and the Papacy,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 29 (1999), 140–154, esp. 149–150.

<sup>38</sup> Diego de la Encarnación to Antonio Manuel, 1 January 1607, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Miscellanae I, no. 91, fol. 188v.

*The viceroys have governors and village heads who principally take care to collect the tributes from their underlings that they owe the King, and they carry them to the Vice Roy of their province, and he goes twice a year to the court to carry this tribute, and if the king is satisfied, he responds with this word Uote, which is to say, *you have done well and as being favored they give many handclaps of both hands* in a sign of gratitude and they go down on the ground and cover their whole bodies with dust.*

One entire folio and part of another dealing with São Tomé are entirely in Spanish.<sup>39</sup> In short, it reads as one might expect an Italian writer in the Vatican taking notes and translating from a Spanish language text, occasionally simply copying, and then returning to Italian translation.

The slip into Spanish has an interesting affect at times. A prime example is the description of household goods, in this sample, “super” defines text placed over a word, but not necessarily correcting a perceived mistake:

*The dowry/furniture [el axuar (trousseau in Spanish) super furniture] in these huts [choças] consists of one or two mats [store] for sleeping, and two other gourds to keep palm wine, a vase and an earthenware pot, which they fashion and adorn with designs [super with many], which are sun dried and are as resistant as ours are without being fired.<sup>40</sup>*

Here, at the beginning of the text, the author used “axuar” or trousseau to define what amounts to the household furnishings, then re-glosses the distinctly Spanish word into Italian in a superscript to read simply “mobili” (furniture). In this way, the reading (or reading Cuvelier and Jadin’s translation, which has simply “Le mobilier de ces cabanes”) overlooks an important cultural trait, still found today, that the wife of the new family is responsible for furnishing the household goods as a sort of trousseau.<sup>41</sup> No doubt the Italian writer, realizing that the Spanish term would be unfamiliar, decided to regloss it.

Vat. Lat. 12516 was clearly not intended as a finished product, written in a cramped non-professional hand, with corrections, marginal notes, and so on, and not for wide dissemination. But, Romance languages being what they are, this text was probably not a burden either for an Italian or a Spaniard reading them. As there is considerable information in the text that cannot be directly traced to any other Carmelite account, including the Florentine Relation. It

<sup>39</sup> BAV Vat. Lat. 12516, fol. 24 (last quarter)-24v.

<sup>40</sup> BAV Vat. Lat. 12516, fol. 108v.

<sup>41</sup> Thanks to Adrien Ngudiankama of the Kongo Academy for responding to my query concerning traditional family life (defined from Ngudiankama’s observations in Democratic Republic of Congo and his own research).

suggests that the underlying text was based on material known to a person with direct knowledge of Kongo.

With this background, it seems quite likely that the account that de la Encarnación wrote to Antonio Manuel about is the underlying text that Antonio Manuel had with him, but probably not emended by him, as the passage on the Jagas refers to him in the third person.<sup>42</sup> This is strongly suggested by the note on attempts to reach Prester John in the latter part of the text:

[fol. 121v] This step [to visit Prester John] has not been attempted so far, because it is prevented by the Xacchi who destroyed the Congo in the past years; and as they are ferocious, one does not dare to go to their lands. But thanks be to God they are losing their strength with the sweetness [*suavita*] of Christ's yoke, because, as was understood by the Ambassador of the King of Congo, who was sent by the King of Congo to ask for Ministers in the year 1606 & already the greatest part of those Xacchi have received the faith, and the others will receive it, if there is anyone who preaches it with the Emperor of Monomengue, of whom they are vassals.

The apparent error of the year as 1606 (Cuvelier and Jadin silently emended the date in their translation to 1608) does not correspond to the year Antonio Manuel left Kongo (1604) but does match the date that the two corresponded, de la Encarnación's first letter being dated 1 January 1607 (but with the implication that they had already communicated before). However, the text is still clearly an informal text, not rewritten in a fine hand, and has relatively few corrections, the marginal notes primarily marking subjects in the text, and it does not seem to have been edited very much. As a working reference paper, it would not need to be written in a beautiful hand or even necessarily be a finished product.

