

# African Queens

## Text & Translations

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### Precatio

Dave Ragland  
Text by Jay St. Flono

Nigra sum, et formosa, filia Jerusalem.  
Sicut gloria Bilquis.  
Sicut potentia Amina  
Sicut sapientia Candacis.  
Sicut feminae spirituales Sybilla.  
Considerare quod fusca sim, quia coloravit me sol.  
Considerare quod fusca sim, quia benedicta me sol.  
Aquaе Divina Matres,  
Nos invocum dos hoc in templum.

I am black and beautiful, a daughter of Jerusalem.  
Like the glory of Bilquis.  
Like the power of Amina  
Like the wisdom of Candace.  
Like the spiritual women of Sybil.  
Consider that I am brown because the sun has colored me.  
Consider that I am brown because the sun has blessed me.  
Divine Mothers of Water  
We invite you to this temple

### CHANT FOR THE QUEEN OF THE KNIVES

Arise, Aminata, and lead your women to peaceful war  
that knows no end until a Hoodoo woman's humanity  
becomes the crown of all men  
Arise, ganuwar Amina  
Huduba to your enemies  
Yellow trumpets scream a song  
of ever-flowing blood  
watering the bitter ground  
growing violent legacies tall-like-trees  
Veil, Aminata  
Watch, Aminata  
Whisper, Aminata  
We are you, Aminata

### Behold, The Queen

Carlos Simon  
Text by Jay St. Flono

PRAISE-SONG FOR THE BLACK VENUS IN TIME  
II. Scriptura  
behold, the queen  
in all her negrified glory,  
behold, the queen  
in all her negrified glory,

sudden alchemies,  
twist, bend, make her hands to rule  
by blood and by spirit  
behold, the queen  
in all her cataclysmic wisdom,  
sudden humanities,  
turn, burn, make her heart to love  
till juices run golden  
behold, the queen  
behold, the queen  
in all her jealous adoration,  
sudden enemies,  
tear, bruise, make her name to die  
but the earth remembers  
her crown is makumba, behold  
her state the unclean world, behold  
her throne a rocking chair; behold  
her wisdom, behold  
all the colors in a song  
call on us to behold  
behold  
the woman who was once a god-loved child,  
and let out a soft, sweet-smelling cry, "behold."

### **The Queen of Sheba**

Dave Ragland

Text by Alicia Haymer

On a courageous journey to meet a king so wise  
As mystery surrounds me,  
People wonder who I really am.  
Bilquis, Makeda, Valiant.  
Queen of Sheba.

Emerging from the land of Sheba  
With all of my power, strength, and might.  
To meet with King Solomon the wisest of leaders  
With gold and stones as offerings  
I marvel at his sight.

As I enter, I witness his power  
I wonder how much he can teach me?  
The opulence of his kingdom  
Astounding!  
I begin to riddle him with queries.  
What are the secrets of this life?  
What are the answers to the vastness above?  
Can his wit and knowledge  
Withstand that of my own?

A woman who has fought and earned her respect.  
No man will make me cower. We soon come to an understanding  
A balance of humility and power.  
Debating is nothing new for the Queen  
For I am aware of the power I hold.  
I've triumphed in battle all while being doubted.

An ultimate woman.  
Powerfully bold.

I set out on this passage in search of understandings  
Assessing a leader and his great command.  
I come away assured of my own worthiness  
The power to move a nation inside of my hand.

### **The Song of Nzingah**

Jessie Nzinga Montgomery  
Text by Jay St. Flono

The non-English text is sourced from Kimbundu/Kikongo language sources from Christian missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century who were translating the Holy Bible into the indigenous languages of present-day Angola. Nzambici is a celestial creator goddess, the female half of Nzambi Mpungu (God Almighty), whose divine bodies stand at the center of all creation on the Congolese Cosmogram, representing the continual flow of existence through cycles of birth, life, death and rebirth. Kalunga, the spiritual fire at the center of the world that gives it its structure, is also the watery line between the world of spirit and humanity, which took on new meaning for descendants of enslaved Africans brought across the Atlantic by the Portuguese, Spanish, English and other European powers during their ongoing political conflicts with many African states and civilizations. The inclusion of this element represents the worldview of spiritual traditionalists, the Banganga (medicine men), who often served in the court of Nzinga as advisors, many of which were sold into slavery by her machinations as she sought to expand Christianity's influence into her kingdom for political purposes of maintaining social and economic relations with Spain and Portugal. Through this, the poem seeks to explore the possible mindset of someone in her political position, with each stanza representing a different emotional stage of reckoning with the world, beginning with Biblical text written in Kikongo that sings the praises of Nzambici and Nzambi Mpungu and ending, ultimately, in acceptance of what her political career costed her personally and how it impacted the future of Angola and the Atlantic Creole world in centuries to come.

