

THE HIERONYMITES IN HISPANIOLA, 1493-1519

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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The course of events in the early Spanish Caribbean was both described and partly directed by four friars from the Order of Saint Jerome, a Catholic regular order that arose in late medieval Spain. Ramón Pané arrived on the island of Hispaniola in 1493 and spent more than three years living within several indigenous communities on Hispaniola. As the first "missionary ethnographer" in colonial Spanish America, Pané's account of the Indians of Hispaniola suggests complex interactions between religion, power, and discourse. More than twenty years later, three Hieronymite friars were named as royal governors of Spanish Hispaniola, which they described as both beautiful and nearly empty. Bearing royal instructions to oversee "the reformation and good regulation of the islands," the three men came at a critical point in the history of the Spanish Caribbean. They arrived at the end of the first phase of the colonial enterprise in Spanish America, and thus they oversaw a transitional historical moment for the Caribbean that involved the decline of the indigenous Taino, the promotion of sugar cultivation and African slavery in a Caribbean context, and the evolving relationship between religious and secular power in the early modern Atlantic World.

CHAPTER 1 RELIGION AND POWER IN THE EARLY MODERN IBERIAN ATLANTIC

Arriving in 1516, the new governors of Spanish Hispaniola found an island that they described as both beautiful and nearly empty. The land was “good and fruitful,” they wrote to Spain in January 1517, but “there are very few Spanish *vecinos* at present, and of the Indians, there are very few.” Short of divine intervention or royal remedies, the friars wrote, the island would become “so depopulated” that it would be no longer inhabited at all.¹ Happily for Hispaniola—the governors implied—both divine and royal objectives had arrived in the corporal forms of the governors themselves: three Hieronymite monks sent to Hispaniola to investigate the Spanish treatment of the indigenous population and to halt the precipitous decline of the island’s economy and population. Bearing royal instructions to oversee “the reformation and good regulation of the islands,” the three men came at a critical point in the history of the Spanish Caribbean.² They arrived at the end of the first phase of the colonial enterprise in Spanish America, and thus they oversaw a transitional historical moment for the Caribbean that involved the decline of the indigenous Taino, the promotion of sugar cultivation and African slavery in a Caribbean context, and the evolving relationship between religious and secular power in the early modern Atlantic World.

If the three governors marked one epochal moment for the Caribbean, then another man—also a Hieronymite, although unknown to the three governors—witnessed another one. Ramón Pané arrived in 1493 and spent more than three years living within several indigenous communities on Hispaniola. Pané learned the local language and

¹ “*muy buena y fructifera...ay al presente muy pocos vecinos espanoles y de los indios ay muy pocos...tan desplobada.*” Archivo General de Indias Patronato 174 ramo 4.

the local folklore as he struggled to proselytize his neighbors. As the first "missionary ethnographer" in colonial Spanish America,³ Pané's disjointed account of the Indians of Hispaniola suggests complex interactions between religion, power, and discourse.

Religion and Power in Late Medieval Europe

The narrative of Western Christendom in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is typically one of decline. Taking their cue from Johan Huizinga, many historians have sought the explanatory mechanisms of the Protestant Reformation in a late medieval Church that was weakened from within by scandals and corruption and threatened from without by humanism and heterodoxy.⁴ Christianity, which had once cut across national boundaries and inspired international crusades, was fading as a unifying identity, and regional identities were on the rise.⁵ In contrast, some historians have argued that the ecclesiastical developments of the late medieval era were driven not by spiritual inertia but by an increasing religious authority accorded to "local forces," producing what John Van Engen has called a "carnival of religious options...overlapping, local, personally appropriated."⁶ Political contests between Rome and European rulers led to a decentralization of religious institutional authority, the development of "territorial"

² Archivo General de Indias Patronato 172 ramo 7.

³ Rolena Adorno, *The Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 200.

⁴ Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁵ Margaret Aston, *The Fifteenth Century: The Prospect of Europe* (London: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1968), 9; J. R. Hale, *Renaissance Europe, 1480-1520*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000), 71.

⁶ John Van Engen, "Multiple Options: The World of the Fifteenth-Century Church," *Church History* 77, no. 2 (June 2008): 263, 284.

churches, and a new convergence of religious consciousness and regional identification throughout Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁷

Among the secular princes negotiating with the Pope for the political and fiscal benefits of ecclesiastical control, the most singularly effective were Isabel and Ferdinand, who yoked together the Iberian kingdoms of Castile and Aragon through their 1469 marriage.⁸ During their reign, Isabel and Ferdinand gained increasing control of ecclesiastical appointments and institutions. They resurrected the medieval Inquisition as a political organ under their direct control in 1478. The Spanish Crown gained the right to name candidates to bishoprics in Granada in 1486. Pope Alexander VI's 1493 bull, *Inter caetera*, formally designated Isabel and Ferdinand as the "Catholic Kings" and granted them complete control over evangelization efforts in the Americas. In 1508, after years of lobbying from Ferdinand, Pope Julius II granted the Spanish Crown the right of all ecclesiastical appointments in the Americas.

As Isabel and Ferdinand incorporated or invented ecclesiastical institutions within their sphere of control, they supervised dramatic changes to the popular religious landscape of the Iberian peninsula. Since 711 and the invasion by Muslim Moors into the peninsula, medieval Spain had cycled through various permutations of religious conflict and coexistence; a centuries-long *Reconquista* existed alongside the hybridizing consequences of tolerance and *convivencia*.⁹ In 1482, Isabel and Ferdinand revived

⁷ Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 204-205; Francis Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 73.

⁸ Hale, *Renaissance Europe*, 165-168; Oakley, *The Western Church*, 247-248; Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 184; J. H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain 1469-1716* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 99-110.

⁹ Stuart B. Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 43-44; Thomas F. Glick and Oriol Pi-Sunyer, "Acculturation as

the nearly moribund *Reconquista*, and their military defeat of Muslim Granada in 1492 was almost immediately followed by a royal edict expelling all practicing Jews from Spain.¹⁰ The Spanish Inquisition was initially intended to identify insincere converts to Christianity among the former Jews (*conversos*) and Muslims (*moriscos*) of the country. Inquisitorial functions were undertaken slowly in the Americas after 1517, and a formal tribunal was created in 1569 under Philip II.¹¹ As their religious conquests and legislation were often undertaken to address immediate political dilemmas, it is unclear if the Catholic Kings perceived or intended the long-term consequences of their acts: the virulent persecution of religious minorities, secret denunciations and *autos de fé* as tools of social control, the social stability conveniently conferred by religious homogeneity.¹² Isabel and Ferdinand, like many of their countrymen, were profoundly devout Christians, and they did not make a distinction between political and religious spheres.

As Isabel and Ferdinand pulled ecclesiastical institutions under their wing, the practice of Christianity among the common laity and secular clergy was often invigorated by local tradition and beliefs. Sara T. Nalle has argued that the "uncontrolled religious fervor" among the Spanish people in the beginning of the sixteenth century was often shaped by local popular understandings in the absence of well-educated priests, and William Christian has argued that local Christian religiosity in sixteenth-

an Explanatory Concept in Spanish History," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 11, no. 2 (April 1969): 136-154.

¹⁰ Elliott, *Imperial Spain*, 46-52, 109.

¹¹ Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved*, 126.

¹² Peggy K. Liss, *Isabel the Queen: Life and Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 177.

century Spain was expressed in widely varying forms.¹³ As popular Christianity maintained a vigorous life in the late medieval and early modern era, so too did the monastic regular orders. Distinguished from the secular clergy by their insular community structure, their rules of daily life, and their distance from worldly society, the various regular orders were undergoing one of their cyclical periods of reform in the late medieval era.¹⁴ The Order of Saint Jerome developed in the fourteenth century during a period in which new religious orders were increasingly tied to a local regional identity, as opposed to the continental scope of earlier orders, such as the Franciscans and the Dominicans.¹⁵

The Order of Saint Jerome originated among a group of Italian and Spanish hermits who had lived as disciples of an Italian hermit named Thomas Succio, who wrote prophetic verse and had a vision of a new monastic order being founded in Spain.¹⁶ At some point before 1350, some of his disciples departed Italy and settled near Toledo, where they came into contact with influential figures among the Spanish clergy. In 1374, Pope Gregory XI formally permitted the foundation of the first Hieronymite monastery, La Plana de Javea in Valencia, where the former hermits were to live as monks under the rule of St. Augustine. Thirty-two monasteries were built between 1373 and 1419, and in 1386 the Hieronymites received the charge of the

¹³Sara T. Nalle, *God in La Mancha: Religious Reform and the People of Cuenca, 1500-1650* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 30; William A. Christian, Jr., *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 20.

¹⁴ Oakley, *The Western Church*, 86-87.

¹⁵ Oakley, *The Western Church*, 232-233.

¹⁶ J. R. L. Highfield, "The Jeronimites in Spain, their Patrons and Success, 1373-1516," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 34, no. 4 (1983): 516.

Guadalupe shrine in northern Extremadura, which would become the most popular shrine in early modern Spain.¹⁷

From its founding, the Order of Saint Jerome enjoyed continuous patronage from the royal houses of Castile, Aragon, and Portugal. Isabel maintained this tradition of royal favor, which was reinforced by her frequent pilgrimages to Guadalupe and by Hernando de Talavera, the Hieronymite friar who served as her confessor from 1474 to 1492.¹⁸ According to historian Miguel Angel Ladero Quesada, the order "combined the practice of their hermetic ideals with opulent cult and choral forms."¹⁹ The paradox of the Hieronymites lies in reconciling their vague rhetoric of humility and eremitism with the concrete details of their order, which did not embrace apostolic poverty and which was notable for its prosperity. Historian Gretchen Starr-LeBeau offers perhaps the sharpest and most concise assessment of the order: "The Order of Saint Jerome in Spain emphasized humility, isolation from urban centers and public life, contemplation without intellectualism or extensive study, and economic self-sufficiency."²⁰ However, the Hieronymites' early ideal of isolation was belied by the order's increasing tendency during the course of the fifteenth century to establish new monastic houses close to

¹⁷ Miguel Angel Ladero Quesada, "Spain, circa 1492: Social Values and Structures," in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 130; William A. Christian, Jr., *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 88.

¹⁸ Highfield, "The Jeronimites in Spain," 523-526.

¹⁹ Ladero Quesada, "Spain, circa 1492," 130.

²⁰ Gretchen D. Starr-LeBeau, *In the Shadow of the Virgin: Inquisitors, Friars, and Conversos in Guadalupe, Spain* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003), 19.

urban centers, which facilitated exchanges between the friars and their powerful patrons in the secular world.²¹

The Pre-Columbian Caribbean

As Spain united under the Christian banner of Isabel and Ferdinand, a Genoese captain steeped in Mediterranean traditions, Portuguese practices, and Spanish funding stumbled across America.²² When Christopher Columbus and his men arrived in 1492, they were discovered by the Caribbean Indians, who arrived at their encounter with the European Other with a complicated history of their own. Their ancestors originated in the South American mainland, spread across the Caribbean in successive waves, and settled the Greater Antilles and the Bahamas at least a thousand years before the arrival of Columbus.²³ In Hispaniola, the Indians built wooden houses and allied with neighboring villages to form chiefdoms governed by hereditary caciques. They cultivated bitter *yuca* roots in fields of knee-high earth-mounds, which were called *conucos*. Yuca (also called cassava or manioc in South America) was poisonous as a raw root, but it could be safely processed in simple, if time-consuming, systems of soaking and baking that produced cassava bread, one of the staples of the Caribbean diet.²⁴ The Indians of Hispaniola used gold for decorating themselves and impressed

²¹ Highfield, "The Jeronimites in Spain," 528.

²² Elliott, *Imperial Spain*, 61-62; Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus: Exploration and Colonization from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, 1229-1492* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press); Samuel Eliot Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1942).

²³ Lee A. Newsom and Elizabeth S. Wing, *On Land And Sea: Native American Uses of Biological Resources in the West Indies* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2004), 29-30, 117-119; Irving Rouse, *The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 71; William F. Keegan, *The People Who Discovered Columbus* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992).

²⁴ Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main*, 54.

the Spanish through their ability at woodworking. Their religious system included an afterlife, multiple deities regulating the natural world, priest-shamans known as *behiques*, and crafted objects of veneration known as *zemi*. Their religious and social ceremonies often featured the consumption of a hallucinogenic snuff known as *cohoba* and the performance of epic song-dances called *areytos*. They played a ceremonial ball-game on plazas called *bateys*.

It is not clear how the people who inhabited fifteenth-century Hispaniola perceived themselves, though the early Spanish sources imply that at least some of the communities of central Hispaniola perceived ethnic distinctions between themselves and the coastal communities.²⁵ Some of the early Spanish sources identified the inhabitants of the Greater Antilles as "Taino," an Indian word from northern Hispaniola that apparently referred to an elite social class, in contrast to the servile *naboria* caste. Some scholars prefer "Island Arawak" as an ethnic designation, which directly links the indigenous people of the Caribbean to their presumed Arawak cousins in northern South America. Both terms implicitly distinguish the inhabitants of the Greater Antilles from the other inhabitants of the Caribbean: the Caribs of the Lesser Antilles, who systematically abducted women from the Greater Antilles communities and practiced cannibalism, according to the Spanish.²⁶ However, the Spanish tendency to categorize the Caribbean's inhabitants in the terms of immediate utility—the malleable Taino were to be easily colonized, while the savage Carib were to be enslaved for their own good—means that the traditionally binary categories of pre-Columbian Caribbean ethnicities

²⁵ Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1986), 58.

may have reflected Spanish colonial needs more than the observed cultural or ethnic divisions among the Caribbean peoples. Furthermore, both "Taino" and "Island Arawak" presume a cultural uniformity throughout the Greater Antilles and the Bahamas. The historical understanding of the fifteenth-century Taino culture is based largely on the institutions of Hispaniola, due to the extensive documentation of the early Spanish Hispaniola in comparison to the rest of the Caribbean, but even Hispaniola did not possess a homogeneous culture. In particular, the early Spanish sources suggest that Hispaniola possessed at least three distinct linguistic regions, although it is unclear if these regions possessed different languages or different dialects of the same language. Most of the island population shared a common language, but the inhabitants of Lower Macorix and Upper Macorix in the northeast corner of Hispaniola each possessed a distinct regional language.²⁷ It is unclear whether these distinct linguistic groups also possessed a distinct cultural or regional identity.

This paper is primarily concerned with the island of Hispaniola and so the label "Taino" will be used for the inhabitants of central Hispaniola, who formed the basis for early Spanish understandings of what constituted "Taino" culture. The Macorix-speaking people of northwestern Hispaniola will be treated as a distinct group.

Spanish Hispaniola

In a 1493 letter to Queen Isabel and King Ferdinand, Columbus rhapsodized that the Taino were "the best people under the sun," that they had no weapons, and that they happily gave their abundant gold in exchange for whatever the sailors offered,

²⁶ Carl O. Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 31; Rouse, *The Tainos*, 5; Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*, 45-87.

²⁷ Wilson, *Hispaniola*, 103-104.

which included "a piece of glass or broken crockery or...the ends of leather latches."²⁸

This rosy picture was complicated when Columbus returned to Hispaniola in 1493 and discovered that the thirty-nine Europeans he had left behind at the settlement of La Navidad had been massacred by the Taino. Two corpses found by the Spanish had been bound with vines, and their eyes had been removed.²⁹ According to Columbus' Taino allies, the repeated abuses and rapes perpetrated by the Europeans had created a coalition of Taino from the island interior that came to massacre the Spaniards.³⁰ Undaunted, Columbus founded another town, La Isabela, and further Spanish settlements followed near sources of gold, while increasing numbers of Tainos were subjugated to support the Spanish colony. Columbus demanded tributes of gold from Taino caciques, but the Spanish settlers objected to Columbus' authority and their exclusion from the profits of Hispaniola. Columbus' eventual concession involved parcelling out the rights to the labor of individual Taino communities in a series of *repartimientos*.³¹ The Spanish sought not only to utilize Taino bodies but also to lay claim to their souls by teaching them the Christian religion and eradicating their non-Christian traditional practices.

In 1495, and again in 1497, large coalitions of Taino chiefdoms revolted unsuccessfully against the Spanish, but concerted Taino action was increasingly difficult to achieve after 1502 and the arrival of Governor Nicolás de Ovando, who began

²⁸ Margarita Zamora, "Christopher Columbus's 'Letter to the Sovereigns': Announcing the Discovery," *New World Encounters*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 5.

²⁹ Troy S. Floyd, *The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean, 1492-1526* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973), 21.

³⁰ Wilson, *Hispaniola*, 75.

systematically executing rebellious Taino leaders.³² Many Tainos managed to flee to other islands or to the interior of Hispaniola, where at least one Taino cacique maintained an independent enclave in the 1520s.³³ Other Tainos remained within the institutional control of the Spanish, under whose auspices the Taino worked and died.

