The Kongolese Saint Anthony

Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684–1706

John K. Thornton

The Kongolese Saint Anthony

This book describes the Christian religious movement led by Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita in the Kingdom of Kongo, from her birth in 1684 until her death, by burning at the stake, in 1706, only two years after the movement had started. Beatriz, a young woman, claimed to be possessed by Saint Anthony, argued that Jesus was a Kongolese, and criticized Italian Capuchin missionaries in her country for not supporting black saints. The movement was largely a peace movement, with a following among the common people, attempting to stop the devastating cycle of civil wars between contenders for the Kongolese throne that fed the growing Atlantic slave trade.

Thornton supplies background information on the Kingdom of Kongo, the development of Catholicism in Kongo since 1491, the nature and role of local warfare in the Atlantic slave trade, and contemporary everyday life, as well as sketching the lives of some local personalities.

John Thornton is Professor of History at Millersville University of Pennsylvania. He has taught at the University of Zambia, Allegheny College, and the University of Virginia. His other works include: *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*, now in its second edition (Cambridge University Press, 1998), and *The Kingdom of Kongo*.

The Kongolese Saint Anthony

Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684–1706

JOHN K. THORNTON

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10013-2473, USA

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521596497

First published 1998
11th printing 2009

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-59370-0 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-59649-7 Paperback

To the women in my life:

Mary Elizabeth
Linda
Amara and Amanda
Betsy, Alix, and Salli

Contents

Illustrations

MAPS

Introduction

IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, a Kongolese woman possessed by Saint Anthony led a mass movement to restore the Kingdom of Kongo. The movement was violently suppressed by the religious and political authorities of the country, and she was burned at the stake as a witch and heretic in 1706 – but not before she had drawn thousands of people to her in the ruins of the country's ancient capital.

Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita's religious and political movement is surprisingly little known outside narrow academic circles. Even though the movement has been discussed quite widely by Africanists since the 1960s, its full implications for the history of Africa and the slave trade to America have not been explored in popular history. Dona Beatriz' movement, although primarily aimed at ending a long-lasting civil war and reestablishing a broken monarchy, can also be seen as a popular movement directed against the slave trade in Africa at the time of the export slave trade. Yet up to the present, it has not fired much popular knowledge.

This neglect may be partly because West Africa is still regarded in the United States as the principal place of origin of African Americans, even though recent research shows that as many as one-quarter of all African Americans ultimately derive from central African (and mostly Kongolese) roots. Then, too, Dona Beatriz' movement, with its possessed saint and Christian ideology, often seems too embarrassingly bizarre or too atypical of African culture to appeal to American conceptions. Although

most Americans are comfortable with the idea of Muslim Africans in the slave trade period, they seem much less comfortable with Christian Africans. A literate elite, dressing partially in European clothes, bearing Portuguese names, and professing Catholicism seems somehow out of place in the popular image of precolonial Africa.

In spite of this image, however, Kongo was an important contributor to the population of the Americas, thanks to the civil wars which Dona Beatriz' movement sought to end. Although the great burst of slaves from Kongo directed to North America (and particularly South Carolina) lay about fifteen years later than Dona Beatriz' death, the issues raised in her day were very much a part of the much less well-known period that followed. The Stono Rebellion of South Carolina in 1739, led by Catholic Kongolese slaves, marked the end of the burst and may have involved the working out of some of the issues raised by Dona Beatriz, as did the Haitian revolution in even greater force a half-century later.[1]

Whereas Americans might find Dona Beatriz' movement interesting because of its implications for the population of the New World, Dona Beatriz and her followers were not thinking primarily about the slave trade. For them, war spawned many problems besides the slave trade – only one of a host of possibly damaging outcomes to conflict. The problems of war – displaced people, intransigent elites, and the absence of popular checks on rulers – remain with Africa today, even if the specific threat of the slave trade is no longer present. In this way, Dona Beatriz prefigures modern African democracy movements as much as she can be seen as an antislavery figure.

