

Date: 1538, April 10. City of Santo Domingo. La Española.

Theme: Comment by the Real Audiencia of Santo Domingo on the use of enslaved black labor in the construction of the main defensive structures of Santo Domingo City.

Source: PARES, Portal de Archivos Españoles--Archivo General de Indias, SANTO\_DOMINGO,49, R.9,N.59

[fo. 1r.]

+ /  
Sacred, Cesarean Catholic Majesty /

In the last ships that left from this port of Santo Domingo /  
around the past month of December, we wrote account of how, in view of /  
what your majesty ordered us to write with the navy that came whose /  
captain was Perea, about the alert that had been received that, in the ports /  
of France, thirteen galeones were being equipped with three thousand /  
men, with the purpose of going to these seas and [barrar] by /  
their ports, so that we were on the alert and /  
took steps so that [in] all the ports of the Northern Strip /  
the denizens of them put themselves in safety and moved inland /  
their properties / so that after this order was received, /  
what we deemed convenient was decide according to the possibilities /  
here, which in fact are not many since the land is very large /  
and the settlers few /

After this navy left, since a few days ago it occurred /  
that, on [this ] past February first a French vessel with a /  
*pataj* came to this island and entered a port of it called /  
Puerto Hermoso, which is fifteen leagues from this city, and the same /  
day that it arrived there it took three *bergantines* that the night before /  
had gone out of this port to go to that port and to the village /  
of Azua, and about ten or twelve sailors that were going on them. /  
It was informed where they were because this Puerto Hermoso /  
is where the salt flats are of which this island is provisioned. And about /  
a league from the same port is another port which is called /  
Ocoa, where I, the Licenciado Zuazo have a sugar mill /  
and another two leagues further down is another sugar mill /  
of the secretary Diego Cavallero, and thus another two leagues /  
is the village of Azua, where there are four sugar mills /  
so all of it falls on the sea shore, next to it, and the /  
furthest one league inland. After the French vessel and *pataje* /

[fo. 1v.]

entered there, the *pataje* came on land, and the salt flats man /  
and some fishermen that were there realized it was a military vessel, /  
and for they talked from afar with those in the *batel* they put /  
what they had in safety, and those in the *batel* made them belief /  
that they were Spaniards and that they were coming from those kingdoms,  
which they did not /

trust. And one of them came in a day with the news to this/  
Real Audiencia and the others went to alert Azua and the /  
sugar mills so that they put themselves in safety, and since they did not want /  
to wait, they jumped on land and burned the bohios and premises /  
of the said salt flats and took what they found there, which was nothing /  
of quantity. Within the same hour that we received the news /  
we ordered to come out of this city and its district /  
sixty men on horses and fifty on foot so they went to /  
defend the land and made them the damage they could and meanwhile /  
this city and the port were prepared the best we could so /  
that if other vessels were to arrive [*en su conserva*] everything was to be /  
secured /

- p the one who brought the news certified to us that the ship was very large, /  
of three topsails, and that the *pataje* was a one topsail vessel, and the/  
batel was like a fusta, and that there were more than five hundred men /  
and we were not marvelled that he imagined it so, because they appeared /  
near them all of a sudden, and then they escaped /
- p Once these people were dispatched by land, who got out of the city /  
in about three hours, we discussed about the equipment that there was /  
to send a navy by sea and taking the chance. We certify to /  
your majesty that since many days ago this port has never been /  
so empty of ships because since from those kingdoms no *nao* has /  
come except more than five months ago, only a large *galeón* /  
of about one hundred *toneles* and two *carvelas* /  
of fifty *toneles* each were in it, and according to what the messenger /  
told us about the *nao* and *pataje*, together with the few people that /  
were in the port, and less artillery and no gunpowder, we did not/  
find means to be able to set up a navy with the little equipment that /  
we had, and mainly so that we did not leave the city alone /  
having your majesty ordered for us to be notified of the navy that /  
was being sent here. / And thus we waited for the result of the people that /  
we had dispatched by land, who got there within a day /  
and a night, and got to the Coa<sup>1</sup> sugar mill, which they found robbed /  
because the day before the French had arrived in it with /  
about seventy men, most of them *harquebusiers* and /  
had taken everything they could carry on themselves /  
of sugars and other things, and six black slaves because /  
the others had escaped from them into the forest. And they /  
captured a French clergyman that resided there and they returned the same /  
day to the *nao* and said to the overseer of the sugar mill to /  
write to this city so that he provisioned himself with four thousand /