The first twenty years of Spanish colonization on Hispaniola would be marked by internal factionalism among the European settlers, various forms of resistance from the Taino Indians to Spanish control, and steady attempts by the Spanish rulers to make their American possessions into a profitable enterprise. Alongside the violence of the young Spanish colony emerged a catastrophic demographic collapse of the indigenous population, which threatened both the colony's economy and its ostensible mission of Christianization. Historians disagree over the precise size of Hispaniola's pre-Contact population, with estimates ranging from 60,000 to 14 million, but by 1517, the population was estimated in the low tens of thousands of Taino people.³⁴ Spanish encomenderos complained repeatedly about the lack of Indian labor in letters home to Spain, and the labor shortage motivated the slaving expeditions of Juan Ponce de Leon and others Spaniards throughout the Caribbean.³⁵

³¹ James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, *Early Latin America: A History of Colonial Spanish America and Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 69.

³² Rouse, 154; Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main*, 149.

³³ Ida Altman, "The Revolt of Enriquillo and the Historiography of Early Spanish America," *The Americas* 63, no. 4 (2007): 587-614.

³⁴ Sherburne F. Cook and Woodrow Borah, *Essays in Population History: Mexico and the Caribbean*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 408; David Henige, "On the Contact Population of Hispaniola: History as Higher Mathematics," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 58, no. 2 (1978): 217-237.

³⁵ Keegan, *The People Who Discovered Columbus*, 223.

Caribbean Demographic Collapse

Accounting for that rapidly dwindling number of Taino has occasioned energetic disputes among sixteenth-century commentators and subsequent historians. Bartolomé de las Casas made the argument for Spanish brutality and blood-thirst, which was an explanation eagerly adopted by Spain's imperial enemies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³⁶ Carl O. Sauer argued instead that the disruption of indigenous agriculture and foodways accelerated Taino decline, while Noble David Cook has suggested that Old World diseases, such as influenza and, eventually, smallpox, had a devastating effect on Hispaniola's population.³⁷ Massimo Livi-Bacci has suggested that—in addition to a confluence of violence, agricultural disruption, and sickness—the Taino birth rate was adversely affected by the dislocation of the community, a decline further exacerbated by Spanish men taking Taino women into their households.³⁸ Kathleen Deagan's work in the archaeological excavations of the early Spanish settlements, however, suggests that Taino behaviors and culture were practiced within the homes of Spanish settlers, which suggests that the Taino continued to survive in ways that may have seemed insignificant or invisible to the Spanish observers.³⁹ However the diminishment of the Taino people was accomplished—whether by violent, biological, or cultural means—it greatly alarmed their Spanish masters on Hispaniola.

³⁶ Benjamin Keen, "The Black Legend Revisited: Assumptions and Realities," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 49, no. 4 (Nov., 1969): 715-718; Charles Gibson, *The Black Legend: Anti-Spanish Attitudes in the Old World and the New* (New York: Knopf, 1971).

³⁷ Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main*, 203, 293; Noble David Cook, *Born to Die: Disease and New World Conquest, 1492-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 15-59.

³⁸ Massimo Livi-Bacci, "Return to Hispaniola: Reassessing a Demographic Catastrophe," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83, no. 1 (2003): 45-46.

³⁹ Kathleen Deagan, "Reconsidering Taino Social Dynamics after Spanish Conquest: Gender and Class in Culture Contact Studies" *American Antiquity* 69, no. 4 (2004).

The demographic decline of the indigenous population occurred during a period of political upheaval in both Spain and the Spanish Caribbean. In Spain, the death of first Isabel and then Ferdinand led to the regency of the Franciscan cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros for the incapable Juana and the immature Charles. To end the controversial government of Don Diego Columbus in the Caribbean, and to investigate the allegations of Indian abuse levelled against the Spanish settlers, Cisneros appointed three friars from the Order of Saint Jerome in 1516 to investigate the situation in the Caribbean. In 1519, they were recalled by Charles, who now had achieved his majority and had his own distinct imperial vision of his colonial possessions. That same year, Hernando Cortes discovered Mexico.

Location of the Caribbean in Colonial Spanish America

The early Spanish Caribbean suffers the role of a minor appendage in the traditional histories of colonial America. In a typical textbook, Christopher Columbus' discovery of America is immediately followed by Cortes; the intervening thirty years are elided. The historiography of the larger Caribbean subjects the Spanish Caribbean to a different but no less problematic fate. In comparison to later Caribbean history, the sixteenth-century Spanish Caribbean is an anomaly within the region's historical themes of sugar plantations and African slavery. Little historical attention is paid to the early Spanish Caribbean's role in shaping the subsequent conquests of Mexico and Peru or the experiences it bears in common with later Caribbean history.

The historiography of religion in colonial Spanish America throws this neglect of the Caribbean into sharp relief. Many histories of colonial religion have taken their cue from Robert Ricard's *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, and so the 1524 arrival of the Franciscans to mainland America is taken as the beginning of missionary Christianity in

the New World.⁴⁰ This approach, however, ignores the crucial missionary precedents established in the Caribbean in the sixteenth century and in the Canaries in the fifteenth century. Other histories turn to Las Casas to represent the totality of Christianity and evangelization in the Americas in the first half of the sixteenth century. Las Casas, however, should not be removed from his larger religious and political context. The hagiographies of Las Casas treat him as a *sui generis* humanist, while the denunciations seek to tear him down as a hypocritical opportunist—but little attention is paid to the communities of Franciscans, Dominicans, and other friars who were instrumental in shaping the religious environment in which Las Casas came to maturity. Religion and power were connected in complex ways in the colonial Spanish Caribbean, but those complexities tend to be ignored in a historiographical rush to reach Mexico or Valladolid, where Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda engaged in the famous debate over the nature of the American Indians in 1550 and 1551.

The tenure of the Hieronymite governors in the Caribbean is often perceived as an interlude more notable for its novelty than anything else, but together with the experiences of Ramón Pané and other religious figures of the early Spanish Caribbean, the documentary sources from the period offer an important opportunity to analyze the myriad ways in which religious rhetoric and practices influenced the process of European colonization in the Americas. The roles assigned to the Hieronymites in Hispaniola—translators, investigators, mediators—were not random or inexplicable acts; they were based on the historical legacy of the order and the entangled Spanish

⁴⁰ Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain: 1523-1572*, trans. Lesley Byrd Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

understandings of Christianity and the Conquest. The Hieronymite experiences on Hispaniola represent a neglected source of information about the missionization of colonial Spanish America, the economic and social development of the Caribbean, and the relationship between religion and power in the Spanish Atlantic.

CHAPTER 2 RAMÓN PANÉ AND SPANISH HISPANIOLA: 1493-1498

In November 1493, Christopher Columbus returned to Hispaniola with a young Hieronymite friar from Catalonia. Ramón Pané spent the next four years trying to convert the island's indigenous people to Christianity, and by 1498 he had composed a report to Christopher Columbus on "the beliefs and idolatries" of his hosts.¹ In addition to its summaries of myths and folklore, the account describes Amerindian society on Hispaniola in the years immediately following European contact and thus represents one of the earliest texts of American ethnohistory. In some ways, Pané presages the paradoxical role played by the sixteenth-century friar-scholars, such as Bernardino de Sahagún, Diego Durán, and Diego de Landa, who carefully preserved a record of the indigenous American beliefs that they planned to eradicate.² Yet Pané was no scholar, and his tortuous text has not generated the fervor of scholarly analysis that has focused on sixteenth-century ethnohistorical sources for Mesoamerica or the North American borderlands. Past scholarship on Pané has typically used his account to analyze the Taino Indians' religious understandings within a static pan-Caribbean cosmology. Little attention, however, has been paid to the relationship between Pané's accounts and the Spanish-Taino interactions that formed the backdrop to its composition.

Political power, cultural traditions, and religion became the focal points of conflict and compromise between Americans and Europeans in the early years of Spanish settlement, and those struggles shaped the religious demonstrations that the Taino

¹ Ramón Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, ed. José Juan Arrom, trans. Susan C. Griswold (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 3.

² For scholarship on missionary-ethnographers, see Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahuatl-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-century Mexico* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989). See also work by James Lockhart and J. Jorge Klor de Alva.

performed for Pané and the selected aspects that Pané recorded from those performances. As a result, Pané's account offers a unique opportunity to analyze a nascent Spanish-Taino society during a period of tremendous trauma and possibility, before relationships, perceptions, and representations had hardened into the familiar tragedies of the sixteenth century.

The Life of Ramón Pané

Aside from his self-professed identity as "a humble friar of the Order of Saint Jerome," Ramón Pané's background is unclear. According to Bartolomé de las Casas, his origins lay in Catalonia, the easternmost region of Spain, and translator José Juan Arrom speculated that Pané may have been a part of the Hieronymite Convent of San Jerónimo de la Murtra, which is located near Barcelona.³ Queen Isabel and King Ferdinand used the buildings of San Jerónimo to receive Christopher Columbus on his return from the first voyage to America, and Pané may have encountered Columbus at the time.⁴ When Pané left on Columbus' second voyage in September 1493, he was accompanied by several friars from other orders, including the Benedictine monk Bernardo Boyl, who had been chosen by the Spanish monarchs to lead the evangelical efforts in Hispaniola, and the Franciscan lay friars Juan de la Duele (also known as Juan de Borgoña) and Juan Tisín.⁵ Within a year, Boyl had quarreled with the Columbus family and returned to Spain to make his complaints to Isabel and Ferdinand.

³ José Juan Arrom, "Introduction to the English Edition," in *An Account*, xiii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xiii-xiv.

⁵ Floyd, *The Columbus Dynasty*, 16-17; Francis Borgia Steck, "Christopher Columbus and the Franciscans," *The Americas* 3, 3 (Jan. 1947), 332-333; B. T. F. Poole, "Case Reopened: An Enquiry into the 'Defection' of Fray Bernal Boyl and Mosen Pedro Margarit," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 6, 2 (Nov. 1974), 193-210.

Many of the friars on Hispaniola may have accompanied Boyl back to Spain in 1494, but Pané remained. By early 1495, Pané was living at the Spanish fort of Magdalena and proselytizing to the Macorix-speaking people who lived near the fort.⁶ His first Christian convert was Guaticaba, the Macorix-speaking man who would become his companion and collaborator in religious instruction to the Taino.⁷ Pané later wrote that Guaticaba, who was later baptized as Juan Mateo, was "the best of the Indians," and Pané "considered him a good son and brother."⁸

In February 1495, Magdalena was attacked by an alliance of Taino Indians led by the cacique Caonabó, and the subsequent Taino revolt in Hispaniola's central region, the Vega Real, was crushed by Columbus' forces in March and April.⁹ When Columbus arrived at Magdalena, he asked Pané to move to the Vega Real and the provinces of the influential cacique Guarionex. Given the uncertain balance of power in the region, Columbus may have wanted Pané to keep an eye on Guarionex, but the primary reason for his relocation, according to Pané, was based on the issue of language. The indigenous people who lived around Magdalena spoke Macorix, an island language that "was not understood throughout the country," Pané reported. In contrast, the language of Guarionex "was understood throughout the land," although Pané did not understand it himself. Pané asked Columbus for permission to bring along someone who could

⁶ Pané, *An Account*, 32; Kathleen Deagan and José María Cruxent, *Columbus's Outpost among the Taínos: Spain and America at La Isabela, 1493-1498* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 60-62.

⁷ Pané, *An Account*, 32; Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, "Juan Mateo Guaticabanu, September 21, 1496: Evangelization and Martyrdom in the Time of Columbus," *The Catholic Historical Review* 82, 4 (1996), 614-636.

⁸ Pané, *An Account*, 34.

⁹ Deagan and Cruxent, *Columbus's Outpost*, 61.

translate between the two Hispaniola languages for Pané, and Columbus granted permission for Guatícaba to accompany Pané.

For the next two years, Pané and Guatícaba labored to introduce Christianity to Guarionex's people, and during that time they were assisted by others, including Guatícaba's mother and brothers and the Franciscan friar Juan de la Duele.¹⁰ In September 1496, Guatícaba was baptized as Juan Mateo.¹¹ While the initial conversion efforts seemed propitious, the political and social tensions between Guarionex and the Spanish authorities led to a souring relationship between Guarionex and his missionaries. "[S]eeing that Guarionex was retreating and abandoning what we had taught him, we decided to leave and go where we might gather better fruit," Pané wrote.¹²

In early 1497, Pané, Guatícaba/Juan, and Duele left Guarionex and moved to the lands of another cacique. Subsequently, Guarionex's rumored plans of insurrection led to Guarionex's preemptive arrest by Bartolomé Columbus, who had been left in charge of Hispaniola during his brother's absence in Spain. At the same time, Francisco Roldán and a group of disaffected Spaniards violently revolted against the Columbus family's authority in the Caribbean. During the chaotic events of 1497, Guatícaba/Juan was killed, and Pané blamed his murder on Guarionex's machinations.

Translations and Transmutations

The murder of his religious collaborator in late 1496 or 1497 marks the end of Pané's account. Christopher Columbus returned to Hispaniola in August 1498, and

¹⁰ Pané, *An Account*, 35.

¹¹ Pané, *An Account*, 38.

¹² Pané, *An Account*, 35.

when he arrived in Spain in 1500, he brought Pané's manuscript with him.¹³ Pané disappears thereafter from recorded history, but his account survived in summarized and translated formats. By 1504, Pietro Martire D'Anghiera (Peter Martyr) had seen the account and incorporated it into his reports on the Americas. Bartolomé de las Casas used Pané's account in his *Apologética historia de las Indias*, which was finished in 1560. Fernando Columbus included Pané's account in his biography of his father, and Alfonso de Ulloa made an incomplete translation of Fernando's account into Italian, which was published in 1571.¹⁴ Both Pané's original manuscript and Fernando's copy have since disappeared. "As a result," translator José Juan Arrom writes, "all we know of the *Account* at present is Anghiera's summary in Latin, Las Casas's extract in Spanish, and Ulloa's Italian translation."¹⁵

Ulloa's version of Pané's account has received various Spanish translations, which have been subsequently translated to English. This degree of textual mediation in a text about mediation has a quality of irony; in her literary analysis of the processes of translation at work upon Pané's account, Constance G. Janiga-Perkins argues that Pane and his successors are "cannibals" who compulsively consume each previous iteration of the text in order to produce a new self-reflective "autoethnography," which is then devoured by another translator in turn.¹⁶

¹³ Arrom, "Introduction," xxiv.

¹⁴ Fernando Colón, *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus by his son Ferdinand*, trans. Benjamin Keen (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1959), 153-169.

¹⁵ Arrom, "Introduction," xxv.

¹⁶ "The *Relación* is the product of the process by which reading creates meaning, which is then revealed, and can ONLY be revealed, by creating or writing a new text to be set in juxtaposition to the very object or experience each reader was investigating. That new text, while it may subsume the previous one as subaltern, also maps out the autoethnography of the reader, new writer of the interpretation that becomes the next text." Constance G. Janiga-Perkins, *Reading, Writing, and Translation in the Relación acerca de*

As a result of this punctilious preservation of a bastardized text, Pané occupies a paradoxical spot of inconsequential primacy in the histories of the early Spanish Caribbean. Scholars have been quick to award Pané the prize of being first. In 1906, Edward Gaylord Bourne wrote that Pané's report was "the first treatise ever written in the field of American antiquities," and literary critic Roberto González Echevarría has argued that it foreshadowed "the future of anthropology and the Latin American narrative."¹⁷ Pané's position as an inaugural figure comes at the price: he often appears as merely the precursor to a later and more important history.

There are exceptions to this historiographical trend of neglect. The most careful work on Pané's text has focused primarily on the reconstruction of Taino religious systems. Mercedes López-Baralt and Antonio M. Stevens-Arroyo have both analyzed Pané's descriptions of Taino beliefs in the context of structural anthropology and the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss. López-Baralt offers a subtle and careful interpretation of Pané's text, and she finds numerous connections between Taino mythology and the culture of the Arawak Indians of South America. However, her explicit purpose is to place the Taino cosmology (and, implicitly, the entire cultural heritage of the Spanish Caribbean) within a pan-American mentality "as Amazonian as [it is] Andean," and her universalizing framework obscures the account's local context of northern Hispaniola.¹⁸ Stevens-Arroyo has closely examined Guaticaba/Juan Mateo's role in the account, but

las Antigüedades de los Indios (c. 1498) by Fray Ramón Pané: A Study of a Pioneering Work in Ethnography (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), 8.