The years of Dona Beatriz' movement are some of the best-documented in Kongo's history, which itself is probably the best described country in Atlantic Africa in the period. This documentation is a product of the convergence of Italian Capuchin mis-

[1] John Thornton, "African Roots of the Stono Rebellion," *American Historical Review* 96 (1991): 1101–13; " 'I am the Subject of the King of Congo': African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution," *Journal of World History* 4 (1993): 181–214.

sionaries on the eastern part of Kongo and their production of lengthy and detailed diaries of their lives there. Luca da Caltanisetta and especially Marcellino d'Atri produced two long (more than 500 pages together) diary-type accounts of the earlier periods of Dona Beatriz' life. The two were often independent witnesses to the same events as they frequently served together. When they left in 1701–2, Bernardo da Gallo and Lorenzo da Lucca, who left briefer but nevertheless detailed accounts, took their places. Dona Beatriz' own movement is described in da Gallo's report to the Propaganda Fide, written in 1710, and da Lucca's annual letters to the Capuchin province of Tuscany of 1706 and 1707. In addition to this eyewitness documentation, the archives contain a number of shorter documents that illuminate the period, one of the most important being the report of the Jesuit priest Pedro Mendes written in 1710 and giving historical background from 1665.

In all this mass of documentation, however, there is not a very strong Kongolese contribution. While some periods, notably the first half of the sixteenth century, are almost wholly presented in documents written by Kongolese, only one letter, written by Pedro IV and included in da Gallo's report, survives from a Kongolese author and deals directly with the period of the crisis.

Yet the Kongolese elite was literate, and the Capuchin accounts frequently mention their correspondence and even their recourse to archives. But this material may not have survived, and if it has, at present its location is not known. Eva Sebastyén's discovery of numerous seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documents in private hands and in local archives in the Dembos regions of Angola (just south of Kongo) in 1987–8 gives us hope that there are documents of eighteenth-century date still to be found in northern Angola that might remedy this situation. At present, however, we learn of the movement mostly through Italian priests.

The Capuchin priests were not impartial observers of the Kongolese scene, and indeed their actions helped to precipitate the movement itself. In the current situation, though, the modern scholar has little choice but to try to read between the lines and hope that the Kongolese viewpoint can be surmised. Sometimes

it has been necessary to make use of modern observation and documentation to interpret or expand what the Capuchins tell us. Ever since the missionaries of the late nineteenth century began teaching literacy in Kikongo, the Kongolese have produced no small number of self-ethnographies, most notably the thousands of pages produced for the Swedish missionary Karl Laman in the early twentieth century, and more modern work by such Kongolese writers as Bahelele Ndimansa, Simon Bockie, and Fu-kiau Bunseki.[2] Unfortunately, most of these writers came from regions within the Kikongo-speaking world that had never been a part of the Kingdom of Kongo.

Students of Catholic missionaries, especially Jesuits and Redemptorists, often from within the boundaries of the old kingdom, have produced works on local history and early-twentieth-century customs. Of this smaller corpus, the most influential is probably the unpublished account, of 1910, of Mpetelo Boka, whose work underlies much of the ethnographic and traditional accounts of the missionary-historian Jean Cuvelier.[3]

Kongolese writers since the early twentieth century have recorded in writing, usually in Kikongo, historical information that was once transmitted orally. Along with their long tradition of literacy, the Kongolese maintained an oral tradition with historical implications, particularly the histories of families and clans. Cuvelier collected and published hundreds of these accounts, both from Kongolese texts and from his own interviews in the 1920s and 1930s.[4] The traditions that he and others recorded,

[2] Bahelele Ndimansa, *Lusansu ye fu mu Kongo tekila mvu 1900* (Kinshasa, (1977); *Kizonzi ye ntekolo andi Makundu*; André Fu-kiau Bunseki, *N'Kongo ye nza yakundilila* (Kinshasa, 1966); Simon Bockie, *Death and the Invisible Powers* (Bloomington, Ind., 1993).

[3] Mpetelo Boka, "Nsosani a Kinguli," 1910 MS, in Archiven der Paters Redemptoren, Leuven, portion was published by Jean Cuvelier in "Mambu ma Kinza Nkulu mu Nsi a Kongo," *Kukiele* 2 (1929): 11–12. A partial French translation appeared in Cuvelier, "Traditions Congolaises," *Congo* 2 (1930–1), and *L'ancien royaume du Congo* (Brussels, 1946; originally published in Flemish in 1941).

