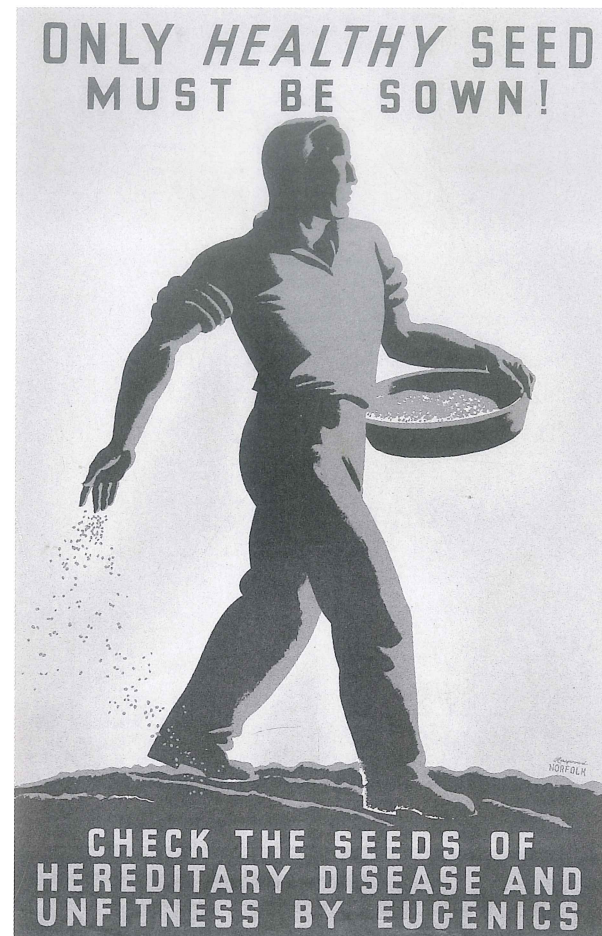


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The Rise and Fall of Eugenics

Three Newly Discovered
New World Letters: The Vision of the
Conquistador Juan Navarro de Virués
and the Attempted Capture
of Dominica Island, 1511-1512

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The Spanish authorizations to capture Indians as slaves in the New World was a constant practice in the first third of the 16th century. The main reason for this was to supply a workforce in the agricultural and mining industries deployed on Hispaniola Island (Santo Domingo) and on the island of San Juan (Puerto Rico). The legal pretext that authorized these slave expeditions was the cannibalism attributed to the Caribs of the neighboring islands, mainly to the inhabitants of Dominica Island, but also for the support they gave to the Taínos Indians of San Juan in their rebellion (1511-1512) against the harsh working conditions that were imposed on them; there were glimpses of solidarity, collective union, and human dignity in the alliance of the Caribs with the Taínos. Thanks to three newly discovered New World manuscripts

in private hands we can demonstrate that the Spanish conquerors were never able to conquer the inhabitants of Dominica Island, and that they respected the resistance techniques of the Caribs which were superior to those deployed by the conquerors, despite the great logistics and money invested in the slave expeditions by a series of notable men linked to the highest spheres of power and business both in Spain and in America.

The Discovery of the Dominican island. The Untamed Character of its Inhabitants. First slave Expeditions, and the War Declared Against the Caribs

Dominica Island (called Waitukuabuli by the Caribs) was discovered by Christopher Columbus on November 13, 1493 during his second trip to the New World. Some incident on the island must have befallen that had an effect on Columbus. One of his travel companions, Guillermo de Coma said that "the islands obey the cannibals...fierce and wild people, feed on human flesh";¹ and in 1498, during his third trip to the New World and before a necessary stopover at Dominica Island, Columbus gave severe warnings to his crew to not to disturb the Caribs.² Because of these facts, and others that will be described later, Dominica Island could never be colonized by the Spaniards and was only partially pacified by the British at the end of the 18th century.³ For this reason, it was one of the last islands of the New World to be explored by Europeans (see Figure 1). Except for the recently known slave privilege of Christopher Columbus,⁴ the expeditions of capture and slavery were not allowed in the first years of colonization in the New World, except as punishment for the "cannibal Indians" of San Bernardo, Isla Fuerte, and Cartagena...this according to a Royal Order of Queen Isabel of 1504 in favor of the explorer Rodrigo de Bastidas (companion of Columbus in his second journey to America).⁵