¹⁷ Edward Gaylord Bourne, *Columbus, Ramón Pané, and the Beginnings of American Anthropology* (Worcester: Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, 1906); Roberto González Echevarría, *Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 147.

his primary focus has been fitting Taino myth within a universal framework of world mythology and Jungian archetypes.¹⁹

Archaeologists and anthropologists have used Pané's account in conjunction with the material record in order to reconstruct Caribbean political and social structures in the pre-contact period, but less attention has been paid to the text within an early colonial context. Samuel Wilson uses Pané's account in his ethnohistorical analysis of indigenous political formation on Hispaniola, but Pané's work plays a subordinate role to the writings of Las Casas and Martyr.²⁰ William Keegan employs Pané's account in his imaginative reconstruction of Taino social practices, but his primary focus is the "layers of narrative" surrounding the Taino cacique Caonabó, who is barely referenced in Pané's account.²¹ Upon Pané's mentality and motivations, relatively little work has been done, and literary scholars have been slow to utilize Pané's text. As part of his analysis of symbolic representations in colonial Mexico, Serge Gruzinski approvingly compares Pané's "ethnographic sensitivity" to the rigid expectations imposed by subsequent chroniclers of the Americas.²² Constance G. Janiga-Perkins has analyzed Pané's account according to post-structural protocols, but her analysis is focused on the responses of Pané's twentieth-century readers, rather than his sixteenth-century

¹⁸ "En cualquiera de los casos, el hecho vincula a la mitología taína con la mitología sudamericana, tanto amazónica como andina." Mercedes López-Baralt, *El Mito Taíno: Levi-Strauss en Las Antillas*, 2nd edition (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Huracán, 1985), 45.

¹⁹ Antonio M. Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua: The Mythological World of the Tainos* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988).

²⁰ Samuel M. Wilson, *Hispaniola: Caribbean Chiefdoms in the Age of Columbus* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1990).

²¹ William F. Keegan, *Taino Indian Myth and Practice: The Arrival of the Stranger King* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 18.

context.²³ Most of Pané's interrogators have tended to depict Pané as an exceptional and quasi-admirable anomaly in the context of the early Spanish conquest, but Meghan McInnis-Domínguez has argued instead that Pané upholds the colonial imbalance of power in his text and "adopts a panoptic posture" in his surveillance of the indigenous Taino.²⁴

Authorship and Authority

It may be impossible to identify Pané as the unquestioned author of any specific word in the account, but the broad consistencies and congruities between the three surviving versions suggest that a certain fidelity may exist between the 1498 original and its subsequent facsimiles. For the sake of convenience, this paper will treat "Ramón Pané" as the single author of this account, even though the versions of Ramón Pané's account that have survived into the current age have been copied and paraphrased and translated by many intermediary hands. The many handlers of Pané's account have preserved it from accidental oblivion, but their smudged fingerprints also obscure Pané. However, these problems of authenticity and authority are not unique to Pané. David Henige notes that many of the sources from early Spanish American expansion, such as the Christopher Columbus diaries, suffer from "the corrosive effects of transmitting written texts" in forms prone to paraphrase, elision, and amendment.²⁵

²² Serge Gruzinski, *Images at War: Mexico from Columbus to Blade Runner (1492-2019)*, trans. Heather MacLean (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 11.

²³ Janiga-Perkins, *Reading, Writing, and Translation*.

²⁴ "Como Pané adopta ahora una postura panóptica, puede juzgar los actos de sus sujetos, tomándoles así 'visibles' a los lectores castellanos." Meghan McInnis-Domínguez, "La violencia del/al género en la Relación acerca de las antigüedades de los indios de Fray Ramón Pané," *Espéculo: Revista de Estudios Literarios* 40 (2008). Available from <http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero40/relacion.html>.

²⁵ David Henige, *In Search of Columbus: The Sources for the First Voyage* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1991), 4

The problems with Pané's account are not limited to the possibility of corrupted meanings during centuries of translation. Like all outsiders and anthropologists, Pané had an imperfect understanding of the societies of Hispaniola's Indians. Most significantly, Pané's identity as an Hieronymite friar undoubtedly influenced his relationship with the Taino people and his method of recounting their stories, but this factor is often ignored in the secondary literature. Instead, Pane is depicted as an independent agent, unburdened by any significant ideological preconceptions or processes. According to Gruzinski, Pané describes Taino beliefs "without ever letting his observations warp under the weight of stereotype or prejudice," but this anachronistic reading of Pané ignores his clear derision for several aspects of the traditional religious practices of the Taino.²⁶ Stevens-Arroyo links Pane's "objectivity" with his order's "lack of scholarly pretensions" and historic neutrality in Spanish political disputes, but Pané's religious role would have necessarily colored his "objectivity."²⁷

At least two of Pané's contemporaries were skeptical of the account's veracity. Christopher Columbus, who had commissioned the account from Pané, later said that "it contains so many fictions that the only sure thing to be learned from it is that the Indians have a certain natural reverence for the after-life and believe in the immortality of the soul," according to his son.²⁸ Las Casas described Pané as "a simple-minded man" with "small abilities" who spoke an unimportant Taino language imperfectly and wrote an account that "was sometimes confused and of little substance."²⁹

²⁶ Gruzinski, *Images at War*, 11.

²⁷ Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua*, 77.

²⁸ Colón, *The Life of the Admiral*, 153.

²⁹ Deagan and Cruxent, *Columbus's Outpost*, 39.

Las Casas wrote that the Catalan Pané did not speak Castilian well, which may have impeded his ability to write in that language.³⁰ Further language difficulties awaited in the Caribbean, as Hispaniola apparently possessed at least three different languages, although the degree of difference between these languages is unclear.³¹ In Hispaniola, Pané apparently did learn to communicate using at least one of the languages spoken on Hispaniola, but it was a language that Columbus deemed of little use on the rest of the island. Pané was sent to Guarionex to learn the *lingua franca* of Hispaniola, and he spent two years living among Guarionex's people, but it is impossible to assess Pané's ability at communicating in this language from his account.³² Pané specifically petitioned Columbus to be allowed to bring along the multi-lingual Guatícaba when he left for Guarionex's lands, but Guatícaba's presence as a translator may have further retarded Pané's language acquisition. There is no explicit reference in the account to Guatícaba mediating between Pané and the Taino Indians of the Vega Real, but Pané's enthusiastic and emotional depiction of Guatícaba suggests that the Hieronymite friar worked closely and often with the Christian Indian, while his interactions with the Vega Real Taino may have been much more remote.

There is no simple way to gauge Pané's understanding of the island's languages and societies, but his possible difficulties of comprehension are underscored by his demonstrated difficulties of composition. His account is a tortuous scramble of subjects

³⁰ Arrom, "Introduction," xxviii.

³¹ Wilson, *Hispaniola*, 104; Keegan, *Taino Indian Myth*, 25-26; D. G. Brinton, "The Arawack Language of Guiana in Its Linguistic and Ethnological Relations," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 14, 3 (1871), 427-444; Julian Granberry, "Was Ciguayo a West Indian Hokan Language?" *International Journal of American Linguistics*, 57, 4 (Oct., 1991), 514-519.

and chronology, and Pané frequently interrupts his own narrative to apologize for his deficiencies as a narrator. Due to the lack of writing among the Taino, Pané wrote, "they do not know how to tell such fables well, nor can I write them well. Therefore, I believe that I put first what ought to be last and the last first."³³ McInnis-Domínguez has argued that this line exemplifies Pané's contempt for Taino oral culture, which leads him to suppress American orality through the colonizing power of the Roman alphabet, but this conclusion ignores Pané's apparent discomfort and insecurity about the act of writing throughout his account.³⁴ After describing a strange Taino myth, Pané wrote, "I did not find out anymore about this, and what I have written down is of little help."³⁵ The oddest moment of Pané's self-consciousness about his difficulties came when he confessed his lack of supplies:

Because I wrote [a Taino myth] down in haste and did not have sufficient paper, I was not able to write down in that place what I had copied down elsewhere by mistake; but in any case, I have not been in error because they believe everything just as I have written it down. Let us return now to what I ought to have written first.³⁶

Paradoxically, it is Pané's fumbling helplessness that has been his account's greatest asset in establishing authenticity and authority in the eyes of scholars. Unlike other early chroniclers of the Spanish Caribbean—that sly courtier Oviedo, that single-minded Las Casas—Pané seems incapable of arranging his narrative to further a

³² The linguistic boundaries between the Macorix-speaking peoples of Magdalena and the Taino of the Vega Real raise the possibility that cultural and religious differences also existed between the two communities, but these differences went unrecorded by Pané.

³³ Pané, *An Account*, 11.

³⁴ McInnis-Domínguez, "La violencia del/al género."

³⁵ Pané, *An Account*, 16.

³⁶ Pané, *An Account*, 12.

personal agenda or employing skillful rhetoric to manipulate his readers, and so his lack of sophistication signals the raw and unrefined honesty of his ethnographic observations. Yet ethnography is invariably contaminated by its author. Pané's perceptions were shaped by his religious purpose as a Christian friar, and his representations in the text were shaped by his desire to please Christopher Columbus and the Spanish authorities. At the same time, the presence of Pané and other Europeans shaped the histories the Taino chose to perform and tell while Pané lived among them.

Stories Spoken and Written

Pané may not have started his account with any plan beyond Columbus' nebulous directions concerning "beliefs and idolatries," but certain themes and elements appear frequently in Pané's descriptions of Taino myth and folklore. In Pané's re-telling, the thematic motifs of these stories include the impermanence of death and the absence of women. Part of the particular emphasis on these elements may be due to Pané's personal fixations, but the shape of his re-telling of these stories also suggests the shape of the stories as they were originally told to him by the Taino themselves.

Pané is at pains throughout his account to assign the responsibility for these Taino myths to the Taino orators who originally presented them, and his efforts should not be disregarded in the scholarly attempt to locate Pané's single "voice" in the text. Rather, there are multiple voices, and at least two authors: Pané in the foreground, assisted and animated by Ulloa and Ulloa's translators, and the shadowed, indistinct Taino storytellers—including Juan and Guarionex—in the background. López-Baralt has described Pané's account as a work of "dual authorship" in which Pané is accompanied by "a secondary, collective author: the Taino people, who generate the myths that the

indigenous informers recite or sing to them."³⁷ The incidents of repetition and emphasis in the account suggest points of intersection between Pané's personal reaction to Taino histories—the stories and events that stuck in his memory and which he judged worthy of including in his account—and the emphasis used by the Taino themselves as they told or performed specific stories in specific circumstances.

The dead walked in Taino folklore.³⁸ They emerged at night in the guise of family members or dangerous warriors or seductive women. In the case of the latter, "when a man thinks he has her in his arms, he has nothing because the woman disappears in an instant," Pané wrote.³⁹ The dead would not appear among crowds, but solitary travelers were vulnerable to their approach. The dead resembled the living in all respects, save two: they did not appear in daylight, and they did not have a navel, which could be detected by touching the apparition's belly. The dead were both cherished and feared. They returned to "celebrate and accompany the living," but at the same time, the Taino Indians were "fearful" to encounter them alone on some moonlit road.⁴⁰

The dead spoke. Corpses could answer questions, although they might not answer them truthfully.⁴¹ The shamanic *behiques* were believed to hold regular conversation with the dead. Unsurprisingly, Pané was skeptical and contemptuous of

³⁷ "hay un autor secundario, colectivo: el pueblo taíno, que produce los mitos que los informantes indígenas recitan o cantan a aquél." López-Baralt, *El Mito Taino*, 133. Meghan McInnis-Domínguez has contested this interpretation of peaceful cultural collaboration and instead argued that the Pané's account represents "la lucha por el control narrativo entre Pané y los taínos." Mc-Innis-Domínguez, "La violencia del/al género."

³⁸ Pané, *An Account*, 5, 18-19.

³⁹ Pané, *An Account*, 19.

⁴⁰ Pané, *An Account*, 19.

⁴¹ Pané, *An Account*, 24.

this relationship. As a missionary, Pané likely encountered significant opposition from the behiques, who were responsible for maintaining Taino traditions of religion and culture. As a Christian, Pané was predisposed to oppose any relationships with the divine that occurred outside Christian orthodoxy, and he wrote that the *behiques* "practice many deceptions" and preyed upon the gullibility of their fellow Taino.⁴² If a behique failed in his obligations, however, the other Taino could mete out certain retributions. Pané offered a graphic and detailed account of what might happen to a behique who failed to cure a Taino Indian through the behique's own negligence.

One day the relatives of the dead man gather and wait for the aforesaid behique, and they beat him so soundly that they break his legs and arms and head, clubbing him all to pieces, and they leave him thus, believing that they have killed him.... He is in this state for two or three days, and while he is thus, the bones of his legs and arms join once again and mend, they say, and he stands up and walks a little and goes back to his house.... And when they see him alive, the relatives of the dead man are very annoyed... and if they can catch him again, they take out his eyes and smash his testicles because they say that none of these physicians can die, however much they may beat him, if they do not remove his testicles.⁴³

It is noteworthy that Pané described this story with such specific detail. Pané's presumed antagonism with the behiques may have encouraged his Taino interlocutors to embellish gruesomely the story as they reported it, and the space and care that Pané devotes to re-telling the story in all its violent particulars suggests that he paid happy attention to the possibility of behique destruction.

Pané was explicitly skeptical of the behiques and their practices, but he was much more reserved about Taino stories of the mobile and voluble dead. There are suggestions of doubt in the validity of the Taino beliefs—"[t]heir ancestors have made

⁴² Pané, *An Account*, 19.

⁴³ Pané, *An Account*, 24-25.

them believe all this"—but there is no reason to think that Pané doubted the quotidian presence of the supernatural itself on Hispaniola.⁴⁴ Christianity had a tradition of resurrections and ghosts, and early modern Spain was a land of divine visitations and messages.⁴⁵

By and large, Pané did not explicitly identify parallels between Taino beliefs and Christian orthodoxy, with one significant exception: the zemis of stone and wood, who acted as intermediaries between the Taino and the divine and which Pané perceived as clearly demonic. "Those simple, ignorant people believe that those idols—or, more properly speaking, demons—make such things happen because they have no knowledge of our holy faith," Pané wrote.⁴⁶ (This line—which comes two-thirds of the way through the account—is also the first explicit reference to Christianity in the text.) Gruzinski has argued that Pané's single comparison of the zemis to idols represents a careless slip of the pen that Pané immediately qualifies. Gruzinski argues that Pané's "ethnographic sensitivity" leads him to take pains to depict the zemi as "a chaos of shape" that is "hesitating between many states."⁴⁷ The demonization and corporealization of the zemi, according to Gruzinski, occurs gradually in the writings of Peter Martyr, who was fixated on the themes of representation and simulacrum, and it was Martyr, not Pané, who influenced subsequent accounts.⁴⁸ This, however, is an unwontedly generous interpretation of Pané's purposes. While the zemi do seem to

⁴⁴ Pané, *An Account*, 5.

⁴⁵ Christian, *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain*, 22-25.

⁴⁶ Pané, *An Account*, 21.

⁴⁷ Gruzinski, *Images at War*, 10-11.

⁴⁸ Gruzinski, *Images at War*, 14-19.

unite a variety of meanings for the Taino, Pané himself demonstrates a dogged insistence on seeing them as physical and unwholesome objects specifically shaped by human hands to represent metaphysical concepts and unnatural animation. Pané reported that, for the Taino, the zemi were capable of digesting food, escaping captivity, and engaging in sexual intercourse; the zemi had names and origins and gender in Taino tradition.⁴⁹ "And so may God help them if the zemi eats any of those things because the zemi is a dead thing, shaped from stone or made of wood," Pané wrote.⁵⁰ Like the walking dead of the Taino, the zemi seem to embody simultaneous expressions of life and unlife in ways that the Taino found perfectly comprehensible and that Pané found persistently irreconcilable.

The impermanence of death is not the only recurring feature in the survey of Taino myths and histories that Pané elected to include in his account. Women are absent from these stories in explicit ways.⁵¹ They appear in animal forms; they are exiled to inaccessible islands; they are the subject of fruitless searches and quests.⁵² In these stories, households of Taino bachelors are reduced to such desperation that they are forced to generate their own women. In one story, when a man's brothers take a stone axe to his swelling back, they find a living female turtle, which they then adopt into

⁴⁹ Pané, *An Account*, 27-30.

⁵⁰ Pané, *An Account*, 23.

⁵¹ Other scholars have argued that Pané's Amazon myth suggests the prominence and importance of women in Taino myth and society, but the isolation and segregation of these women, and the implication that they are "lost" to Hispaniola after their exile, would seem to suggest the opposite. Their absence on Hispaniola and the subsequent events engendered by that absence seems a more vital factor than their presumed presence on an unreachable island. For analyses on the presence of women, see López Baralt, *El Mito Taino*, 152, and Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua*, 155-174.

⁵² Pané, *An Account*, 8-9, 12, 16.

their bachelor household.⁵³ Another story about bachelor Tainos described the sudden appearance of sexless and slick creatures who were finally caught by syphilitic Taino men with rough-skinned hands.⁵⁴ The men found a woodpecker and tied it to the bodies of the sexless creatures. "[T]he bird began his customary work, picking and burrowing holes in the place where the sex of women is generally located. And in this way the Indians say that they had women."⁵⁵

The absence of women is not the only possible interpretation of the gender dynamics of Taino mythology. Two female figures, a healer and a queen, appear in Pané's account wielding some degree of authority, and a few of the *zemis* are identified as female. Contemporary accounts from other Spaniards on the island suggest that political power among the Taino descended matrilineally.⁵⁶ Yet the absence of women seems to be the narrative structure that Pané himself employed. Part of this emphasis on absence may be due to Pané's own relationship with Taino women. As a Hieronymite friar, Pané's religious responsibilities included celibacy, and he may have had limited contact with Taino women. The only woman to emerge as an individual in Pané's account is the mother of the cacique Guarionex, and Pané does not interact directly with her. Instead, her words and actions are reported to Pané by another man.⁵⁷ Pané's implied distance from Taino women shaped the kinds of stories that he heard, just as his experiences were shaped by the position he occupied in Taino society.

