

Date: 1519. [City of Santo Domingo]

Theme: Testimony on how a Black slave got the tips of some of his toes amputated in La Española in 1519 as punishment after being convicted of a crime

Source: Ministerio de Cultura de España—Archivo General de Indias, JUSTICIA 43, Número [], fo. 77v.

As part of the *juicio de residencia* or audit-trial conducted in Santo Domingo city at the end of the tenure of several colonial officials in 1519, local witnesses were called to testify under oath as to how these officials had handled events that had happened during their term in office and under their respective jurisdictions. One of the witnesses called was local surgeon Anton Angulo, who testified as to how some Black slaves convicted of crimes had been punished by having part of their toes amputated.

Angulo was the official in charge of executing the punishment, and in his deposition he described that, before going on with the procedure, he was approached by the owner of the slaves who was concerned as to how the slaves would be cured after been amputated. Angulo also declared that, before applying the punishment, he decided to consult with judge Alonso Zuazo how much of the slaves' toes' extension he was supposed to sever, and for this purpose he visited the judge at his home in the company of the slaves' owner.

According to Angulo, judge Zuazo declared Angulo responsible for the decision, and subsequently Angulo proceeded to *La Picota*, the place in the town with a stone column where public punishments were implemented. There all the convicted slaves had the first segment of their big toes as well as the same segment of some other toes cut off, all slaves in the same fashion. Angulo went on to say that this amputation was less damaging than the one that would have been applied if the slaves had been “in Castille or in other places.” Angulo also added that the owner of the slaves insisted that only the toes were to be cut to his slaves, apparently alluding to the fact that other parts of the feet may have been cut off in this case.

This very early colonial testimony is proof that the severity we read in the prescription of punishments in Black slave laws that have survived from subsequent decades of La Española-Santo Domingo (1522, 1528) was actually implemented by the Spanish colonial authorities when it came to the execution of verdicts against the enslaved, and that the punishment was done in public, in this case after the slaves had been made walk the distance from the jail to the pillory.