In 1508, and when he was at the end of his term, the Governor from The Indies, active on Hispaniola Island, Nicolas Ovando

had warned with some concern that native labor was missing, the Spanish population was increasing and the gold mines at La Hispaniola had finished the extraction period.⁶ In the adjacent islands it was known that there was an appreciable amount of indigenous people who had not been colonized and that they could either be used as slaves or as part of las encomiendas (a group of Indians handed over to a person to arrange labor as he prefers) to that group of conquerors who had not yet had that "benefit".⁷

In 1509, the first slave navy against the Caribs of the surrounding islands was registered with the participation of Rodrigo de Bastidas, and Francisco de Garay who was related to Columbus by marriage (he was married to Ana Muñiz Perestrello, sister of Columbus' wife Teresa, co-founder of La Hispaniola. Garay was considered "one of the wealthiest men in the New World"⁸). Their mission was to obtain labor for agriculture and encomiendas on that island.⁹ That same year, Juan Ponce de León led another slave expedition on the island of Santa Cruz.¹⁰

At the beginning of 1511, the Taíno Indians of San Juan (Puerto Rico) led by Cacique Agueybana II allied themselves with the Caribs of Dominica Island. Tired of the conditions of servitude, hard agricultural labor on the Hispaniola, the intense mining in the island of San Juan, and the furtive slave expeditions in the Dominica and Guadalupe Islands, they initiated a rebellion with the killing of several Spaniards, seeking their expulsion, however, such a state of affairs did not change the Spanish authorities. On the contrary, at the beginning of the viceroyalty of Diego Colón (judicially replenished in Spain that same year) the slave expeditions in the surrounding islands were revived (detailed information on these excursions has not survived.¹¹) On May 2, 1511 the King of Spain ordered the authorities of Puerto Rico to bring as many Indians as possible to work in the mines of San Juan and thus boost the economy of the island.¹² A month later, he authorized the merchants of the Spanish island to trade slaves in Puerto Rico.¹³

On July 25, 1511 the Catholic Monarchs sent the Governor of San Juan, Juan Cerón, to take slaves for Puerto Rico and "to explain the requirement to them and if they did not accept to make war on fire or blood to the Indians of the Comarcan Islands to that serve as *naborías* and slaves".¹⁴ These incursions made many *Táinos*, of their own will and dignity, to the point of preferring to be a servant of another Indian, as an author has found among the inhabitants from Trinidad Island,¹⁵ migrate to other adjacent islands so as not to suffer the harsh working conditions imposed by the Spaniards. On that same date, the King ordered the Viceroy of the New World, Diego Colón "to mark with the *carimbo* or hot iron on the leg or on the arm of the slave Indians so that they are known".¹⁶ Four months later, the Kings congratulated the explorer Juan Ponce de León for marking the forehead with an F (hot iron) to the Indians taken as slaves in the war.¹⁷ In a letter dated 1511 from America, Ponce de Leon, companion of the second voyage of Columbus and discoverer of what is now Puerto Rico, explained the origins of this rebellion: "the war does not cease because every day more rebel *Caciques* refuse to work. The Caribs have done a lot of damage on this island".¹⁸ The chronicler Antonio de Herrera said that the Caribs made the Spanish cruel war and ate them and they were from Dominica Island.¹⁹ As a war strategy, the Caribs of Dominica Island attacked the island of San Juan from time to time to free the Puerto Rican Indians who were in the hands of the Spaniards, who had to set up rescue expeditions of these Indians to the same Dominica.²⁰ That year was known of a slave army to Dominica and Guadalupe, sponsored again by Francisco de Garay, which ended in a resounding failure and with large losses.²¹