The passage on the Xacchi is interesting, because the account in Vat. Lat. 12516 has an earlier section on the invasion of the "Xacas" (in the marginal note it is "Jacas" as in the Florentine Relation), which seems largely drawn from Pigafetta, though not quoted in his words.<sup>42</sup> As about half the bottom part of the left side of the page is missing, it is hard to judge how close the wording is. But at one point, the author enters—underlined, in Spanish on the remaining right-hand side of the page—the phrase, "they turn back their eyelids and decorate them red and white." The author also says that they "entered the Congo through the province of [word blotted out] and

<sup>42</sup> Cuvelier and Jadin also summarize what they see in the manuscript, and although it is not apparent, p. 125 is a summary by them rather than part of the account. Most of what BAV Vat. Lat. 12516 has written on this is on fols. 114v-116 and appears to be simply a summary of Pigafetta. Following this, the manuscript takes up a long description of Kongo's government, which Cuvelier and Jadin translate from p. 130 forward.



rendered the Manibatta [hole].” But the remaining section, which only contains the ends of lines, clearly follows a shorter and highly condensed account close to that of Pigafetta.

Writing over twenty years after his stay in Kongo, and openly acknowledging to Antonio Manuel that his memory of his visit to Kongo was weak, one might imagine that de la Encarnación would consult a published text like that of Pigafetta—but that he might also alter it in places where he trusted his own knowledge. When the Kongolese ambassador told him of the further fate of the Jagas, de la Encarnación added this was news to him.

### The Unpublished Chapter of Diego de Santissimo Sacramento

De la Encarnación’s work has added considerably to our knowledge of late sixteenth-century Kongo, while his companion Diego de Santissimo Sacramento’s known work is primarily about the missionaries’ adventures. But the unpublished chapter of his account supplies new insights into religious development within Kongo, adding to the Florentine Relation’s observations, showing how African and European ideas about it converged and supplemented each other.

When the Carmelites went to Kongo, the bishop of São Tomé, Martinho de Ulhoa, sailed with them from Portugal. He had been bishop since 1578 and stayed for eight months in Kongo before returning to Portugal, and undoubtedly shared stories with the Carmelites about Kongo as he returned to São Tomé on the long return trip. De Santissimo Sacramento often relates stories that he heard from the bishop, one of which concerned the relationship between Kongo and the Bible, which can expand the Florentine Relation. In the Florentine Relation, de la Encarnación mentioned a conversation he had with Álvaro about a certain “fig” tree called in Kikongo “Mizefhos”:

[fol. 165] This fig is triangular and it has a skin which when it is peeled all that is inside tastes very sweet like a pineapple and in whatever part of this fig one cuts, one can see so natural an effigy of a crucifix that it immediately seems both in this and in the sweetness of the fruit that it is a tree of great mystery and when I discussed the qualities of this fig tree with King Don Alvaro, he told me that he understood it to be the same tree and fruit that tempted our mother Eve in the earthly paradise, seeing the great size of its leaves so that only two leaves suffice to clothe a man as I some of in the same kingdom used in place of their cloths.

De Santissimo Sacramento also noted the story, which he heard from the bishop, of the fig tree and its leaves, and clearly linked this to European conceptions of the Garden of Eden, based on Genesis 3:1–8 concerning Adam and Eve who, having eaten the forbidden fruit, used fig leaves to cover their nakedness. He also supported the idea that the Garden of Eden was close to Kongo, writing in the unpublished chapter, “One of the most notable things found in this kingdom is the [Congo] river, believed to be one of the

four that come out of the Terrestrial Paradise [Garden of Eden],” He also mentioned the “fig of Congo” but called it by the name of the trees, “Miçenfo.”<sup>43</sup> He continued:

