

REVIEWS

NJINGA OF ANGOLA

Njinga of Angola: Africa's Warrior Queen. By Linda M. Heywood. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018. Pp. 310. \$31.00 cloth.
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Njinga of Ndongo (1582–1663) was born into a kingdom in declension. When her grandfather usurped power in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the realm was very near its meridian. Then, Ndongo possessed an Atlantic border extending from the Bengo River in the north to the Kwanza in the south. It exercised suzerainty over a region extending more than 200 miles into the interior, and it projected cultural, political, and military power well into its territorial frontiers.

By the first third of the seventeenth century, however, Ndongo was very far indeed from its apogee. Much of the former western end of the realm was now better described as Portuguese Angola, while Ndongo proper persisted as a not insignificant but much reduced eastern rump. Now queen of this diminished Ndongo, Njinga found herself standing on a literal precipice in May of 1629, chased out of what remained of the kingdom while Portuguese colonial soldiers and her erstwhile vassals (now Portuguese allies) closed in, determined to end her reign, by taking her life if necessary. At this juncture, several hundred of Njinga's soldiers formed a cordon about her, and, as a momentary standoff ensued, the queen of Ndongo performed a feat of astounding dexterity, intelligence, and power. The nearly 50-year-old queen (in a time and place where life expectancy was around 40 years) reached out toward the cliff face and rappelled into an impossible escape. Three hundred of her troops were not so fortunate.

Linda M. Heywood deftly chronicles the myriad negotiations, contentions, escapes, and transformations defining a remarkable ruler's will to power in early modern west-central Africa. Njinga ruled in an age when the already complex nature and stakes of mastery in the region were complicated further by the arrival of hundreds of covetous adventurers from various far-flung states an ocean away. Heywood's book is part colonial history centering on African resistance, collaboration, and manipulations of Portuguese and Dutch efforts at African dominion. In the span of her long life, Njinga was a greater foil than abettor of European power in west-central Africa. But even if she was easily more one than the other, she was still very clearly *both*. Heywood's description and

analysis of her career and of the careers of lesser African and European doyens in her orbit is an astute study in the dialectics of colonialism.

Njinga's relationship with the strangers within her realm is not easily characterized as colonial, and Heywood's story is not at its heart one of European conquest. In seventeenth-century west-central Africa, the Portuguese, the Dutch, and other Europeans were as much conquered as they were conquerors—especially when one considers the social and cultural realms alongside the military and political ones. Consequently, African sovereignty and Atlantic diplomacy and negotiation are major themes of the book.

Heywood's success with centering Njinga in the theatrical, epistolary, and strategic worlds of transatlantic diplomacy is a hallmark of the volume. Dealing with Njinga's efforts (during her brother's reign) as a Ndongo ambassador to the Portuguese at Luanda, her near-constant subsequent machinations with an assortment of mercenary European governors, and the stratagems she devised later in her career to bring the Vatican and lesser Church officialdom within her orbit, Heywood's life of Njinga is a careful, insightful study of the translation and exigencies of regional power in an Atlantic context.

Through Njinga's biography, the book shines also as a social and cultural history of the region. The intersection at which tradition and the demands of the present meet forms a critical, illuminating locus of the book. Heywood's attention to how Njinga and those around her, the Portuguese and other European sojourners included, negotiated the human crossroads at which they found themselves offers the reader compelling accounts of key social formations in the region that stress internal dynamics and tensions and change over time. For instance, the histories of gender, Christianity, and Ndongo society that emerge from the book are complex and deeply humanistic. Heywood's volume is African history, world history, and Atlantic history folded into a riveting story centered on the life of a remarkable human being. Turning so much into plot, tight narrative, and biography is a stunning achievement.

This kind of work, of course, requires some compromises. The actual problems of entering into Njinga's thinking are not always clear, and the extraordinarily attentive and subtle rendering of Njinga's Ndongo emerges out of a more mythic and thus historically flattened presentation of the Kingdom before her rise. But these are matters that add fuel to seminars. Stood next to the book's remarkable achievements, they are more imperfections than flaws. The book's rescuing of Njinga from portrayals of "deviance, evil, and brutality" that dominated many previous accounts of her life, and its success at placing Njinga in her "rightful place in world history" beside figures like Elizabeth I of England, also raises the question of what exactly to do with the human tragedy that powerful political figures like Njinga and Elizabeth I worked in the world around them (250, 257). What of the 300 captured when Njinga escaped in 1629? What of the men, women, and children necessarily sent to slave ships as part of the work of kingdom-building in Njinga's Ndongo?

Heywood in no way shies away from showing these and other human disasters. It is part of her commitment to presenting Njinga in all of her complexity. But it is also disquieting to witness the death, and war, and pain around Njinga's evolving greatness simply as *complexity*. Readers may want to come to some judgement on the tragic nature and consequence of power, and Heywood's life of Njinga offers a tremendous opportunity to do so from the vantage of seventeenth-century Angola. Her book deserves to be widely read and taught.

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ALEXANDER X. BYRD

MISSIONARIES IN FLORIDA

Account of the Martyrs in the Provinces of La Florida. By Luis Jerónimo de Oré. Edited and translated by Raquel Chang-Rodríguez and Nancy Vogeley. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017. Pp. 182. \$45.00 cloth.
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In 1936 the Franciscan scholar Maynard Geiger singled out Luis Jerónimo de Oré as “one of least known and least cited chroniclers of Peru.” For decades, Geiger’s translation of the *Martyrs of Florida* (ca. 1619) served as the sole English source for this lost text, written after the Peruvian’s 1614 and 1616 journeys there. Translated from a rare copy now at the University of Notre Dame, the current edition ends the undue neglect. With a thorough introduction and ample scholarly apparatus supplied by Raquel Chang-Rodríguez and Nancy Vogeley, this lively text comes to us like a puzzle whose missing piece is finally restored.

This is a composite book, mostly a summation of other sources, and the kind of work that needs context. The first four chapters review Ponce de Leon’s 1513 arrival in *la Florida*; the series of ill-fated expeditions into what is now the US South; Pedro Menéndez de Avilés’s triumph over the French and the 1565 founding of St. Augustine; and the Jesuit missions at Jacán (Chesapeake Bay). The middle chapters recount imperial struggles between England and the Spanish from the Chesapeake to St. Augustine; native resistance to colonization and coerced conversion, culminating with a detailed account of the 1597 Guale Rebellion; pocket biographies of early Franciscan missionaries; and a chapter-length captivity narrative of Francisco de Ávila, valuable in itself as an early example of the genre.

The last three chapters sharpen in focus, as Oré reaches his point: a peaceful conquest of la Florida through Christianity. Chapter 9 folds in a field report from Francisco Pareja, who lived among the Timucuan for three decades. Chapter 10 testifies to Martín Prieto’s work among the Apalache of northern Florida, and the eleventh and final chapter, written in first-person, recounts Oré’s arduous visitations across the remote and swampy peninsula.