The emigration of *Táinos* to the Dominica and Guadeloupe islands as a result of this rebellion with the consequent job desertion imposed²² and the impossibility of defeating the Caribs of Dominica (and Guadalupe Island) and the lack of indigenous workers motivated the Catholic Monarchs to give a Royal Order in Burgos on December 23, 1511 formalizing the war they already had

against the Caribs under the pretext of being cannibals and actually, for altering the other Indians of the other islands, authorizing their captors to use them as slaves:²³

"We had sent a letter ordering that no person go to the islands or mainland or captive to any native Indian ... However, with the intention of making them reasonable Christians and men, we sent some captains of those islands and mainland...where they found some people known as Caribs, who did not want to receive us or listen to us in any way. They preferred to defend themselves with their weapons and resisted our entry into these islands, killing some Christians. The Indians of the island have maintained this radical attitude and have joined many other Indians of other islands, fighting against the Indians who are at our service, burning them alive and then eating them...helping the Indians of the island of San Juan (Puerto Rico)...for what the Caribs arrived on that island in fourteen canoes... the Caribs must be punished for the crimes they committed against my subjects...and for persisting in their vile ways, dismembering and eating [Christians and vassals of the King]...I authorize and authorize all those who under my command went to such Islands and mainland to go to war against the Caribs of the Barú Trinity, Dominica...and capture and take them."²⁴

This order of the Catholic Monarchs for war and authorization to capture Carib Indians for slavery was reiterated by Queen Juana on July 3, 1512 and specified for the islands of Trinidad, Curacao and Dominica.²⁵ What has been known is that Dominica Island was twice attacked after that declaration of war. Spanish historian Enrique Arranz says "it would be illustrative to explain how people in Santo Domingo responded to this general call against the Caribes. We know the immediate response translated into the

work *Catálogo de Pasajeros a Indias Durante los Siglos XVI, XVII, y XVIII. Volumen I, 1509-1534* (Catalog of Passengers to the Indies During the 16th, 17th, and 18th Centuries...1509-1534) by the Spanish researcher Cristóbal Bermúdez Plata.

Father Bartolomé de Las Casas, and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, the first Chroniclers of the New World³⁰, knew and wrote about Navarro de Virués and affirm that he died in September 1517 during the exploration and conquest expedition to Tierra Firme which had been led by Pedrarias Dávila since 1514. Specifically, Navarro de Virués died while on an expedition (with Pedrarias' lieutenant Juan de Tavira) looking for in the jungle of Darién (territories that today belong to Panama and Colombia) along with the then young Francisco Pizarro and Hernando de Soto. These data confirm that, five years after the expeditions to Dominica Island, Navarro de Virués had managed to build a reputation as an explorer. In an expedition report of that time, the explorer Espinoza says of Navarro de Virués:

"By mandate of his lordship the lieutenant general (Pedrarias) I went to make the provinces of Comagre and Potorosa to the other South Sea to pacify and punish the crimes and excesses and deaths of Christians that the said chiefs and Indians of said provinces they had preached in Usagaña, sending Navarro de Virués as Captain with more than seventy men to a province that the Indians said was near there called Quante and I also sent him to the Cacique de Parruraca because he was the main responsible in the death of the Christians of Santa Cruz."³¹

In 2006, The Karpeles Manuscripts Library published an investigation into this Spanish adventurer and made known to the academic world an acquired letter (see Figure 2) dated from the Spanish island on May 18, 1512³². This letter drew the attention of researchers from the post-Colombian period because, amongst the

other rich data provided by Navarro de Virués, there was outlined a future slave expedition to Dominica Island, and also the ideological-legal thought of a Spanish conqueror regarding the justification of slavery. In later years, the private collection of Ricardo B. Salinas Pliego in Mexico has made known to the intellectual world the acquisition of another letter (see Figure 3) from Juan Navarro de Virués, dated from the Spanish island on March 17, 1512 with data very rich on an old slave expedition made to Dominica Island in 1511 that was commanded by Francisco de Garay, a member of the expedition that accompanied Columbus on his second trip to the New World in 1493, and later disputer of the Mexican territory to Hernan Cortes himself.