[4] In *Nkutama a mvila za makanda* [collection of praise names of clans] (1st ed. Tumba, Congo, 1934; 4th ed. Matadi, Congo, 1972 [revised by Joseph de Munck]. The content of the book first began appearing serially in the missionary newspaper, *Kukiele*, in 1928 under the title "Mambu ma Kinza

however, do not tell us much about life in Kongo before about 1800. Moreover, the most intensive collection and publication of traditions related more to Kongo's northern provinces in modern Zaire (renamed Congo in 1997), and less from the region where Dona Beatriz lived and worked as well as from the lands of the great royal families of Kongo that lay in Angola.[5] More may yet be gleaned from such sources when systematic research is again possible in northern Angola.

The Kongolese writers of orally transmitted history and ethnography have been joined by Western writers, primarily missionaries like Cuvelier and by anthropologists like John Janzen and Wyatt MacGaffey, who have mined Kikongo sources and conducted fieldwork. Although much of this work also concerns regions north of the old Kingdom of Kongo, it can still help scholars to understand the ideological world of the eighteenth-century Kongo presented in the Capuchin accounts. By using these studies, one hopes to see beyond the prejudices of the missionary sources.

The book that follows is a narrative based largely on the eyewitness observations of the primary sources. The records of the four principal sources – Marcellino d'Atri, Luca da Caltanisetta, Lorenzo da Lucca, and Bernardo da Gallo – are all arranged chronologically in diary or letter format, so that they lend them-

Nkulu mu Nsi a Kongo" [Matters of the Ancient World of the Land of Kongo] and ran until 1933, but the book was organized differently and contained more information. A supplement, composed of a lengthy clan history called "Nkutama . . ." by a catechist Gustave Nenga, came out in 1935, apparently forming the "2d edition," and a partial "3d edition" was serialized in 1948–9. Cuvelier only rarely stated the sources of the information, although some can be located through study in the Redemptorist Archives. My thanks to the archivist, Father Joseph Roosen, for his help in locating material and his knowledge of the language, environment, and history of the Redemptorists.

[5] Joseph de Munck, however, did visit both the São Salvador region and that around Kibangu expressly to collect oral traditions, some of which he published. They were revealed to be more or less of the same nature as those in *Nkutama* (see de Munck, "Notes sur un voyuage au Kongo dia Ntotila" in *Ngonge* 3 [1960], no. 8, and "Quelques clans bakongo d'Angola," ibid. 4 [1960]). The Kikongo versions of these traditions were added to the 4th edition of *Nkutama*, edited by de Munck, which appeared in 1972.

selves readily to narrative style. They are very rich in details, and even in conversation, for this crucial period of Kongo's history. Because sources of this kind are very rare in eighteenth-century African history, even in the history of Kongo which is already unusually well documented, it is likely this will be a striking narrative for Africanists who are not familiar with these particular sources. Throughout I have followed them very closely, although, at times, interrupting the flow for interpretative passages and presenting the details from a different point of view. The book has very few footnotes, as I have chosen to identify the source from which I have drawn my tale only when it is necessary to switch to another source or make commentary. Readers who wish to consult the original sources will have little difficulty, for all this, in locating the passages I have used. I have made one significant alteration, however, which needs to be noted. Much of the dialogue in this book is presented in the sources as reported speech or after the fact, along the lines of "He said that he would come . . ." which I have altered to "He said, 'I will come . . . ' " In all such cases, however, my alterations of the quoted material extend only to changing personal pronouns from third to first person, and to altering verbs from past to present. The effect is a great gain in immediacy without, I think, changes in the material presented in the sources.

The interpretation of this book is not substantially different from the one I presented in 1979,[6] which broke with the then prevalent interpretation of Dona Beatriz' movement as a nationalist one in a "semicolonial" context.[7] In addition to adopting a narrative style, I have been able to add a great deal of detail by consulting d'Atri's account, which was unavailable to me then. Other scholars have touched on the movement since then in a variety of contexts, sometimes not in ways identical to my inter-

[6] In my UCLA Ph.D. thesis, subsequently published as John Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition, 1641–1718* (Madison, Wis., 1983). Also see " 'I am the Subject.' "

[7] Georges Balandier, *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York, 1968 [French original, 1965]); Teobaldo Filesi, *Nazionalismo e religione nel Congo all'inizio del 1700: La setta degli Antoniani* (Rome, 1972).