—Jay Saint Flono

Spoken:

Eme ngala Njinga, Rainha Njinga, Dona Anna de Sousa, Njinga Mbande, Ngola Njinga Born of mysteries, Kujinga, Serene as a Serpent, Nzingah.

Sung:

Sia yimbila kwa Nzambici, yandi olungidi.  
Nzambici yandi wune zingolo zame, ye lumbu luami!  
Nzambi Mpungu wavanga dizulu ye ntoto,  
Nsi ina kavite vanga, yayonsono yakalakunsinlangu.

I have kept my fear a secret  
I have seldom known defeat  
I have come through tremblin' waters  
Drowned, below, my enemies  
Yearn to kiss my warring feet

I twist and bend Nzambi's knife  
In the vellum-skin of history  
Make jealousy leak from Europa's fascinated eye  
As her children burst their lips to taste me

At the old Kalunga cross where I first saw the light  
And the terror of the Christ fell away  
There the priests were sold  
'Cross the salt-bleeding sea  
And now I am blessed to sing His praise!  
I have kept my faith a secret  
I have come to sing defeat  
I depart through tremblin' waters  
O Kalunga, carry me

TRANSLATION/MEANING of text in spoken section:  
I am Njinga, Queen Njinga

Kujinga - to twist (referencing how the umbilical cord was wrapped around Njinga's neck at birth) and drawing parallels between that immensity of birth and the wisdom of serpents in Kongo religion and their connection to zumbi (ancestors) and ilundu (deities), which counteracts Christian ideas about the innate 'evilness' of serpents.

TRANSLATION of Congo text:

I will sing of Goddess, (s)he conquered.  
Goddess (s)he is my strength and my song.

God Almighty created Heaven and Earth,  
The earth first made, all was underwater.

### Luwah (Bitter Tears)

Fred Onovwerosuoke

Text based on Mokpe-Bakewri (Cameroon)

Traditional folktale collected by Lyombe Eko

Lu wahe'e  
Wu la aszre na zhi  
whiye lu we  
Lu wah'e  
E kweli yenga na  
Na lute ya  
Nanga na ka ma

Hear my lament  
I've never cried  
Like this before  
Hear my lament  
This great loss  
Saddens me  
And startles me

### A Letter from Queen Ufua

Shawn Okpebholo

Text by Tsitsi Ella Jaji

O daughters of my granddaughter's  
grandson, I am Queen Ufua,  
Light wed to Responsibility,  
Hear my blessing:

Love the ones who look up  
And see you in the stars.

Anywhere you go is good  
If you make it so.

My darlings, beauty burns,  
Yet tears will not blind you.  
If hunters chase your feathers  
Make your beak like a spear.

I leave you your light  
I leave you your beauty  
I give you your life, as  
Mothers always have.

She wears bright gold jewelry,  
she knows she does not need it.  
Only God gives firewood  
when there is no axe.

My darlings, no amount of trouble,  
Has ever killed the sun.  
Nothing can stop a River flowing  
So grow, grow like the reeds.

I see your light  
I see your beauty  
I see your life,  
hope in deadly times.

Mother-love does not  
Begin in the Womb  
The Child on my back  
Gives birth to delight.

My darlings, they said we should not sing  
Our children's praises to them  
But I am Queen Ufua and  
I call you all my light.

This is all I wanted you to know  
when I asked your father  
to give you this note,

You are beauty  
Your are life and  
We are light

Love,  
Queen Ufua,  
Your daddy's nana's nana

### **Duniya (Mystic Universe)**

Fred Onovwerosuoke

Text based on Mandinka/Bambera (Gambia/Mali) poem co-edited with Sankung Susso

Alisalam aleka  
Fa, duniy'Allah  
Allah sum i'llahi  
Fa, duniya, lon man di  
Allah sum ilahi

Allah, akubar!  
E, Kuba jama le  
Tambita walasum

Peace be upon you  
Behold, God's universe  
Of God, the Merciful  
God's universe is beyond  
Understanding, Merciful God  
Great God  
Grand designs, perpetual,  
And forever

### **I Am Not Your God**

Jasmine Arielle Barnes  
Text by Deborah D.E.E.P. Mouton

I am not your God!  
I am Nandi. Queen Nandi.

Threat by Threat I build a new home.  
Don't call me blessed.  
Curse by curse by my own tribe  
Left on my own

I knew I held Zulu future in my womb  
I knew you were a fighter.  
Felt you kick and spear your own war  
But Son...

I am your Mother.  
I can't bend the sands of time  
I am Nandi, just trying not to fall  
You named me Queen  
like the world sees me divine  
I am your Mother. I am not your God.  
I am not your God!

Throne by throne you took by force  
Your Father's throne, once again ,  
Our Zulu home.  
War by war we took revenge.  
Those who opposed, oppose no more.

Thousands of soldiers and female regimes.  
Knew you were a leader, and I, your Queen.  
I know you will make Zulu rise.  
You rule with power through my advise.  
But Shaka...