Finally, during a trip to Sao Paulo, the Brazilian collector Pedro Correa do Lago, world authority on ancient manuscripts and prolific author³³ told me gently that he had acquired, from Christie's in New York, a letter to Ochoa de Isásaga from the conqueror Juan Navarro de Virués also from Dominica Island and dated on November 30, 1512.³⁴ This letter recounts a new slave expedition not only to that island, but also to the island of Guadalupe. This letter had been unknown to the chroniclers of that time, and is now a part of the very few post-Colombian manuscripts that have survived becoming the earliest surviving manuscript known written and sent from Dominica Island.³⁵ It is also now the earliest surviving manuscript known that has registered an expedition of slaves in the New World.³⁶ Unravel the post-Colombian alliances of investors, merchants and slave operators, study the ideological-legal content towards the slavery of the New World poured by a conqueror of that time, as well as enhance the identity of the Caribs thanks to the resistance shown against the Spanish expeditionaries and the respect that these last ones felt for the warlike strategies of these natives is the object of this investigation, thanks to these surviving manuscripts that have seen the light and that allow us to reconstruct part of the history of the peoples of our continent, lost by course of time, wars, and climatic calamities, and that have

caused the destruction of valuable manuscripts both in America and in Spain. As Karpeles says:

“Nevertheless, no letters from the first ten years of the operation of the ‘Casa de Contratación de Indias’ appear to have survived, and precious few remain from the following 5 years. Apparently this period, referred by historians as *la primera colonización* (1500-1520), negligence, war, climate and the repositories’s tendency to dispose of seemingly common daily items impeded the survival of the documents.”³⁷

The Unknown Account of the Slave Expedition to
Dominica Island in 1511: The letter from the Private Collection
of Ricardo B. Salinas Pliego

As stated here, in 1511, the explorer Francisco de Garay made a slave expedition to Dominica Island. Knowledge of the expedition known, but the details of it were not. No chronicler has given any clues, and manuscripts are not preserved in public or private collections that directly or indirectly speak of this expedition. Only fragments derived from royal orders issued by the Catholic monarchs of which only drafts are preserved in the copybooks of the General Archive of the Indies in Sevilla, Spain. Thanks to the private collection of Ricardo B. Salinas Pliego, a fascinating unpublished autograph letter of two pages, signed by Captain Juan Navarro de Virués and dated from the Hispaniola island (Santo Domingo) on March 17, 1512, unknown to researchers until today is now on the public scope.

This letter sheds a great deal of light on that post-Colombian period, so elusive to researchers because of the shortage of surviving manuscripts. Juan Navarro de Virués reminds his recipient - the powerful official of the House of the Casa de la Contratacion in Seville, Ochoa de Isásaga - to have sent an extensive report (lost

forever) on the 1511 slave expedition to Dominica Island. The expedition was projected to remain a year, and systematically take Indians, enslave them and sell them to intermediaries, farmers, and miners in the San Juan Islands for their nascent mining, and on the island of Hispaniola for the agriculture that was being developed there. Navarro de Virués explains the change of plans and anticipated departure of the expedition since the Caribs of Dominica Island, when noticing the long stay of their captors, destroyed all the crops (“conucos”) and we suppose, they burned fruit trees and edible things, in such a way that they cut the local natural supply of the Spanish expeditionaries who also did not have access to provisions from the island of Hispaniola.

We assume that the Caribs had food supply alternatives, perhaps in other parts of the island to which the expeditionaries did not have access, or a stockpile of certain types of food, but the truth is that the Caribs made hunger a condition of war on the Spanish, which made the Spanish expedition a resounding failure. The most important part of the letter is transcribed here:

“From the island of Dominica I wrote to you for a long time [lost letter], telling you everything we had on that land more than a year ago and how the [Carib] Indians did things differently than we thought...the Indians, realizing that we had decided to stay on the island, they destroyed all the conucos (cazabe crops) so that they did not leave conucos either for them or for us and since from here [the Hispaniola Island] they did not send us any provision, we did not nothing to eat on the island and made war with hunger. We did everything that was possible to do and not having solutions or results, we agreed to return to this Hispaniola Island, from where I remain at the service of your mercy”