pretation, but generally not in ones that would cause me to alter the interpretation of my earlier work.[8] Dona Beatriz' movement has inspired some popularization, for example a play by the Ivorian writer Bernard Dadié, a popular story for young readers by Ibrahima Kaké, and even a plea for her canonization by R. Batsikama.[9] The narrative here advances on my and the other scholars' work, primarily in fixing the context of the movement more precisely in time, and proposes a chain of events leading to the immediate crisis in Dona Beatriz' life that led to her mission. My primary goal, however, is not to break new interpretative ground but to present a narrative account of the movement in a way that is accessible to a nonacademic audience.

ORTHOGRAPHY AND PRONUNCIATION

I have written all names and terms in European languages according to modern orthographic rules. This includes the Christian names of the Kongolese, although as is noted in the text, their phonology would not be the same as for Europeans.

There is no standardized modern orthography for Kikongo as the language has several dialects and is spoken in three different modern countries. For this book I have modernized these words

[8] António Custodio Gonçalves, *La symbolisation politique: le "prophetisme" Kongo au XVIIIème siècle* (Munich, 1980), subsequently developed in *Kongo, Le linage contre l'état* (Évora, Portugal, 1985); Celestine Goma Foutou, *Histoire des civilisations du Congo* (Paris, 1981), pp. 305–13; Anne Hilton, *The Kingdom of Kongo* (Oxford, 1985); Wyatt MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa: The BaKongo of Lower Zaire* (Chicago, 1986). I have followed with interest, but ultimately not accepted, the contention that the present-day cult of Saint Mary in Soyo and the Antonian movement are connected, advanced by Henrique Abranches in his *Sobre os Basolongo: Arqueologia da Tradição Oral* (Gand, Belgium, 1991), pp. 49–52; 69–75 (also notes on pp. 84–5), using local research; nor the more elaborate contention on Beatriz' origin and itinerary presented fictionally in his *Misericórida para o Reino do Kongo!* (Lisbon, 1996).

[9] Bernard Dadié, *Béatrice du Congo* (Paris, 1970); Ibrahima Baba Kaké, *Dona Béatrice: La Jeanne d'Arc congolaise* (Paris, 1976). I have not been able to locate or consult the plea for her elevation to sainthood proposed by R. Batsikama, *Ndona Béatrice: Serait-elle témoin du Christ et de la foi du vieux Congo?* (Kinshasa, Congo, 1970).

according to usage in works written by the early-twentieth-century Kongolese writers, the English Baptist missionaries of São Salvador, and the Belgian Redemptorist missionaries whose language corresponds most closely to the modern form of the dialect of Dona Beatriz' home in the Kingdom of Kongo. The dialect, vocabulary, and grammar of this language were first established in the catechism of 1624, prepared by native speakers for use by Jesuit missionaries, but using modified Portuguese orthography. It is possible to demonstrate that some phonological changes (e.g. use of "v" for the bilabial "b") and grammatical changes (loss of singular class prefixes on the some words and loss of the *ku*-class altogether on infinitives of verbs) have taken place since Dona Beatriz' day, but I have used modern forms in all cases.

I have sought most of the historical terms and usages from the material written in Kikongo by the early-twentieth-century Kongolese historians and their missionary compilers and synthesizers such as Cuvelier and de Munck.[10] I have also followed the grammatical rules of the Mbanza Kongo/Zombo dialect in which these texts are written, although I have omitted the use of the articles "o" and "e," which are very common in this dialect and sometimes attached to words.

In presenting Kikongo terms, I have not pluralized according to the rules of Kikongo. Like many other related languages in central and southern Africa, Kikongo pluralizes by changing the prefix of nouns, according to their membership in a number of noun classes. This system is unfamiliar to most readers, so I have adopted a seventeenth-century convention used by both European and Kongolese writers of the time, of pluralizing the singular form of the noun, with its singular class prefix, according to English rules.