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<sup>1</sup> Probably a misspelling for "Ocoa."

pesos for the ransom of the ingenio, that otherwise they would jump on /  
land and burn all its cane fields /

As soon as the people that we sent from here arrived, certain part went /  
ahead to Azua and the other sugar mills, and the larger part /  
of them stayed there waiting that they jumped on land. /  
It occurred that later, another day they went with the pataje to the port /  
of Azua before the people from this city arrived, and /  
in two straw houses by the sea they took more than three thousand /  
arrobas of sugar that they found. And, so that they would not burn the village, they /  
demanded certain ransom and concerted with them to /  
give them meat of [illegible] and [illegible] to get from them /  
the Spaniards and some blacks that they had taken into the /  
ships under appearance of peace, an alcalde /  
of that village and a clergyman and six or seven denizens, /  
P whom they captured, and they brought them from the *nao* since /  
another day they rescued them for three hundred castellanos, and thus /  
we were warned that the *nao* was of one hundred and fifty /  
*toneles* and that there could be about one hundred men and not /  
more, and that they had twelve *tiros gruesos* and other [illegible] /  
and *falconetes* /

At the time we received these news, seeing that for five days /  
they were in those ports and wandered trading and /  
bartering as if in their seas, it was agreed to set up /  
a navy against them, and on the same day that the news were received /  
and during another subsequent one the *galeón* and the two *caravelas* /  
mentioned above were equipped with two hundred men of sea and land, /  
as well provisioned as we could. And ten iron *tiros gruesos* were found /  
and we found about two quintales of gunpowder and from /  
the fortress we took two half *culebrinas* and /  
two *sacres* and some *falconetes*, and another four quintales /  
of gunpowder and other *minutiae*, that certainly all was done with much /  
work because of lack that there is of all of it. And another subsequent day /  
early in the morning the navy sailed with the understanding /

P

[fo. ] that in the afternoon it would reach the French one. / It seems that the prior day //  
the *batel* of the Frenchmen went to Ocoa to demand ransom /  
of the sugar mill or otherwise burn it down. And only six of them jumped on land /  
and while entering into the road to the sugar mil a squadron /  
of people on foot that were spying on them came out on them and killed /  
them and took two of them alive and went to take over /  
the skiff and since it was in the water they could not, and it /  
turned back to the *nao*, and that night the *nao* and *pataje* sailed away /

and fled away from the port so that when /  
the navy arrived they did not find it. There they wandered five /  
or six days inspecting the ports of that district and they did not /  
find news of it. During this time the *nao* went up beyond /  
this port and got to La Saona, which is twenty five /  
leagues from here, and at the site through which all the /  
ships from Spain come in. And we were warned of it and we sent /  
for the navy to be called and it came, and we provisioned it again /  
and dispatched it again without it entering the port and /  
in three days it went to La Saona, where it found it and chased it /  
an entire day taking shots at it until it escaped from them due to being /  
a large sailing *nao* and being very much equipped. And after seeing that /  
they had chased it off La Saona as well, our navy returned /  
to the port. It happened that another subsequent day by the same site /  
of La Saona a *nao* of your majesty's navy came in of which /  
[illegible] de Peñalosa was the captain. The *nao* is of Don Alvaro /  
de Bazán. In it they were bringing silver for your majesty in value /  
of one hundred thousand ducados, which in time and the *nao* coming very badly /  
equipped [in between the lines: to this island] and since the French *nao* /  
escaped from the armada [crossed out: and arrived in this island ], and the day  
before had expelled it /  
from the land, and this *nao* of Peñalosa's was coming [close to /  
the land], saw the French *nao* very far away on the sea and found /  
next to it the *pataje*, which reached at the *nao* itself to /  
demand that it slowed down and they responded to them with two shots /  
of artillery, and thus it did not returned to it, and it came to this /  
port. At the same hour we had this news we went /  
to the river and took out the silver of your majesty and the /  
gold of private individuals /  
and all was given by the weight to your officials. And since /  
this *nao* carried one hundred men of sea and land and very good /  
artillery and much gunpowder and provisioning of ammunitions, /  
we decided to dispatch the navy again with another /  
*nao* that was at the port before, and thus we worked on /  
it, and while dispatching it, later another subsequent /  
day a *nao* was coming from the island of Cubagua that was bringing /  
pearls for your majesty and of private individuals and Indians and /  
fish and salt and other things, and since the French *nao* /