In this letter, Navarro de Virués mentions Francisco de Garay. It is clear that he was under his command in that expedition, complaining to Ochoa de Isásaga that he has not granted him an encomienda of Indians and then, given the tremendous power that Garay had, he asks the recipient of the letter, to intermeditate in his favor so that said explorer grant him a bailiff on the island of Hispaniola. The strategies of the Caribs of Dominica Island are very interesting: espionage of the slave expeditionaries, the plan of "scorched earth" to their own crops is a clear message to the expeditionaries who knew their limited logistics of local supply and no shipping from the island of Hispaniola. The reality of a European domination protected by a formal and ambiguous right ("the capture of Indians for slaves for being cannibals" according to the Royal Cedula of the Catholic Monarchs at the end of 1511) rejected by warfare by brave natives of an island that could never be conquered by the Spaniards and their resistance to these European incursions took violent forms that made them fearful of the slave expeditionaries, as well as the geographical mobility of the Caribs, totally different from the Taíno stillness in San Juan.³⁸

Preparations for a Future Expedition to Dominica Island:

The Karpeles Manuscript Libraries letter

Considered one of the most nourished collections of manuscripts in America and with offices and exhibitions in several states of North America, the Karpeles Manuscript Libraries acquired another letter from the explorer Juan Navarro de Virués. At the time, its director, Dr. David Karpeles, invited me to work on an investigation into this Spanish explorer.³⁹ In this new autograph letter of two pages, dated from Santo Domingo on May 18, 1512, it was also addressed to the Comendador Ochoa de Isásaga in Seville. The hypothesis about the participation of the explorer Francisco de Garay in the slave expedition of the aforementioned letter, held in the private collection of Ricardo B. Salinas Pliego, is

corroborated with this letter where Navarro de Virués explains to Isásaga the preparations for the next slave expedition. Here appears a high public official as an investor and sponsor of the expedition, the mayor of the island, Marcos de Aguilar, one of the first lawyers that came to the New World in 1508. He became years later, third ruler of Mexico.⁴⁰

The expressions of Juan Navarro de Virués about the status of the Dominicans in this letter are impressive and reveal in all their dimensions the legal reasoning of this explorer, connected, in some way with the rights of the crown over the inhabitants of the The New World. Navarro affirms that the Dominica Caribes must be made slaves because of the law, the Royal Order of the King. There has never been such a direct testimony on the issue of slavery in a post-Colombian manuscript. Navarro de Virués announces that he will go as Captain, a rank of importance in the military world of that time, probably due to the experience gained with Francisco de Garay in the slave expedition of 1511 and of which only the details of her have been known thanks to the letter from the private collection of Ricardo B. Salinas Pliego commented on previously. We transcribe the most important part of the letter here:

"I let you know that the Mayor [of the Hispaniola city, Marcos de Aguilar] and Francisco de Garay, chief bailiff (Alguacil Mayor) are sending to these islands [Dominica and Guadalupe] some ships with people and with me as Captain with the order that the natives we take shall be brought to this island precisely to be slaves"

The Chronicle About a New and Unknown Expedition to Dominica Island: The Letter from the Private Collection of Pedro Correa do Lago

As this letter (see Figure 4) dated November 30, 1512 from Dominica Island describes, this slave-raiding venture had as a partner