The Lord the Bishop told me: that in the third chapter of Genesis there had been mention of this River: because it was the one that passes through Ethiopia. In past times (they say) a King wanted to know its origin, and so he commanded a great ship to be built, and taking people and provisions, after sailing three months up the River, they came to where there were very different people and monsters on the shore, and overcome by difficulties, after all this time they returned. All this was told as an absolutely sure thing.<sup>44</sup>

Whether the story originated with Álvaro’s wondering about Biblical stories or with the bishop’s understanding of geography is impossible to tell.<sup>45</sup> But as we can see from the Florentine Relation’s account, Álvaro was certainly willing to absorb and repeat them; he was, after all, reading the work of a major Spanish theologian to his family. However, it is quite true that in 1536, Afonso I ordered ships to be built to ascend the Congo River, and in fact they were being built, although there is no further evidence that the expedition took place.<sup>46</sup>

De Santissimo Sacramento’s unpublished chapter also preserves what seems likely to be a Kongolese story, since at least one of his informants was a noble Kongolese, concerning Kongo’s place in Divine providence, when it reveals how Christianity came to Kongo:

[99v/118v] Creditable people told us how the Kingdom of Congo had been discovered and it was like this: some Portuguese returning from India were forced to stop there because of contrary winds, they were sailing a very large ship, the country people marveled at seeing such a large house, the Portuguese seeing they could go no farther on, sought to enter the port which lay

<sup>43</sup> This is frequently attested to later, for example, in Cavazzi, *Istorica Relazione*, Book I, no. 83, but spelled “nicefo” (with some variations). This fig is sometimes identified as *Musa paradisiaca sapentium* L (banana), but the spelling “Mizefhos” suggests the Kikongo fruit *nsafu* (*Dacryodes edulis*), the tree of which is called *misafu*. The fruit is segmented and so the appearance of a crucifix could sometimes be detected in a cross-section cutting. (My thanks to Adrien Ngudiankama for advice on this point.)

<sup>44</sup> Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 2711, fol.119v.

<sup>45</sup> The Congo River had already been identified as coming from the Garden of Eden in the early sixteenth century; see Alessandro Scafi, “The African Paradise of Cardinal Carvajal: New Light on the ‘Kunstman II’ Map, 1502–1506.” *Renaissance and Reformation* 32–2 (2008), 7–28.”

<sup>46</sup> Manuel Pacheco to João III, 28 March 1536, Brásio, *Monumenta* III, 58.

on a very great river (of which more later) and as the Blacks seeing the Portuguese dressed with boots and white, all (would have thought) that they were born that way. And so they went to the King to give him news of what was happening: and told him that a great house was coming up the river, and that there were some men who had raw faces and hands, and whose feet had no toes, and that the rest of each of their bodies were different colors [reflecting colored clothing].

The King, along with his sorcerers, marveled greatly at this. And as this matter was guided by God, and so the King was determined to see them. The Portuguese asked for various things that they needed by signs, and gave other things back in thanks. And seeing this the people of that kingdom trusted them. Before this (I say, before the Portuguese came) there was a great sorcerer in that kingdom in whom the devil spoke, and predicted many things which were yet to happen, and everyone had a lot of respect for him. He lived near the sea where all would come to hear his predictions and superstitions (I knew this from a descendant of the Kings of the Congo). Portuguese went to his city by order of the King (which is where he is now) and there were many and they put them in order; and there were some in whom the Devil spoke, and the king was accompanied by many of those of the kingdom, and by the predictions of soothsayers and sorcerers, finally seeing them peaceful, he ordered them to be given sustenance.

The Portuguese easily took up the language of the Congo, which (as it was the Blacks) is the best that we came upon for there, and used it to tell the King of the houses of Portugal and [100/119] where they came from and that they were Christians, and that Christ was the son of God and of the Holy Virgin Mary, and that he had been killed by sinners, and they showed him a very well figured crucifix that they were carrying. Since they were amazed; the king was determined to know if it were true and sent people from his kingdom with the Portuguese to see if it were so, that they asked that ministers be sent to them. All went well, because going to Portugal with this news they were well received, although they did not go to India.