⁵³ José Juan Arrom in Pané, *An Account*, 16, fn 73.

⁵⁴ Pané, *An Account*, 12.

⁵⁵ Pané, *An Account*, 12.

⁵⁶ Keegan, *Taino Indian Myth*, 97, 120, 190.

⁵⁷ Pané, *An Account*, 37.

Lopez-Baralt suggests that, as a stranger to the community, Pané's access to Taino folklore came primarily through public performances, such as ceremonial *areytos*.⁵⁸

The Taino religious myths represented in Pané's account are often treated by scholars as timeless and universal beliefs among the Caribbean Arawak. Yet this presumes a rather static and flat vision of Taino religion as lived and performed by Pané's neighbors from 1495 to 1498. Pané's account of Taino belief systems is incomplete, because Pané was necessarily selective in his memory and his composition, and the Taino were presumably no less selective in their performances and explanations. Religion, as a constellation of shared understandings, offers a range of possible interpretations of the world, but the entirety of that spectrum is rarely applicable in any single situation. Instead, at any point in their history, the Taino Indians of Hispaniola were telling and re-telling the stories that held the most meaning and resonance for that particular point in time. Assessing the totality of factors influencing Taino life during the 1490s is beyond the scope of the documentary or material record, but it seems probable that the presence and actions of the Spanish settlers played a disproportionately large role in community concerns during this time. Accordingly, it is possible that the Taino religious and mythic narratives that would receive the most repetition and emphasis during these years would be the stories that held particular significance for the particular social conditions of a nascent Spanish-Taino society. This is not to suggest that social conditions could be immediately and directly translated to folklore traditions. Rather, people will choose to express the cultural narratives and religious explanations that seem most relevant to their immediate circumstances.

⁵⁸ López Baralt, *El Mito Taino*, 40.

For example, the absence of women in these stories echoes the known disruptions of Taino households caused by the early years of Spanish settlement, when political violence rearranged community boundaries, tributary demands affected traditional labor patterns, and Taino and European men competed with one another for sexual access or marriage alliances to Taino women. Similarly, stories about death and infirmity may have had a special significance in the period of rising Taino mortality from factors both evident and invisible.

Disease is largely absent from the stories that Pané reported. Smallpox famously arrived in the Caribbean in 1518, but the appearance of other illnesses of the Old World, such as influenza and measles, have less certain dates of entry. Noble David Cook has argued that influenza began laying waste to Hispaniola's indigenous population with the arrival of Columbus' second voyage in 1494, and that the Spanish accounts of the era are rife with oblique references to illness and mortality, but there is no echo of that concern to be detected in Pané's account.⁵⁹ Instead, New World diseases are mentioned. There are several references to a skin disease called *caracaracol*, which may have been either a form of parasitic mange or bacterial syphilis, and there is one explicit reference to syphilis sores.⁶⁰ There are no explicit references to other diseases, and Pané does not mention any signs of illness or physical weakness in his descriptions of Taino society, although Pané may have simply been oblivious to outbreaks of influenza or measles around him. Pané's account cannot be taken as conclusive

⁵⁹ Cook, *Born to Die*, 28-45

⁶⁰ Pané, *An Account*, 10, 12, 15.

evidence as to the absence of disease around him, but it suggests that disease had not yet emerged as a major factor of life within the Vega Real before 1498.

However, the presence of European disease in the Vega Real may be implied in Pané's description of *behiques*. In Pané's telling, the primary role of the shamanic behiques was a medicinal one: they treated the ill and infirm among the Taino, and interceded on behalf of their patients with the supernatural plagues that manifested themselves physically upon the bodies of the ill. The Taino ill were taken to the behiques, who would treat them in a variety of ways, including a dose of the emetic *cohoba*, a special diet shared by both patient and behique, and an intercession with the particular zemi who had caused the illness. A behique's efficacy as a healer depended upon the purity of his own conduct, and so an ineffectual healer was presumed guilty of personal corruption. As was described earlier, a Taino family might take violent revenge upon a behique if they suspected him of deviating from the special diet. Pané spends a great deal of space describing the behiques and their treatment of sick people. While this focus is clearly related to Pané's Christian expectations and the spiritual trespasses committed by the behiques, it may also reflect a point of tension among the Taino themselves. If Old World diseases had begun to spread through the Vega Real between 1492 and 1498, the Taino might have been grappling with a gradually rising mortality rate and the decline of the behique's perceived power. Pané's description of a murdered behique is delivered with the specific and particular details of a real and recent event. Just as the presence of the Spanish altered the positions political power across Hispaniola, the presence of Old World disease may have contributed to destabilized religious understandings among the Taino of the island.

Guarionex and Guatícaba

The Taino Indians and their "voices" can be heard distantly in this account, represented both in the stories that they told Pané and the observations that Pané made himself. Areas of conflict and accommodation between Spanish and Taino factions are indirectly revealed by Pané's references to violence, political negotiation, and religion. Pané's own interactions with the Taino were shaped by his role as a proto-missionary, and religion proved to be a complicated issue throughout his account. Finally, the voices and motivations of individual Taino emerge indirectly from Pané's account. The evangelical efforts of the Christian Juan Mateo and the political frustrations of the cacique Guarionex both suggest complications and motivations that extend far beyond Pané's narrative.

It is clear from Pané's account that the Christianity of the Spanish settlers was adopted or adapted by some Indians on Hispaniola. When Pané lived at Magdalena, the Macorix-speaking household of the lord Guanáboconel converted to Christianity.⁶¹ One of these household members included Guatícaba, who would become Pané's indispensable companion and assistant in his further evangelical efforts. When Pané and Guatícaba moved to Guarionex's province in the Vega Real, Guarionex exhibited an enthusiasm for demonstrations of Christianity.

In the beginning he showed us goodwill and gave us hope that he would do whatever we wished and that he wanted to be a Christian...so he learned the Pater Noster and the Ave María, and the Creed, and likewise many members of his household learned them; and every morning he would say his prayers and made those of his household say them twice.⁶²

⁶¹ Pané, *An Account*, 32.

⁶² Pané, *An Account*, 34-35.

There is a surprising degree of zeal in Guarionex's actions here, especially in the two sets of prayers he commanded from his household. It should be remembered, however, that he had just witnessed the recent settlement of a Spanish military force at Concepción, which was either within or near his territory, and he had received the gift of an inarticulate Hieronymite friar from Columbus, who may have intended Pané to keep an eye on Guarionex. There is no evidence that Guarionex himself was involved in Caonabó's revolt in 1494 and 1495, but at least one of his subordinate caciques, Guatiguará, was allied with Caonabó.⁶³ After Caonabó's deportation, Guarionex was considered to be the most powerful cacique on Hispaniola, and he appears to have enjoyed the most success in negotiating with the Spanish about the new tributary system. However, the Spanish themselves were fighting one another for control of Hispaniola, which threatened to alter previous alliances and understandings. Given the uncertain political atmosphere of Hispaniola, Guarionex may have chosen dramatic expressions of Christianity as a means of ensuring the legitimacy of his political power in relationship to the Spanish.

Of course, Guarionex might have also felt genuinely called to adopt the religion of his resident Hieronymite. It is clear that Pané himself viewed Guarionex's early religious enthusiasm as genuine. The reference to the double prayers, rather than a subtle insinuation of sham zeal, seems instead intended by Pané to emphasize the contrast with Guarionex's subsequent loss of faith, which was brought about by the persuasions of other caciques:

But afterwards he grew angry, and he abandoned his good intention; other leaders of that land were to blame, for they reproached him because he

⁶³ Deagan and Cruxent, 59-60; Wilson, 84, 90.

wanted to obey the law of the Christians, because the Christians were wicked and had taken possession of their lands by force.⁶⁴

The period between 1495 and 1497 were turbulent ones for Spanish-Taino interactions in the Vega Real. The tributary system imposed by Christopher Columbus in 1495 demanded a hawksbell of gold (which contained about three ounces) every three months from every adult Taino vecino in the mining regions of the Vega Real.⁶⁵ The tributary system disrupted agricultural systems among the Taino, and the shortage of food was further exacerbated by the presence of Spanish conquistadors and debilitating Old World disease in the Taino villages.⁶⁶ As a possible result of these conditions, Hispaniola suffered a widespread famine in 1495 and 1496. The shortage of food further exacerbated tensions between Indians and Spaniards, who accused the Indians of deliberately destroying their own crops in order to starve the Spanish into leaving Hispaniola.⁶⁷

Given the starvation and disruption of these years, Guarionex is notable for enjoying a degree of prosperity. According to Peter Martyr, Guarionex's province was less affected by the famine than other areas of Hispaniola, and so he provided food to the Spanish.⁶⁸ Some of Guarionex's reported stability may have been due to the agricultural benefits of his position within the eastern Vega Real, which experienced

⁶⁴ Pané, *An Account*, 35.

⁶⁵ Indians living outside mining areas were expected to give twenty-five pounds of cotton in tribute instead of gold. Wilson, *Hispaniola*, 93.

⁶⁶ Wilson, *Hispaniola*, 93-94.

⁶⁷ Wilson, *Hispaniola*, 95.

⁶⁸ Wilson, *Hispaniola*, 95.

more annual rain than the western Vega Real.⁶⁹ Bartolomé de las Casas described the region as "very fertile" and having "abundant food and cassava bread."⁷⁰ Guarionex's stability might have also been due to his political ascendancy; Samuel Wilson has described him as "perhaps extraordinary in his ability to manage two competing groups of Spaniards as well as the other indigenous political leaders in the valley."⁷¹ While the Spanish viewed Guarionex as the foremost political leader of the region, Guarionex's political authority actually depended upon his alliances with other Taino caciques, and any consensus reached by these caciques necessarily shaped his decisions.

There is also the faintest whiff of a familiar missionary complaint in Pané's description of Guarionex's lapse from Christianity. Throughout the colonial Americas, it was not unusual for the first wave of Christian missionaries to proclaim the ease and speed of their conversion of the indigenous locals; it was only later, after traditional or syncretic practices persisted alongside Christianity, that missionaries began to suspect insincerity among Indian converts. European missionaries frequently viewed religion as a binary proposition, in which one was either a Christian or not, but their American parishioners were capable of reconciling Christian concepts with prior American understandings. Just as Pané understood Taino religion within the framework of his Christian European background, so too did the Taino understand Pané's religious instruction within their prior cultural conceptions.

⁶⁹ Wilson, *Hispaniola*, 81.

⁷⁰ "donde hay una muy fértil y graciosa vega...abundantísima de comida y pan caçabi." Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*. vol. 2, edición de Agustín Millares Carlo y estudio preliminar de Lewis Hanke (Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1951), 69.

⁷¹ Wilson, *Hispaniola*, 108.

After Pané and Guatícabanu/Juan left Guarionex, they left behind a chapel with religious icons. A group of men "by order of Guarionex" broke into the chapel, stole the images, buried them in a cultivated field, and urinated on them.⁷² Pané interpreted these actions as a calculated blasphemy, but it seems likely that the Taino were enacting a traditional agricultural ceremony for the fertility of crops.⁷³ They were, in short, incorporating elements of Christianity into pre-existing Taino religious expressions. Pané was furious, and he reported with satisfaction that the perpetrators were executed by being burned as heretics by Bartolomé Columbus.⁷⁴

If Guarionex's approach to Christianity seemed unsatisfactory, Pané had the consolation of Guatícabanu/Juan, who seemed to better fit the expected model of Christianization. Guatícabanu was a member of the Macorix-speaking people around Magdalena, and he and his family may have been dependent *naborias* of the cacique Guanáoboconel.⁷⁵ Guatícabanu was the first among the household to convert, and the rest of his family followed him into Christianity. Similarly, when Guatícabanu left for the Vega Real with Pané, he was followed by his mother and brothers. Guatícabanu was baptized in September 1496 as Juan Mateo, and one of his brothers was baptized as Antón at the same time.⁷⁶ Stevens-Arroyo suggests that the baptism was likely part of a

⁷² Pané, *An Account*, 36.

⁷³ Arrom in *An Account*, 36 fn 155.

⁷⁴ Pané, *An Account*, 36.

⁷⁵ Stevens-Arroyo, "Juan Mateo Guaticabanú," 633-635.

⁷⁶ Pané, *An Account*, 37.

mass baptism that was staged for Guarionex's benefit.⁷⁷ When Juan Mateo, Pané, and Duele left Guarionex for the lands of the cacique Mabiatué, they left behind Juan's family to safeguard the chapel and fields that Pané "had ordered tilled."⁷⁸ The responsibility given to Juan's family was common in early modern Spain, where poor rural shrines were often maintained by one or two lay people who lived at the shrine and supported themselves by cultivating a garden in the land around the shrine.⁷⁹ When Guarionex's men broke into the chapel, they did so against the will of Juan's family, who reported the episode to the Taino and Spanish authorities. Pané presented the conflict between Juan's family and Guarionex as a conflict between Christian believers and blaspheming heathens. Stevens-Arroyo has argued that tensions between Guarionex and Juan's family may have instead arisen from their status as servile *naborias* who refused to serve Guarionex and thus went against traditional systems of power in the Vega Real.⁸⁰

Whatever the source of this conflict, Pané reported that it had deadly consequences. Guarionex conspired to attack the Spanish, but his plans for revolt were prematurely ended when Bartolomé Columbus arrested him. However, Pané wrote, "in spite of all this, they persisted in their perverse intention, and carrying it out, they killed four men and Juan Mateo...and his brother Antón."⁸¹ Pané was not witness to this

⁷⁷ Stevens-Arroyo has also argued that Pané's unordained status meant that Duele conducted the baptisms, but it is not clear if Duele was ordained himself. Stevens-Arroyo, "Juan Mateo Guaticabanú," 626.

⁷⁸ Pané, *An Account*, 35.

⁷⁹ Christian, *Local Religion*, 107.

⁸⁰ Stevens-Arroyo, "Juan Mateo Guaticabanú," 634-635.

⁸¹ Pané, *An Account*, 36-37.

murder, which may have happened when Juan traveled back to his family in the Vega Real. "I am certain he died a martyr," Pané wrote. "For I have learned from some who were present at his death that he had said 'Dios naboria daca, Dios naboria daca,' which means 'I am a servant of God.'"⁸²

Pané blamed the murder on Guarionex's partisans, who killed the Christian Indians based on religious motivations, and most scholars have accepted his verdict. Yet it is not clear that Pané had an accurate understanding of the political situation of the Vega Real in 1497. Guarionex was released the day after his capture in 1497 when other Taino petitioned for his release, but he was released under the understanding that he would not revolt against the Spanish again. While Guarionex's "pacification" does not preclude the possibility of individual acts of violence by Guarionex or his partisans, it does render Guarionex's culpability in Juan's murder somewhat less certain. The Spanish chronicles reported no further difficulties between Guarionex and the Spanish until the summer of 1498, when he fled to the northern mountains and took refuge with a Macorix-speaking community of Indians.⁸³ Violence committed against the Christian Indians on Guarionex's instigation would have been possible but somewhat out of character, as Guarionex appears to have been occupied with appeasing both Spaniards and other Taino caciques in the period immediately following his abortive revolt, and his ultimate response of flight suggests that he had permanently abandoned his plans to overthrow the Spanish. While Guarionex may have been the culprit, his motivations are somewhat thin.

⁸² Pané, *An Account*, 32-33.

⁸³ Wilson, *Hispaniola*, 102-108.

However, there is an important element to the balance of power in the Vega Real in 1497 that goes unmentioned by Pané. Francisco Roldán and his men were already in rebellion *and* in the Vega Real when Guarionex was captured by Columbus, and their continued presence added to the instability and violence of the region. Pané's converts and their loyalty to Spanish authority may have been seen as a threat by Roldán's men in their attempt to control the region, and the fact that Pané's patron was Christopher Columbus would not have eased tensions. Roldán, rather than Guarionex, seems the much more likely source of violence against Columbus-aligned Christians. However, Pané never mentions Roldán or his rebellion in his account, which seems like a curious omission. Either Pané deliberately omitted references to Roldán—which seems unlikely, given that his intended audience of Christopher Columbus was desperate for muckraking details about his nemesis in order to justify his actions against Roldán – or Pané was legitimately ignorant of Roldán's presence in the Vega Real. After all, Pané had left the region by that point, and it is not clear from his account if he had returned to La Isabela before he finished writing his account. He may have had limited contact with other Spanish settlers or other sources of information, and he had an incomplete understanding of the larger circumstances of Hispaniola. All Pané knew was that his companion and co-religionist had been killed, and he naturally blamed the man who had earlier proved himself perfidious by turning away from Christianity.