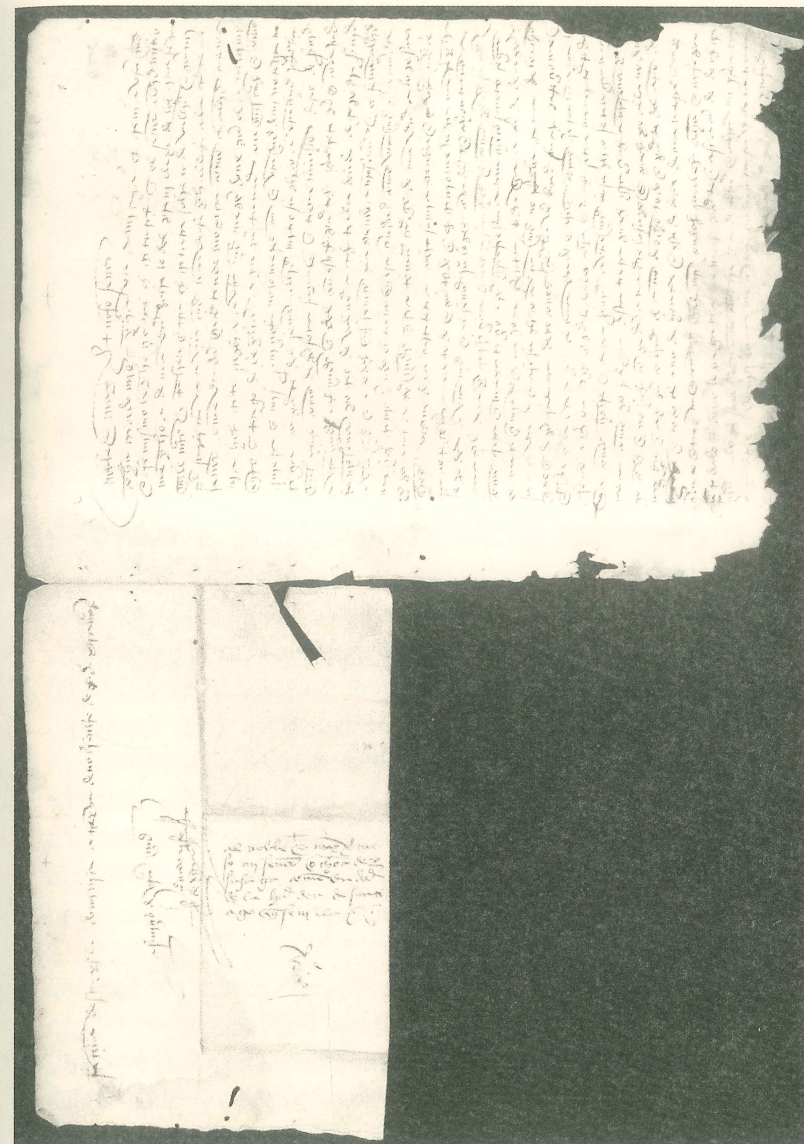
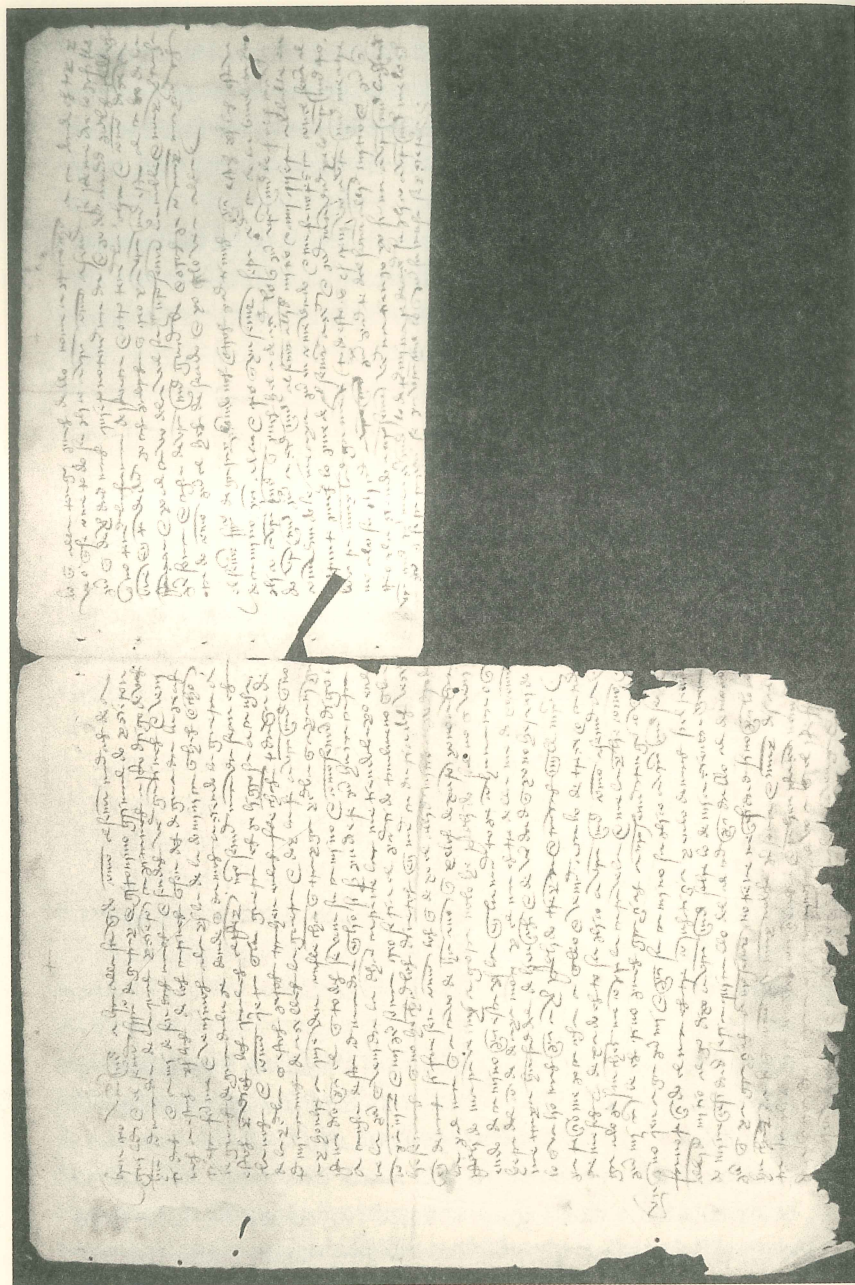