[fo. ]

spotted it by La Saona it approached it, and /  
this other one drew up sails and it happened to be a very large *nao* /  
as to the sail and it chased her that day and another until it brought it /  
into this port at a little more than a *lombarda*'s shot away from /  
this fortress, something that in fact here we considered /

as much daring. And since at the time /  
we could not dispatch the navy nor /  
there was weather as to go out of the port, tha *nao* /  
had that night's time to turn back, and thus /  
the next day in the afternoon the navy left and very well /  
provisioned with everything, and when it went to La Saona it  
did not find it /  
and it proceeded over there up to the island of San Juan because we thought /  
it had gone there, since thus we had been told by one of the two /  
Frenchmen that they captured alive at the *ingenio* of Ocoa, /  
because the other one passed away a following day after they captured him, /  
and he was one of the armadores of that *nao*. And since they did not /  
find it, the same navy returned along the coast of this /  
island up to beyond Azua, and trace of it was /  
never found. Therefore we deem it a fact that it has returned /  
to France. A great cruelty was committed on that *nao*, /  
that they killed the maestres of the bergantines that they captured /  
around Puerto Hermoso. They killed them all. They are carrying /  
fifteen ladino black slaves that they have taken around these /  
ports and about three thousand arrovas of sugar and other /  
things ransom that they got /  
This one French that we have enjailed we recieved his confession /  
and he declared that in Dieppe a navy was being gathered of three large /  
*naos* to come to these seas. And considering what your majesty /  
ordered to be written to us with the navy of Perea, and what this Frenchman /  
has confessed, and the coming of the *nao* itself, and since in /  
reality all the strength and defense of these Indies /  
p is this port of Santo Domingo, like in the kingdom of Navarre /  
Pamplona [*is*], and that if they were to take over the city /  
everything else would run into great risk, we have decided that /  
the people on foot and on horse be always prepared the best /  
we can, and that the fortress may have the artillery where /  
it may best be taken advantage of, and thus a place be made /  
where there be four pieces of *culebrinas* and half *culebrinas*, /  
which we are certain they will prevent the entry /  
into this port, besides it being in itself [*in between the lines*:almost all of it] very  
solid since it is /  
all of carved stone, so that we do not believe that through /  
the river anyone will dare to attack unless it were through /  
a becach that falls half a league from this city along the same /  
sea coast, that over there it seems that with bateles they might /  
drop people on land. And since the entrance into this beach falls /  
by the weakest [*area*] of the city, which is by a flat plain /  
that may be about two thousand steps in width, from the sea to the mountain; /  
in view of this we discussed about strengthening this entry /  
and for the time being we have made this ditch /

[fo.3v. ]

of one thousand steps, which may have two *estados* in depth and in width /  
twenty feet, and from the soil and mud that has been dug from here, /  
a defense has been made at the top of another two *estados* and of sixteen /  
feet in width, with its timber well tied, the best we could think, /  
so that from the bottom to the top the height /  
of the ditch and defense may be four *estados*, and all of it will be completed /  
this week. Four or five bastions on which to put the artillery /  
remain to be built that fall between stretches and /  
once finished it will be rather solid to defend that entrance, /  
which is the weak that this city has. And where the dock of the beach is /  
this defense has been made with some blacks /  
that have been distributed among the denizens that have served mor or less /  
for a month and a half, and what is left of the strongholds will be done with the /  
blacks the city has. And some small expenses that /  
have been made in it and those thay may be needed until finishing /  
it completely will be paid from the *sisá*, so that no more burden is put on the people. /  
This shelter for the time being and for some days will be /  
sufficient defense, but it is convenient for the royal service of your majesty /  
and the sacurity of this land that with all brevity /  
this city all of it be walled and fortified since otherwise /  
we certify to your majesty that this here runs great risk /

