

Date: 1520, August 20. Santo Domingo, La Española

Theme: Colonial treasury officials of Santo Domingo complained that Iberian settlers of La Española suffered from a lack of an open, free-trade-based commercial supply of enslaved black laborers and requested that colonists be allowed to import as many slaves as they considered necessary

Source: PARES, Portal de Archivos Españoles--Archivo General de Indias, PATRONATO,174,R.24, F. 121R.-124V, - 1 - Imagen Núm: 5 / 12

In a letter to king Charles V written from Santo Domingo City on August 20 of 1520 by the three colonial treasury officials appointed by the Crown (Miguel de Pasamonte, Juan de Ampiéés and Alonso Dávila), they mentioned the new business of cane sugar as a welcomed enterprise, while pointing out that the colonists as well as the Crown's coffers were suffering "very great damage" ("grandísimo agravio") as a result of the Crown having granted to the Governor of Bresa the exclusive right to ship 4,000 "black slaves" to the New World. Though the authors do not describe it explicitly in this letter, they seemed to be alluding to how the control of the supply of enslaved labor by an outside sole provider that determined how many, when and at what price the slaves would be sold to them put them at a disadvantage as a result of having no competitive trading option available. To compensate this negative impact the officials requested that the Crown allowed "that the denizens of these parts may bring over [all] the black slaves they may need" paying as license "for each head" the proportional amount corresponding to the 25,000 *ducados* to be paid to the governor of Bresa (presumably for the 4,000 slaves assigned to him).

The officials referred as well to "black slaves and indians and *yucayos* and giants" that were working in the gold mines of La Española at the time, recommending that only one tenth of the gold collected, instead of a fifth, was to be charged to the miners as government tax, as an incentive that would bring in more settlers to populate the colony. They also expressed, already at this relatively early stage of the colony, fear about the great demographic imbalance between a majority of black slaves and the ruling and dominant minority of Iberian whites. More Spanish settlers extracting gold would mean an increase in the local revenues of the Crown, and at the same time their presence would strengthen the colonial social order, since "this island would be safer from the black slaves that may uprise in it or may make a scandal in it." In addition, "these territories would become populated without your majesty spending what is spent in transporting farmers to this island."

The authors of the letter commented that the Crown had imposed a ten percent tax (*diezmo*) on the gold extracted by "black and Indian slaves," while a twenty percent (*quinto*) had been imposed on the gold extracted by the local Indians controlled under the "repartimiento" regime, recommending that instead the Crown raised a single ten percent tax on any gold extracted, regardless of the status of the blacks and Indians used as laborers ("cualesquier negros e indios de cualquier calidad que sean"). The fall of the local Indian population of La Española was by then, according to this commentator, acute, indicating that "there are no longer almost any Indians and there will be less two years from now."