Figure 4: The 3-1/4 page letter written by Juan Navarro de Virués from Dominica Island on November 30, 1512 to Ochoa de Isásaga of the Casa de Contracción de Indias in Seville. *Image courtesy of the private collection of Pedro Correa do Lago*

the Italian Geronimo Grimaldo (or Grimaldi), a Genoese merchant who settled in La Hispaniola, "the most powerful merchant in the Indias during the reign of the Catholic Kings".⁴¹ In 1508, he started to look after his uncle Bernaldo Grimaldo's interests in the New World.⁴² Bernardo Grimaldo was a moneylender to Christopher Columbus⁴³ and also accountant to Piero Rondinelli, representative of the Medici in Spain, and moneylender to Americo Vesputio.⁴⁴ In 1512, Geronimo Grimaldo "was managing the accounts of every fleet organized in the island, and formed a partnership with other Genoese, the Jacome and Tomas Castellon (Castiglioni) brothers, who lived in Puerto Rico, thus becoming the strongest economic group in the Antilles".⁴⁵ So, after the Royal Order of the Catholic Monarchs, authorizing the capture of the Caribbean Indians of Dominica Island (1511) this becomes the third slave expedition on Dominican Island in 1512, with documented participation by the Genoese and the Spanish, data which was unknown until today.

The other partners of this slaving expedition to Dominica Island were the often-mentioned Francisco de Garay, and Rodrigo de Bastidas (1460-1526) Columbus' companion during his second voyage. He traveled across mainland with Juan de la Costa and Balboa, discovered the Uraba Gulf and explored what is now known as Panama. According to this letter, Rodrigo de Bastidas was one of the captains of this expedition with another being Captain Juan Navarro de Virués. That indicates the rank that Captain Juan Navarro de Virués had reached the author of this letter in the world of explorations and conquests.