[10] Notably in Cuvelier's presentation of Kongo's history in *Kukiele*, "Mambu ma Kinza" and "Lusansu lua Nsi a Kongo" and in Joseph de Munck, *Kinkulu kia nsi eto Kongo* [History of Our Country Kongo] (Tumba, Congo, 1956; 2d edition, Matadi, Congo, 1971). I have also read Diawaku dia Nseyila, *Bimfumu Biankulu bia Nzanza* (Kinshasa, 1986), an abridgment and paraphrased translation of Jan Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna* (Madison, Wis., 1966; original French, 1965), but have not followed his usage, which reflects a more northern dialect.

I have also followed these rules in giving ethnonyms, so that the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Kongo are Kongolese, not, as would be correct in their language, Esikongo or Besikongo (singular Mwisikongo). In this case, I have dropped class prefixes and used English rules for creating ethnonyms from the resulting root.

Readers unfamiliar with Kikongo might consider the following for pronunciation: the consonants are all pronounced more or less as in English, and the vowels all have the "Italian" values, that is, *a* as "a" in "father," *e* as the "ay" in "hay," *i* as the "ea" in "peach," *o* as the "o" in "phone," and *u* as the "u" in "glue."

Nasal clusters like "nz," "nk," or "mb" give nonspeakers the most trouble, since the tendency is to try to pronounce the "n" and then the following letter. Usually this creates something like "imbanza" or "inkisi" (for *mbanza* and *nkisi*), which are less correct than if one simply treats the initial "m" or "n" as if it were silent, as in "banza" for *mbanza* or "kisi" for *nkisi*. In regular spoken Kikongo the initial sound is often not pronounced or is pronounced so softly and quickly that it almost disappears. However, it is frequently quite noticeable when it occurs after a final vowel in whole Kikongo sentences, where it elides to produce something like "ganga ankisi" (*nganga a nkisi*) meaning "priest" or after a definite article as in "onganga ankisi" (*o nganga a nkisi*) meaning "the priest." For purposes of reading this text, however, one is rarely called upon to produce sentences, and so it is best to leave it unpronounced.

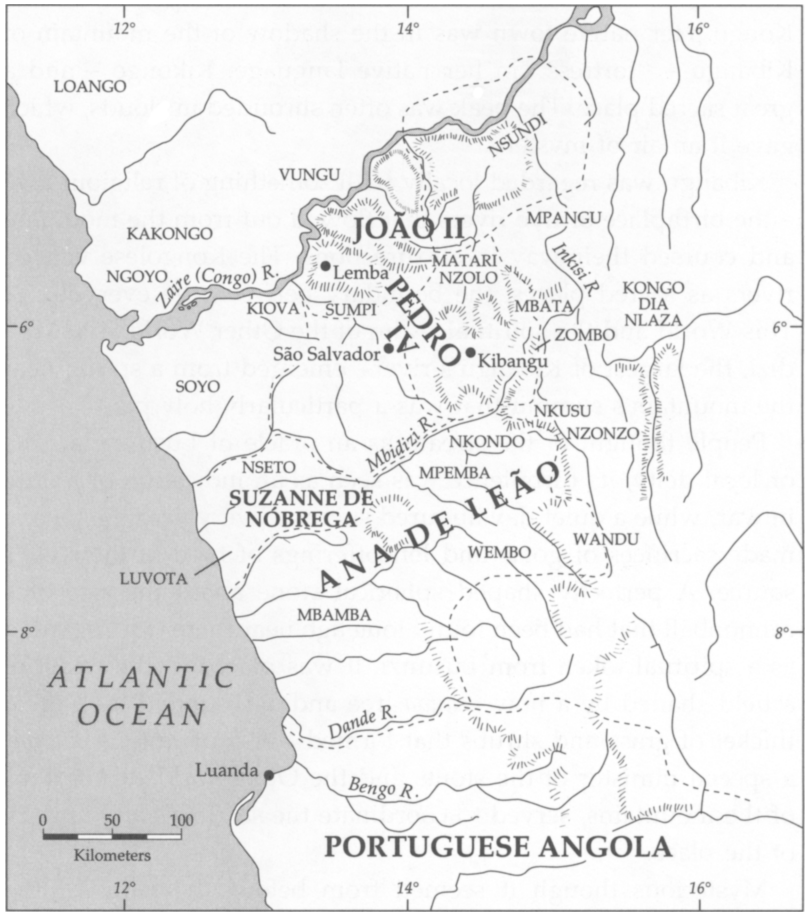
1

A Land in Turmoil

IN AUGUST OF 1704, DONA BEATRIZ KIMPA VITA, a twenty-year-old Kongolese woman, lay deathly ill upon her bed. For seven days she had been sick. Sweat poured from her feverish body and wild visions flashed in her head. She knew now she was dying. Then, suddenly, she became calm, and a clear vision appeared to her. It was a man dressed in the simple blue hooded habit of a Capuchin monk, so real that he seemed to be standing in the room with her. She turned to him, transfixed.