[fo. 4r ]

- p and since the city has committed two hundred blacks /  
and the *sisá* to wall it and make other buildings, it seems /  
that your majesty should ordermandate that they are provided of them or of  
something else, /  
in reward, whatever you may want, because this item of the wall /  
is not abandoned until it is finished. /
- p In the navy that has been assembled twice against this French *nao* /  
more than two thousand pesos of gold have been spent and though /  
the *nao* has not been caught it has been rather productive because /  
we chased it out of the ports of this district and /  
the entrance and exiting of ships in this port was secured /  
and thus to pay these expenses an *avería* has been created /  
of one half of a percent on everything that may enter and leave in /  
this port, and two of the main merchants have been designated /  
as collectors of the said *avería* so that it is done with more /  
fidelity and contentment of the merchants. /  
We are making a report of it to your majesty so that you may order about it /  
what you please both in regards to this occurred and so that /  
the order to be follwed in the future when things of this /  
nature happen, since every day we expect them. /
- p The *nao* of your majesty's navy that was brought by this captain Pero /  
de Peñalosa arrived so broken in all its gear and /

takes in so much water that, without great expense and repair it/  
will not be able to sail to those kingdoms, and since the expenses /  
here are so great, until now it has not been determined /  
what will be done with it, especially that since the *nao* is not of /  
your majesty but goes on salary, we do not dare to intervene /  
in it, and even coming very good and equipped /  
it would not be appropriate either to carry the silver on it /  
without your majesty's mandate and since the said silver is under control of your/  
officials. Your majesty may mandate issuing the order you please as to how /  
it should be shipped [*to Spain*] /

- p The people of sea and land that came on the *nao* on salary by your majesty /  
have been employed until now in the navy against the French /  
*nao*, and their past salary will be paid from the *avería*, and /  
until shipping is found for them to go they will be fed here /  
out of the treasury of your majesty, and in the briefest possible, we will /  
dispatch them and with the lowest expense we may be capable of /

[fo. 4v.]

- p Many times it has been reported to your majesty about the little artillery/  
this fortress has and also about the one needed /  
for it. There is a need that at the entrance of the port and at /  
some other parts of the city, for the defense of /  
one and the other, some artillery is provided. It happens /  
that this navy *nao* of your majesty has brought certain pieces of /  
cannons and *sacres* and other shots very adequate /  
for what is necessary here, and a little of gunpowder and other /  
ammunitions. All of it is being unloaded and being delivered /  
to the fortress' *alcaide* in the presence of your officials /  
and, once delivered, we will send your majesty the report /  
and thus we supplicate you be pleased to mandate that it remains in this /  
city and port for the protection and defense of it, for /  
we may truly say that it has come to put /  
itself in a place where there was so much need. /  
And together with this it is necessary that your majesty orders his /  
officials of the Contratación to provide some quantity /  
of saltpeter because here there is zulfur stone and coal to /  
make gunpowder, that we have extreme need for it, /  
and because two *naos* remain preparing [to leave] for those kingdoms, on /  
which we will submit a more detailed report to your majesty /  
in what may be necessary, we say no more. /

Our lord may protect and preserve the life and very high and very royal state /  
of your majesty as your royal heart desires. From Santo /  
Domingo of La Española, on tenth of April of xxxviii years /

[Back cover]                      Of Your Sacred Cesarean Catholic Majesty /  
   very humble servers and servants /  
   that kiss your royal hands /  
   [Rubric] [ ] [Fuenmayor?] [Rubric] liçençiad<sup>o</sup> [Rubric] /  
   + /  
   /To the Saintly Cesarean /  
   Catholic majesty of the Emperor /  
   King, our Lord /

[*On the right margin, across:*]  
+ Duplicate. To his majesty. Seen. /  
From the president and *oidores* of the Española island, on /  
x of April, 1538 /