Pané concluded his account with an outline of the proper methods of religious instruction among the Indians of Hispaniola. There was the possibility, Pané wrote, of converting Indians through simple religious instruction, for he had seen Juan Mateo become a Christian easily. For others, however, "there is need for force and

ingenuity...there is need for force and punishment," Pané wrote darkly after his difficulties with Guarionex.⁸⁴ These thoughts—which may have been an interpolation of Christopher Columbus, or his son, or his son's Italian translator, but which are not implausible coming from a disillusioned friar—are expressed with a degree of force and conviction that is unusual for Pané's account; he issues them from a position of rare authority. "And I can say it truly, for I have worn myself out in order to learn all this," he wrote.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Pané, *An Account*, 38.

⁸⁵ Pané, *An Account*, 37.

CHAPTER 3 LAS CASAS AND THE HIERONYMITES: 1499-1516

In December 1511, Dominican friar Antonio de Montesinos delivered an incendiary sermon in Hispaniola castigating the Spanish colonists for their cruel and inhumane treatment of the American Indians. After nearly twenty years of Spanish colonization on Hispaniola, Montesinos helped inaugurate a new wave of Spanish efforts to repair—or, at the very least, better regulate—the Spanish-Indian relationship via such devices as religious reform and the 1512 Laws of Burgos.¹ Montesinos' sermon was followed by the slow conversion of the man who would become the Defender of the Indies, an erstwhile encomendero named Bartolomé de Las Casas. Partly as a result of the religious rhetoric of Montesinos and Las Casas, and partly as a result of Spain's concern over the Caribbean's uncertain economic future, a trio of Hieronymite friars was sent to investigate conditions on Hispaniola in 1516.

The historical portrayal of the Hieronymite governors has been shaped by Las Casas, who penned the most accessible account of the Hieronymite rule and who also numbered the friars among his political enemies. Thus, the Hieronymites' historical depiction is often colored by each historian's individual affection or animus for Las Casas. For example, Lesley Byrd Simpson, despite facetiously characterizing their reign as a "theocracy," offers a generous and sympathetic interpretation of the Hieronymite government, but this sympathy appears to owe more to Simpson's contempt for Las Casas than to any independent interpretation of the Hieronymites' version of events.²

¹ Daniel Castro, *Another Face of Empire: Bartolomé de Las Casas, Indigenous Rights, and Ecclesiastical Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 56-59.

² Lesley Byrd Simpson, *The Encomienda in New Spain: The Beginning of Spanish Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 39-55.

Analysis of the Hieronymites all too often starts and stops with Las Casas, who himself often suffers from a historiographical tradition that views him as an isolated crusader, distinct from the larger political, social, and religious currents of Spain and Spanish America. This chapter, therefore, investigates the larger religious and political contexts that gave rise to both Las Casas and the Hieronymite governors.

The Changing Face of Hispaniola, 1498-1511

Spanish Hispaniola changed dramatically in the years after Ramón Pané's account. The political landscape of Hispaniola shifted in 1499, when Christopher Columbus made peace with the rebellious Francisco Roldán by giving Spanish settlers a greater piece of the colonial pie through the repartimientos of what came to be known as the *encomienda* system.³ Columbus' earlier tributary system required massive disruptions of Taino agricultural and social systems, but its centralized structure, in which all Taino caciques were under the direct administrative control of the Columbus family, may have afforded Taino caciques a small degree of political autonomy so long as they could make tribute. Columbus had originally envisioned the Spanish settlers as salaried middle-men in this hierarchy, but Roldán's success meant that many Spanish settlers could take responsibility for the profitable labor of individual Indian communities themselves.⁴ This ad-hoc *repartimiento* system was based on the *encomienda* of medieval Spain, and it was reluctantly formalized in 1503 in the Caribbean.⁵ The implementation of the repartimientos further encouraged individual Spaniards to intervene in the political and social structure of indigenous Caribbean communities to

³ Sauer, *Early Spanish Main*, 101.

⁴ Sauer, *Early Spanish Main*, 95-96, 101.

⁵ Sauer, *Early Spanish Main*, 150.

maximize their profits from that community's labor. The Catholic Monarchs resisted repartimientos in the Americas, and their subsequent representatives would frequently bear royal instructions to reform or eliminate repartimientos if possible. Once in the Caribbean, their representatives rarely found it possible.

As a result of royal displeasure, Columbus was removed from his position of authority and replaced by the Crown's chosen representatives. Francisco de Bobadilla arrived in Hispaniola in August 1500 to become governor of the Spanish colonies in the Caribbean, and his removal of the Columbus family altered the landscape of alliances and understandings in Hispaniola.⁶ As governor, Bobadilla stimulated gold production by temporarily suspending royal taxes on precious metals, and the development and expansion of gold mines in Hispaniola may have increased the distance traveled by Taino miners from their homes and families. In 1502, Bobadilla was succeeded by Frey Nicolás de Ovando, whose brutal suppression of Taino rebellion effectively ended the possibilities of united Taino resistance against the Spanish. Ovando is perhaps most notorious for his actions at a 1503 feast hosted by the powerful Taino ruler Anacaona, where he violated the traditions of hospitality when he interrupted the entertainment to signal his men to begin massacring the assembled Taino leaders.⁷ In respect to her high station, Anacaona herself was spared for a later execution by hanging. This event has often been interpreted as the textbook example of unprovoked Spanish barbarity during the Conquest, although Troy S. Floyd has argued that the fragmentary documentary evidence of the event suggests instead that Ovando was reacting against

⁶ Sauer, *Early Spanish Main*, 105-106.

⁷ Sauer, *Early Spanish Main*, 149.

a credible threat of a rebellious Spanish-Taino alliance in the region, due to the close historical ties between the Indians of the region and Roldán's supporters.⁸ Whatever its motivations, Ovando's peremptory destruction of Anacaona, who had controlled a significant Taino state, was followed by the Spanish forces' swift military destruction of other Taino caciques throughout Hispaniola and neighboring Caribbean islands.⁹ After either eliminating or decisively weakening the Indian caciques in the region, Ovando formalized the encomienda system on Hispaniola in order to cement local Spanish control throughout the island. Ovando demonstrated himself willing to revoke and reassign encomiendas when encomenderos violated regulations or fell from political favor. The risk of losing the encomienda may have lessened the abuses committed by the average encomendero, although Frank Moya Pons has argued that the temporary nature of the encomienda grant may have also led to greater overwork and exhaustion among the Taino laborers.¹⁰

The political upheaval in Hispaniola during the second decade of Spanish rule was partly due to Spanish and European turmoil. Queen Isabel died in November 1504, and Castile passed to her daughter Juana and her husband, Philip of Burgundy. When Philip died in 1506, Juana ceded administrative control of Castile to her father, Ferdinand of Aragon, and retired to Tordesillas.¹¹ Juggling hostile Castilian aristocrats in Spain and military campaigns in Europe and the Mediterranean, Ferdinand sought to

⁸ Floyd, *The Columbus Dynasty*, 62.

⁹ Sauer, *Early Spanish Main*, 149.

¹⁰ Lynne Guitar, *Cultural Genesis: Relationships Among Indians, Africans and Spaniards in Rural Hispaniola, First Half of the Sixteenth Century* (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1998), 105; Frank Moya Pons, *Después de Colón: Trabajo, Sociedad y Política en la Economía del Oro* (Madrid: Alianza, 1986), 40.

maximize the state revenue gained from the Caribbean by encouraging gold mining.¹² The Spanish settlers in the Caribbean complained about the diminishing number of laborers for the gold mines, and so Ferdinand encouraged Spanish slavers to abduct Indians from the Bahamas, the Lesser Antilles, and the Pearl Coast in order to labor in Hispaniola's gold mines.¹³ Don Diego Columbus became governor of the Indies in 1509 and spent his tenure attempting unsuccessfully to secure the powers and territories that had been promised to his family.

Two decades of labor under the Spanish radically altered the lives and social structures of the indigenous Taino and their relationships with the Spanish settlers. The Taino were forced to mine gold in distant fields, to cultivate food to feed the Spanish, and to serve in the households of the colonists. The destruction wrought by disease, war, starvation, and the separation of families increased Indian mortality, decreased the Indian birthrate, and drove many Taino to flee to inaccessible areas of Hispaniola or to other islands entirely. To compensate for the dwindling labor source, the Spanish settlers began making slave raids on other indigenous communities of the Caribbean, Florida, and South America.¹⁴ They also began agitating for an expanded importation of African slaves to the Caribbean. The demographic composition of the island further

¹¹ Liss, *Isabel the Queen*, 355; Elliott, *Imperial Spain*, 130.

¹² Elliott, *Imperial Spain*, 135-142; Simpson, *The Encomienda in New Spain*, 16; Moya Pons, *Después de Colón*, 44.

¹³ Simpson, *The Encomienda in New Spain*, 16-28.

¹⁴ Michael H. Perri, *The Spanish Conquest of the Pearl Coast and the Search for the Province of the Meta* (PhD diss., Emory University, 2004), 17.

altered as the labor force began to include black slaves and Indian laborers from outside Hispaniola.¹⁵

Franciscans and Dominicans

As the Spanish colony in the Americas entered its second decade of existence, the regular clergy finally began to arrive in significant numbers. In 1500, Bobadilla arrived with a handful of Franciscan friars, including Juan de la Duele and Juan Tisin. Tisin and Duele first arrived in 1494 with Ramón Pané, and Duele had worked alongside Pané in the Vega Real in 1496, but both Tisin and Duele returned to Spain in 1499 to petition for more friars to be sent to the Caribbean.¹⁶ On their second voyage in 1500, Tisin and Duele were accompanied by at least three other Franciscan friars, and they began a process of mass Indian baptisms on Hispaniola.¹⁷ In 1502, Ovando arrived with twenty-five hundred settlers from Spain, including twelve Franciscan priests and four lay brothers led by Alonso de Espinal.¹⁸ They began constructing buildings for their order in Santo Domingo in 1503, followed by convents in Concepción de la Vega and Vera Paz de Jaraguá by 1510.¹⁹ The Dominicans would later accuse the Franciscans of devoting their efforts to Spanish settlers rather than the Taino, but there is evidence that the Franciscans did offer at least some religious instruction to children of the Taino elite.

¹⁵ Guitar, *Cultural Genesis*, 407-410.

¹⁶ Antonine S. Tibesar, "The Franciscan Province of the Holy Cross of Española, 1505-1559," *The Americas* 13, no. 4 (Apr., 1957): 379.

¹⁷ Among the accompanying friars were Juan de Robles, Francisco Ruiz, and Juan de Trastierra. Ruiz would later serve as a prominent advisor to Cardinal Cisneros. Carlos Nouel, *Historia Eclesiástica de la Arquidiócesis de Santo Domingo, Primada de América I* (Santo Domingo: Editora de Santo Domingo, 1979), 21; Tibesar, "The Franciscan Province," 379.

¹⁸ Sauer, *Early Spanish Main*, 147; Tibesar, "The Franciscan Province," 381.

¹⁹ Tibesar, 381.

The cacique Enriquillo, who led an autonomous Taino community on Hispaniola from 1519 to 1534, received religious instruction from the Franciscans at Vera Paz.²⁰

Dominican friars arrived in the Caribbean in September 1510. The initial group of Dominican friars included Antonio de Montesinos, Bernardo de Santo Domingo, and Pedro de Córdoba, the group's leader who was twenty-eight-years old at the time.²¹ Córdoba was a figure of major influence on the young Bartolomé de Las Casas, and Las Casas's later writings portray his spiritual mentor in a hagiographic light. According to Las Casas, the natural austerity of the group was matched by the straitened circumstances of daily life that they found when they arrived at Hispaniola. Living in a cramped, thatched hut, the friars ate a diet that included little meat and much cassava bread.²² They slept on beds of dry straw; their clothing was rough or made from "badly carded wool."²³ Las Casas contrasted this religious rigor with the general spiritual torpor that the Dominicans found upon their arrival on Hispaniola, where meat was widely eaten on Fridays and corruption apparently flourished.²⁴ Las Casas portrayed the first Dominicans embracing the hardships of Hispaniola as if they were happily donning a hairshirt, and it is likely no coincidence that Pedro de Córdoba was known from his youth by the pain he suffered from his austerity and penitential habits.²⁵ His legacy

²⁰ Altman, "The Revolt of Enriquillo," 589; Tibesar, 381 fn 26.

²¹ Sterling A. Stoudemire, "Preface," in *Christian Doctrine: For the Instruction and Information of the Indians* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970), 20.

²² Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias* 2, 383.

²³ "el vestido suyo era de jerga aspérrima y una túnica de lana mal cardada." Ibid., 383.

²⁴ Ibid., 383.

²⁵ "si por las penitencias grandes que hacía no cobrara grande y continuo dolor de cabeza...y lo que se moderó en el estudio, acrecentó en el rigor de las austeridad y penitencia todo el tiempo de su vida." Ibid., 382.

extended beyond Las Casas and the Caribbean. Before his death in 1521, Córdoba wrote a simple catechism for the Christian instruction of American Indians; his *Doctrina Cristiana* would later be adopted by Bishop Juan de Zumárraga and the early figures of Christian evangelization in sixteenth-century Mexico, where it became one of the first books printed in the Americas.²⁶

By January 1511, a second group of five Dominican friars from Spain had joined their brothers on Hispaniola, and another seven arrived in May 1511.²⁷ Altogether, during the first two decades of Spanish Hispaniola, at least seventy-eight regular friars emigrated to the Caribbean and began spreading through the islands.²⁸ Juan de la Duele, Pané's companion, participated in the conquest and settlement of Jamaica, where he died between 1508 and 1511.²⁹ His companion Juan de Tisin went to Cuba in 1512 as part of Diego Velásquez y Cuellar's military campaign and worked to negotiate with the Indians during the bloody conquest of the island.³⁰ During the Cuban conquest, an unidentified Franciscan friar—who may or may not have been Tisin—played a supporting role in the story of the Taino cacique Hatuey, one of the prototypical figures of American Indian resistance to colonization and Christian conversion.

Hatuey had been a cacique in Hispaniola, but after Ovando's suppression of Taino power on Hispaniola in 1503, Hatuey and his people fled to Cuba, where they

²⁶ Stoudemire, "Preface," 42-43.

²⁷ Miguel A. Medina, "Introducción General," in *Doctrina Cristiana Para Instrucción de los Indios* (Salamanca: Editorial San Esteban, 1987), 22.

²⁸ Franklin W. Knight, *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 35.

²⁹ Tibesar, 384.

³⁰ Tibesar, 384.

attempted to organize resistance to the Spanish among the Cuban Taino.³¹ In 1512, Hatuey was defeated and captured by Velásquez's forces, who prepared to burn him alive. When Hatuey was bound to the stake, a Franciscan friar gave him a rapid introduction to Christianity and said that Hatuey would go to heaven if he would only embrace the friar's faith.³² The cacique asked if Christian Spaniards went to heaven and was told that, yes, the virtuous ones did. Hatuey did not respond to this good news with the enthusiasm that the Franciscan friar may have expected.

And the cacique then said without thinking on it any more, that he did not desire to go to the sky, but rather down to hell, so that he would not be where [the Spanish] were and would not see such cruel people.³³

In Las Casas' polemical telling, Hatuey's decision exemplified the wider failures of the ongoing conquest, in which Spanish brutality and greed impeded evangelical efforts to win hearts and minds. According to Las Casas, in his attempt to rally the Cuban Taino, Hatuey had called them together to show them the god that the Spanish worshipped: a basket of gold and gems.³⁴

Burgos and Las Casas, 1511-1516

On December 21, 1511, the Sunday before Christmas, the Dominican friar Antonio de Montesinos delivered a sermon on the "voice crying in the wilderness" in a

³¹ Irene A. Wright, *The Early History of Cuba, 1492-1586* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 25-26.

³² Bartolomé de las Casas, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies*, ed. Franklin W. Knight, trans. Andrew Hurley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2003), 18-20.

³³ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

Hispaniola church of wide-eyed Spanish settlers.³⁵ Montesinos castigated the Spanish for their treatment of American Indians.

This voice says that you are in mortal sin, that you live and die in it, for the cruelty and tyranny you use in dealing with these innocent people. Tell me, by what right or justice do you keep these Indians in such a cruel and horrible servitude?³⁶

The Spanish colonists protested this sermon strongly and demanded an apology from the Dominican leader, Pedro de Córdoba. Córdoba flatly responded that no apology would be forthcoming. The following Sunday, Montesinos performed a second sermon that was similar in shape and even stronger in tone. The settlers complained loudly to Spanish officials, and both King Ferdinand and the Dominican order in Spain criticized the efforts of the Hispaniola Dominicans as misguided and harmful.