I am your Mother.  
I can't bend the sands of time  
I am Nandi, just trying not to fall  
You named me Queen  
like the world sees me divine  
I am your Mother. I am not your God.  
I am not...

Forever. I don't know how to be forever.

No reason for Zulu to suffer.  
Cease all bloodshed.  
Let the earth yield its harvest.  
No sacrifice will bring me back to life.  
I am your Mother.  
I can't bend the sands of time  
I am Nandi, just trying not to fall  
You named me Queen  
like the world sees me divine  
I am your Mother. I am not your God.  
I am not your God!

#### SHE IS OF GOD

She is  
She is of God  
  
She is  
She is the eyes that Loved God  
And shined as the Love returned  
To the source of her humanity  
Where the heart truly lives

She is  
She is the eyes that Saw God  
When fear came  
And as a night-hiding thief tried to steal freedom  
From her trembling fingers  
Stained with the honeyed colors of happiness

Oh but she  
She is  
She is the hand that Held God  
Because in the sweet sway of time  
Before woman was even made  
It was there that God held Her

#### A Prayer

Will Liverman  
Text by Jay St. Flono

I am black and beautiful, a daughter of Jerusalem.  
Like the glory of Bilquis.  
Like the power of Amina  
Like the wisdom of Candace.  
Like the spiritual women of Sybil.  
Consider that I am brown because the sun has colored me.  
Consider that I am brown because the sun has blessed me.  
Divine Mothers of Water  
We invite you to this temple.

#### Queen Nanny's Lullabye

Joel Thompson

#### **Jamaican Patois**

Come here, likkle one  
Come an ress your head

"It won't be long now,"  
So di baaba said.

You look a likkle lost, baby  
But you will find your way.  
No worry if yu yeye dem a droop so,  
Jus lissin what you Nanny seh:

Come here likkle one  
Come an ress your head  
"It won't be long now,"  
So di baaba said.

So, tarry a while pon di big rock stone  
if you legdem a cramp an strain.  
Mi know yu chess a go toogatoomtoom  
but you Nanny soon tek weh di pain.

Come here likkle one  
Come an ress your head  
"It won't be long now,"  
So di baaba said.

Here you are  
Time to sleep now,  
Close those wide and fearful eyes.  
As yu throat close up  
and yu lips grow numb,  
I'll wipe away the blood and you'll realize:  
The end is drawing nigh, enslaver.  
You stole my sister from my arms, colonizer,  
And stole the land from my people, abuser,  
And beat my brother black and red, fertilizer,  
And you will reap what you've sown, likkle one.  
Good night, likkle one.  
It won't be long now...

### **Standard American English**

Come here, little one.  
Come and rest your head.  
"It won't be long now,"  
So the barber said.

You look a little lost, baby,  
But you will find your way.  
Don't worry if your eyes are drooping.  
Just listen to what your Nanny says:

So, rest a while on that boulder  
if your legs are cramped and strained.  
I know your heart is palpitating  
but your Nanny will soon take away the pain.

As your throat closes up,  
And your lips grow numb,

## **WATCHING**

Great Woman of the Black Land  
Watching Amanirenas  
Amon's Child  
Conquering, searing gold in a holy hand  
Knowing Amanirenas  
Mother of a Million Suns  
Shining in the shadowed gaze of a Red Wolf  
Who bites the heel of a Lioness  
Yet cannot taste her blood

Great Woman of the Valley  
One-eyed Amanirenas  
Amon's Child  
Sleeping, weeping salt in a misty mirror  
Glistening Amanirenas  
Victor of a Hundred Bloods  
Wading in the earthen glaze of Nahal's water  
Who drowns the angbreast of Amon's child,  
Yet cannot take her heart

## **Amanirenas**

Damien Geter  
Text by Lorene Cary

No, Daughter! No!  
Do not take up my sword.  
Do not strap on my shield

Patience...

Rome marched into Kush,  
Bringing death:  
To your father,  
Your brother,  
Our soldiers,  
Our women,  
Our children,  
Our cattle and grain.

And I cut of the head  
Of their statue,  
Caesar's head,  
And buried it  
Under the door  
To my temple.

Go step on it  
When you pray.  
But do not take up  
My sword.

Patience...

This is not Egypt  
And I am not Cleopatra.  
I am Amanirenas.  
I will not hold

Death to my breast  
And give my people  
Over to Rome.

No!

We steal into their stinking camps.  
Night after night  
And as they  
Dream of our blood,  
We slit their throats -  
And choke on their own.

Patience -

I have sent  
Golden arrows to  
Caesar and said:  
"If you want peace, take these with my blessing;  
If you want war, you will need them."

Rome has scooped out my eye.  
But the eye that is left

Can see the future:  
We will live!  
Queen-mother and queen,  
Qora and kandake,  
Ruling Kush,  
Free of Rome!!

And your daughter  
And hers  
And hers,  
And hers!

Do not take up my sword.  
Do not strap on my shield.

Patience!

I will give you a crown!