"I am Saint Anthony, firstborn son of the Faith and of Saint Francis," he told her, "I have been sent from God to your head to preach to the people. You are to move the restoration of the Kingdom of Kongo forward, and you must tell all who threaten you that dire punishments from God await them." He told her he had tried for a long time to help Kongo, going from one province to another. "First I had gone into the head of a woman who was in Nseto, but I had to leave as the people there did not receive me well. Then I left Nseto and went to Soyo where I entered the head of an old man. But there was a Reverend Father stationed there, and the people wanted to beat me, so again I fled. Then I went to Bula, and the same thing happened again. I am trying once more, this time in Kibangu, and I have chosen you to do this."

With those words, the vision of the saint moved toward her, entered into her head and merged with her. She felt herself recover. Her strength returned. In fact, she felt in vibrant good health, strong and in good spirits. She rose from her bed, full of



Kongo in 1700. Territories of the major factions.

resolve to complete the mission. Beatriz had been possessed by Saint Anthony.[1]

Dona Beatriz, a spiritual leader in the making, was born on the banks of the Mbidizi River, in the eastern end of the Kingdom of

[1] Bernardo da Gallo, "Relazione dell'ultime Guerre civili del Regno di Congo; della Battaglia data dal Rè D. Pietro Quarto; e della vittoria da lui ottenuta contro i Rebelli. Come anche del scisma nella Fede per via d'una donna, che si fingeva S. Antonio, felicemente superato colla di quella," 17 October 1710, fols. 296–96v, published from the original in the Archivio "de Propaganda Fide," Scritture originali riferite nella Congregazione Generale (hence forward APF:SOCG), vol. 576, in Teobaldo Filesi (ed.), "Nazionalismo e religione nel Congo all'inizio del 1700: La

Kongo. Her native town was in the shadow of the mountain of Kibangu – "fortress" in her native language, Kikongo – and a great sacred place. The peak was often shrouded in clouds, which gave it an air of mystery.

Kibangu was regarded locally with something of religious awe – the birthplace of five rivers that flowed out from the mountain and coursed their way in all directions. The Kongolese viewed rivers as sacred places, the boundary between the everyday of This World and the spiritual realm of the Other World. The Mbidizi, the largest of Kibangu's rivers, emerged from a spring near the mountain's summit that was a particularly holy place.

People thought of the stream as an oracle of Lusunzi, a *nkita* or local deity, its turbulence was seen as an indication of failure in war, while a quiet day augured success. Every year the people made sacrifices of goats and left offerings of food at the river's source. A perfectly shaped spherical stone about the size of a cannonball that had been found long ago near there was regarded as a spiritual token from Lusunzi. It was placed in the midst of a field shaded by a holy *nsanda* tree and surrounded by a great thicket of grass and shrubs that formed a sort of cave. A *kitome*, a special minister of the stone, and the Otherworldly guardians of the mountains, served to coordinate the sacrifices and augury of the place.

Mysterious though it seemed from below, the mountaintop plain was thickly inhabited, and for the residents the mist was a

setta degli Antoniani," *Africa (Roma)* 9 (1971): 276–303, 463–508, 645–68. I have cited the folio numbers of the original (marked in this edition, and the separate edition of the same title, published in Rome, 1972, and in the French translation of Louis Jadin, "Le Congo et la secte des Antoniens. Restauration du royaume sous Pedro IV et la 'Saint Antoine' Congolaise [1694–1718]," *Bulletin, Institute historique belge de Rome* 33 [1961]: 411–615). There is not a specific date given in the sources for her possession. Bernardo da Gallo, our witness, who interviewed her shortly afterward, first heard about the movement after returning from a mission trip in August. No more than about two weeks elapsed between his return to Kibangu and Beatriz' arrival there. Since she stated that she went straight to Kibangu after her possession, it seems likely that the events took place in August or perhaps early September at the latest.

constant nuisance. On the mountaintop there was scarcely a sunny day during the dry season of June to September, and the humidity ruined everything in short order. Local humor said that "morning" in Kibangu was whenever the sun finally broke through the mist, and sometimes morning did not come until noon. The elevation and dampness made it a chilly place in an otherwise tropical climate. But in the rest of the year the climate was delightful, and from the top one had a marvelous view of the countryside below.