In 1512, Córdoba sent Montesinos to Spain to lobby for better treatment for the Indians; he was preceded by the Franciscan Alonso de Espinal, who was tapped by the Spanish colonists to defend the status quo of the encomienda system. Córdoba followed Montesinos at the end of the year. Partly as a result of the pressure exerted by the Hispaniola Dominicans, Ferdinand convened a royal commission at Burgos to devise a set of laws to codify better relations between the Spanish and Indians. The Laws of Burgos, first promulgated in December 1512 and subsequently expanded in July 1513, contained a lengthy list of regulations for both Indians and Spanish settlers, but the regulations were designed to support and sustain the encomienda system on Hispaniola.

³⁵ Lewis Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice*, 17-18.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

Perhaps the most tangible consequence of the Burgos conferences was the 1514 argument developed by Juan López Palacios Rubios in the defense of natural slavery. In Palacios Rubios's treatise, the American Indian lived in innocent barbarism before the moment of European contact, but the touch of European civilization reduced him to the state of an Aristotelian "natural slave" who was required to surrender authority and autonomy to his biological and intellectual superiors.³⁷ As rhetoric, Palacios Rubios' words became a recurring element of Spanish imperial thought in the sixteenth century; as text, it became part of a ritual ceremony of conquest that combined imperial and Christian imperatives.³⁸ In theory, Spanish conquistadors were to read the text of the *Requerimiento* to each newly encountered group of Indians, who thereafter would be able to make an informed choice between either Spanish rule and Christian instruction or rebellion. (Rebellion allowed the Spaniards to enslave them in good conscience.) In practice, the *Requerimiento* was an empty gesture; according to historian Lewis Hanke, the conquistadors typically neglected to translate the text into an Indian language comprehensible to their listeners, performed the *Requerimiento* for the benefit of empty forests or open seas, or "muttered its theological phrases into their beards on the edge of sleeping Indian settlements"³⁹ The *Requerimiento* accompanied Pedrarias Dávila on his 1514 expedition to Tierra Firme, and it became a formally

³⁷ Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 50-56.

³⁸ Patricia Seed, "Taking Possession and Reading Texts: Establishing the Authority of Overseas Empires," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 49:2 (Apr., 1992), 183-209; Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 147-148; Lewis Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949), 31-36.

³⁹ Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle*, 34.

required feature of all Spanish conquests in 1526.⁴⁰ As such, it became a recurring enactment of the Christian rationale for conquest performed not for the Indians but for the Spanish themselves.

In November 1514, two Dominican friars from Hispaniola were sent to the Pearl Coast of modern-day Venezuela to establish a mission among the Indians there.⁴¹ (Antonio de Montesinos had originally been part of the delegation but was forced to return to Hispaniola after he became ill during the voyage.) Unfortunately, a Spanish expedition was slaving in the region, and their forcible abduction of seventeen members of the local cacique's family provoked the Indians to murder the unsuspecting Dominicans in retribution. Undeterred, a second group of Dominicans arrived at the Pearl Coast in 1515, and they punctuated their Christian instruction to the Indians with angry letters to Spanish authorities about the Spanish slaving being committed under flimsy pretenses in the region.

Meanwhile, a young secular priest and encomendero on Cuba was undergoing a slow process of conversion. Bartolomé de las Casas had come to the Caribbean in 1502 with the expedition of Ovando; he had been twenty-seven years old at the time of Montesinos' famous sermon.⁴² While Las Casas was initially unmoved by the Dominican efforts at reform, he underwent a slow process of conversion that culminated in his 1514 decision to give up his encomienda and its claim on Taino labor.

Simultaneously, he began delivering sermons in Cuba against the current encomienda

⁴⁰ The Requerimiento made its first mandated appearance in the 1527-1536 expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez in North America. Adorno, *The Polemics of Possession*, 264-266, 372 fn 31.

⁴¹ Perri, *The Spanish Conquest of the Pearl Coast*, 35-38.

⁴² Henry Raup Wagner and Helen Rand Parish, *The Life and Writings of Bartolome de las Casas* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1967), 7-13.

system. While Las Casas would not formally enter the Dominican order until 1522, his new purpose in life gave him common cause with the Caribbean Dominicans. The support of the order enabled Las Casas and Montesinos together to go to Spain in 1515 and advocate for the reform of the Spanish Caribbean.⁴³ Unfortunately for his plans, Las Casas achieved one meeting with King Ferdinand before the death of the monarch in 1516.

Political control of Castile and Aragon passed to Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, a member of the Franciscan order who governed as regent for Ferdinand's daughter, the unstable Juana I, and her son, the teenaged Charles. Cisneros was a noted figure of religious reform within the Franciscan order, and he was receptive to the Dominican-backed effort to reform the governance of the Indies. However, he was apparently reluctant to entrust the project to the contentious factions already involved in the debate, which included both the Dominicans and the Franciscans. Instead, Cisneros sought a more neutral set of actors to investigate conditions on Hispaniola and, if warranted, institute reforms. Thus, his wandering eye alighted upon the Order of Saint Jerome.

An Invitation to the Hieronymites

Founded in Spain in 1373, the Order of Saint Jerome was unusually young in comparison to the established and multinational Franciscans and Dominicans.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the Hieronymites did not belong to a mendicant order; they did not take vows of poverty or renounce property. While never as influential as either the

⁴³ Wagner and Parish, *Life and Writings*, 13.

⁴⁴ Timothy John Schmitz, "Particular Devotions": Tridentine Reform and State Power in the Hieronymite Order, 1563-1598" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2000), 7, 58.

Franciscans or the Dominicans, the Hieronymites were not obscure in the sixteenth century; the Hieronymite monastery in Madrid was a popular and prestigious location to request for one's burial in one's will.⁴⁵ They had a close relationship with secular power and Iberian heads of state throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: Hernando de Talavera, confessor for Queen Isabel and first archbishop of Granada, was a Hieronymite; Emperor Charles V resided within a Hieronymite monastery at Yuste after he abdicated from the throne in 1555; and King Philip II built the immense San Lorenzo de El Escorial for the Hieronymite order in 1563.⁴⁶ Whether this cozy relationship between the Hieronymite order and the living embodiments of state power in the Iberian world played any role in Cisneros' decision is unclear, but a great deal of the order's appeal to Cisneros in this situation seems to have arisen from its perceived lack of any ideological or political agenda and its apparent absence from Spanish Hispaniola's contentious history.

In July 1516 Cisneros wrote to the Hieronymite General, Pedro de Mora, and invited him to commit his order to Spain's colonial project. "Our Highnesses have been informed that, thus far, the things of the Indies have not been in such good order as they should be," wrote Cisneros, who began his letter by invoking the two people in whose stead he ruled.⁴⁷ The ardent Spanish desire to instruct and convert the Taino to the Catholic Faith was now threatened by the dramatic demographic decline of the

⁴⁵ Carlos M. N. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 104.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 63, 67.

⁴⁷ "Que Sus Altezas han sido informados que en las cosas de las Indias no ha havido hasta agora tan buena orden como fuera razon." In *Santo Domingo en los Manuscritos de Juan Bautista Muñoz*, edited by Roberto Marte (Santo Domingo: Ediciones Fundación García Arévalo, Inc., 1981), 181.

indigenous population, Cisneros wrote, and the Spanish queen and her son were painfully distressed by the reports of encomendero abuses and greed. They had resolved to send representatives to investigate the situation. Furthermore, they had decided no religious order had people so capable and so suitable for this task—"in matters spiritual as in matters temporal"—as did the Order of Saint Jerome.⁴⁸ Cisneros concluded the letter by requesting the presence of whichever Hieronymites that Mora would recommend for this task.

In his August 1516 reply, Mora politely declined this honor.⁴⁹ The Hieronymites had never undertaken the kind of mission that Cisneros described, and the Herculean magnitude of the task was quite beyond their humble abilities, he wrote. Naturally, they were obedient to every desire of the state, and they would comply with the project if Cisneros really and truly desired it, but Mora begged Cisneros to reconsider and choose someone else.

Cisneros peremptorily brushed aside Mora's hesitations in his 1516 reply. "Your modest excuses...are the excuses of any sane person that prudently looks at the full weight of these things."⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Cisneros had made his choice, and his choice was the Hieronymites. Cisneros went on to describe a vision of the colonial project in the Spanish Caribbean that is startling for how completely it encapsulates the entire religious rationale for the conquest of the Americas and its apparently inescapable conflict with the parallel economic motivations. In the time of Queen Isabel and King

⁴⁸ "*asi en lo spiritual como en lo temporal.*" Ibid., 182.

⁴⁹ As summarized in Ibid., 182-183.

⁵⁰ "*vuestras discretas excusas...son de personas cuerdas que miran con mucha prudencia el peso de las cosas.*" Ibid., 183.

Ferdinand, he wrote, there had existed uncertainty about how to incorporate the Indians into the Spanish possessions, but Christianity offered a solution to the peaceful-but-pagan existence of the Indians.

As they were a people without faith and without doctrine and without industry and the good arts that normally train the human reason, it was expedient and provident that they served while they were taught of faith and good arts, in such a way that their service was more that of sons than of slaves.⁵¹

Spanish settlers had been envisioned as a central part of this system of spiritual tutelage and material compensation, but now reports suggested that many had been overcome by gold and greed. According to these reports, encomenderos had forgotten the intention of religious instruction and "placed such a grave type of service upon the Indians, such oppressions of intolerable work" that the land was being "depopulated" and the souls of unsaved dead Indians were being lost to perdition.⁵² For this reason, Cisneros demanded two or three Hieronymite friars to investigate "the business with their own eyes" and report back to him.⁵³

Receiving this letter, Mora dutifully sought such sane and prudent Hieronymites to send to the Indies, although his search was complicated by a certain lack of enthusiasm for this mission by the members of his order.⁵⁴ Historians often portray the Hieronymite friars, who belong to an historically obscure order, as belonging to a basic monkish template of asceticism and scholasticism, which is then used as an explanation

⁵¹ *"Pero por ser como era gente sin fe ni sin doctrina, sin las industrias i buenas artes en que se suele egercitar la razon humana; que les era expediente i provechoso servir mientras que esto de la fe e buenas artes se les enseñaba, en tal que el servicio fuese mas de fijos que de esclavos."* Ibid.

⁵² *"han puesto tan grave tipo de servidumbre en los dichos Indios, que opresos de intolerables trabajos."* Ibid.

⁵³ *"el negocio por sus propios ojos."* Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 185.

for their timidity about obeying Cisneros and thereby entering the concerns of the secular world. However, given the historic Hieronymite associations with aristocratic patronage and royal favor, and their famously magnificent monasteries, this assumption of modesty and shyness on the part of the Hieronymites may miss the mark. It is equally possible that they dreaded leaving their comfortable homes and moving to the rough frontier of civilization in the Caribbean. Whatever reason for their reluctance, Mora at last selected three Hieronymite representatives—Luis de Figueroa, Alonso de Santo Domingo, and Bernardino de Manzanedo—and sent them to attend upon Cisneros and the impatiently waiting Las Casas. In Madrid, the Hieronymites received a detailed set of instructions from Cisneros, including the necessity of resettling Taino Indians into concentrated villages that would facilitate Spanish access to their labor. The Hieronymites also received an additional member of their mission: Licenciado Alonso Zuazo, *juez visitador extraordinario*, designated to serve as an advocate for the Taino Indians in addition to his work collecting *residencia* accounts from the officials of the Spanish Caribbean.⁵⁵ Historians have endlessly argued about who was in charge of whom in the relationship between the Hieronymites and Zuazo, but Manuel Serrano y Sanz has argued that both the language of their royal instructions and the actions the four subsequently undertook in the Caribbean clearly place Zuazo as subordinate to the Hieronymites.⁵⁶

Las Casas had devised extensive plans, and he apparently held great hopes for influencing the project of investigating and reforming Hispaniola. He claimed a large role

⁵⁵ Castro, *Another Face of Empire*, 77.

⁵⁶ Manuel Serrano y Sanz, *Orígenes de la Dominación Española en América* (Madrid: Casa Editorial Bailly-Bailliere: 1918), 361.

in the selection of both the Hieronymite order and the individual friars picked by Mora, although both the sixteenth-century correspondence and a seventeenth-century history of the Hieronymite order are studiously silent about his participation in events.⁵⁷ If Las Casas initially had high hopes for the Hieronymites, he was disappointed from nearly the beginning. In his account, written many years after the Hieronymite mission to Hispaniola, Las Casas complained that the three friars had fallen into the clutches of his enemies immediately after their arrival in Madrid. These foes—the Spanish settlers who vigorously opposed Las Casas' efforts to end the *encomienda*—"spoke of nothing but ill of the Cleric [Las Casas] and of the miserable Indians, vilifying them as beasts and saying that they were dogs" with such unending repetition that they succeeded in prejudicing the friars against the project before they had even set sail.⁵⁸ Some subsequent historians have taken a more jaundiced view of Las Casas' accusations, and Lesley Byrd Simpson has argued that Las Casas' autocratic and bullying nature may have played a larger role than the devious blandishments of *encomenderos* in the estrangement between Hieronymites and Las Casas.⁵⁹

However the division developed, it appears to have been in full swing by the time the little group sailed, because the Hieronymites sailed separately from Las Casas to the New World. In December 1516 the Hieronymites arrived on Hispaniola with specific instructions from Cisneros concerning the resettlement of the Taino population and other reforms of the island. However, the three friars seemingly regarded these

⁵⁷ José de Sigüenza, *Historia de la orden de San Jerónimo II* (Madrid: Bailly/Bailliere e Hijos, 1909), 101-110.

⁵⁸ "de día y de noche...no hablaban sino en decir mal del clérigo y de los miserables indios, infamándolos de bestias y que eran unos perros." Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias* 3, 119.

⁵⁹ Simpson, *The Encomienda in New Spain*, 40-41.

instructions with a great latitude, because they did not immediately embark upon the sweeping reforms envisioned by Las Casas. In 1517, Las Casas indignantly returned to Spain to register his complaints, and the Hieronymites were left to their own pragmatic devices.

In the actions that the Hieronymites eventually undertook, they balanced their imperial and religious directives with the immediate desires of the Hispaniola encomenderos. Las Casas may have perceived the Hieronymites as ineffectual, but they served as important—and, indeed, in some ways prophetic—figures in three of the policies that they pursued: sugar cultivation, African slavery, and Indian relocation.

CHAPTER 4 THE HIERONYMITE GOVERNORS OF HISPANIOLA: 1516-1519

After the Hieronymites left Spain, they travelled first to the Canary Islands, then to Puerto Rico, and finally to Hispaniola, where they arrived on 20 December 1516.¹ They immediately presented themselves to the Franciscan monastery, where they stayed for two or three days. They would have stayed longer if they had not been reluctant to cause further “disturbance and uneasiness” to their hosts, they reported.² Uneasiness, however, preceded the three friars in Santo Domingo. They discovered that letters from Spain about their appointment had arrived before they did, and there were widespread rumors when they disembarked that the Hieronymites had been sent to “give liberty to the Indians” and end the encomienda entirely.³

The letters from Spain were not far from the truth—the Hieronymites had been sent with a long list of instructions that gave them the power to dissolve the encomienda system if they saw fit. Their purpose, however, was primarily investigative, and their 1516 instructions offered them flexibility in navigating the local politics of Spanish Hispaniola. While their primary purpose, according to their instructions from Cisneros, was to ensure the continuation of the Caribbean colonies and the religious instruction of the indigenous people, they were instructed to approach these tasks using the guidance and input of the principal vecinos of Hispaniola.⁴ The Hieronymites followed this instruction to the letter, while their other instructions from Cisneros were approached

¹Marte, 217.

² “*estuvieramos mucho mas si no temieramos la turbacion i desasosiego que con mas estada pudieran recibir aquellos devotos Padres.*” Marte, 217.

³ Marte, 218.

⁴ Marte, 190.

with less rigor. They were instructed to cooperate with both Franciscans and Dominicans in their plans for religious reform, but that cooperation proved impossible to achieve in practice.⁵ Likewise, they were instructed to talk to the Indian caciques as well as Spanish encomenderos, but there is little recorded evidence of any contact between the Hieronymites and the Indians of Hispaniola.⁶ Other parts of their instructions – including investigations into Indian settlements, marriage regulations, and religious instruction—were carried out with greater fidelity by the Hieronymites, but their primary concern was working well with the representatives of local political power in Spanish Hispaniola.

The Interrogatorio

As the Hieronymite friars understood their purpose, they had been sent to the Caribbean to investigate the "conservation and good treatment" of the Indians and to "give order so that this land shall be settled."⁷ Given the time they had spent waiting in Sevilla to depart, trapped between the opposing importunities of Las Casas and the Spanish settlers, the Hieronymite friars had enjoyed many descriptions of Hispaniola before they ever set foot on the island. Yet one of their first actions in the Caribbean was to solicit further portraits of Spanish-Taino society. The problem of the Indies was a grave and weighty matter, the Hieronymites said, and they intended to rely on the advice and counsel of the people with the most experience of Hispaniola: the expert

⁵ Marte, 190.

⁶ "*Leelgados a la Espanola llamareis algunos de los principales pobladores, les direis la causa de vuestra ida. Y esto mismo direis a los Caciques de la dicha isla.*" Marte, 190.