This conqueror, in this third letter, defends his conduct and work in the Royal Order of the Catholic Monarchs of 1511 to capture the Caribs of Dominica Island. That is, he needs to justify himself with the protection of the law in his slave labor, which makes sense, since in Spain, after the complaints and claims of the Dominican priests with Bartholomew de las Casas at the head, they were discussing in the higher levels of intellectuality and the Royal Administration, the legal status of the conquest and the use of the

Indians of the Americas in the service of the encomienda. Navarro de Virués again refers to the resistance strategies of the Caribs of Dominica Island. On the other hand, in the letter from the Salinas Pliego collection, Navarro de Virués lamented the strategy of the Caribs to destroy all the crops on the island (even those that fed the Caribs themselves). In the letter from the Pedro Correa do Lago collection a new element of fear emerges, the poisoned arrows that the Caribs used in war (with no antidote at that time). The most important part of the letter is transcribed here:

"I believe that your mercy will already know there as Mr. Marcos de Aguilar and Mr. Francisco de Garay and Geronimo Grimaldo made an army and appointed Rodrigo de Bastidas as captains and me as two ships and brigands and we came to these islands of the Caribs that are from Guadalupe to Tierra Firme and we came to the island of Dominica that is eight leagues from Guadalupe, where we were waging war on these Indians, to whom the King our lord commands them to be slaves and whatever the war is dangerous because of the grass (poison) that these dogs bring in the arrows we still continue to make war on them and I assure you that there is no man to be hurt with an arrow that brings poison that there is any remedy for him that all they go their way (die)."

Conclusions

As part of the right to conquer in the colonized territories of the New World, a normative corpus emerged that authorized the capture of those natives who practiced cannibalism and enslaved them as punishment (1504-1569), more, behind that formal right there was a background of concessions and lobbies that were managed in Spain for slave expeditions in the adjacent islands, given the shortage of labor for agricultural and mining work on

both the Hispaniola Island (Santo Domingo) and the Island of San Juan (Puerto Rico). Former travel companions of Colon, senior officials of America and Genoese merchants (bankers, lenders, businessmen) participated in the slave business trying to maintain persecutory legislation against the Caribs as cannibals.

The continued practice of such expeditions indicates a certain success in the infamous slave-gathering business, despite not being able to definitively colonize most of the adjacent islands (Dominica, Guadeloupe, Martinique). And although, thanks to the denunciations of the religious in America, a set of laws of better treatment for the natives were managed; the Caribbean Indians of Dominican Island and the adjacent unconquered islands were expressly exempted from them, due to which slave legislation and their business-military practice maintained their full force in the 16th century. In that context, the explicit legal opinions of the writer of the letters under study reflect a literal compliance with the "royal privilege" of legal decisions, without stopping at the particularities and rights of "the other".

The three letters written from the New World in 1512 studied here corroborate a surprising identity in the Caribs of Dominica island, which materialized in a long resistance to be conquered or captured and then destined for slavery. Likewise, their defense strategies of the island, known but never surpassed by the Spanish conquerors and their counter attacks on the island of San Juan, signal of some solidarity with the Taínos Indians of the island of San Juan, show warlike survival techniques and a certain embryonic collective dignity that nothing had to envy their western counterparts. For the same reason, for the Spaniards, as for the author of the studied letters, there was a deep respect for the Caribbean rival of Dominica Island.

About the Author

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¹³ Op Cit: 394

¹⁴ Op. Cit: 396

¹⁵ Op. Cit: 402

¹⁶ Op. Cit.

¹⁷ Op. Cit. 399

¹⁸ 1511 October 7 letter, colección Harlan Crown (Texas).

¹⁹ *Historia General de los hechos de los Castellanos en las islas Tierra Firme del mar*. (1730). Década Primera., p. 224

²⁰ Fernández Méndez: 399

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⁴² Hugh Tomas. *Who is Who of the Conquistadors & Others Connected with the Conquest of Mexico*. p. 344

⁴³ April 26 1498 Letter of Cristobal Colón to Ximeno de Briviesca in: Carmen Varela. Op. Cit: 362-363

⁴⁴ Consuelo Varela. *Colon y los Florentinos*. Madrid. Ed. Alianza America. 1988., p. 117-118

⁴⁵ Enrique Otte: 109