The story told here tracks quite well with the actual events, as it was as a result of what a Kongolese embassy to Portugal learned in Lisbon before it returned to Kongo in 1491 that convinced Nzinga a Nkuwu to be baptized, albeit with the interesting twist that the arrival of the Portuguese was already foretold by an ancient wise man.

Turning to stories that circulated in Europe, de Santissimo Sacramento also claimed on local authority that

After this Kingdom became Christian, it was learned (he already said that to me for certain) that an apostle had passed through there, at the time of the evangelical preaching, and found out that it was Saint Thomas, who left some letters written on a stone, which no one knows how to read [but there] are in phrases that are Hebrew, and this is by tradition, and the letters testify

to being true. And this also confirms what happens in Brazil, a land that is also black.<sup>47</sup>

Stories of apparently Christian customs that Europeans found in the cultures of Africa and America during the sixteenth-century voyages posited that these customs had been planted by the Biblical Apostle Thomas, who was known to have gone to India. But in the sixteenth-century versions, Saint Thomas somehow also made his way to the Americas and, as in this text, to Kongo. In fact, the earliest such claim was made in 1513 by sailors returning from Brazil, and Jesuits working there in the late sixteenth century made a good deal of Saint Thomas and an earlier Christianity.<sup>48</sup>

Stories, whether originating in Kongo or among the European ecclesiastical community, would fit well into Kongo's increasingly patriotic self-image as a Christian kingdom. Certainly, Kongolese soldiers facing the Portuguese during the invasion of 1622–1623 claimed that Kongo had a Black Saint James.<sup>49</sup> The Jesuit visitor Mateus Cardoso wrote of them in 1624 that the Kongolese believed that their good customs and virtues had predestined them to become Christians.<sup>50</sup> In the mid-seventeenth century, the Capuchin Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi recorded that Kongolese had retold the creation story to make God send his angels to create all other people, reserving for himself the creation of Kongo.<sup>51</sup> And famously, the eighteenth-century prophetess of Saint Anthony, Beatriz Kimpa Vita, would place the whole Nativity story in Kongo.<sup>52</sup> And finally, Kongolese craftsmen produced crucifixes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that depicted Christ on the cross with African features and a loin cloth decorated with distinctive patterns used in Kongolese textiles.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Biblioteca Nacional de España MS 7211, fol. 120. Geoffroy Heimlich discovered this “missing” text, and cited it to explain rock engravings around Lovo, in the hills around Kimpese, Democratic Republic of Congo, in “The Kongo Cross Across Centuries,” *African Arts* 49 (2016), 22.

<sup>48</sup> John Thornton, *A Cultural History of the Atlantic World, 1250–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 423, 430, 437, 440.

<sup>49</sup> António de Oliveira Cadornega, *História geral das guerras Angolanas (1680–1681)*, ed. José Delgado, 3 vols. (Lisbon: Agência-Geral do Ultramar, 1940–42, reprinted 1972), vol. 1, 105. (This is based on testimony of Jeronimo de Soveral.)

<sup>50</sup> [Mateus Cardoso], *História do Reino de Congo*, ed. António Brásio (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1969) fol. 3v of MS (marked in the edition).

<sup>51</sup> Cavazzi, *Istorica Descrizione* I, no. 156.

<sup>52</sup> John Thornton, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement (1684–1706)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 113–114; 160–162.

<sup>53</sup> See Cécile Fromont, *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014) for a thorough study

While the Carmelite work, especially the Florentine Relation, does not fill the chronological gap in missionary coverage of Kongo's history, it does enrich considerably the fund of texts currently known to scholarship, confirming elements reported otherwise only by Pigafetta and at times expanding and elaborating on them. Indeed, the Carmelite texts work well with Pigafetta, and the account of Kongo in Vat. Lat. 12516 could be considered a culmination of the informed juncture of those two bodies of work.

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of the various intersections of local crucifixes and Kongo culture. The African features of the Jesus are visible in many of these objects, and the designs on his loincloth show distinct Central African patterns.

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