⁷ "*la conservacion e buen tratamiento de los yndios...a dar orden como esta tierra se poblase.*" In *Los Dominicos y las Encomiendas de Indios de la Isla Española*, edited by Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi (Santo Domingo: Editora del Caribe, 1971), 274.

encomenderos.⁸ To that end, they prepared a set of seven questions for the vecinos of Hispaniola that mingled concerns both spiritual and political. Did the Indians have the capacity to govern themselves? How should the Indians receive religious instruction? How should Indian labor be organized?

In April 1517, interviews were conducted with fourteen residents of Hispaniola. Their testimonies were recorded by the notary Pedro de Ledesma. The collection of these testimonies in the 1517 *Interrogatorio* contains a wealth of information about the economic, religious, and social aspects of Taino-Spanish society and the influences at work upon the Hieronymites. The men interviewed were powerful members of Spanish society on Hispaniola, and it was these same men, employing a rhetoric that combined political purpose and religious sentiment, who sought to mediate how the Hieronymites perceived Hispaniola.

The fourteen interviewees of the *Interrogatorio* all occupied positions of power or prestige within Spanish Caribbean society, but they varied in the amount of time that each had spent in the Caribbean. A fourth of these interviewed had arrived in the 1490s, another fourth had come with Ovando in 1502, and the other half had arrived between 1506 and 1512. The testimonies in the *Interrogatorio* represent experiences from the entire period of Spanish colonization in the Caribbean, but the largest segment of those testimonies came from men who had arrived in the previous ten years.

Four of the vecinos had arrived in the first decade of Spanish Hispaniola. Anton de Villasante, Andres de Montamarta, and Diego de Alvarado had arrived on Columbus' second voyage in 1493. All three men said that they had not left the Caribbean since

⁸ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 274.

their 1493 arrival; if true, all three had witnessed the complete arc of Spanish Hispaniola's development, and their perspectives were shaped by that complicated history. Alvarado, for example, could remember the very earliest schemes of Taino subjugation, starting with Christopher Columbus' command that each Indian "vassal" was required to bring him enough gold to fill a hawksbell every month.⁹ It was not long, in Alvarado's telling, before the Indians stopped bringing gold in favor of dancing areytos and smoking cohobas and "pondering how they would kill all of the Spanish."¹⁰

The fourth vecino to arrive in the 1490s was Pedro Romero, whose arrival in 1499 or 1500 would have coincided with the beginning of Francisco de Bobadilla's tenure as governor.¹¹ Romero stands as a significant representative of Spanish-Taino culture. He was one of the many Spanish encomenderos to marry a Taino woman, and he said that he had come to his knowledge of Taino affairs by "asking my wife as well as the other caciques and cacicas of the island."¹² He testified that he had numerous connections with both the Taino communities and the Spanish settlements on Hispaniola.¹³ When Enriquillo revolted against Spanish authority and formed his own autonomous community in the 1520s, it was Romero who acted as one of the mediators between Enriquillo and the Spanish authorities.¹⁴

⁹ *Rodríguez Demorizi, Los Dominicos*, 295.

¹⁰ "*fazer sus areytos e cohobas e pensar como matarian a todos los espanoles.*" *Rodríguez Demorizi, Los Dominicos*, 295.

¹¹ *Rodríguez Demorizi, Los Dominicos*, 333-338.

¹² "*asi preguntandolo a mi muger como a otros caçiques e caçicas desta ysla.*" *Rodríguez Demorizi, Los Dominicos*, 334.

¹³ *Rodríguez Demorizi, Los Dominicos*, 333.

¹⁴ Altman, "The Revolt of Enriquillo," 609.

Three vecinos testified in the Interrogatorio that they had arrived in 1502 with Ovando. Juan Mosquera was a significant figure in early Spanish Hispaniola: a member of the island elite who would become heavily involved in the inter-Caribbean slave trade.¹⁵ He was married to Ofrasina de Pasamonte and therefore linked to the powerful Pasamonte family, and their daughter Maria would marry Don Diego Colón's son, Don Luis, in 1546.¹⁶ Gonzalo de Ocampo and Christóbal Serrano, who both subsequently would lead various military campaigns and slaving raids in the South American mainland, arrived together with Ovando in 1502.¹⁷

The third and largest wave of interviewees had arrived between 1506 and 1512. Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón, the most powerful judge in the Audiencia de Santo Domingo, arrived in 1503 or 1504.¹⁸ Miguel de Pasamonte, royal treasurer, arrived in 1508.¹⁹ Jerónimo de Agüero, tutor to Don Diego Colon and, subsequently, to his children, arrived in 1509.²⁰ Marcos de Aguilar arrived in 1509; in addition to his time on Hispaniola, he had spent time on Cuba and Puerto Rico as well as Hispaniola.²¹ Juan de Ampies, royal factor in 1517, had arrived in 1511.²²

¹⁵ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 278-282; Enrique Otte, *Las Perlas del Caribe: Nueva Cadiz de Cubagua* (Caracas: Fundación John Boulton), 160, 209, 251.

¹⁶ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 81 fn 16;

¹⁷ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 282-288, 296-301; Manuel Giménez Fernández, *Bartolomé de Las Casas: Delegado de Cisneros Para La Reforma de las Indias (1516-1517)*, vol. 1 (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de Sevilla, 1953), 316 fn 872; Otte, 102, 189.

¹⁸ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 85 fn 27, 308-311; Otte, 139, 143, 192.

¹⁹ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 75 fn 5, 306-308.

²⁰ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 288-293.

²¹ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 339-350.

²² Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 302-306; Giménez Fernández, 312 fn 865.

Among the fourteen interviewed men were two regular friars. Franciscan friar Pedro Mexia arrived in 1506.²³ He had experienced extensive contact and conversation with the Taino, he said, and they only desired "to be free and idle and move around at their pleasure."²⁴ He opposed the continuation of the encomienda and argued instead that the wheels of the economy should be driven by a tribute that the Taino would pay through laboring at their own discretion.²⁵ Bernardo de Santo Domingo was one of the first three Dominican friars to arrive in 1510, and his testimony in the Interrogatorio represented the antagonism against the encomienda already expressed by Montesinos and Córdoba.

The Taino, as Painted by the Encomenderos

The interviewed encomenderos had a vested interest in retaining their repartimientos, and accordingly they took pains to represent the Taino Indians as undisciplined and in desperate need of oversight. In an ideal Caribbean, the Indians would work and live in the familiar manner of Castilian peasants, but it was clear to the vecinos that, given the choice, the Taino would spend all their time dancing areytos and playing on the batey field, where the Taino participated in a ceremonial ball-game.²⁶ They were "lazy idlers and enemies of work," Juan de Ampies testified.²⁷

They could also be violent. Even the recently arrived colonists displayed a keen awareness of the bloody dimensions of Spanish-Taino society. Montamarta testified that

²³ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 328-330.

²⁴ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 329.

²⁵ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 330.

²⁶ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 332, 340, 290.

²⁷ "muy perezosos holgazanes y enemigos de trabajar." Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 302.

the Indians should not be released from the encomienda system because "they are not people of reason and they are inclined more to the bad than to the good and, knowing such liberty, they would kill the Spanish who had overseen them."²⁸ Aguilar said that the Taino of Puerto Rico still celebrated in 1517 a victory that that they had won over Spanish forces in 1511.²⁹

The Taino in the mountains of Hispaniola, living beyond the easy reach of the Spanish, were portrayed as alien to Spanish sensibilities. Pedro Romero reported that, unlike people of civilized knowledge, the Taino had such disregard for the possessions of their ancestors that "by the smallest whim in the world, the Indians might destroy and burn their homes and go to the mountains to build others."³⁰ Juan de Ampies stressed that the Taino of the mountains were sustained by poisonous spiders and snakes, while Juan Mosquera described the Taino as having such vices as eating spiders and alligators and "other filthy things"—although this diet suggests hunger more than it does perversity.³¹ Gonzalo de Campo was even more explicit about the savagery of the mountains:

And the caciques and Indians having such a necessity of work, because they walked around naked and by working, they were given clothing with which to cover their flesh [but] very few of them were seen that came to serve before they fled intercourse with the Spanish and went through the

²⁸ "e por que no son gentes de rason e son ynclinados mas al mal que al bien e sabiendo la tal libertad matarian a los españoles que toveisen dellos cargo." Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 332.

²⁹ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 346.

³⁰ "hablando en general de todos digo que comunmente aborresçen lo que las personas de conosçimiento suelen amar que son las casas e posesyones que sus antepasados les dexaron que por el menor antojo del mundo las destruyen e queman e se van al monte a hedifican otras." Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 334.

³¹ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 302, 279.

mountains eating wild roots and showing Ovando their brutality and the ruin of the Christians.³²

Not all of the Indians lived at a distance from Spanish settlements. While some vecinos emphasized the fundamentally alien and uncivilized nature of the Indians, others suggested a more complicated image of an entwined Spanish-Taino society. Complexities emerged in the cases of Taino Indians who lived among the Spanish or the caciques who held encomiendas themselves.³³ The testimonies suggest the ways in which the Taino had adopted Castillian trade goods. They would happily trade their only shirt or hammock for a pair of scissors, Agüero noted, which he interpreted as yet further evidence of their inability to understand the true worth of objects.³⁴ Several vecinos made reference to alcohol consumption among the Taino, and Juan de Ampies described them as habitual drunkards.³⁵ Diego de Alvarado said that the Indians had been known as enthusiasts for batey and areytos and cohobas and "drinking yerbas so that they could expel from their bodies everything that they had eaten," but now they were also known for their enthusiasm for wine, which they said was better than cohoba or games on the batey-field.³⁶

³² *"teniendo los dichos caçiques e yndios asaz nesçesydad de trabajar por que andavan denudos y les dieran por su trabajo rropa con que cubrir sus carnes muy pocos dellos se vio que viniesen a seruir antes huyan de la conversaçion de los españoles y se adavan por los montes comiendo rrayzes salvajes y veyendo el dicho Comendador mayor su bestialidad y la perdiçion de los christianos."* Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 283-284.

³³ *"porque son ladrones por la mayor parte espeçialmente aquellos que mas sean criado entre los espanoles."* Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 302. For Indian encomenderos, see Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 283, 306, 341.

³⁴ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 288.

³⁵ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 302.

³⁶ *"ser afiçionados hera al juego de batel e areytos e cohobas e tomar yervas para hechar del cuerpo todo lo que an comido e çenado, e lo que agora al presente delllos conosço es ser afiçionados al vino porque dizen ques mejor cohoba que la suya e al dicho juego de batel."* Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 292.

It was the space between the mountains and the Spanish settlements—the long and deadly road that linked Taino communities to Spanish mines and haciendas—that most concerned the vecinos.³⁷ The encomenderos testified that, within Spanish spheres of control and influence, the Taino lived good and prosperous lives, but that prosperity slipped away as soon as the Taino left, once their annual labor commitments were completed. According to Gonzalo de Ocampo,

It is very evident that when the Indians go to serve, they go fat and well treated, and when they return, they come very thin, as though they cannot support themselves while they have the distractions of women and games of *pelota* and the other frivolities with which they occupy themselves on their own lands that are more exhausting to them than work.³⁸

Issues of food and hunger were frequently invoked by the vecinos, who blamed the demographic collapse of the indigenous population on the starvation and willful destruction brought about by the Taino inability to live and eat in a civilized manner. The Taino ate filthy things; the Taino gorged on food; the Taino practiced ritual vomiting in cohoba rituals. In particular, yuca cultivation and cassava production were singled out as examples of deadly Taino practices. Aguilar described people who "value life so little that they drink yuca water and other herbs" that continued to kill them, while Montamarta testified that the Taino deliberately damaged themselves because they "would drink yuca water and die" rather than relocate their communities.³⁹ Yuca could be deadly; improperly prepared, it was a poison. The mortality created by encomienda

³⁷ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 343.

³⁸ "*muy manifiesto que quando los yndios van de servir van gordos y bien tratados y quando buelven vienen muy flacos asy por los mantenimientos que no tienen como por sus desconçiertos de mugeres y juegos de pelota y otras liviandades en que se ocupan en sus tierras que los fatigan mas quel trabajo.*" Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 286.

labor and Old World diseases was likely exacerbated by the exhausted Indians' lack of time and energy to cultivate and prepare the staple of their diet properly. Pedro Romero said that the Indians had been driven to eat from new and "unseasoned" conucos, and that "great illnesses" developed from their diet of "much filthiness."⁴⁰

The solution to this childish improvidence depended, the vecinos testified, on proper regulation and close oversight by both encomenderos and religious officials. When asked about the ideal encomendero, the settlers of Hispaniola concurred on the need to give encomiendas exclusively to those people who resided in the Caribbean. Just as the Taino could not be incorporated into the economic and spiritual provenance of the Spanish when they lived at a distance, the encomenderos should be required to oversee their labor force personally and closely. Given the large numbers of absentee encomenderos who lived in Spain, and given the fact that the interviewed vecinos all claimed a long and uninterrupted tenure in the Caribbean, it is not surprising that requiring encomenderos to reside permanently in the Caribbean was a common sentiment expressed. Miguel de Pasamonte suggested that married Spaniards receive preference for encomiendas over the unmarried Spaniards who remained so uncommitted to Hispaniola and so full of longing to return to Spain that they would not even consent to the permanence of building a "stone house."⁴¹

³⁹ "gente que estima en poco la vida tomarian agua de yuca e otras yervas e cosas con que por muy livianas cosas se suelen matar." Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 342; "porque tomarian agua de yuca e se matarian." *Ibid.*, 331.

⁴⁰ "asymismo comen tras aquello los conucos nuevos questan syn sazón e tras de aquello muchas suziedades de que proçeden grandes enfermedades." Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 333.

⁴¹ "a los solteros con tanto que tengan casas de piedra porque los que no las edifican y tienen con que tan poca voluntad tienen de permanecer en la tierra como los solteros que mas desean yrse a Castilla." Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 308.

The vecinos occasionally mentioned concerns about the "depopulation" of Hispaniola, but it is clear that those fears encompassed both Taino and Spanish. Christóbal Serrano said that, if the Taino Indians were given their freedom, the disappearance of the Spanish from the island was certain, because the Taino would not serve the Spanish, and thus the entirety of the Spanish Caribbean would be lost.⁴² In order to sustain Spanish residence in the Caribbean, several vecinos mentioned alternate sources of labor. Because the Indians "were not able to be instructed in our sainted faith any more than they were able to multiply within the mines, it would be good if His Highness could open the license for bringing blacks to this island," said Pedro Romero, who also alluded to the internal slave trade of Lucayan Indians from the Bahamas.⁴³ Africans appeared several times in the Interrogatorio, both as a source of labor and as an additional source of discontent when they collaborated with the rebellious Taino.⁴⁴

Religion and Regulation

The vecinos offered differing opinions on how to reform and regulate the treatment of the Indians. Jerónimo de Agüero, for example, offered a long and elaborately detailed plan for reform that, among other things, called for every Indian to possess two shirts, so that "when they got wet, they would have a change of clothing."⁴⁵ Yet all of the interviewed participants duly agreed that converting the Indians to

⁴² Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 297.

⁴³ "e porçe como dicho tengo los yndios andan en las minas no pueden ser dotrinados a nuestra santa fee ni menos pueden multiplicar andando en las minas seria bien que su alteza abriese la liçencia para traer negros a esta ysla." Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 338.

⁴⁴ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 292, 304, 308.

⁴⁵ "por que quando vienen mojados tegan rropa que mudar." Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 292.

Christianity was the most important step in the reformation of the Indies. The traditional Taino were set up in opposition to the Christians. If released from the encomienda, the Taino "would return to their rites and ceremonies and empty superstitions...and go about naked and live bestially as they are the enemies of intercourse with the Christians," Aguilar testified.⁴⁶

For the encomenderos, Christian belief required the outward expressions of the faith, such as saying the Pater Noster and the Ave Maria, but the Taino did not maintain these simple demonstrations when they were within their own communities, according to Montamarta.⁴⁷ However, these expectations would have been difficult for even Spaniards of the period to fulfill; Sara T. Nalle has found that many lay Christians in sixteenth-century Spain could not recite from memory the established prayers of the Church.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the vecinos affirmed the importance of converting the Indians in order to save their immortal souls. Given the cultural background of the vecinos and the nature of the three men conducting the Interrogatorio, it is not surprising that they would be so explicit about the need for more clerics to administer the sacraments to the Indians. However, the emphasis placed on ensuring that the Taino enjoyed a good death may also be linked to the social conditions surrounding the vecinos in 1517. There is little overt discussion of high mortality rates among the Taino, but many of the vecinos suggest a consciousness of death and disease among the Taino that may have been driven by European diseases.

⁴⁶ "se tomarian a sus ritos e çirimonias e vanas supersticiones...e andarse desnudos e beuir bestialmente como son enemigos de la conversaçion de los christianos." Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 340.

⁴⁷ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 331.

⁴⁸ Sara T. Nalle, *God in La Mancha*, 105.