Kibangu was at the northern end of the Miongo mia Kanda, the "Mountains of Kanda," which formed a rugged backbone to Kongo's eastern provinces; sheer drops of over a thousand feet separated it from plains to the north and west. The Mbidizi River, most important of the five whose sources were found there, fell with a thundering roar over a spectacular waterfall two hundred feet high to the valley below, sending up a great permanent cloud of mist, the source of constant rainbows as the sun played on it. From the valley floor the Mbidizi flowed westward for about five miles, then turned south and grew rapidly as it was joined by a dozen smaller streams known locally as Mpangi a Mbidizi or Mwana a Mbidizi – the "Brother of the Mbidizi" or the "Child of the Mbidizi." The young river, still growing and carving its way southward, was a turbulent stream during this 30-mile course, before making a final bend and heading off westward toward the ocean some 125 miles away, now a stately and mature river too broad to be bridged.[2]

Dona Beatriz's home, a *mbanza* or small provincial town, was between the two great bends in the broad valley defined by a

[2] See Marcellino d'Atri, "Giornate apostoliche fatte da me Fra M. d'A . . . 1690," in Carlo Toso (ed.), *L'Anarchia Congolese nel sec. XVII. La relazione inedita di Marcellino d'Atri* (Genoa, 1984), pp. 460–2, for the geography of Kibangu, and pp. 483–6, 499 on the religious elements. Fr. Joseph de Munck visited Kibangu in 1960 and reported on the continuing veneration of the rock Lusunzi and its sacred trees: "Quelques clans Bakongo d'Angola," *Ngonge* 4 (December 1960), no. 14. I have called this deity an *nkita* rather than use the term *simbi*, a synonymous term preferred by modern anthropologist Wyatt MacGaffey in describing modern Kongo-

ridge of low hills on the west and the Kanda mountain ranges that trailed southward from Kibangu on the east. Nearly ten thousand people lived in this valley, in a handful of towns and some forty villages ruled by a king from his town on the mountaintop. By Kongolese standards, the valley was thickly inhabited, and the villages, posted along the banks of the Mbidizi and its "brothers" and "children," were frequent enough that their lights at night could guide a traveler along the road.[3]

The small town in which Dona Beatriz was born was not an important place. Her own family lived in houses typical of the lesser elite of Kongo, several buildings joined together by walls and small courtyards, and the whole surrounded outside by a stout palisade. Buildings were rectangular with walls of wood and woven grass, and roofs that were thatched with tough grasses from the open fields nearby. They were built in the same style and materials as those of the commoners around them, though the buildings were somewhat larger and more carefully made.

Intricately woven mats, made from fibers drawn from tree bark and pounded to reveal threads, formed the decoration of the walls, which were sometimes planked. Wall hangings such as tapestries, upon which were mounted arms, such as a sword and shield and bow, made up the elite decorations. The cloth, of which Kongolese were justly proud, was attractive enough that much was exported to Portuguese Angola, and smaller quantities, even farther away. The wall hangings and noble weapons like

lese religion, because *nkita* is used in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources, and in this dialect. See *Religion and Society in Central Africa*, pp. 85–8.

[3] On the demography of the region in this time period, see John Thornton, "Demography and History in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1550–1750," *Journal of African History* 18 (1977). On village lights guiding a traveler in the valley, Archivio Provinciale dei Cappuccini da Provincia da Toscana (Montughi Convent, Florence), Filippo Bernardi da Firenze, "Ragguaglioi de Congo . . . ," 2 vols. (1714). Lorenzo da Lucca, "Lettera Annua, 1706," vol. 2, p. 296 (Jean Cuvelier edited and translated this text in French, marking the original pagination in *Relations du Congo du P. Laurent de Lucques* [Brussels, 1954]).