The interviewed vecinos chalked up the past failure of religious instruction to various factors. Gonzalo de Ocampo said that some Taino elders would mock other Indians if they spoke about Christian beliefs among themselves, which further inhibited conversion efforts.⁴⁹ Gonzalo de Ocampo noted that current religious instruction only penetrated so far as the laboring Taino, who were adults, and thus missed the opportunity to convert malleable children, who instead were reared in the "vices and bad customs" of their mothers.⁵⁰ Similarly, Miguel de Pasamonte said that, because the Taino did not begin to serve (and, implicitly, mingle with) the Spanish until they were at least twelve or thirteen years old, they absorbed the customs of their parents and never were able to embrace Christianity.⁵¹

The Dominican friar Bernardo de Santo Domingo offered the most extensive suggestions for the proper regulation and religious instruction of the Indians. His recommendations, he said, were intended to be the "least inconvenient" way to balance Spanish "conscience" about the salvation of "these miserable people" while also ensuring the least damage to the haciendas or the royal revenues from the Caribbean.⁵² He offered numerous suggestions for the regulation of agricultural systems, labor requirements, Taino administration, and domestic spaces.

The regulation—and protection—of women occupied a significant portion of his suggestions. The labor of women, according to Santo Domingo, should include "making

⁴⁹ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 284.

⁵⁰ "*sus vicios y malas costumbres especialmente en cosas de mugeres.*"

⁵¹ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 307.

⁵² "*menos ynconveniente...la salvacion de las conçiençias de los españoles...desta miserable gente.*" Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, "

bread, cooking food, washing clothing, making shirts, rearing chickens, and other such things.”⁵³ Cotton was to be planted around the villages so that women could make hammocks; and the women are instructed to take up sewing so that the Indians would have clothing.⁵⁴ In addition to these restrictions, Santo Domingo issued a broadly inclusive prohibition against rape: “The penalty of the law warns whichever Indian man or Spanish man or black man or man of any other nation that would force [themselves upon] some Indian or other women of whatever nation or by force would deflower her.”⁵⁵

In some ways, the preoccupation with women operating within a particular sphere is unexpected—it was certainly not directly echoed by the other encomenderos, who appear largely unconcerned with Taino women in their testimonies. They discuss the need to bring women closer in terms of properly Christianizing the Taino race: they could not civilize the people if they could not reach the women and children. Other motives for bringing women closer to Spanish society go undiscussed, although many Taino and *mestizo* women already operated within Spanish societies as cooks, nannies, mistresses, wives, and daughters. In some ways, therefore, the Dominican friar must have been responding to situations undiscussed in the testimonies that were nonetheless visible to members of Spanish-Taino society.

In other ways, however, the friar and the encomenderos are concerned about the same thing: the preservation of the labor source for the Spanish Caribbean. Ensuring

⁵³ “*ni en deservarlos ni cogellos ni entidean las mugeres salvo en hazer pan guisar de comer lavar sus pa[n]jos hazer camisas crier gallinas e en tales cossas.*” Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 350.

⁵⁴ Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 350, 352.

⁵⁵ “*qualquier yndio o español o negro o de otra naçion que forçare alguna yndia o otra mugger de qualquier naçion o por fuerça desflorare la pena de la ley avisallos.*” Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 352.

Taino reproduction was an essential step for ensuring Taino production, but while the encomenderos perceived this problem as one external to Spanish society—something that needed to be fixed out there, in the mountainous wildernesses beyond the bounds of civilization—Santo Domingo perceived it as a problem that sprang from the entangled and entwined nature of Spanish-Taino-African society.

Unsurprisingly, Santo Domingo devoted extensive space to the forms of religious instruction to be practiced among the Taino of Hispaniola. Religious instruction was to “teach the articles of the faith, the commandments and the sacraments, and the other things that they agree to know and they will be given writings for that language in their language so that they are able to read, in their language if it is known.”⁵⁶

Sugar, Slavery, and Smallpox

By and large, the established encomenderos of the island felt the encomienda system was excellent, and they vocally doubted the ability of the Indians to live properly without Spanish supervision. The *Interrogatorio* conducted by the Hieronymites appears to have been influential in shaping how the friars perceived the situation on the island, and their letters back to Spain express the general tenor of these interviews. Similarly, they were encouraged by the encomenderos to pursue new forms of economic development for Hispaniola as the profits of the gold mines dried up. Thus, the Hieronymites entwined purposes – the religious reform of the Indians, the preservation of the Caribbean's labor force, the prosperity of the Spanish settlers – led to the advent of sugar plantations, African slavery, and the inadvertent decimation of the Taino

⁵⁶ “*para quel cura enseñe los articulos de la fee mandamientos e sacramentos e las otras cossas que a ellos conviene saber e dargelas escriptas a esta lengua en su lengua para que gelas pueda leer, que esta lengua sy supiere.*” Rodríguez Demorizi, *Los Dominicos*, 351.

through smallpox. In these efforts, the Hieronymite governors were in accord with Zuazo, whose florid letters to Spain echoed the concerns of the Hieronymites.

Sugar cane arrived in the Caribbean with Christopher Columbus's second voyage, which brought a hybrid variety of *Saccharum barberi* and *Sacharum officinarum* that was cultivated in India, the Middle East, and the Eastern Atlantic.⁵⁷ The sweet plant proved popular with the indigenous people of the Americas, and it penetrated through some areas of the Caribbean and the mainland Americas far ahead of European settlement.⁵⁸ Sugar plantations would come to dominate the economy of the Caribbean during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, and the crop would have a wide-ranging effect on the course of industrialization, globalization, and modernity throughout the Atlantic World, but sugar failed to achieve that dominance in the sixteenth-century Spanish Caribbean.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the sugar cultivation in the early Spanish Caribbean was an important chapter in both the development of sugar plantations and the economic development of the Spanish Caribbean, and the Hieronymites played an important role in that story. In the wake of diminishing returns from exhausted placer gold deposits, the Hieronymites recommended the pursuit of more agricultural industries, including increased sugar production. In a letter from June 1517, the three friars spoke of the rich earth of Hispaniola and suggested a broad array of possible crops, "such as wheat, wine, sugar cane, cotton, and cañafistula, and other

⁵⁷ J. H. Galloway, *The Sugar Cane Industry: An Historical Geography from its Origins to 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 11.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵⁹ Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985).

groves of these parts."⁶⁰ In 1518, the Hieronymites dutifully reported that they had planted cañafistula and were optimistic about wheat and wine, but most of their enthusiasm was reserved for sugar.

Concerted sugar production had been occurring in Hispaniola since at least 1501, but an effective mill arrived on the island only in 1515.⁶¹ In consultation with the encomenderos, the Hieronymites supported and promoted sugar cultivation on Hispaniola, even going so far as to issue loans to prospective planters.⁶² "And we in the name of Your Majesty helped with some little money," they wrote to Charles V in 1518, "because as we said, these are needy people."⁶³ This effort by the Hieronymites was subsequently followed by increased state support: funds from the Royal Treasury were available to settlers seeking to build *ingenios* by 1518, and by the 1520s, colonists were permitted to smelt their own copper for their sugar kettles, rather than importing that copper from Spain and paying its attendant import tax to the Spanish treasury.⁶⁴ The efforts of the Hieronymites therefore marked the beginning of a shift in the policies of local and imperial administrators and their conception of the Caribbean economy.

Despite the promising possibilities of sugar cultivation in 1517, the burgeoning industry faced an immediate obstacle: it required a great deal of labor, and Hispaniola

⁶⁰ "asi como trigo, vides, canaverales dulzes, algodonaes, i canafistolas, i otras arboledas de las desas partes." In Marte, 229.

⁶¹ Genaro Rodríguez Morel, "The Sugar Economy of Espanola in the Sixteenth Century," in *Tropical Babylons: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 87; Galloway, *The Sugar Cane Industry*, 65-66.

⁶² Mervyn Ratekin, "The Early Sugar Industry in Espanola," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 34:1 (Feb., 1954), 10.

⁶³ "i nosotros en nombre de Vuestra Magestad ayudamos con algun poco de dinero, porque como havemos dicho es gente nezesitada." In Marte, 249.

⁶⁴ Morel, "The Sugar Economy of Espanola," 89.

was currently enmeshed in an intensifying labor shortage. With growing numbers of Taino either dead or disappearing to spaces beyond Spanish reach, a new source of labor would need to be found in order to keep the colonists living in the style to which they had become accustomed. In weighing this situation, both the Hieronymites and Zuazo recommended African slaves as the solution to Hispaniola's labor problems.⁶⁵

Slavery had been a fundamental aspect of the early Greek polities and the Roman Empire, and the institution survived in the Mediterranean world to become one of the cultural legacies passed down to unified Christian Spain in 1492.⁶⁶ An internal slave-trade also occupied an established place in African history, but it was not until Portuguese traders established trans-Atlantic trade routes with sub-Saharan African in the fifteenth century that the Atlantic slave trade truly developed.⁶⁷ A small number of enslaved Iberian Moors and Africans traded through the slave port of Sevilla already lived and labored on Hispaniola alongside illegally imported African slaves, but the Hieronymites wanted to expand the legal slave trade and they specifically wanted African-born slaves.⁶⁸ Encompassed within the intellectual sphere of the "Old World," the continent of Africa had already experienced an opportunity of long duration for Christian instruction, unlike the Americas, and thus religion could be used to defend the enslavement of the African people as willful infidels and heathens. The request for *negros bozales*, who were perceived as the easiest type of slave to train, was a

⁶⁵ Carlos Esteban Deive, *La Española y la Esclavitud del Indio* (Santo Domingo: Ediciones Fundación García Arévalo, 1995), 233-234.

⁶⁶ Herbert Klein, "The Atlantic Slave Trade to 1650," in *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 201.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 204.

common feature in their reports to Spain. One of the Hieronymite friars, Bernardino de Manzanedo, returned to Spain in 1518 to issue a report in which he recommended African slaves as a repeated request from the Hispaniola encomenderos: "Everyone on Hispaniola asks permission to bring Blacks, as there are not enough in the Indies."⁶⁹

The Hieronymites were not the first to suggest the expansion of the African slave trade in the Caribbean. Las Casas had also suggested enslaved African labor as an alternative to Indian labor, and this single suggestion has tarnished his humanitarian legacy ever since.⁷⁰ If the import of African slaves to the Caribbean was not a novel idea when the Hieronymites suggested it, neither was it an idea that had previously enjoyed much support from the Spanish authorities. However, in 1519, Charles V issued a permit to import 4,000 African slaves to the Caribbean tax-free. Expanding throughout the course of the region's subsequent colonial history, the African slave trade would prove to be the major demographic and cultural influence on the modern Caribbean, and the Hieronymites played their supporting role in that larger event.

In addition to acting as boosters for sugar cultivation and the African slave trade, the Hieronymites also played a role in the continuing decimation of the indigenous Taino population of Hispaniola. Finally following their original instructions from Cisneros, the Hieronymites had rearranged the scattered Hispaniola Indians into thirty new settlements. Far from easing the problems of a declining indigenous population, this action exacerbated the demographic collapse when smallpox broke out on the island for

⁶⁸ Guitart, *Cultural Genesis*, 279-282.

⁶⁹ "Los de la Espanola todos piden licencia para llevar Negros, pues no bastan los Indios." In Marte, 247.

⁷⁰ Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean 1492-1969* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 43.

the first time at the end of 1518 and decimated an estimated third of the Indian population in the first month.⁷¹

Back in Spain, Cardinal Cisneros had died in November 1517, and the reins of Spanish government had been taken up by a new king, Charles, and his new set of advisors. Charles signed the documents relieving the Hieronymites of power in August 1518, but neither these instructions nor their successor, Rodrigo de Figueroa, arrived in Hispaniola until August 1519.⁷² The next year, the Hieronymites returned to Spain, their religious duties, and historical obscurity. However, their participation in the developing society of Spanish America came at an important transitional moment for the region, and the Hieronymites are an important component to understanding the influences and problems that would subsequently define the Caribbean. Sugar, slavery, and smallpox remade the region, and the Hieronymites presided over the initial period of Caribbean transformations.

⁷¹ Cook, *Born to Die*, 60-63.

⁷² Simpson, 53.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

The Hieronymite governors exercised an influence in the encouragement of sugar plantations, the expansion of the African slave trade, the extent of the smallpox epidemic. These things may have happened without the Hieronymites: smallpox would have arrived anyway, delivering its inevitable blow to the social fractures already produced within Taino society by physical separation, sexual segregation, overwork, and malnutrition, while sugar and slavery were predictable (although not inevitable) solutions to the economic crisis of the 1510s. The Hieronymite governors were merely convenient conduits: receptive to persuasion by the settlers and capable of passing those demands onward to higher levels of Spanish authority. If not the Hieronymites, another governor might have done just as easily.

Yet it was the political and moral conductivity of the Hieronymites that made them unusual in the early Spanish Caribbean. Until the Hieronymites were invested with power, the Spanish Caribbean had oscillated between the feudal aspirations of the Columbus family, the brief tenure of Francisco de Bobadilla, and the deliberate military conquests of Frey Nicolás de Ovando. Christopher and Don Diego Columbus had little prior political experience, but during their governments, they established an entrenched Caribbean network of support through patronage and marriage, and both Bobadilla and Ovando had experience with power and leadership as military commanders governing frontier lands on the Iberian peninsula.¹

¹ Frank Moya Pons, "The Politics of Forced Indian Labour in La Espanola, 1493-1520," *Antiquity* 66 (1992), 132.

The Hieronymite governors lacked both political experience and a ready network of Caribbean support. Their own religious order had virtually no presence on the island. The Dominicans were obdurately opposed to them after the experiences of Las Casas, and the Franciscans, while not hostile, do not appear to have lent them much visible support after their first few days on Hispaniola. The Hieronymite governors arrived as neutral observers, chosen for their lack of a stake in the fate of the Spanish Caribbean – and this absence of a stake weakened their political position. For the sake of their original appointment by Cisneros, they were obligated to investigate and alleviate the conditions under which the Taino lived, but their lack of ready-made allies in Spanish Hispaniola meant that they needed to placate the island’s most powerful bloc, the long-established encomenderos, who had the most to lose in the reform of Indian labor laws. These obligations were further complicated by the overriding imperative to justify their political appointment by materially improving conditions on the island, which is why they desperately investigated various industries and labor alternatives. None of their plans quite worked out, and when Charles V came suddenly to power in Spain, the Hieronymites’ lack of political clout and connections meant that they were easily summoned home, lacking a place in Charles’ new plans for the region.

The Hieronymites had a tradition of steadfast and safe neutrality in their positions of service to royal or political authority. After all, they had been profoundly successful in their stewardship of multiple Spanish shrines, and multiple Hieronymite friars served as personal and political auxiliaries of the Spanish monarchs in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They were named as the governors of Hispaniola in recognition of this tradition of imperturbable steadfastness. That Hispaniola might fail to yield the rewards

of those earlier acts of service—the rich rents of Guadalupe or the bishopric of Granada—may have been foreseen by the Hieronymites at the time. Hence their hesitancy to accept the charge, but their reputation prevented them from a successful evasion.

Ramón Pané was chosen by Columbus for similar qualities of reliability. He was not chosen for his untainted ability of ethnographic description but because Columbus initially perceived him to be a safe bet, someone who he could toss into the wilderness to investigate a muddled situation and someone who could be counted upon to report back with reasonable accuracy. Columbus eventually disowned Pané and denied the accuracy of his report, but the implications of his original decision remain unchanged. Pané, as one of the lone religious figures on the island at that time, was chosen to go among the Taino of the Vega Real because he seemed to embody the two roles that Columbus most sought: a mediator, to learn Taino culture and transmit Christian religion, and a reporter, to describe and communicate. That these roles were apparently beyond Pané (in Columbus' estimation) suggest that he was chosen for the job not for any innate qualities that he demonstrated to Columbus, but for the qualities that he was supposed to have as a Hieronymite, as a member of a regular order, and as a religious figure. A similar expectation of reliability and neutrality appears to have overlaid Cisneros' appointment of the Hieronymite governors in 1516.

In many ways, the Hieronymites of early Spanish Hispaniola fulfilled these expectations and discharged their responsibilities by going where they were told to go and attempting to find a safe middle ground between competing forces. The weakness of their position in Hispaniola forced them to make alliances where they could, and the qualities assigned to their religious identity allowed them to seek particular kinds of

negotiation and accommodation within the framework of their Christian religious understanding. In turn, their religious identities shaped the ways in which they interacted with others. Hispaniola's vecinos sought to use religious rhetoric to persuade and convince the Hieronymite governors; Las Casas objected to the Hieronymites specifically due to their failed potential as corrupted clerics; Pané's relationship with the Taino of the Vega Real was defined by his evangelical role. In these ways, the events that occurred within the Hieronymite sphere of early Spanish Hispaniola were specifically contingent on the peculiar role played by these four Hieronymite friars and the position they occupied at a formative moment in the relationship between evangelical Christianity and the expansion of empire in the early Iberian Atlantic. The diverse experiences of Hieronymites in Hispaniola suggest the variety of ways in which European and American religious understandings were enacted, contested, and reshaped during the course of colonialism.

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